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Iran dismisses U.S. bid to end conflict, sets its own terms

Halting aggression, reparations, and 'sovereignty' over Strait of Hormuz part of Tehran's terms; U.S. offers sanctions relief for reopening the Strait

Stanly Johny

Iran on Wednesday dismissed a U.S. proposal to end the war and set out its own terms for peace, even as it continued trading fire with Israel.

The U.S. proposal offered a ceasefire and sanctions relief in return for the Islamic Republic abandoning its nuclear programme and reopening the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran, according to state-run Press TV, has laid down five conditions to end the war, which the U.S. and Israel launched on February 28 with the assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several other leaders. Tehran is seeking: "a complete halt to aggression and assassinations"; "concrete mechanisms" to prevent future attacks; payment of war damages and reparations; an end to fighting on "all fronts"; and recognition of its "exercise of sovereignty" over the Strait of Hormuz, which it calls its "natural and legal right".

"Iran will end the war when it decides to do so and when its own conditions are met," a senior security official said, according to Press TV. The official, who is not named in the report, said Washington has put forward proposals through various diplomatic channels that are "excessive" and "disconnected from reality" on the battlefield.

U.S. President Donald Trump, who had backed off from his threat to attack Iran's power infrastructure claiming that Washington and Tehran were in talks, said on Tuesday that Iran had given him "a very big present worth a tremendous amount of money", adding that "we are dealing with the right people". "I think we're going to end [the war]," Mr. Trump said without elaborating on the "present".

Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters on Wednesday dismissed reports about talks, adding that the U.S. is calling its "defeat" an agreement.

On alert: Security forces and first responders at a site struck by a projectile on the outskirts of Tel Aviv in Israel during the war. AFP

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Centre defends stand as Opposition raises 'Pak. role' in West Asia

Sobhana K. Nair
Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Parrying the questions raised by the Opposition regarding the reported central role played by Pakistan in mediating between the U.S. and Iran, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Wednesday termed the neighbouring country a "*dalal*" and said that it had been playing this role since 1981.

He was addressing an all-party meeting chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on the recent developments in West Asia and their impact on India. Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri also assured the gathering that India continued to maintain a strategic petroleum reserve of 74 days. While the country was not facing any imminent energy crisis, he noted that the supply cycle for Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) had extended from 20 days to 45 days. This, he said, should stabilise soon.

Responding to criticism over India's "silence", Mr. Jaishankar asserted that with nearly one crore Indians living in West Asian countries, it was crucial for India's strategic and economic interests to maintain a balanced position.

S. Jaishankar

India, he said, remained in a unique position, able to communicate with all sides.

Citing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent talks with Iranian authorities, he said two Indian ships had been allowed to sail through the Strait of Hormuz, while 18 others still in the region would soon set sail for Indian shores. He said that the U.S. continued to be India's biggest trading partner, while Israel was a key technological partner.

The External Affairs Minister also said that the U.S. sanctions on India had a long history and that previous administrations in Washington had deployed them in past. While the Opposition "shamed" the government, he said that India's import of Russian oil never completely stopped.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 10

IN BRIEF

T.N. poll: AIADMK releases first list of 23 candidates

CHENNAI
The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) on Wednesday announced its first list of 23 candidates, including party general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami, for the Tamil Nadu Assembly poll. » Page 4

Meghalaya groups demand curbs on non-tribal voters

GUWAHATI
Four tribal groups have written to the Meghalaya Governor seeking steps to bar non-tribal people from voting in elections to tribal councils after a similar rule was implemented for the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council elections. » Page 3

Kejriwal's official house: CAG report referred to PAC

NEW DELHI
The Delhi Assembly Speaker on Wednesday referred the CAG report on irregularities flagged in the renovation of the house allotted to former CM Arvind Kejriwal to the PAC for a detailed probe. » Page 2

Govt. revamps UDAN scheme with changes in subsidy

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

In a significant policy shift, the Centre has extended the subsidy period for airlines on select Tier-2 and Tier-3 routes from three to five years, after a large share of those routes fell into disuse. The shift comes under the modified UDAN scheme, approved by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday with a total outlay of ₹28,840 crore.

The subsidy will also shift from a levy embedded in airfares to direct funding from the exchequer.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 10

India raises clean-energy ambition with 60% non-fossil fuel power goal by 2035

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Updating its climate goals, India has pledged that by 2035, 60% of its installed electric capacity will comprise non-fossil sources. It also aims to reduce by 47% the intensity of emissions per unit of GDP from 2005 level and to increase its carbon sink to 3.5 billion tonnes – 4 billion tonnes.

These targets make up its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), which are to be communicated to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

"We will easily achieve these goals... [with] the speed with which we are expanding our non-fossil sources," Union Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said at a briefing on Wednesday following a Cabinet meeting.

As a signatory to the Paris Agreement, India was required to issue an updated NDC in 2025, which spells out its voluntary actions towards transitioning away from fossil fuel and improving energy-efficiency measures.

At the 30th edition of the Conference of Parties in Belem, Brazil, in November last year, Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav said that India would announce the NDC by the "year-end".

India's current NDC, officially conveyed to the United Nations in August 2022, commits to the following by 2030: having 50% of its installed electric power from non-fossil sources; reducing the intensity of emissions per unit of GDP by 44%; and increasing its carbon sink to at least 2.5 billion tonnes to 3 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 10

Significant rise in China border patrols after Galwan clash: MHA

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Patrolling by the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) along India's border with China increased significantly after 20 soldiers were killed in clashes with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in eastern Ladakh's Galwan valley in June 2020, according to data from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

The MHA's annual report for 2024-25 published on Wednesday stated that 4,503 patrols were conducted from April 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 by the ITBP, the primary border guarding force deployed along the 3,488-km border with China.

On an average, the ITBP conducted 500 patrols per month during the nine-month period, it added.

4,503 patrols were conducted from April 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 by the ITBP, which guards India's border with China

'Strict vigil'

"ITBP ensured security of the border and remained vigilant during heightened security scenarios along the Indo-China border. To keep strict vigil, ITBP conducted 4,503 patrols along the Indo-China border," the report stated.

According to previous annual reports, 6,561 patrols were conducted between January 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024 - a 15-month window averaging about 437 patrols per month - while 2,899 patrols were conducted between April 1, 2022 and December 31, 2022, at an average of 322 per month.

Though the corresponding figures for other years are not available, the numbers reflect a marked rise in border patrols since 2017-18, when only 2,083 patrols were recorded: about 173 per month.

In September 2020, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had informed Parliament that face-offs with the Chinese PLA happened because "patrols were interrupted" and there was no commonly delineated Line of Actual Control.

Assembly gets second bomb threat in 2 days, turns out to be hoax

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Security personnel conducting checks on the Assembly premises on Wednesday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

The Delhi Assembly received a bomb threat for the second consecutive day on Wednesday, triggering a security scare during the ongoing Budget Session, but the warning later turned out to be a hoax.

While the session, which began at 11 a.m., continued without interruption, the dog squad and bomb disposal squad personnel carried out a thorough search of the Assembly complex after the threat mails were sent to the official e-mail addresses of the Assembly and the Speaker around 9.50 a.m.

According to sources, the e-mail warned that 16 RDX explosions would take place inside the premises at 1.40 p.m. Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta said, "Despite the threats, the House proceedings continued without any interruption."

Mr. Gupta said the police have been instructed to investigate the matter from every possible angle.

Day 3 of Budget Session: CAG report on Kejriwal's official bungalow referred to PAC

CM requests House for detailed probe by panel into CAG findings; BJP MLAs target AAP over the bungalow; Budget Session extended, discussions to continue tomorrow after Ram Navami holiday

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

CM Rekha Gupta at the Assembly on Wednesday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Following a request from Chief Minister Rekha Gupta to the Assembly on the third day of the Budget Session, the Speaker on Wednesday referred the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report on the irregularities flagged in the renovation works at the 6, Flag Staff Road residence allotted to former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) for a detailed investigation.

As discussion on the CAG report, which was tabled in the House on Monday, began in the ongoing session, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLAs targeted AAP over the bungalow, nicknamed by them as "Sheesh Mahal (glass palace)" during the Assembly poll in February 2025 to highlight alleged corruption by AAP and its national convener.

AAP members, meanwhile, continued to boycott the session for a third day except Matia Mahal MLA Aaley Mohammad Iqbal, who raised questions over LPG "shortage".

Launching a sharp attack on the former CM, Ms. Gupta called for a probe into the irregularities and strict action against those found guilty. She said, "Those who built a 'Sheesh Mahal' in Delhi have now moved into 'Sheesh Mahal-2' in Punjab." She also questioned how the project cost escalated from an initial ₹8 crore to ₹33 crore, as per the CAG report, calling it a matter that warrants thorough investigation.

Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh brought a long paper roll in the House, citing findings from the CAG report on the renovation work of the house with a list of installations and cost details during his speech.

Selective targeting: AAP

Responding to the allegations, AAP said that BJP is "selectively targeting" Mr. Kejriwal for the past three years over the bungalow allotted to him during his tenure as Delhi Chief Minister. AAP Delhi president Saurabh Bharadwaj said, "Those who bought a VVIP boat for ₹6.20 crore are questioning a ₹30 crore CM residence renovation for the past three years." He also alleged that no disclosures have been made regarding the cost for the Prime Minister's residence, which was renovated at the same time as the former CM's official residence. "We demand full disclosure of the total cost, materials used, and equipment installed, excluding anything related to security," he said.

The three-day Budget Session, which started on March 23, has been extended. The session will resume after Ram Navami holiday and continue on Friday as discussion on the Delhi budget was initiated by Minister Ashish Sood. Ms. Gupta also introduced the Societies Registration (Delhi Amendment) Bill, 2026, which will be taken up on Friday.

The Speaker also proposed a condemnation motion in the House on the request of BJP MLA Satish Upadhyaya over alleged remarks by Mr. Bharadwaj. Mr. Upadhyaya said, "Bhardwaj made inappropriate remarks that they (AAP) will take the schoolgirls, for whom the government has announced free bicycles in the budget, to campaign for the Samajwadi Party in the next Uttar Pradesh election."

AAP protests against LPG crunch; BJP says Oppn. playing politics

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

AAP leaders protesting against LPG shortage in New Delhi on Wednesday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs on Wednesday continued their protest outside the Assembly as part of an attempt to "expose" the BJP government for allegedly failing to address a "deepening" gas crisis in the Capital.

The BJP responded, saying the statements by AAP and Congress leaders over gas cylinder supply were comparable to "anti-national activities".

"The entire country is paying the price for Prime Minister Narendra Modi surrendering before [U.S. President] Donald Trump. People are being forced to stand in endless queues for gas cylinders. The BJP promised free cylinders on Holi and Deepavali, but instead, cylinders have disappeared from across the country," said Leader of the Opposition Atishi.

She said the Prime Minister's "silence" on the issue has worsened the situation. " His voice has fallen silent, and the consequences are being borne by the people of Delhi and the entire country. The entire nation is asking where that '56-inch chest' has gone," Ms. Atishi said. AAP MLA Kuldeep Singh alleged that party legislators were being stopped from entering the Assembly to prevent discussion on the recent Palam fire incident and the gas shortage.

In his response to the allegations, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said the shortage was a result of tensions in the Gulf region and it was "unfortunate" that the Opposition parties were trying to gain political mileage during a difficult situation. "The Centre, through timely policy measures from the very beginning, has significantly reduced the impact of this shortage. Today, almost everyone in the country is receiving regular gas cylinder supply after booking," Mr. Sachdeva said.

Security stepped up ahead of Ram Navami

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Security has been tightened across the national capital ahead of Thursday's Ram Navami celebrations with additional police deployment in sensitive areas, especially in Uttam Nagar following recent tensions, a police officer said on Wednesday.

The officer added that security personnel have been deployed on rooftops to monitor suspicious movements in sensitive areas. Police are also closely monitoring social media accounts of "suspicious users and influencers".

Security arrangements have also been stepped up near religious sites and crowded areas.

Any attempt to disturb communal harmony will invite strict action, the officer added.

Uttam Nagar clash: SC asks Tarun's family to approach Police Commissioner over safety

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked petitioners to approach the Police Commissioner with a comprehensive representation if the family members of the 26 year-old Tarun Bhutolia, who was killed in a clash between his family and neighbours amid Holi celebrations, fear for their safety and security.

A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said the police would evaluate the threat perception and take remedial measures.

The family would be free to move the Delhi High Court if their apprehensions were not addressed, the court said.

Appearing in the writ petition filed by petitioner Hari Shankar Jain and three others, advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain said the case was one of lynching. He referred to the *Tehseen Poonawalla vs Union of India* judgment in 2018 in which the top court had compared communal violence and lynchings to a "typhoon-like monster".

Chief Justice Kant said the investigation by the Delhi Police was under way.

The petition had sought a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into the death.

'CBI's plate full'

"Every day, the CBI comes here and raises their hands and says their plate is full. Delhi Police is a professional force. Why to demoralise them? If the police need to be sensitised, you can approach the Police Commissioner first," the Chief Justice addressed the petitioner side.

SC raps police over lax probe into minor's sexual assault

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday pulled up the Haryana police and other authorities for their handling of a sexual assault case involving a four-year-old minor in Gurugram, calling their conduct "insensitive, reckless and wholly irresponsible" while ordering a fresh probe by a special investigation team (SIT).

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said the Gurugram police, the local Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and the Judicial Magistrate before whom the case came up failed in their duty to protect the child and ensure justice.

The top court said the incidents of sexual assault took place between December 1 last year and January 31, 2026, and came to light on February 2.

"The manner in which the police authorities, ranging from the Commissioner of Police to the Sub-Inspector, have so far investigated the case discloses a concerted and unwarranted attempt to discredit the version of the minor victim and to portray the concerns raised by her parents as exaggerated and unfounded," read the court order.

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given that our client has instructed us to investigate the entitlement of **BESTECH INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED ("Bestech"),** an existing company under the provisions of the Companies Act, 2013, bearing CIN: U99999DL2001PTC110996, having its registered office at Unit No. 5D, 5th Floor, Assets Area 4, Delhi Aerocity Hospitality, District West Delhi, New Delhi 110037 to all those pieces and parcels of land measuring 24.418 acres i.e. 98,819.174 square metres situated in the revenue estate of Village Harsaru, Sector 89A, Gurgaon, Haryana (**"said Land"**) excluding the entitlement of landowner Retired Col. Rajinder Kumar Singh Kalaan under the Compromise Decree dated 18th April 2015 inter-alia being residential apartments having total saleable built-up area admeasuring 2,01,000 square feet (super built-up area) alongwith proportionate undivided, impartible and indivisible ownership rights in the said Land (**"Owner's Allocation"**). The Subject Property is more particularly described in the **Schedule** hereunder written.

All persons having or claiming any share, right, title, estate, claim, interest or demand of any nature whatsoever upon, in respect of or against the Subject Property or any part thereof or the entitlement of Bestech to the Subject Property, whether by way of ownership, sale, transfer, exchange, assignment, lease, sub-lease, tenancy, sub-tenancy, leave and license, license, lis-pendens, pending litigation, mortgage, encumbrance, hypothecation, pledge, guarantee, inheritance, share, gift, acquisition, partition, lien, charge, injunction, loans, advances, attachment, acquisition proceedings, compensation, maintenance, easement, covenant, right of prescription or pre-emption, trust, beneficiary/ies, possession, release, relinquishment or by way of any other method through any agreement, deed, document, writing, conveyance deed, development agreement, letter of intent, devise, bequest, succession, operation of law, family arrangement/ settlement, litigation, decree or court order or award of any court of law or tribunal, any contracts, approvals, development rights or FSI/FAR consumption or TDR or encumbrance or otherwise howsoever, are required to make the same known, in writing and along with documentary proof, to the undersigned at their office at **M/s. Wadia Ghandy & Company, Advocates, Solicitors and Notary, First Floor, 112, Mathura Rd, Sundar Nagar, New Delhi, Delhi 110003** with all notices marked to the attention of our Partners (i) **Pranaya Goyal** at **pranaya.goyal@wadiaghandy.com** and (ii) **Apeksha Munot** at **apeksha.munot@ wadiaghandy.com** within fourteen (14) days from the date of publication hereof, failing which any such alleged share, right, title, estate, claim or demand shall be disregarded and shall be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned and will not be binding on our client and the proposed transaction will be completed without reference to any such alleged claim and any such claim shall be disregarded.

THE SCHEDULE REFERRED HEREINABOVE

(being description of Subject Property)

All those pieces and parcels of land bearing diverse Rectangle Nos./ Killa Nos. aggregate admeasuring about 24.418 Acres i.e., 98,819.174 square metres excluding the Owners Allocation being the entitlement of landowner Retired Col. Rajinder Kumar Singh Kalaan under the Compromise Decree dated 18th April 2015 inter-alia being residential apartments having total saleable built-up area admeasuring 2,01,000 square feet (super area) alongwith proportionate undivided, impartible and indivisible ownership rights in the said Land:

Sr. No.	Rectangle No.	Killa No.	Area		Area (in square meters)	Area (in acres)
			Kanal	Marla		
1.	53	5	8	0	4046.856	1
2.	53	6	8	0	4046.856	1
3.	53	7	8	0	4046.856	1
4.	53	8	8	0	4046.856	1
5.	53	9/1	4	16	2428.114	0.6
6.	53	15	8	0	4046.856	1
7.	53	16	8	0	4046.856	1
8.	53	25/2	5	3	2605.164	0.64
9.	54	1	8	0	4046.856	1
10.	54	2	8	0	4046.856	1
11.	54	3	8	0	4046.856	1
12.	54	4/1	6	16	3,439.828	0.85
13.	54	7/2	7	6	3692.756	0.91
14.	54	8	8	0	4046.856	1
15.	54	9	8	0	4046.856	1
16.	54	10	8	0	4046.856	1
17.	54	11	8	0	4046.856	1
18.	54	12	8	0	4046.856	1
19.	54	13	8	0	4046.856	1
20.	54	14/1	7	6	3692.756	0.91
21.	54	18	8	0	4046.856	1
22.	54	19	8	0	4046.856	1
23.	54	20	8	0	4046.856	1
24.	54	21	8	0	4046.856	1
25.	54	22	8	0	4046.856	1
26.	54	23/1	4	0	2023.428	0.5
TOTAL			**195**	**7**	**98,819.174**	**24.41**

The said Land is bounded as follows:

On or towards the North: Other Land
On or towards the South: Revenue Road
On or towards the East: Other Land
On or towards the West: Sector Road

Place: New Delhi
Date: 24th March 2026

For Wadia Ghandy & Co.
Pranaya Goyal
Partner

BENGALURU SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT LIMITED

Office of the Deputy General Manager-1,BSWML, 1st Floor, BBMP Building, Thimmaiah Road, Vasanth Nagar, Bengaluru – 560 052.

No: DGM-1/BSWML/TEND/31/2025-26 **Date: 25.03.2026**

Invitation for Short Term Tender
(Through GOK KPPP only) (Call-03)

The Deputy General Manager-1, Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Limited on behalf of the Managing Director, BSWML, Bengaluru invites bids from eligible bidders for the Services mentioned in the table given below.

Sl. No.	Name of the work	Amount Put to Tender per annum (Rs. in Lakhs)	EMD (Amount in Rs.)	Time of Completion
1	Primary Collection and Secondary Transportation of Municipal solid waste (MSW) and Street sweeping waste in CV Raman Nagara division (Package-01) **Call-03.**	**1,477.85**	**Rs.1,00,000/-** through e-payment mode under of the following i.e., online / RTGS/ NEFT / OTC and the balance **Rs.14,00,000/-** by bank Guarantee/FDR issued by Nationalized /scheduled Bank.	84 Months

1) Last date for uploading Pre-bid Queries : 3**1.03.2026 before17:30 hrs. 2)** Tender Pre-Bid meeting : **01.04.2026 at 15:00 hrs** at above mentioned office. **3)** Last Date of Receipt of Tender: **10.04.2026 before 17:30 hrs. 4)** Opening of Technical Bid: **13.04.2026 after 17:30 hrs.**

More details can be downloaded from website - **https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in**

Sd/-
Deputy General Manager-1, BSWML

DIPR/CP/JA/6327/2025-26

MAHANAGAR TELEPHONE NIGAM LTD.

EASTERN COURT, JANPATH, NEW DELHI-110001

Hello Customers!
MTNL
welcomes you to....
OPEN HOUSE SESSION
on 28th March, 2026, (Saturday)
from 10.30 am to 01.30 pm

Customers are cordially invited to attend the Open House Sessions/ Consumer Education Workshop in their respective areas and requested to offer their valuable suggestions for further improving the services in their areas.

MTNL
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PUBLIC NOTICE

It has always been our endeavour to become more customer friendly, more responsive to the problems/grievances of our customers and to add more convenience to our public interface. In continuance of this endeavour, MTNL announces Area-wise Open House Sessions/Consumer Education Workshop as per details below:

S.No.	Area	Venue for OHS/CEW
1.	South	1st Floor, Committee room, Nehru Place main Tel Exch Bldg. Nehru Place New Delhi-110019
2.	Central	Room No.101, 1st Floor, Jorbagh Telephone Exchange, New Delhi-110003
3.	East	O/o Area Manager (Delhi Gate), First Floor, Delhi Gate Telephone Exchange Building, Delhi Gate, New Delhi - 110002
4.	TY	DGM (Admin) TY, 3rd Floor, Karkardooma Exchange Delhi-92
5.	West	Committee Hall, 5th Floor, Admin Block, Telephone Exchange, O/o General Manager (West), MTNL, Rajouri Garden, New Delhi-110027
6.	North	Committee Room O/o GM(North) FF, Sanchaar Parisar, MTNL Telephone Exchange, Rohini Sector-3, Delhi-85

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1800 102 1878
Or write to us at
customercare@thehindu.co.in
Scan the QR code to register your feedback

THE HINDU | thehindu businessline. | FRONTLINE | SPORTSTAR | The Hindu Young World | THE HINDU

Directorate of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra
Head Office : 4th Floor, Sakhar Bhavan, Plot No. 230, Nariman Point, Mumbai- 400 021
Tel. No. 91-22-69107600, 91-22-69107604 E-mail: ee.diot.tourism@gmail.com

TENDER NOTICE

Directorate of Tourism is inviting proposals for the following project via its e-tendering system from pre-qualified organizations. Details of the project are as follows :

Project: Selection of Project Management Consultant for the World Bank supported 'MahaSTRIDE' Operation for Directorate of Tourism, Govt of Maharashtra.

E – Tender Schedule

Period for downloading and submitting tenders online – **25.03.2026 (05:00 PM) to 27.04.2026 (03:00 PM)**

Date and time of opening of Technical proposal – **27.04.2026 (05:00 PM)**

Corrigendum - **The above e-tender notices and corrections will be displayed online only.**

Detailed tender instructions and e-tender information are available from the following website **www.mahatenders.gov.in**

Sd/-
Director, DoT, Mumbai

POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL EDUCATION & RESEARCH, CHANDIGARH

E-TENDER NOTICE 2026/7 **CORRIGENDUM**

The closing date and time in respect of e-tender of Built up Cafeteria at 3rd Floor, Advanced Pediatrics Centre, PGIMER, Sector 12, Chandigarh has been re-scheduled as under:-

EMD physically Submission End Date : 07.04.2026 (16.00 P.M.)
Technical Bid Opening Date : 08.04.2026 (11.00 A.M.)
Financial bid Opening Date : 10.04.2026 (11.00 A.M.)

The link for the e-Bidding portal is **http://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app**

Note: Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at **http://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app** ***Website: http://pgimer.edu.in***

PGI/RC/Advt./2026/HR- 000190 **DIRECTOR**

Government of Punjab
Punjab Energy Development Agency

Dt. 25.03.2026

E-TENDER NOTICE NO. PEDA/2026-27/02

Punjab Energy Development Agency (PEDA) invites online bids from companies regarding to conduct detailed Energy Audits in 1875 MSMEs under RAMP scheme at various locations in the State of Punjab with scope of work as mentioned in DNIT.

Closing Date & Time for Submission of e-bids - 16.04.2026 upto 3:30 PM

Date & Time for Opening of Technical e-bids - 17.04.2026 at 11:30 AM

For more details logon to - https://eproc.punjab.gov.in/

Note:

1. Corrigendum/ Addendum/ Corrections, if any will be published on the above mentioned website and no separate notices shall be issued.
2. PEDA reserve the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason thereof.

1034/12/2025-26/9900 **ADDITIONAL DIRECTOR**

Allahabad HC refuses to quash '84 anti-Sikh riots cases in Kanpur

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The Allahabad High Court has refused to quash criminal proceedings in a batch of cases filed against residents of Kanpur in connection with the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, holding that the "passage of time and the absence of original records cannot defeat the course of justice in crimes of such magnitude".

On Tuesday, a Bench of Justice Anish Kumar Gupta dismissed petitions filed by nine individuals, seeking the quashing of chargesheets and summoning orders in cases dating back to 1984. The court emphasised that a prima facie case existed against the accused based on material gathered during re-investigation by a Special Investigation Team (SIT).

The court noted that the nature of the incidents was "like to a genocide against a particular community", in which several innocent persons were killed or set ablaze, and houses and properties were destroyed, in the aftermath of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination.

AAP MLA on run arrested in rape case from Gwalior

Press Trust of India
PATIALA

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Harmeet Singh Pathanmajra was arrested by the Punjab police from Gwalior, more than six months after he escaped custody in a rape case.

Officials on Wednesday said that Mr. Pathanmajra, a first-time MLA from Sanour in Patiala, was nabbed on the outskirts of the Gwalior on Tuesday night.

He was brought back to Patiala, Senior Superintendent of Police (Patiala) Varun Sharma said. Mr. Pathanmajra was produced before a court in Patiala, which remanded him to four days of police custody.

On September 1, 2025, police registered a case against Mr. Pathanmajra at the Civil Lines police station in Patiala on charges of rape, cheating and criminal intimidation.

The case was registered based on a complaint by a Zirakpur-based woman.

She accused the AAP MLA of continued sexual exploitation, issuing threats, and sending "obscene" material to her.

In Meghalaya, call to bar non-tribals from voting in council polls

Four tribal groups write to Governor Vijayashankar, say measures to restrict participation in autonomous district council polls necessary

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

A day after he approved an amendment making a Scheduled Tribe (ST) certificate mandatory for candidates contesting the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) polls, four tribal groups have written to Meghalaya Governor Chandrashekhar H. Vijayashankar seeking similar measures to bar non-tribal people from voting in elections to tribal councils.

On March 23, Governor Vijayashankar approved the amendment to the Assam and Meghalaya Autonomous Districts Rules, 1951, barring non-tribal people from contesting the GHADC election. The GHADC governs the western half of Meghalaya, dominated by the Garo tribe.

On Tuesday, leaders of the Garo Students' Union (GSU), the Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo People, the Association of Democratic Empowerment, and the Nangrimingin A'chik Dol wrote to the Governor that measures to make the autonomous district council polls off-limits to non-tribal people were necessary "to protect the constitutional intent of these councils".

"Rules relevant to the tribal councils need amendment to incorporate provisions safeguarding the rights of the indigenous tribes of the Garo Hills," GSU president Tengsak G. Momin said.

Members of Nangrimingin A'chik Dol (NAD) are among the four groups to approach Governor Chandrashekhar H. Vijayashankar demanding ban on voting rights for non-tribal people. FILE PHOTO

'GHADC model'

Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong said he would write to the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) and the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) to adopt the GHADC model.

The JHADC and KHADC govern areas where the Khasi and Jaintia communities are dominant.

'Zero FIR in Pawar crash case attempt to defame Maharashtra'

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said the zero FIR registered in Bengaluru in connection with the plane crash that killed then Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on January 28 was an alleged attempt by the neighbouring Congress-led Karnataka government to "defame" the State.

Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) [NCP-SP] MLA Rohit Pawar, Ajit Pawar's nephew, said on Tuesday that, as the Maharashtra police failed to register an FIR on his complaint alleging negligence in connection with the air crash, he filed a zero FIR in Bengaluru.

Replying to a motion moved by the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Fadnavis said, "What Karnataka has done is to defame Maharashtra by suggesting that the probe in the Ajit Pawar matter is not being conducted fairly. Karnataka should have told you [Rohit Pawar] that a zero FIR cannot be registered here."

CM Devendra Fadnavis said his government has written to the Centre for a CBI probe in the case. FILE PHOTO

He said that a probe by the Criminal Investigation Department is under way, and an Accidental Death Report (ADR) has been registered.

The State government has also written to the Centre seeking a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe in accordance with the family's wishes, Mr. Fadnavis added.

He said that everyone in the House wanted an impartial probe into the matter and felt strongly about it. "We will not spare anyone if they are involved in a conspiracy against Ajit Pawar. We will do everything possible to bring them to justice and to find them," he said.

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	34	16
Safdarjang	34	16
Palam	32	17

Delhi Palam Today
28°C The weather will be comfortable. Night will be cool. Spell of duststorm and thndershower with strong winds to occur.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
31°C Morning will be cool. Day will be slight warm. Night also will be cool. Mostly dry weather to occur.

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Timings
DELHI

THURSDAY, MAR. 26		
RISE	06:18	SET 18:36
RISE	11:54	SET 01:40
FRIDAY, MAR. 27		
RISE	06:17	SET 18:36
RISE	13:01	SET 02:34
SATURDAY, MAR. 28		
RISE	06:16	SET 18:37
RISE	14:07	SET 03:20

THE HINDU
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INBRIEF

International Film Festival Delhi inaugurated by CM

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Wednesday inaugurated the first edition of International Film Festival Delhi at Bharat Mandapam. She said that through this initiative, the national capital is securing its place on the global film map and moving forward alongside major film hubs like Mumbai, Pune, and Goa. The festival, scheduled from March 25 to 31, will showcase more than 125 Indian and international films. The inaugural ceremony ended with the screening of the opening film *Sirât*. The closing ceremony of the film festival will feature a special screening of the restored version of the film *Sholay*.

Body of man killed in Riyadh missile attack brought home

The mortal remains of a 26-year-old man from Uttar Pradesh, who was killed in a suspected missile attack in Riyadh earlier this month, was brought to his native village in Sitapur on Wednesday, his family members said. Ravi Gopal, a resident of Baghain village under Mahmudabad police station limits, had been working as a driver in a plastic factory in the Saudi capital since September 2025. He was killed on the night of March 18 in what his family described as a missile strike near his workplace. His elder brother Manmohan Dayal said the mortal remains were handed over to him in Lucknow on Wednesday morning with the help of the administration. PTI

AIADMK releases its first list of candidates; NDA will win 210 seats: Palaniswami

Oppn. alliance will form the govt. with an absolute majority, says party leader while launching his campaign for the Tamil Nadu election; Mylapore, Sattur, Avanashi among 27 seats allotted to BJP

T. Ramakrishnan
CHENNAI

The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) on Wednesday announced its first list of 23 candidates, including party general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami.

The Opposition party, which will contest 169 out of 234 constituencies in the Tamil Nadu Assembly election on April 23, has given up four seats to accommodate its allies.

At a media briefing in the presence of leaders of constituents of the AIADMK-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the State, Mr. Palaniswami made public the details of 64 seats assigned to the AIADMK's allies, including 27 seats for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The AIADMK general secretary will contest from Edappadi for the fifth successive time. The party renominated 16 former Ministers. While there were hardly any surprises in the choice of candidates, the list had neither a single woman nor a member from the Scheduled Castes (SC).

In poll mode: AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami and BJP leader Tamilisai Soundararajan campaigning in Chennai's Mylapore Assembly constituency on Wednesday. S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

The Mukkulathor community accounted for eight of the 23 candidates: Kongu Vellala Gounders (five) and Vanniyars (four). Barring three candidates, 20 were renominated from their old constituencies.

Of the 27 seats the BJP will contest this time, it is familiar with eight - from where nominees from the same coalition contested in 2021 - Tiruvannamalai, Thalli, Modakurichi, Udhagamandalam, Nagercoil, Vilavancode, Ramanathapuram, and Colachel.

The remaining 19 seats are Mylapore, Avadi, Rasipuram, Avanashi, Tiruppur (south), Coimbatore (north), Gandarvakottai, Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Tirupattur (Sivaganga district), Madurai (south), Sattur, Tiruchendur, Vasudevanallur, Radhapuram, Aranthangi, Manamadurai, and Padmanabhapuram.

Avanashi was represented by P. Dhanapal, former Speaker of the Assembly and the AIADMK's prominent SC face.

Interestingly, the Tirunelveli Assembly constituency, which was won by BJP State president Nainar Nagenthran, is not among the list of seats being contested by the national party. Mr. Nagenthran is likely to contest from the Sattur Assembly constituency in Virudhunagar district.

On campaign trail

Launching his election campaign from Mylai Mangollai in Chennai on Wednesday, Mr. Palaniswami said the AIADMK-led NDA would win 210 seats and form the government with "an absolute majority".

Campaigning in Mylapore, a constituency allotted to the BJP, he appeared alongside BJP leader and former Governor of Telangana Tamilisai Soundararajan despite the fact that the BJP is yet to officially announce her candidature. In 2001, the BJP had won the constituency when the DMK was in an alliance with the BJP-led NDA.

BJP fields R.G. Kar victim's mother from Panihati constituency

Shiv Sahay Singh
Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

The party also announced names of candidates for 19 more constituencies on Wednesday

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday fielded the mother of the doctor who was raped and murdered at Kolkata's R.G. Kar Hospital and Medical College in August 2024.

The mother of Abhaya [the victim was called Abhaya by protesters who took to the streets] will contest from Panihati in North 24 Parganas. The party announced the names of candidates for 19 more constituencies in West Bengal on Wednesday evening.

A few days ago, Abhaya's mother had confirmed that she will contest from Panihati Assembly seat on a BJP ticket. Several BJP leaders including Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari had reached out to the family convincing the mother to contest the poll. She had criticised a section of leaders of the Left parties, accusing them of using the death of her daughter for political gains.

The protests over the gruesome crime that went on for months in 2024 were one of the biggest challenges faced by the Mamata Banerjee government in her third term as Chief Minister, prompting people to raise questions on deteriorating law and order situation and safety of women.

Thousands of people had descended on the streets of the city for months seeking 'Justice for Abhaya'. Junior doctors of all-State run institutions went on strike for weeks.

Ongoing CBI probe

The Kolkata police had arrested a former civic volunteer for the crime. In January 2025, a court in Sealdah sentenced him to life imprisonment. The Central Bureau of Investigation took over the case as per directions of the Calcutta High Court but has not made much headway in the case.

Tirthankar Ghosh, son of outgoing Panihati MLA and West Bengal Minister Nirmal Ghosh, is contesting on a Trinamool Congress ticket in the constituency. The CPI(M) has fielded Kaltan Dasgupta as its candidate.

Cauvery basin to face dry spell until 2050, says study

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

While a warming climate is expected to significantly increase the flow of most major Indian rivers, the Cauvery basin stands out as an exception. The river faces a potential "near-term decline" of approximately 3.5% of its waters between 2026 and 2050, even as its northern counterparts brace for floods, according to a study by researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Gandhinagar, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Earth's Future*.

Given the fraught history of Cauvery water sharing between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the study suggests that despite climate models projecting increased rainfall from global warming in India, the river might not benefit. In such a situation, river interlinking projects, such as the proposed Godavari-Cauvery link project, might be necessary, the researchers say. The study finds that the Cauvery experienced a 28% decline in streamflow between 1951 and 2012, based on data from Kollegal which, one of the authors told *The Hindu*, "well represented" actual flows in the Cauvery.

While the study is based on a modelling study and is reliant on an extrapolation, it attempts to reduce errors that can creep in from blindly applying climate models to predict the impact of global warming on Indian rainfall. To do that, the authors use a novel statistical framework and base their analysis on actual river flows between 1951 and 2012, measured at nine stations representing nine major river basins, and then extrapolates the data using a "constrained modelling" approach.

Worry lines

An IIT Gandhinagar study paints a grim picture

- Flows in the Cauvery basin are expected to decline in the 'near-term' (2026-2050) and rise only 'negligibly' from 2051
- The river will not benefit from the increased rainfall from global warming in the decades ahead
- River interlinking projects such as the proposed Godavari-Cauvery link could help

The Cauvery riverbed lies largely exposed at the Mukkombu dam in Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu. R. VENGADESH

Avimukteshwaranand, aide get Allahabad HC relief in POCSO case

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The Allahabad High Court on Wednesday granted anticipatory bail to Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath, in a case registered against him in Prayagraj under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. Noting several inconsistencies and procedural concerns, the court held that protection from arrest was warranted at this stage.

Abuse charges

The FIR against the religious leader and one of his aides, Mukundanand Giri, was registered on the directions of a special court in Prayagraj. On February 21, the court ordered the police to act on a complaint filed by Ashutosh Brahmachari and two minors, aged 14 and 17, who alleged sexual abuse by the accused during the recent Magh Mela in Prayagraj.

The religious leader had termed the case against him as "politically motivated". Justice Jitendra Kumar Sinha had previously granted interim bail to Mr. Saraswati and Mr. Giri last month; on Wednesday, he announced the final order on the anticipatory bail plea.

'Delay in reporting'

The court noted a delay in reporting of the case. It said the informant claimed the incident happened on January 18, but the complaint was lodged only six days later.

An earlier complaint filed on January 21 had made no mention of the alleged sexual offences, the court observed. The medical evidence, it added, was inconclusive.

Cong. fight in Kerala against BJP-LDF partnership: Rahul

The Hindu Bureau
KOZHIKODE

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said only "two parties" are fighting the upcoming Assembly election in Kerala - the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF), and the partnership between the BJP and the ruling CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF).

Mr. Gandhi was addressing, through online mode, a public rally organised by the UDF on the Kozhikode beach. He could not attend the event as his mother, Sonia Gandhi, has been hospitalised in Delhi.

The Congress leader said while the UDF unites people, listens to them, and empowers them, the LDF and "their hidden partner" divide people and "crush their dreams".

He said while Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised two crore jobs at the national level, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan promised 40 lakh jobs. "After a decade, you find that they have not created any jobs, but destroyed them... Neither the BJP nor the LDF believe that they are answerable to the people of Kerala... They don't believe that the people have a right to ask questions. Policies of the BJP and the CPI (M) can't be separated from each other," he said.

UDF leaders greeting the crowd that gathered on the Kozhikode beach to attend a public rally on Wednesday evening. K. RAGESH

Mr. Gandhi alleged that the BJP not targeting Mr. Vijayan, against whom corruption charges have been levelled, is proof of its collusion with the LDF.

Earlier, opening the event, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also alleged a "secret understanding" between the CPI (M) and the BJP. "People here are saying that it has a name, 'the Communist Janata Party'," he said.

'BJP helping LDF'

Mr. Kharge claimed that the NDA knows that they cannot win the election in the State. "So, the BJP is fielding weak candidates to help the LDF. Every vote for the BJP is a vote gifted to the LDF," he said.

LPG shortage affects students preparing for govt. job exams in Patna

Amarnath Tewary
PATNA

In a windowless room of a five-storey building on Rampur Nahar Road in the Musallahpur Hatt area of eastern Patna, Prahalad Kumar, 24, and Rahul Kumar, 25, have crammed their cots, study table, coaching materials, books stacked on cemented slabs, a single gas stove with a five-kg Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinder, and other essentials needed for daily use.

But their LPG cylinder is empty, and they have not cooked a proper meal since Tuesday. "We are surviving only on *churadahi* (flattened rice and curd) and *sattu* (roasted gram flour)," Mr. Rahul said on Wednesday. Like lakhs of other students, both are enrolled at the nearby coaching institute to prepare for competitive examinations for government jobs. They, along with their friend Shrawan Kumar, tried getting their LPG cylinder refilled, but without success.

Earlier, refilling a small LPG cylinder cost about ₹100, but since the shortage began due to conflict in West Asia, they have been paying ₹300 to ₹350. "If the crisis continues, we will go back to our village. It is better to return home than fall sick or remain hungry here," they said. Their friend Guddu Yadav, 28, hailing from Supaul district like them, said they are waiting only for the State government's Assistant Education Development Officer (ADEO) examination scheduled from April 14-20. "Otherwise, there is no point staying here in such a situation," Mr. Yadav said.

(From left) Prahalad Kumar, Rahul and Shrawan looking to refill LPG cylinders in Musallahpur Hatt area on Wednesday. AMARNATH TEWARY

Food prices go up

Even roadside hotels have raised meal prices from ₹10 to ₹40, the students complained. "Our parents are asking us to come back home, saying health is more important... Black marketing of LPG refills for students is happening openly. Has the government not noticed?" said Mr. Prahalad. The State government, however, has said there is no shortage of LPG cylinders.

Students carrying empty cylinders could be seen in several lanes of Musallahpur Hatt, Bazar Samiti, and Saidpur Nahar areas - the main coaching hub of Patna. Outside Gyan Bindu GS Academy, hundreds of students walked out after classes, but attendance has fallen. A staff member at the reception admitted there had been a sharp drop since the LPG shortage began. At the nearby coaching institute run by Faisal Khan, popularly known as Khan Sir, an office staff member told *The Hindu* that the crisis has affected attendance.

Back to coal

Rajendra Yadav, who runs Mohit Library at Saidpur Nahar Road for about 200 students, said attendance has dropped from 210 to nearly 100. "The impact on students' lives in the city is bad," he said. At Shree Sai Girls Hostel, cooking has shifted from LPG to coal to feed over 100 students paying ₹6,000-7,000 per month. Magadh Mahila College principal Nagendra Verma has written to the Patna District Magistrate about the shortage. "For 10 days, we have not received any LPG supply. We have shifted to coal and wood, and the hostel menu had to be changed," Mr. Verma told *The Hindu*.

However, at Saidpur Boys Hostel of Patna University, students cooking on electric heaters say they have not been affected. "We have no mess here and we do not face any crisis," said a boarder, Anish Kumar. Leader of the Opposition Tejashwi Yadav blamed the government. "The crisis of LPG, petrol and diesel will increase further, and it is a failure of foreign policy," he said.

Long queue at pumps in M.P.; State Minister denies fuel shortage

The Hindu Bureau
BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Cabinet Minister Govind Singh Rajput on Wednesday said that there was no shortage of petrol and diesel in the State, a day after long queues were seen at fuel pumps in various parts of the State, including Indore.

Several videos surfaced online on Tuesday showing long vehicle queues in various districts like Indore, Ujjain, Mandsaur, Shajapur and Jhabua with local reports claiming that people had turned up to get their fuel tanks full fearing a shortage of petrol and diesel amid the ongoing war in West Asia.

Mr. Rajput, Minister for Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Protection, said that the queues and panic buying were a result of rumours while claiming that petrol and diesel are available in "ample quantities".

'Only rumours'

"There is absolutely no shortage of petrol and diesel stocks at the petrol pumps; both are available in ample quantities. Furthermore, supplies are being continuously dispatched from the depots to the petrol pumps. There is no need to be misled by any kind of rumours," he said, asking people not to engage in panic buying and hoarding.

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ISSN 0971 - 751X

ଓଡ଼ିଶା ବିଦ୍ୟୁତ୍ ଶକ୍ତି ସଂଚାରଣ ନିଗମ ଲିଃ
(ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାରଙ୍କ ଏକ ଉପକ୍ରମ)

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NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

E-Tender No.	Tender Description:	Estimated Cost
SGM-NZ-BLS-07/2025-26	Bids are invited under single stage two-envelop system from reputed manufactures/ firms/ contractors for Metal spreading in 132kV & 33kV S/Y of 132/33 kV GSS, Baripada under EHT (O&M) Division Baripada under Northern (O&M) Zone, Balasore.	Rs. 33,14,980/-
SGM-SZ-BAM-18/2025-26	Bids are invited under single stage two-envelop system from reputed contractors having valid B class Civil license and HT/EHT license or a valid HT/EHT license having EHT supervisor and Civil license (B class) for Painting of 220kV Jayanagar-Balimela DC line under EHT (O&M) Division, Jayanagar under Southern (O&M) Zone, Berhampur	Rs. 55,29,185/-

Complete set of bidding documents are available at **www.tenderwizard.com/OPTCL** and **www.optcl.co.in**.

/optcl.odisha /optcl_odisha **HIPR-87/2025-26**

BENGALURU SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT LIMITED
Office of the Deputy General Manager-1,BSWML, 1st Floor, BBMP Building, Thimmaiah Road, Vasanth Nagar, Bengaluru – 560 052.

No: DGM-1/BSWML/TEND/32/2025-26 **Date: 25.03.2026**

Invitation for Short Term Tender
(Through GOK KPPP only) (Call-03)

The Deputy General Manager-1, Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Limited on behalf of the Managing Director, BSWML, Bengaluru invites bids from eligible bidders for the Services mentioned in the table given below.

Sl. No.	Name of the work	Amount Put to Tender per annum (Rs. in Lakhs)	EMD (Amount in Rs.)	Time of Completion
1	Primary Collection and Secondary Transportation of Municipal solid waste (MSW) and Street sweeping waste in Shanthi Nagara division (Package-02) **Call-03.**	**1,411.47**	**Rs.1,00,000/-** through e-payment mode under of the following i.e., online / RTGS/ NEFT / OTC and the balance **Rs.14,00,000/-** by bank Guarantee/FDR issued by Nationalized /scheduled Bank.	84 Months

1) Last date for uploading Pre-bid Queries : 3**1.03.2026 before17:30 hrs. 2)** Tender Pre-Bid meeting : **01.04.2026 at 15:00 hrs** at above mentioned office. **3)** Last Date of Receipt of Tender: **10.04.2026 before 17:30 hrs. 4)** Opening of Technical Bid: **13.04.2026 after 17:30 hrs.**

More details can be downloaded from website - **https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in**

Sd/-
Deputy General Manager-1, BSWML

DIPR/CP/JA/6328/2025-26

PM SHRI KENDRIYA VIDYALAYA No.1 FARIDABAD
NH-IV, NIT, Faridabad

Interview for Empanelment of Contractual Teachers for the year 2026-27

1.	Date 30.03.2026 9.00 AM Onwards Walk In Interview For	Primary Teacher, Computer Instructor , Yoga Teacher, Sports Instructor, Special Educator, Staff Nurse, Counsellor , Dance Instructor, Vocational Instructor and Post Graduate Teacher (Political Science).

NOTE

1. All posts are temporary in nature.
2. Interested Candidates must register them selves on Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan Portal URL:https://samvida-sathi.kvs.gov.in Only registered candidates will be eligible for interview. A written test may be conducted for screening purpose.
3. The Interview will be of 100 marks and will include subject proficiency, general knowledge, teaching and communication skills.
4. For application form visit Vidyalaya website (https://no1faridabad.kvs.ac.in) For Educational Qualification and eligibility criteria visit Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan website (https://kvsangathan.nic.in)
5. All candidates must bring application form and all original documents at the time of interview.

PM SHRI KENDRIYA VIDYALAYA NO.1 FARIDABAD
Tel:-0129-2416889

Principal
PM SHRI K V No.1, FARIDABAD

KARNATAKA INDUSTRIAL AREAS DEVELOPMENT BOARD
(A Government of Karnataka Undertaking)
No.2, 2/1 and 2/3, Kalidasa Marg, 1st Main Road, Gandhinagar, Bengaluru - 560009. Phone No. 080-22265383, website: www.kiadb.in

No. IADB/ENGG/ETND-DPR-08/4082/2025-26 **Date: 25.03.2026**

SHORT TERM NOTICE INVITING TENDER
(Through GOK Karnataka Public Procurement Portal Only)

KIADB invites tenders from reputed consultants/firms under two cover bid system having an office at Bengaluru with vast experience and proven record of similar nature of work for project mentioned below:-

Name of the works : Consultancy Services for Preparation of Detailed Project Report (DPR) Including Economic Analysis, Surveying, Layout Plan, Design, Preparation of Estimates, Cost Structure etc., for the proposed Jangamakote Industrial Area at Sidlaghatta Taluk of Chikkaballapura District. (Extent 2823.12 A). (3rd-Call).

The last date and time of receipt of tender is : **10.04.2026** upto **4.00 pm.**

Applicants May Download Bidding Documents from the Karnataka Public Procurement Portal **https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in.**

Sd/-
Chief Engineer-1, KIADB, Bengaluru

DIPR/CP/6462/Zen/2025-26

EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY
OPEN TENDER NOTICE

Open Tender Notice No. MC-115-BioLab-2026-RNCC, Dt. : 21.03.2026

The Divisional Railway Manager, E.C.Railway, Danapur is inviting online open tender (on IREPS Portal) for and on behalf of the President of India from reputed contractor with experience, financial capability including those registered/working with Railway/ Irrigation/ CPWD/MES or any other public sector undertaking for under mentioned works:

1. Name of work with its location : Requirement of testing of Bio Effluent Samples of Bio Toilet in Bio Lab including supply of required reagent at RNCC Depot" for 2 years. Location:- RNCC Depot., **2. Approx cost of the work :** ₹ 1,24,32,372.24/- (Rs. One Crore Twenty Four Lakhs Thirty Two Thousand Three Hundred Seventy Two and Paise Twenty Four only) **3. Earnest Money to be deposited** : ₹ 2,48,700/- (Rs. Two Lakhs Forty Eight Thousand Seven Hundred only) **4.** Date & Time for submission of tender and opening of tender : Date & Time for submission of tender - 13.04.2026 up to 12:00 hrs. on **www.ireps.gov.in** Date & Time of opening of tender - 13.04.2026 at 12:30 hrs. on **www.ireps.gov.in 5.** Website particulars & Notice Board location where complete details of tender, corrigendum (if any) can be seen etc. : The tender notice is available on website **www.ireps.gov.in**

Divisional Railway Manager (Mech.),
E.C. Railway, Danapur

PR/1988/DNR/MECH/T/25-26/52

GOVERNMENT OF PUNJAB
EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, PWSSD NO.1, AMRITSAR
E-TENDER NOTICE NO. 34 OF 2025-26

The department of : The Punjab Water Supply & Sewerage Division No.1, Amritsar invites Bid for Civil Work:-

Sr. No.	Name of Work	Date of Closing of Tender	Date of Opening of Tender
1.	DNIT for the work Providing, Jointing, Cutting & Fixing of D.I. K-7 Pipes, G.I Pipe of Various Sizes, Construction of Sluice Valve Chambers including House Connections, Dismantling & Restoration of Roads Complete in all respects at Khem Karan Town District Tarn Taran (Under Special Assistance)	13.04.2026 at 13:00 Hrs	13.04.2026 at 15:00 Hrs

For detail login to: **https://eproc.punjab.gov.in**
Note : Any Corrigendum (s)/Addendum to the tender shall be published on the above website only.

Executive Engineer,
Pb. W/S & Sew. Divn. No. 1,
Amritsar.

1309/12/2025-26/9889

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida-201301 (U.P.)
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E-TENDER NOTICE

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5.	32/D(H)/DD(H)-II/2025-26, D/o Green Belt Construction of Footpath in F and G block Green Belt) Sector-44. Noida	75.16

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Welfare and distress

The Opposition is trying to undermine the LDF's development pitch

Kerala stands on the threshold of a high-stakes election on April 9 which could mark an inflection point in the State's electoral history. In 2021, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) led by the CPI(M), which broke tradition with its consecutive win, now seeks a third term. But it is beset by a slew of allegations, rebellion in its ranks and high-profile defections to the Congress and the BJP. This election, therefore, unfolds on a very different political terrain. The Congress-led United Democratic Front is counting on a perceptible undercurrent of anti-incumbency, the signs of which were evident when it outperformed the LDF in the December 2025 local body elections; it notched up a vote share of 38.8% against the LDF's 33.4% and won most local bodies. The Congress-led alliance has fielded a handful of Left leaders who had defected, causing agony to its cadres in some seats even as it was set back by senior leader K. Sudhakaran's mutiny during candidate selection. The Congress is seeking to counter the Left's development rhetoric by offering its own welfare schemes, aimed at women and youth. Attempting to queer the pitch in the bipolar polity is the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, which wrested the Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation from the Left Front in the local body elections in December 2025 through deft election engineering. But its vote share dropped to 14.7% from 19.2% in 2024 when it made its Lok Sabha debut from Kerala. Aiming to build on what it sees as a gradual shift in the political landscape, the BJP has drawn a few disenchanted leaders from both major coalitions and broadbased its reach by aligning with emerging outfits such as Twenty20, which claims a foothold in parts of central Kerala. The alliance is also attempting to expand its reach into minority communities, particularly among Catholic Christians in central Travancore.

The ruling coalition has largely retained its incumbent legislators, projecting continuity and seeking to rebut claims of anti-incumbency. It is also banking on its decade-long development welfare initiatives while attempting to capitalise on perceived uncertainties in the Congress over its chief ministerial candidate. Beyond the familiar rhetoric of development, a complex interplay of factors, with demographics being a key variable, will likely determine the outcome in each constituency. Foremost is the alignment of Kerala's two major religious minorities, Muslims and Christians, who constitute nearly 47% of the electorate. A range of issues, from the Union government's approach to the State, the Sabarimala gold theft, concerns over land encroachment to agrarian distress and debates around political Islam, is expected to shape voter sentiment.

Cuban sorrow

The U.S. asphyxiation of Cuba demands global condemnation

Even as the world is feeling the pinch of the ill-thought-out and cruel attacks by the United States and its West Asian loose-cannon ally, Israel, on Iran, an equally heinous imperial act is under way in the Caribbean, drawing little attention. The Trump administration has effectively blockaded Cuba's fuel supplies to pressure regime change. In actions taken since December 2025, interdicting Venezuelan oil shipments, threatening punitive tariffs on any country supplying fuel and deterring Russian diesel and crude oil supplies, the U.S. has strangled a petroleum-dependent country, where oil drives 83% of power generation. The consequences have been devastating. There have been three grid collapses in March 2026, even as garbage is piling up in Havana and other cities, perishable food is rotting, and industry and government offices have shut. Donald Trump's actions are criminally illegal by international law. He claims that Cuba is "seeing the end", boasts that he will have the "honour" of "taking" Cuba, and has called on the Cuban government to "make a deal before it's too late", without specifying any terms.

The actions against Cuba must be seen against a six-decade long U.S. embargo – but what Cubans term a blockade – ever since the revolution nationalised U.S.-owned enterprises in the early 1960s. The U.S.'s trade embargo in 1962 was progressively strengthened as the Helms-Burton Act of 1996 effectively conscripted the global business community into enforcing it. Meanwhile, Cuba's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism – removed by Barack Obama but restored by Mr. Trump and lacking any rational basis – has cut the country off from international banking. That these coercive measures persisted much after the Cold War reveals that their true purpose is not U.S. national security, but the appeasement of the right-wing Cuban-American community in Florida, led by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, son of Cuban émigrés, for whom regime change in Havana is a lifelong ambition. Mr. Trump's military intervention in Venezuela, including capturing a sitting President and seizing control of its oil, was itself partly designed to sever Cuba's primary fuel lifeline under the doctors-for-fuel arrangement. The pattern is clear: impunity in Venezuela emboldened the Trump administration to asphyxiate Cuba and impunity in Cuba has accompanied America's war on Iran. Each unchallenged act of imperial overreach normalises the next, threatening not just vulnerable nations in the U.S. orbit but also the very framework of international order. The world, including India, must not remain silent and have the gumption to condemn these actions and provide humanitarian assistance, under the aegis of the United Nations, for the people of Cuba.

The Transgender Persons Amendment Bill, a flawed fix

Gopi Shankar Madurai

Special Monitor for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC) Rights, National Human Rights Commission of India

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 (Bill No. 79 of 2026), introduced in the Lok Sabha on March 13, 2026, makes several sharp changes to the 2019 Act. It narrows the definition of "transgender person" to only specific socio-cultural identities such as kinner, hijra, aravani, jogta, eunuch, or biologically-defined intersex variations, or persons forcibly compelled into such an identity through mutilation, castration, amputation, or any surgical, chemical or hormonal procedure. It explicitly excludes persons with different sexual orientations and non-heteronormative gender fluid identities.

The Bill removes the right to "self-perceived gender identity" from Section 4(2), replaces the simple District Magistrate process with a medical board "authority" headed by a Chief Medical Officer, and mandates hospitals to report every transgender surgery to the District Magistrate and the authority.

Perpetuating structural problems

The government claims that the new amendments fix the vagueness and implementation failures of the 2019 Act. Every year, thousands of intersex infants are killed or undergo medically unethical, non-consensual sex-selective surgeries that mutilate their bodies without regard for lifelong physical and psychological trauma, all in pursuit of a false "normalcy". Millions of intersex individuals remain ghosts in our Census systems, their births and deaths unregistered, rendering them invisible to legal protections and social services.

Even the highest authorities fail to grasp the fundamental distinctions between sex identity and gender identity, or between intersex variations and transgender identities, which fuels rampant discrimination. The Bill itself refers to male and female as "gender identity", which is fundamentally wrong – male and female are sex identities. By clubbing sex identity under the gender column, the Bill creates new problems where it is meant to solve existing ones.

The government does not have reliable data on transgender and intersex persons in India. They want to grant us rights but do not know who we are. Separating sex and gender identity as different categories on official documents would address the root causes of this problem.

Despite the new wording, the Bill still lumps "persons with intersex variations" inside the definition of a "transgender person." The term "transgender persons" often conflates distinct identities. The Trans Act's definition includes persons with intersex variations under "transgender", which erases intersex-specific needs. Intersex is a natural biological spectrum (recorded 1%-2% globally). Transgender identity is a psychological and social construct.

> The Bill only deepens the conflation of gender identities and ignores core crises

Retaining this conflation under one label violates rights under Article 21 to bodily integrity and privacy. It leaves out intersex infants without any specific ban on "normalising" surgeries and ignores repeated calls for separate intersex legislation.

The Bill's definition also contradicts established international standards: the United Nations and the World Health Organization define intersex as innate variations in sex characteristics that do not fit typical male or female binaries, requiring distinct legal recognition and explicit protections against non-consensual medical interventions. By forcing intersex persons into a transgender category, the Bill undermines these global definitions and erodes the very human rights framework that India has committed to uphold.

The Bill leaves the outdated title, National Council for Transgender Persons, and all State Welfare Boards unchanged. It ignores the long-standing proposal to rebrand them as a National GIESC Welfare Council and State GIESC Welfare Boards (GIESC is Gender Identity/Expression and Sex Characteristics). This keeps the entire policy architecture trapped under the problematic "transgender" umbrella instead of creating a scientifically accurate, inclusive framework. The government continues to promote a single identity at the national level.

This heteronormative bill erases the reality that GIESC communities, including transgender persons, may have diverse sexual orientations such as transgay, translesbian, transbisexual, or queer.

Legally empowering exploitative structures

New clauses in Section 18 introduce rigorous imprisonment (between five to 14 years) for forcing adults or children into "transgender presentation" plus begging or servitude. Yet, the Bill does nothing to regulate or dismantle the colonial hijra jamath-gharana system. By targeting only external perpetrators while leaving internal hierarchies untouched, the amendment effectively legitimises and empowers the long-standing hijra jamath-gharana system, codifying it into law. These structures are not inherently traditional; earlier Indic frameworks were more inclusive and rooted in a broader, affirmative understanding of diverse identities, free from later external influences.

At present, chief hijra nayaks control chelas' earnings from begging and prostitution, trapping gender non-conforming children (often abandoned) in bonded labour. Meanwhile, thousands of gender non-conforming children, abandoned or rejected by families, are thrust into exploitative hijra jamath gharanas, havelis, and dayars, where education is a distant dream; instead, and forced into begging and prostitution.

State police often refuse to register missing child complaints for gender non-conforming children, and there are no dedicated policies to address their vulnerability to trafficking and abuse. There is also no framework for reform, rehabilitation, or protection of minors within these systems. By protecting these colonial-era identities without evidence-based safeguards, the government is undermining earlier inclusive traditions.

The Bill contains no requirement for genetic counselling by medical geneticists before certification, intersex surgeries and health management. It offers no mandate for India-specific longitudinal studies on "affirming surgeries" and raises serious privacy concerns due to inadequate safeguards.

Instead of addressing the problems faced by diverse GIESC communities such as administrative barriers and unregulated medical practices which include gender-affirming surgeries and hormone therapies (Government of India promotes freely despite severe health risks) the Bill offers only superficial measures with little relevance to their needs. Despite the 2019 UN CRPD recommendations to prioritise intersex welfare and dignity, these concerns remain largely neglected.

No intersectionality

The Bill contains no intersectional lens for caste, disability, poverty or religion. Transgender persons from Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe or disabled backgrounds will continue to face compounded discrimination with zero targeted remedies. It also fails to protect India's family-dependent societal structures by skipping any requirement for rigorous, evidence-based research before policy changes. Most critically, the Bill is completely silent on civil and marriage rights of diverse GIESC identities. It offers no provisions for marriage, adoption, inheritance, divorce, or succession for transgender persons, leaving them without full legal recognition in family law, and perpetuating their exclusion from the very institutions that define citizenship and dignity in Indian society.

The 2026 Amendment Bill tightens some definitions and increases penalties for forced exploitation, but leaves every core structural flaw untouched – the hetero-normative erasure of diverse SOGIESC identities, the complete neglect of civil and marriage rights, the legal entrenchment of colonial hijra structures at the expense of ancient Indic heritage. India needs a scientific, culturally grounded approach that separates biological sex characteristics from gender identity, prioritises evidence over ideology, bans non-consensual intersex surgeries, ensures equal rights, dismantles exploitative systems, and protects the dignity of intersex persons and gender non-conforming children. The Constitution demands nothing less.

Democracy, dissent and the 'national image' debate

Sandeep Phukan

The dramatic 'shirtless' protests by the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) at the India AI Impact Summit on February 20 triggered a debate on the limits of dissent and the response of the ruling party. As soon as the visuals of IYC workers going shirtless to protest the India-U.S. trade agreement went viral, several leaders from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were quick to describe it as an "anti-national" act and called Congress leader Rahul Gandhi a "traitor" who was determined to tarnish India's global image. The Delhi Police quickly filed charges, including rioting and promoting enmity between groups, and arrested 14 IYC members.

Does protesting against the government in front of international delegates at the AI summit dent the country's image? While there can be a debate on the manner of protests, it is not uncommon to find protesters at international events. Such protests are often seen as a demonstration of democratic credentials.

Perspective that might not sit well

In democracies, dissent is often considered a safety valve through which citizens not only express disapproval of a particular policy but also participate in the governance process. Such a view, however, does not fit well into the narrative of parties that seek to project strong and decisive leadership, where the personality and charisma of the leader drive the decision-making process.

In 1976, when former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposed the Emergency in the country, Congress president Dev Kanta Barooah had famously said, "India is Indira, Indira is India." Though no BJP leader has gone to the extent of equating Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the country, they routinely brand any serious criticism of him or his government as "an attack on the nation".

The projection of an all-pervasive leadership often blurs the line between the government and the state. In theory, though, there exists a clear one: the state is sovereign, permanent and supreme, while the government manages the affairs of the state. The executive, or the government, is another organ of the state, just as the legislature and the judiciary are. In a democracy, the state would also include a healthy opposition that would provide the checks and balances.

> Democratic strength lies in engaging dissent without equating it to disloyalty to the nation

How this distinction plays out in practice depends largely on the institutional design of the state, the distribution of power within it and how a ruling party frames its relationship with them.

Federal structure tensions

The concept of an all-pervasive "strong leader" necessarily leads to the notion of a strong state, where the distinction between dissent and sedition may dissolve. The extent to which this tendency manifests itself, however, is shaped by the constitutional arrangement of the state.

In the Indian context, the Constitution has been described as a document that is federal in structure and unitary in spirit. While there is a neat division of responsibilities in the central and the State Lists, the Union government has been accorded primacy in the Concurrent List – subjects over which both State governments and the Centre have jurisdiction.

Parties arguing for a "strong" state often adopt a reading of the Constitution that focuses on the unitary spirit of the document, and any contrarian position is viewed as an attempt to weaken the Centre. From this perspective, excessive regional assertions are sometimes seen as carrying the potential to encourage centrifugal tendencies.

Those who insist on the federal structure of the Constitution emphasise its pluralistic design, with different linguistic, cultural and ideological currents coexisting within the constitutional framework.

Political parties or ideologies alone do not shape our understanding of the state and the government; it is also influenced by the historical experience of the state with separatist movements and internal security challenges.

Intelligence and security agencies prefer political messaging through mass media that pushes towards creating a 'one nation, one identity' narrative. Such messaging not only reinforces a strong and powerful Centre but also acts as a safeguard against any centrifugal force.

And the mass media acts as a force multiplier, especially when political communication has become visual and performative. Every evening, TV anchors issue certificates of patriotism and sit in judgment on what constitutes an anti-national act. In doing so, they merge the line between the government and the country, often arguing that criticism, when amplified globally, are used by actors to question the legitimacy of the state.

Be it the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) in 2019 or the farmers' agitation of 2020-21, a large section of the mass media accused the protesters of playing into the hands of the forces that are inimical to the country. And, therefore, a protest against policy became a protest against the nation.

The tension between these two approaches reflects a deeper debate about the nature of nationalism in a democracy – whether unity is best preserved through a celebration of diversity or the assertion of a singular national identity.

Deeper questions

The debate sparked off by the IYC protests goes beyond what constitutes a 'decent' protest. It raises larger questions about how a democracy negotiates the space for dissent while maintaining national cohesion.

A confident nation derives its strength not merely from uniformity but also from its ability to accommodate competing voices within the constitutional framework, while remaining alert to attempts that may challenge the unity and integrity of the State.

The real test of democratic maturity lies not in the absence of dissent but in the willingness to engage with it without conflating criticism of the government with disloyalty to the nation.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The war in West Asia

President Donald Trump's shifting ultimatums and abrupt reversals expose not strength, but confusion and desperation. His claims of "victory" ring hollow when Iran continues to retaliate effectively, holding its ground despite sustained military pressure. This is not strategy. It is miscalculation of the highest order. Every act of aggression has been met with escalation, pushing the region closer to a catastrophic conflict. Such brinkmanship is not only irresponsible but deeply dangerous, with the global economy already paying the price. Equally, Israel's continued strikes, enabled by U.S. backing, risk dragging the entire region into prolonged instability.

K.J. Haroon Basha,
Vaniyambadi, Tamil Nadu

This is an event with cascading second-order effects. Curtailment of gas to petrochemical units threatens to choke the production of essential polymers, disrupting supply chains that sustain everyday life, from food packaging to infrastructure materials. Equally concerning is the vulnerability of semiconductor hubs. India must be prepared for deepening economic shock.

M. Jeyaram,
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

Corrections & Clarifications

A sentence in "India's dual dependence on West Asia for urea production" (Opinion page – 'Data Point', March 23) should have read, "In 2025, India's urea imports *exceeded $2.3 billion,* with a staggering 71% of these imports coming from West Asia (Chart 4)", and not "... exceeded 2,300 lakh metric tonnes, with a staggering ...".

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An energy transition driven by ethics

Vasudevan Mukunth

"Fossil fuel dependency is ripping away national security and sovereignty, and replacing it with subservience and rising costs," UN climate change arm executive secretary Simon Stiell told European Union officials and ministers in Brussels on March 16, against the backdrop of the U.S.-Israel-Iran war. He added that the disruption serves as an "abject lesson" on the pitfalls of banking on fossil fuels.

The war in West Asia has disproportionately affected economies such as India which gets nearly 60% of its crude oil from the region. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has forced state-run refineries to declare force majeure – an act of god. Pushing a country like India to abandon its remaining coal or domestic gas reserves without a take-off ramp could lead to industrial collapse.

Mr. Stiell's comments are reminiscent of the expressions of impatience by climate negotiators and stakeholders about how slow countries have been to switch away from fossil fuels: in 2021, activist Greta Thunberg called the COP26 talks "blah, blah, blah".

The West used fossil fuels to build its strategic reserves and today can't deny India and other countries like it the same opportunities, especially as the latter waits for its renewables infrastructure to mature and expand. At the same time, India's reliance on fossil fuels from West Asia is obviously why its economy is currently hostage to the region's geopolitical crisis.

Dependence on minerals

Mr. Stiell et al. have argued that renewables are immune to such blockades, which is true in part: if the flow of fossil fuels stops today – it is pinched in the Strait of Hormuz – the 'flow' of energy also stops, because we burn fossil fuels to release energy. With renewables, the critical minerals are not the source of energy itself. Once the state has set up solar panels and erected wind turbines, their ability to generate energy cannot be embargoed because they will operate as long as the sun shines and the wind blows.

However, critical minerals still represent a significant bottleneck, with additional complications such as the number of industries that need them – from consumer electronics to missile targeting, with the renewable energy sector somewhere in between. The supply chains for many minerals are even more concentrated than oil. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC+) controls around 40% of global oil production. And while the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Australia plus Chile extract most of the cobalt and lithium, respectively, a single country – China – currently processes almost 60% of the world's lithium, 70% of its cobalt, and 90% of rare-earth elements.

With renewable energy also making intensive use of hardware, a blockade of the required components, whether it be turbine blades or magnets based on rare earth minerals, would be just as effective as one of oil. At that point, it is once again a question of whether war could break out between the world's primary mineral-processing hubs.

Fossil versus mineral

The "abject lesson" is only so abject because of the prevailing oil situation. If, say, the West Asia conflict had not begun and Brent crude was $65 a barrel, the trade-off for renewables could return to seeming like a moral luxury – in turn retrenching the value of 'shock' events like wars to push the world away from fossil fuels. And to that extent, perhaps Mr. Stiell et al. are smart to seize the chance.

Without a war driving prices up, the high upfront capital expenditure for renewables is less attractive to governments. If oil is cheap, the payback period for a large offshore wind farm might be 15 years; if gas prices jump 50%, this period could shrink to 4-5 years. In other words, sans a war, governments would have continued to place fiscal responsibility before energy sovereignty.

In the same scenario, the world's dependencies on the critical mineral supply chain presents itself as a scarier prospect. If West Asia is stable and oil is flowing, the U.S. and its allies would likely view the option of trading West Asian oil for Chinese minerals as a net loss in strategic autonomy, which could encourage countries to reshore mineral mining and processing capabilities even before the energy transition picks up pace.

For India, a more stable supply of oil together with its arguably excessive focus on easing business could render its off-ramp into a long and gentle slope with room to continue using its domestic coal and cheap imported gas to power industrial growth while waiting for renewables to mature.

In other words, the Strait of Hormuz blockade could be forcing India to accelerate investments in renewables simply because it has no choice.

Fear not an effective tool

Mr. Stiell is in effect wielding fear as his primary tool, especially when he says "dependency is ripping away national security". The effects of fear never last – especially when countries imagine new ways to outmanoeuvre these threats. What ultimately matters is ethics. The virtue of renewables should be debated, and adopted, in order to save the planet rather than for saving the economy for another month.

This also matters because when oil is cheap, the environmental damage of mining lithium, or human rights issues in Congolese cobalt mines are scrutinised more heavily by the public – and while this is as it should be, it should not just be because oil is cheap.

Short-term gains or geopolitical shocks should not dictate green energy shift

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Tidings from Kejriwal's comeback

The BJP will have to ensure that the 'triple engine' sarkar works efficiently

STATE OF PLAY

Jaideep Deo Bhanj
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As the extended celebrations by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Delhi, on completing one year in office, brings to an end its honeymoon phase, the focus of the government is on ensuring that the "triple engines" that run Delhi, work in tandem to deliver on the vision laid out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of making Delhi a "world class" city.

With the arduous task of addressing legacy problems such as cleaning the Yamuna and fixing Delhi's air pollution on the cards, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta will have to reveal a clear blueprint of what her government plans to build, moving away from blaming the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for "neglecting" Delhi's development and finances for over a decade.

The return of Kejriwal

Coinciding with the end of the first year of the BJP government is also the return of former Chief Minster Arvind Kejriwal to Delhi's political field, ending a self-imposed exile. After a Delhi Court discharged Mr. Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia and 21 others from a politically-charged liquor policy case, the former CM explained that he had decided to remain silent until he is proven innocent before the country, and when his *kattar imandar* (staunchly honest) credentials were back. With Mr. Kejriwal staying silent, senior AAP leaders busy in Punjab where it is in power, and the Leader of Opposition and former Chief Minister Atishi in-charge

of the AAP's Goa unit, the role of the Opposition was being played by the AAP's Delhi unit president Saurabh Bharadwaj.

Some leaders in the AAP say that the vacuum created by Mr. Kejriwal's decision to step out of the limelight was deliberate so that the BJP could have a chance at governing Delhi. It would then turn up the heat once the party starts failing to deliver its promises.

Mr. Kejriwal's return acquires significance as his political persona has been built on opposition – opposition to entrenched power, to central authority, and to what he calls bureaucratic overreach. Even when in power, frequent run-ins with the Lieutenant Governor (L-G) and the Union government had him fighting against the tide. How Mr. Kejriwal leads his party on its home turf as the Opposition is sure to keep the BJP guessing his next move.

However, the political impact of the allegations against Mr. Kejriwal will not be easy to erase. Crores of public money spent on renovating the official residence allotted to him, that the BJP has mockingly called the 'Sheesh Mahal', has tarnished the original image that he created of being a politician that will shun VIP treatment when he comes to power. Mr. Kejriwal will have to curate a comeback from controversy if he wants to carry on with his original mission.

Adding to this mix is the entry of former bureaucrat-diplomat Taranjit Singh Sandhu as Delhi's new L-G. He is seen as someone the Centre has brought in to help the first time Chief Minister in a city that has a large diplomatic community. Mr. Sandhu who served as the Indian Ambassador to the U.S between 2020-2024, joined the BJP on March 19, 2024 and contested unsuccessfully from the Amritsar constituency in Punjab in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

His predecessor V.K Saxena's tenure was marked by frequent run-ins with Mr. Kejriwal who accused him of stalling development in the capital. A less confrontational relationship between the Chief Minister and the L-G will see files move faster in the national capital territory.

The road ahead

The Delhi government in its first year has mostly relied on implementing central government schemes like the Ayushman Bharat, or modifying welfare schemes to introduce Arogya Mandirs as an alternative to the AAP's Mohalla Clinic scheme, or replacing the AAP's schools of specialised education with the CM Shri Schools.

There has been careful compliance, with the Centre and the Chief Minister not going off-script.

The BJP, for its part, is unlikely to cede ground easily to the AAP but it will have to prove that Delhi benefits from aligning with the Centre, particularly in areas requiring large-scale coordination and resources. Will Delhi's "triple engine" government generate enough power to change the face of the capital? Or will it idle away the next four years allowing the AAP to reclaim its space?

Rural Telangana's verdict on the Congress, BRS and BJP

Defections, pro-incumbency, and better performance among the tribals were factors which aided the Congress' victory in the local body elections

DATA POINT

Pradeep Kumar Dontha
Vignesh Karthik K.R.

In December 2025, Telangana's ruling Congress swept the rural body local polls, winning 53.7% of gram panchayats. This analysis maps every one of those 12,702 results individually to their Assembly Constituencies (ACs), mandals, and reservation categories, covering 94 rural/semi-urban ACs and 590 mandals. The party inclination of each sarpanch was gathered through district-level reporters on the ground; and the reservation category of each seat was sourced from the Telangana State Election Commission. Together, these two data streams make it possible to read the results not just by party aggregate but by geography, community category, and the specific context of each constituency.

While the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) held 27.7% panchayats, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) managed 5.5%, and the remaining went to smaller parties, independents, and rebels. Mapped to ACs, the Congress led in 83 of the 94 rural/semi-urban ACs, the BRS in 8, the BJP in 2, and others in 1. At the mandal level, the Congress led in 445 of the 590 seats **(Table 1)**. The sweep extended well beyond the 62 out of 94 rural/semi-urban ACs the Congress won in 2023.

The defection factor

The single most revealing pattern in the data is the effect of MLA defections. Eight BRS legislators defected to Congress in function if not in law, campaigning under the Congress banner, and coordinating with its leadership. The Assembly Speaker did not disqualify them under the anti-defection law, leaving them formally as BRS members even as they operated as Congress on the ground. It is this legal grey zone that made reversals possible: the same MLA could walk to the Congress for the panchayat elections, walk back to the BRS for the municipals, and never technically have left either party. The consequences are written plainly in the data. In the eight constituencies where MLAs crossed over, the BRS averaged just 18.6% against the Congress's 61.8%. Where the BRS MLAs remained united, the party averaged 38.4%, nearly matching the Congress's 37.7% **(Table 2)**. A single MLA crossing the floor cost the BRS roughly 20 percentage points. Banswada is the starkest case, where the BRS was left with just a 2.2% share of panchayats.

Patancheru proved the effect works in both directions. Its BRS MLA crossed to the Congress in July 2024; Congress won the segment in December 2025. When the same MLA returned to the BRS in January 2026 before the municipal polls, BRS swept the urban wards in February 2026. That is, wherever MLAs held firm, the BRS showed that it remained a formidable local force. Harish Rao's Siddipet returned 80% of panchayats to the BRS, reducing the Congress to 6.6%. K. T. Rama Rao's Sircilla gave the BRS 47% of panchayats. The party finished second in 67 of 94 ACs despite having no government at any level and eight of its own legislators campaigning against it.

The BJP finished fourth or worse in 79 of the 94 rural/semi-urban constituencies, and won zero panchayats in 20 ACs. Any meaningful presence of the party was confined to just two northern Adilabad seats – Mudhole (49.7% panchayats) and Adilabad (35.3% panchayats). In south Telangana, the BJP is not just weakening; it does not exist.

A bipolar contest

The regional split sharpens the picture further. Northern Telangana, that is, the old districts of Adilabad, Nizamabad, Karimnagar, and Medak, account for 5,418 panchayats. The Congress won 47.5% panchayats here, the BRS 27.4%, and the BJP 9.3%. Southern Telangana accounts for 7,284 panchayats, where the Congress won 58.3%, the BRS 27.9%, and the BJP collapsed to 2.7%. The pattern is clear: the BRS's vote share is remarkably consistent across both regions, suggesting a baseline of organisational loyalty that does not depend on geography. The Congress is stronger in the south. And the BJP's already thin State-wide presence is almost entirely a northern phenomenon, driven by sitting MLAs in Adilabad and pockets of Nizamabad and Karimnagar. This geographic context matters for reading the caste patterns that follow: tribal seats concentrate in the north, Dalit seats are more evenly spread, and the two geographies produce different competitive dynamics.

Looking at each party's performance within reservation categories against its State-wide average, reveals a striking Congress-BRS mirror image. The Congress overperforms in tribal seats (Scheduled Tribes (ST) Women +5.8%, ST General +3.6%), likely reflecting post-2023 forest rights and tribal welfare policy. The BRS overperforms in Dalit seats (Scheduled Castes (SC) General +3.8%, SC Women +3.3%), retaining loyalty built during its decade in power. The BJP shows its only notable variance in Backward Classes women seats (+3.8%), reaching 9.4% against its overall 5.5% **(Table 3)**. The SC base is the BRS's most durable asset and the Congress's most visible vulnerability.

The Congress's 2023 wave has deepened rather than receded, reinforced by incumbency and absorbed MLA networks. Whether this is genuine organisational growth or just a ruling-party advantage will only become clear when it is no longer in power. The BRS survives as a collection of political fortresses, potent where its leaders held, hollowed out where they left. However, the BJP's claim to a Telangana growth story is contradicted at every level of this data.

Panchayat verdict

The tables map panchayat results across constituencies, mandals and reservation categories to understand Telangana's rural political balance

Table 1: Party performance in panchayat elections across Assembly Constituencies (ACs) and mandals

Party	Panchayats (%)	ACs led	Mandals led	2nd place in ACs
Congress	53.7%	83	445	5
BRS	27.7%	8	101	67
BJP	5.5%	2	19	5
Others	13%	1	25	17

Total ACs: 94 | Total mandals: 590

Data were sourced from Telangana State election commission and the authors' constructed dataset

Table 2: The effect of MLA defections on panchayat results

MLA status	BRS avg share	Congress avg share
Crossed to Congress (8 ACs)	18.6%	61.8%
Stayed with BRS (17 ACs)	38.4%	37.7%
Difference	−19.7 pp	+24.1 pp

Table 3: Party performance by reservation category

Category	Seats	Congress %	Distortion*	BRS %	Distortion	BJP %	Distortion*
UR (General)	2,747	53.08%	-0.62%	28.54%	0.82%	6.3%	0.76%
UR (Women)	2,488	52.77%	-0.93%	28.50%	0.78%	6.07%	0.53%
BC (General)	1,215	52.59%	-1.11%	28.81%	1.09%	7.49%	1.95%
BC (Women)	962	51.66%	-2.04%	27.86%	0.14%	9.36%	3.81%
SC (General)	1,170	49.74%	-3.96%	31.54%	3.82%	4.79%	-0.76%
SC (Women)	918	50.76%	-2.94%	31.05%	3.33%	4.79%	-0.75%
ST (General)	1,741	57.27%	3.57%	24.35%	-3.37%	3.1%	-2.44%
ST (Women)	1,461	59.48%	5.78%	22.72%	-5%	3.08%	-2.46%

Distortion (in %) measures each party's performance within reservation categories against its State-wide average

Pradeep Kumar Dontha is a political consultant based in Hyderabad. Vignesh Karthik K.R. is a postdoctoral research affiliate of Indian and Indonesian politics at KITLV-Leiden and research affiliate at King's India Institute, King's College London.

Local poll: Voters wait to cast their votes during the second phase of the Telangana panchayat polls in Shivampet on Sunday. MOHD ARIF

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 26, 1976

New diversion line on S.C. railway

From our Vijayawada correspondent: A new diversion railway line between Bhigwan and Pophlaj stations on the Daund-Kurudwadi section of the South Central Railway, constructed at a cost of Rs. 6.91 crores, is expected to be thrown open to traffic in April.

The diversion to a length of 33 km has become necessary because of the Maharashtra Government's decision to construct a dam on River Bhima, a tributary of the Krishna, at Ujjani, 150 km from Poona. The reservoir of the dam submerges the existing railway track for a length of 34 km.

The Government of Maharashtra has contributed Rs. 5.67 crores while the Railways are bearing the rest of the expenditure, as the diversion has been taken up at the instance of the Maharashtra government.

There are four major bridges on the new line – Bhima, Hingni, Bhopalpet and Pandara. The bridge on the Bhima is the longest with 23 spans of 60 feet each.

The work was started in 1971 and is now complete in all respects expect for the launching of girders on three bridges. The project has provided employment to the tune of 18 lakh mandays.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 26, 1926

Medicine in ancient India

Madura, March 25: Dr. Lakshmipathi delivered a lecture yesterday on "Indian medicine" in the Edward Hall, Madura, under the presidency of the Municipal Chairman, Mr. R.S. Naidu, Bar-at-Law. He said after the recent publication of the Artha Sastra, which was not merely a text book of political economy, but an encyclopaedia of contemporary scientific knowledge in all departments, the history of Indian medicine and the methods adopted by the ancient Hindus for living a healthy life, had become very clear. The work had given us strong contemporary evidence in proof of many valuable facts contained in ancient medical works. The scale of punishment laid down for infringement of public health rules was very severe. Society was thoroughly organised in the most democratic manner. The medical practitioners were held in great esteem. The physicians helped the King, in keeping up a high state of morality in the State.

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Prisoners benefiting from support scheme for poor inmates

458 Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar said the scheme aims to provide financial assistance to prisoners who are unable to pay fines or secure bail due to financial constraints. PTI

Political prisoners released by the Cuban government

20 Cuba has freed at least 20 political prisoners. The unusual show of clemency was made after President Miguel Diaz-Canel confirmed that his government was in talks with the U.S. amid rising tensions between the two countries. AFP

The estimated value of India's healthcare sector by 2030

700 in $ billion. The country's healthcare ecosystem was valued at around $300 billion in FY25 and projected to reach $700 billion by 2030, but health financing remains underpenetrated. PTI

Number of Lokpal complaints registered in 2025-26

389 Anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal registered 389 complaints in 2025-26 (till February this year), Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Wednesday. The Minister said the Lokpal disposed of 336 complaints. PTI

Number of migrants who died on the Eastern Route in 2025

922 The number of migrants who died on the "Eastern Route" from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula doubled to a record high of 922 last year, the UN migration agency said. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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What is at stake at the WTO's MC14?

What is the context in which MC14 is taking place? What has weakened the WTO's dispute settlement system? What are the key issues before MC14? Why is the e-commerce moratorium contentious? What role should India play at MC14?

EXPLAINER

Prabhash Ranjan

The story so far:
The World Trade Organization's (WTO) 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) will take place from March 26 to 29 at Yaoundé, Cameroon. The conference is the WTO's highest decision-making body and generally meets once every two years. It is empowered to make all decisions on WTO law and to chart a path for the organisation's future work.

What is the context in which MC14 is taking place?
MC14 is taking place amid rising geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and China, ongoing global conflicts, and the mounting securitisation of international trade relations. Furthermore, trade multilateralism appears to be in retreat, while unilateralism is on the rise. The U.S. has, over the last year, launched a massive assault on trade multilateralism by weaponising tariffs. Arbitrary tariff impositions by the U.S. grossly violate the cardinal rules that underpin the WTO, namely the most favoured nation (MFN) rule, which epitomises non-discrimination, and the obligation not to impose tariffs beyond bound rates. The U.S. has also begun signing new, one-sided trade agreements with countries through tariff coercion.

Why is trade multilateralism reeling under a crisis?
There is a growing belief in Washington that the WTO, which the U.S. was instrumental in creating in 1995, has not served American interests well. The meteoric rise of China in the last two decades has significantly narrowed the gap between Washington and Beijing. Moreover, China's accession to the WTO, which the U.S. facilitated, has not had the desired impact of disciplining Beijing's state-led industrial policies.

Consequently, the U.S. now wants to eliminate all legal constraints that apply to it, such as WTO law, to take on the Chinese threat head-on. For this reason, the U.S. paralysed the WTO's dispute settlement system by relentlessly blocking the appointment of members to the Appellate Body – the organisation's highest judicial arm.

Another key reason for the crisis is the WTO's inability to draft new trade rules due to consensus-based decision-making. Over the past three decades, the WTO has created only two new agreements: the Trade Facilitation Agreement and the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. The sluggishness in forming new trade rules has pushed countries to seek new venues for trade law-making, such as free trade agreements (FTAs).

GETTY IMAGES

What are the key issues in MC14?
A fundamental issue at MC14 is whether plurilateral agreements, such as the Investment Facilitation for Development, endorsed by over 120 countries, and the Agreement on Electronic Commerce, should be incorporated into the WTO rulebook.

Although the WTO is a multilateral organisation, it allows plurilateral trade agreements – agreements between fewer than all WTO members. These are typically included in Annex 4 of the WTO treaty. Plurilateral agreements bind only the signatories. However, for inclusion in Annex 4, such agreements must be approved by consensus among all WTO members.

Given the difficulty of achieving consensus, many countries believe that plurilateral agreements are the way forward to reinvigorate the WTO's legislative function. On the other hand, a few countries, such as India, argue that inaugurating the plurilateral rule-making door would open a Pandora's box and lead to the fragmentation of the system. It will be riveting to see whether countries can break this logjam at MC14.

Another key issue is the WTO's e-commerce moratorium. First agreed in 1998 and renewed every two years, this agreement among WTO member countries not to impose tariffs on electronic transmissions has benefited digital trade. This moratorium is set to expire on March 31. While the developed world wants it to be made permanent, the choice is not so easy for developing countries like India. Given the rise in digital trade, continuing the moratorium could lead to significant revenue losses for developing countries.

The 166 WTO member countries meeting in Cameroon are also expected to deliberate on issues of special and differential treatment (SDT) for developing and least developed countries (LDCs). SDT, part of the 'WTO reforms', recognises that, since not all WTO members are on an equal footing, special rights shall be conferred on developing countries and LDCs. The U.S. is keen to weaken the SDT principle by prohibiting larger economies, such as China, India, Brazil, and Indonesia, from enjoying special rights.

On dispute settlement reforms, it is critical to unequivocally demand the restoration of the Appellate Body to put the WTO's dispute settlement system back on track.

The U.S. is also expected to use MC14 to challenge foundational WTO principles, such as the MFN rule. Developing countries that benefit from these principles should strongly oppose such efforts.

What should be India's role?
India, which has always maintained its support for trade multilateralism, needs to walk the talk. It should regain its role as the normative leader for the third world by using the MC14 to articulate the importance of multilateralism and to forge alliances with other developing countries.

To do so, New Delhi should not shy away from re-visiting its deeply entrenched positions, such as opposing plurilateral agreements. India, along with other countries, should also consider other innovative solutions, such as electing Appellate Body members through voting. If MC14 fails to strengthen the WTO and promote trade multilateralism, it will represent a victory for America's blatant unilateralism and its effort to establish a new global trade order rooted in coercion. This will be detrimental to the developing world.

(Prabhash Ranjan is a Professor and Vice Dean (Research), Jindal Global Law School. Views are personal)

THE GIST

- MC14 takes place amid rising U.S.-China rivalry, global conflicts, and the retreat of trade multilateralism, with unilateralism and tariff coercion on the rise.
- Key issues include plurilateral agreements, the e-commerce moratorium, SDT, and restoring the Appellate Body, with developing countries seeking to protect the WTO system.

Why is Chennai's microplastic problem bigger than it looks?

What are the ecological risks of microplastics in beach sediments?

T.V. Padma

The story so far:
Microplastics, especially nylon fibres, seem to be present rather sparsely in Chennai's beach sediments but could still wreak long-term ecological damage, new research has cautioned. A study by researchers at V.O. Chidambaram College in Thoothukudi examined the abundance, sources, and ecological risks of microplastics from beach sediment samples from 15 sites along the Chennai coast. The findings show fibres dominating, with most particles smaller than 1000 μm.

Why does low abundance not mean low risk?
"This study is important because it shows that microplastics are already present in Chennai's beach sediments, even if we don't always see them," Sekhar Selvam, senior assistant professor at the Department of Geology, V.O. Chidambaram College, Thoothukudi, said. "We found that most of the microplastics are nylon fibres, which are more harmful than many other plastics."

In other words, even though Chennai's beaches have fewer microplastics than many global ones, the risk to marine life remains significant.

An additional insight from the study is the disconnect between abundance-based assessments and risk-based evaluations, Shaji Erath, professor of geology at the University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, said. Traditional monitoring often focuses on microplastic counts alone.

However, the study has shown that polymer type, shape, and aging characteristics are equally, if not more, important in determining ecological risk, he added.

What are the ecological concerns?
Ecological concerns in the study are chiefly centred on marine life and coastal ecosystems, Dr. Selvam said. Small organisms living in beach sand, such as worms, crabs, and shellfish, easily ingest the small plastic fibres, which can go on to block or injure their digestive tracts. Toxic compounds in plastics can also enter and poison their bodies.

According to Dr. Erath, besides feeding by marine microorganisms, plankton, and marine animals, hazardous polymers such as nylon pose higher ecological risks due to their persistence, chemical additives, and capacity to adsorb pollutants.

Fibre-shaped microplastics in particular can alter habitats by modifying the structure of sediments, affecting the benthic – or bottom layer – of seas and the microbial communities there, he explained. There could also be prolonged environmental exposure and long-distance transport of microplastics, highlighting the transboundary nature of microplastic pollution.

How do human activities contribute?
Most microplastics found by the Chennai study team were clearly linked to human activities, according to Dr. Selvam. These include fishing, where damaged nets and ropes shed plastic fragments that break up into microplastics; synthetic clothes, which release minuscule fibres when they are washed; tourism and beach use; and urban sewage and stormwater drains that carry plastics into the sea.

After reaching the coast, they reenter human bodies via seafood contaminated by microplastics, among other pathways. Seafood in particular can ferry both harmful chemical substances and disease-causing bacteria and other microorganisms into the body, causing tissues to become inflamed and affecting the hormonal and immune systems over longer periods.

Is it too late to act?
Right now, microplastic pollution levels are not so extreme in Chennai and better waste management, responsible fishing practices, and public awareness can still prevent a much bigger problem in the future, according to Dr. Selvam.

In the final analysis, the research has reinforced the need for timely policy-driven interventions, including better solid waste management, recycling of fishing gear, promotion of biodegradable alternatives, and public awareness, Dr. Erath said.

(T.V. Padma is a science journalist based in New Delhi)

THE GIST

- Microplastics, especially nylon fibres, are present in Chennai's beach sediments in relatively low abundance, but low overall microplastic abundance does not necessarily imply low ecological risk.
- Even small particles can cause long-term ecological damage by affecting marine life, moving up the food chain, and eventually impacting human health through contaminated seafood.

BUILDING BLOCKS

What is mineral water and how does it naturally contain dissolved minerals?

Mineral water comes from a protected underground reservoir and retains the natural minerals it has acquired from geological processes over years, decades or even centuries; in India, tap water is drawn from rivers and borewells and disinfected with residual chlorine

Vasudevan Mukunth

Millions of people around the world drink mineral water every day because their tap water is unsafe or because they prefer the taste. It's packed with naturally occurring minerals that support bone and muscle health and governments and health organisations promote it as a clean, reliable source of hydration.

What is mineral water?
Mineral water is water that naturally contains dissolved minerals and trace elements. It comes from a protected underground reservoir, like a spring or aquifer, and has a specific composition of minerals. Unlike ordinary tap water, which treatment plants produce by filtering and purifying water drawn from rivers or groundwater, mineral water retains the natural minerals it has acquired from geological processes it has been a part of over years, decades or even centuries.

As rainwater and snowmelt slowly percolate through layers of limestone, granite, sandstone or volcanic basalt, the minerals from the surrounding rocks dissolve in the water, and the differences in pressure underground push this enriched water back towards the surface, where it emerges as a spring or collects in a subterranean reservoir. Producers then drill wells or tap natural springs and flow the water into containers, using pumps if required.

How is mineral water regulated?
The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Parliament and the Council both have regulations that stipulate that mineral water must come from a geologically stable source, which producers must undertake to protect; that separate batches of the same water must have the same profile of minerals; and that producers must not chemically treat it to alter its mineral composition.

In India, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) stipulate that natural mineral water must come from underground sources such as natural springs and borewells, must be protected by various formations that ensure the water is free from pollution, and should ideally be collected in conditions that guarantee the original bacteriological and chemical composition.

As in the U.S. and the EU, the BIS standard IS 13428 requires the water's TDS and the relative proportions of various minerals to be stable over time and across producers' batches. Producers are also prohibited from treating the water to change its mineral composition, and instead are only allowed to filter or decant it, aerate it, and sterilise it. Chemical decontamination, such as by adding chlorine, is also disallowed.

Finally, unlike many food products in India, mineral water requires mandatory certification: to sell mineral water, producers must have both an FSSAI license and a BIS certificate and every bottle must carry the ISI mark (according to IS 13428). The FSSAI also requires the bottle to be labelled with the location and name of the source and the levels of various minerals, and disallows the packager from claiming the water has any medicinal or healing properties.

GETTY IMAGES

How is mineral water packaged?
To meet these strict criteria, producers usually bottle the water directly at or near the source. Once they extract the water, they filter it to remove particulate matter and elements such as iron to ensure the liquid is clear. Producers may also pass it through ultraviolet light for disinfection and adjust the level of dissolved carbon dioxide to produce still or sparkling variants.

Finally, the producers store the water in tanks and package it in glass bottles, PET bottles or aluminium cans at or near the source to avoid contamination or changes in composition. That said, the storage materials come with tradeoffs of their own. For instance, glass is chemically inert and doesn't react with the water but it must be handled with care; PET is light but can leach small amounts of plastic over time, especially when it's hot; and aluminium cans are most recyclable but require an internal plastic lining to prevent the metal from reacting with the water, which reintroduces concerns about chemical leaching and increases costs.

Packaged drinking water is not always the same as natural mineral water. Producers may start with tap or groundwater, purify it through reverse osmosis, then add back small amounts of minerals to improve taste. Similarly, spring water comes from a natural underground source but doesn't need to meet the same strict standards for mineral consistency.

That said, under 'bottled water', the U.S. FDA encompasses Artesian water, mineral water, sparkling bottled water, spring water, and purified water (including distilled, deionised, and/or demineralised water or water that has undergone reverse osmosis). Artesian water is groundwater being pushed to the surface due to pressure created underground by impermeable rocks.

What effects do minerals have?
The minerals present in mineral water depend on its natural source. The most common minerals include calcium, magnesium, sodium, potassium, bicarbonates, sulphates, chlorides, silica, and sometimes fluorides or iron in trace amounts.

Calcium and magnesium make water 'hard' and give mineral water the mouthfeel people are familiar with and have come to expect, including a slight weight and body. Higher calcium levels render a smooth or slightly chalky sensation, while magnesium introduces a subtle bitterness. Similarly, bicarbonates neutralise acidity and give the water an almost sweet finish, sulphates – associated with magnesium-rich springs – add a slightly crisp taste, and sodium imparts a faint saline note.

Dissolved minerals also raise the water's content of total dissolved solids (TDS) and change how it interacts with food, soap, pipes, and tissues, with different chemical and thermal environments (e.g. cooking), and with tissues in the human body. You may know from common experience that harder water deposits 'scales' in kettles and washing machines and doesn't lather well with soap. Its inherent chemical properties also mean hard water supports bone density and aids muscle function, although the contribution of drinking water to these outcomes is generally much smaller compared to nutrition. Bicarbonates may improve digestion.

What are other forms of water?
When water is distilled, it means it is boiled into steam and condensed back to liquid, in the process leaving all dissolved solids, including minerals as well as contaminants, behind in the vessel. As a result the condensed water is nearly pure H_2O, and tastes very different, almost hollow. It does not form scales on metal surfaces and behaves in the sort of predictable way that research laboratories and diagnostic labs prize.

However, while it is safe to drink, distilled water is not advised for regular human consumption because, aside from being devoid of minerals, it can also draw minerals out of surfaces it comes in contact with, including food and, potentially to a small degree, biological tissue.

Industries also treat water according to their needs. They may soften it to remove calcium and magnesium, deionise it to strip it of almost all dissolved ions or alter its chemistry to use in boilers or cooling systems. They could also demineralise it to prevent scaling and/or add compounds like sodium phosphate to lower its corrosion potential. Industrial water is neither safe nor suitable for human consumption.

To prepare municipal tap water, finally, treatment plants draw water from natural sources like rivers and groundwater, remove pathogens and chemical pollutants by filtering and chlorinating it, and add disinfectants such as chlorine. Unless a local authority specifically softens it, tap water retains its dissolved minerals. Its mineral content varies enormously by region: London's tap water is noticeably hard because it comes from chalk aquifers while many Scandinavian cities supply naturally soft water low in minerals.

How is tap water 'made' in India?
The main source of water that eventually becomes tap water in India is rivers and deep borewells.

Because the pathogen loads are higher in tropical areas, municipalities subsequently disinfect it more aggressively than in temperate or cold regions like North America or Scandinavia. Among other steps, they add alum to make dirt clump together so that it filters out more easily, and add residual chlorine, meaning more chlorine than what is required to disinfect the water, so that water disinfected at first becomes reinfected later if, say, a leaky pipe exposes it to sewage.

In fact, such 'mixing' is so common that most Indian municipalities don't guarantee potable tap water. Among the few exceptions are Puri in Odisha and parts of Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.

Tap water is a State responsibility while the Union government sets the standards. The IS 10500:2012 standard prescribes limits for the quantity of minerals in potable water but also has room for variations. For instance, while the TDS limit is 500 mg/l, it can go up to 2,000 mg/l if no alternative source is available.

Rajasthan, Gujarat, and parts of Delhi/NCR have very high mineral content, including calcium and magnesium, because their groundwater lies in aquifers rich in minerals, whereas cities and States drawing water from Himalayan rivers or areas with high rainfall, such as Mumbai and parts of Kerala, have much softer water with lower mineral levels.

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

With the media 'conclusively' uncovering the identity of the world-famous street artist yet again, here's a quiz on Banksy and his works

Mohammed Hidhayat

QUESTION 1
The elusive artist worked under which pseudonym before shortening it to Banksy (as per media reports)?

QUESTION 2
The recent Reuters expose hopped on hints left behind in a war-torn country where the anti-establishment spray painter drew seven murals in 2022. Name the country.

QUESTION 3
Banksy has cited this graffiti artist as one of his many inspirations. Name the personality who is also a musician and a founding member of the British trip hop group Massive Attack.

QUESTION 4
What is the name of Banksy's dystopian theme park-style art exhibition?

QUESTION 5
What is the artist's most widely reported likely real name, as suggested by media investigations since 2008?

QUESTION 6
The Reuters report released last week suggests Banksy may have changed his legal name to David Jones. It is also the given name of which famous English rock star, best known for pioneering glam rock?

QUESTION 7
The enigmatic creator famously orchestrated the partial self-destruction of his artwork via a hidden shredder at Sotheby's London auction in 2018. Name the painting, which is an adaptation of his 2002 mural.

Visual Question:
At a 2023 exhibition, Banksy acknowledged this scene from an iconic 1975 film, featuring a doctored tourism billboard, which inspired him to get into graffiti. Name the movie and its director. IMDB

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. His tribute single "Candle in the Wind 1997", a rewritten version of his 1974 single, sold over 33 million copies worldwide. Who was this tribute to? **Ans: Princess Diana**
2. What is EGOT? **Ans: EGOT is an acronym for the Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony Awards**
3. Which was John's debut album? **Ans: Empty Sky in 1969**
4. What is the name of the film in which his life and career were dramatised? **Ans: Rocketman**
5. Every year, John hosts a party. What is the reason he does it? **Ans: Aids**
Visual: John's songwriting partnership with this lyricist is considered one of the most successful in history. **Ans: Bernie Taupin**
Early Birds: Prem Nath Tiwari | Neil Lall | Akshansh Thakur | Abhay Krishan | Satvik Prashasti

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

"What was the name of the movie you saw yesterday?"

"I think it was called 'White Men Can't Jump'. I really enjoyed it. It was a real entertainer. It ..."

"...'White Men Can't Jump', eh? After seeing some of the decisions made by the umpires in Australia, I have decided to make a movie called 'White Men Can't Ump'."

"That's an excellent idea! I am positive that the Indian team will finance your project. The umpiring was terrible, wasn't it? Some of the decisions made by Hair and Co. had me tearing my hair out."

"Does 'tear one's hair out' mean to become angry?"

"Yes. 'To tear one's hair out' means to be anxious, frustrated or angry. It's an informal expression."

"When Sachin was given out LBW in the second innings of the first test, I was ready to tear my hair out. How does that sound?"

"Sounds great. It's getting late. Your parents will be tearing their hair out."

"No, they won't. They will..."

"...that was just an example!"

"I see. I don't think my parents would tear their hair out on my account."

"Your mother told me the other day that you had the habit of getting in her hair."

"I certainly do not get in my mother's hair! How could I...."

"...do you know what the expression 'to get in someone's hair' means?"

"Doesn't it mean to irritate someone?"

"Excellent! When you get in someone's hair, you bother or irritate him/her."

"I am sure Hair and Co. got in Tendulkar's hair."

"The umpires must have given the batsmen sleepless nights. As my friend put it, the umpires' policy seemed to be, 'When in doubt, give Tendulkar out'."

"Yes, the umpires in Australia were very patriotic! How about this example? There are times when you get in my hair."

"You're beginning to sound like my boss. He complains that I am in his hair all the time."

"That's understandable. By the way, does the expression 'to curl someone's hair' mean the same thing as 'to get in someone's hair'?"

"No. When you make someone's hair curl, you frighten, alarm, or shock them. I thought that the movie 'The Haunting' would make my hair curl. It did nothing of the kind."

"My friend, Lavanya, said that some of the special effects curled her hair."

"Boris Becker, when he came to Chennai last year, said that the speed at which people in India drove made his hair curl."

"Perhaps that's why he lost in the second round! He didn't want to take any more drives from the hotel to the stadium!"

"You may have a point there!"

"Some of the decisions given by the Australian umpires were enough to make my hair curl."

"...You've been harping on about them...."

"...what does 'harp on about' mean?"

"It means you keep talking about it again and again, although your listener may be sick and tired of it."

"Some of my cousins who are in 10th class keep harping on about how difficult it is to get through the IIT entrance exam."

"My friend in Bombay keeps harping on about what a great all-rounder Ajit Agarkar is."

Published in The Hindu on January 18, 2000

Word of the day

Clandestine:
conducted with or marked by hidden aims or methods

Synonyms: secret, covert, private

Usage: *They held a clandestine meeting late at night.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/clandestine

International Phonetic Alphabet: /klændestɪn/

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

From Page One

Iran dismisses U.S. bid on war, sets own terms

The comments from Mr. Trump, who has put off his threatened strikes until Friday, came amid reports that the Pentagon was planning to deploy thousands of troops from the elite 82nd Airborne Division to West Asia.

The *Associated Press* earlier cited two Pakistani officials as saying that Islamabad had delivered the U.S. plan to Tehran.

"We are closely monitoring all U.S. movements in the region, especially troop deployments," Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf said on Wednesday in a social media post. "What the generals have broke[n], the soldiers can't fix; instead, they will fall victim to [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu's delusions," he added. He later warned of a possible invasion of an Iranian island with the support of an unnamed regional country.

"Our forces are monitoring all enemy movements, and if they take any step, all the vital infrastructure of that regional state will be targeted with relentless, unceasing attacks," he said in another social media post.

Centre defends stand on crisis in West Asia

Barring the Trinamool Congress, all Opposition parties attended the meeting. Their questions covered India's silence on the assassination of Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei; the timing of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Tel Aviv; and Pakistan's reported role as a mediator.

Congress Rajya Sabha member Mukul Wasnik opened the questioning by highlighting Pakistan's reported central role as a mediator in the crisis. According to sources, he said that the Manmohan Singh-led United Progressive Alliance government had succeeded in isolating Pakistan globally after the 26/11 attacks, whereas today Pakistan occupied a prominent position in global diplomacy.

Mr. Jaishankar, in response, traced the history back to 1971, during the India-Pakistan conflict, when Pakistan brokered communication between the U.S. and China in an effort to corner India. Mr. Jaishankar also pointed to Pakistan's role in mediating talks between the U.S. and the Taliban in 2004. If Pakistan's current mediatory role is viewed as a setback for Indian diplomacy, he reportedly said, "then the setback began in 1981, when Pakistan began working as interlocutor between U.S. and Iran". "We don't run around asking countries what kind of brokerage (*dalali*) we can do," Mr. Jaishankar reportedly said.

India eyes 60% non-fossil fuel power goal by 2035

The Conference of Parties, or CoP, is a body of nations that convenes annually to discuss climate issues and transition their economies away from fossil fuel. India and Argentina were the only two G-20 countries that had not announced a 2035 NDC as of December 31, 2025.

A total of 128 parties, representing about 78% of global greenhouse gas emissions, had submitted new NDCs by that date. These included 21 Small Island Developing States, 19 Least Developed Countries, and 18 G-20 members.

Current commitments

Currently, about 52% of India's installed electric capacity comes from non-fossil fuel sources – a target achieved well before the deadline – though only about 25% of the power generated is non-fossil. These sources include solar, wind, hydropower, biomass, and nuclear power. As of 2019, say official estimates, India has achieved an emissions intensity of 36% from 2005-2020.

A carbon sink of 1.97 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent had already been created from 2005 to 2019. However, forest and tree cover accounts for about 24.6% of India's geographical area as of 2021, which is higher than the 21% in 2005, but still less than the national policy goal of 33%.

UDAN scheme revamped with changes in subsidy

Out of the total ₹28,840 crore outlay for the modified UDAN scheme, ₹10,043 crore is set aside for a subsidy to support airlines flying on regional routes over the next 10 years. A government official explained that airlines would receive subsidy support for specific routes for five years at a stretch. Under the earlier scheme design, these subsidies were not funded by the exchequer but through a Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) levy built into airfares on non-UDAN routes.

Subsidies were also capped at three years to push airlines towards self-sustaining routes. However, a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report found that only 7% to 10% of these routes had remained viable beyond the subsidy period. As of February 2026, of the 663 routes launched under the UDAN scheme since 2017, 327 routes had been discontinued, according to data recently presented in Parliament by Minister of State for Civil Aviation Muralidhar Mohol. The data showed that 15 of the 95 airports revived under the scheme have also fallen into disuse.

'Vande Mataram advisory not a threat to conform'

Ministry's advisory on National Song only prescribes protocol and those who do not sing it will not face any action, says SC; even then, there is burden on those who refuse to sing, argues petitioner

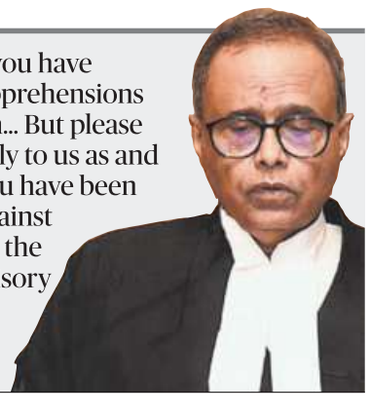
Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said the January 28 guidelines issued by Union Home Ministry on playing National Song *Vande Mataram* in full at public and ceremonial occasions are not a "threat to conform" and do not fall foul of constitutional freedoms.

"...it is only an advisory... The Ministry feels the National Song is as much an expression of the national identity. You may have a different point of view. But we feel you have vague apprehensions of discrimination which do not have a clear nexus with the advisory now... But please come immediately to us as and when you feel you have been discriminated against or singled out on the plank of this advisory," Justice Joymalya Bagchi addressed petitioner Muhammed Sayeed Noori, represented by senior advocate Sanjay Hegde.

Mr. Hegde began his arguments by noting the Ministry's circular made the singing of the National Song "mandatory" and compelled citizens to participate in a social demonstration of loyalty which goes against one's individual conscience. He pointed out that the circular has instructed the three-minute National Song to be played before the 55-second National Anthem, reducing the status of the latter to an "epilogue".

> We feel you have vague apprehensions of discrimination... But please come immediately to us as and when you feel you have been discriminated against or singled out on the plank of this advisory
>
> **JUSTICE JOYMALYA BAGCHI**
> Supreme Court



Anthem vs. Song

Chief Justice Surya Kant, heading the three-judge Bench, said there was absolutely nothing in the January 28 circular to show that people who did not play or sing the National Song would face penal or adverse action.

"Even if there is no penalty and even if today there is no legal sanction, there is a huge burden on somebody who refuses to sing or stand up," Mr. Hegde argued.

"What is that burden in law here? The circular prescribes a protocol of when and how the National Song must be played, what is to be done when it is played, etc. We can understand if somebody sends you a notice saying you did not play or stand up for the National Song and your institution should be closed or derecognised as a result," the Chief Justice reacted.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta intervened to emphasise that respect for the National Song was organic and, ideally, even an advisory was not necessary. He referred to Article 51A of the Constitution, which made it a fundamental duty to respect the National Flag and National Anthem.

Mr. Hegde said the National Anthem and National Song were distinct from each other. "..It was on January 24, 1950 that Rajendra Prasad, as President of the Constituent Assembly, ended the controversy by saying *Jana Gana Mana* would be the National Anthem and *Vande Mataram* the National Song. When the Parliament subsequently inserted Article 51A [in the 42nd Constitutional Amendment], it spoke only of the National Anthem," he explained.

He said India was a country which paid equal respect to all religions and everyone's individual conscience, even that of an atheist. Mr. Mehta retorted that it was not as if people were being compelled to sing *bhajans*.

Justice Bagchi referred to the circular which said, "In all schools, the day's work may begin with community singing of the National Song". "The expression 'may' means you could sing as much as not sing. It allows individual conscience to take the decision," he said.

Mr. Hegde said patriotism cannot be compelled, provoking the Chief Justice to ask if "patriotism cannot be compelled even for the National Anthem".

The court refused to entertain the petition, terming it "premature".

Cong. gets notice to vacate its iconic 24 Akbar Road office

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The 24 Akbar Road office has been the address of the Congress for the past 48 years.

The Centre has issued notices to the Congress to vacate its 24 Akbar Road office and 5 Raisina Road premises, where the Youth Congress functions, by March 28. The notice was sent by the Estate Department under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, informed sources said, adding they were served in mid-March and the party faces eviction, as it is the final notice sent by the department.

The party has been told that its new headquarters already functions from Indira Bhavan on Kotla Road and it is not entitled to hold on to the premises, the sources said. Congress sources said the party was still formulating its strategy to counter the notices and was keeping options open of moving court.

A two-member Congress delegation led by G.S. Sappal, in-charge of Administration, met Urban Development Minister M.L. Khattar over the notices.

The party, according to Congress sources, was paying market rent for its 24, Akbar Road office and there were attempts to get the bungalow allocated to a party MP so that it could hold on to it but it did not materialise. When it shifted to Indira Bhavan office on Kotla Marg, sources had indicated the party will not vacate 24, Akbar Road and it will continue to house some of its cells arguing that the BJP has not vacated its old headquarters at 11, Ashoka Road, even after shifting to DDU Marg.

Congress MP Karti Chidambaram said the Centre should apply its rule uniformly to all and not single it out while BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said the Congress should shed the "unnecessary victimhood card", recalling the policy made under the UPA government that parties would shift their offices from Lutyens to DDU Marg or to Rouse Avenue.

The 24 Akbar Road address has been the Congress headquarters since January 1978 when Indira Gandhi made it the office after her election loss following the Emergency.

Papa Rao, 17 other Maoists surrender in Chhattisgarh

Shubhomoy Sikdar
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma on Wednesday said that 96% of the Bastar region was free from Maoism and that only 30 to 40 cadres were surviving in the remote areas.

Mr. Sharma made the remarks at a programme held in the wake of the surrender of Maoist commander Papa Rao.

In a press note, the Bastar Police said that Papa Rao and 17 others – carrying a collective reward of ₹87 lakh – had shunned violence and joined the mainstream.

Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) P. Sundarraj said that security forces recovered 18 weapons, including AK-47 rifles, SLRs, INSAS rifles, .303 rifles, a 9 mm pistol, a BGL launcher, and ₹12 lakh in cash from the surrendered cadres.

Papa Rao

The press note stated that Papa Rao was also known by the aliases Ashok, Sunnam Chandrayya, and Mangu, and his association with the Maoist movement dated back to 1997. "A South sub-zonal bureau secretary (SZCM), he held key operational roles in Bastar," the note said. He had been in charge of the Pamed-Usur Area Committee and, from 2018, handled operations in West Bastar. He carried a bounty of ₹25 lakh.

Rajya Sabha brushes aside objections by Opposition, starts debate on CAPF Bill

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Bill seeks to nullify historical judgments of the Supreme Court, says DMK MP Tiruchi Siva

Brushing aside the Opposition's notices against the introduction of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF-General Administration) Bill, the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday started discussions on the legislation, moved by Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai.

Opposition members had moved six notices against its introduction.

The Bill aims to regulate recruitment, deputation, promotion, and other service conditions for the paramilitary officers.

Trinamool Congress MP Derek O'Brien termed the Bill anti-federal and alleged that States' rights are being taken away. Congress MP Ajay Maken said the Bill is encroaching upon the rights of the judiciary. He said six Supreme Court judgments had stated there has been an injustice to paramilitary forces.

DMK MP Tiruchi Siva said the Bill seeks to nullify historical judgments of the Supreme Court that the deputation of IPS officers in CAPFs will be done away with. He said the Centre's stand was rejected by the apex court, and Parliament is being used to override the Supreme Court's powers.

Responding to charges, Mr. Rai said the Bill is under the ambit of the legislative competence and right of the Rajya Sabha. He said the concerns raised by the Opposition are baseless, and the Bill does not interfere with judicial rights, and it is on the service conditions of police officers in CAPFs. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said the judiciary has been mandated to interpret the laws, to arbitrate and to pass judgments. "This nation is run with the spirit of the Constitution and the laws passed by Parliament of India and Assemblies. How can the legislative competence of this House be taken away...," he said.

Rejecting the notices, the Deputy Chairman put the introduction of the Bill to vote and invited Mr. Rai to introduce the Bill.

Later, initiating the debate, Mr. Maken said the paramilitary forces play a key role in protecting democracy. "The Bill should have gone to a Parliamentary panel for scrutiny."

Parliament to function until April 2: Rijiju informs LS

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Wednesday informed the Lok Sabha that the second part of the Budget session would continue as per schedule, and the government would take up its business on Friday instead of private members' business.

Mr. Rijiju said though there was a proposal to hold sittings during the weekend, Parliament will not function on Saturday and Sunday. March 31 will be a holiday because of Mahavir Jayanti. "On the rest of the days, the House will function as proposed," he said, indicating Parliament will function until April 2.

The announcement came amid reports that it may adjourn early in view of the Assembly polls in four States and one Union Territory.

Immigration, visa issuance scheme gets 5-year extension

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

IVFRT system has enabled 100% contactless visa process leading to faster processing

The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of the Immigration, Visa, Foreigners Registration & Tracking (IVFRT) scheme for a period of five years from April 1, 2026 till March 31, 2031 with a budget outlay of ₹1,800 crore, the government stated on Wednesday.

The IVFRT platform seeks to interlink and optimise functions related to immigration, visa issuance and registration of foreigners in India. The core objective of the scheme started in 2010 is to modernise and upgrade immigration and visa services within a secure and integrated service delivery framework.

"After the recent enactment of the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025 and its subsequent rules and order, it has become imperative to strengthen and modernise the Immigration, Visa, and Foreigners Registration & Tracking (IVFRT) system to effectively meet emerging requirements and future challenges in the domain of immigration control and foreigner management, including illegal migration," the government stated.

The scheme has covered 117 Immigration Posts, 15 Foreigners Regional Registration Officers (FRROs) and 854 Foreigners Registration Officers (FROs)/ Superintendents of Police (SPs)/ Deputy Commissioners of Police (DCPs) across the country.

The IVFRT system has enabled a 100% contactless visa process with online appointment scheduling and payment facilities, leading to faster visa processing times with 91.24% of e-visa applications cleared within 72 hours during the past five years, it further stated.

Congress criticises Modi govt.'s 'U-turn' on women's quota law

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday accused the Narendra Modi government of making a U-turn on the women's reservation law by seeking to implement it after carrying out of delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats on the basis of the 2011 Census.

Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh alleged that the move marked a reversal of the government's earlier stand that the provisions of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam could only be operationalised after the completion of the next Census and delimitation exercise. "When the Nari Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023 was being debated, the Indian National Congress had demanded its immediate implementation from the 2024 Lok Sabha elections itself. The Modi Govt said this was not possible since both delimitation and the census had to necessarily be completed first," Mr. Ramesh said in a post on X. "Now the U-turn Ustad has, after 30 months, suddenly changed his mind and wants to implement the reservations WITHOUT completing the delimitation and census operations," he added.

Jairam Ramesh

He termed the move a "weapon of mass diversion", and said, "Desperate to change the narrative from his foreign policy failures and setbacks from the LPG crisis, he has come up with this new initiative. Wanting to take full political advantage of it, he has let it be known that a special two-day session will be convened to pass the amendments necessary to the Nari Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023."

ASSEMBLY POLLS

BJP will win 177 seats in Bengal polls: Suvendu

Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday claimed that the Bharatiya Janata Party would win 177 of the 294 seats in the West Bengal Assembly polls.

The BJP leader said if people were allowed to vote, "the BJP will win nothing short of 177 seats".

This is the first time that a BJP leader in West Bengal has put up a figure on how many seats the BJP will win in the Assembly polls.

There are 294 seats in the Assembly and the magic figure for securing a majority is 148 seats.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, while announcing candidates for the polls, had said her party would win at least 226 seats. In the 2021 Assembly polls, the Trinamool Congress had won 215 seats and the BJP was reduced to 77 seats.

BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari during an election campaign, in Kolkata. PTI

'Grave breach': CPI on EC letter with BJP seal

Communist Party of India (CPI) Rajya Sabha member P. Sandosh Kumar has written to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, flagging what he termed a "serious breach of institutional neutrality and procedural integrity" after an Election Commission communication was found with the seal of the BJP.

The Kerala Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) has reportedly acknowledged circulating the document, attributing the presence of the party's seal to a "clerical mistake", an explanation the MP described as untenable and deeply troubling. He argued that the incident goes beyond routine administrative lapses and strikes at the credibility and constitutional impartiality of the EC, especially at a time when public confidence in democratic processes requires utmost protection.

Some say there are many Muslims in Trinamool Congress. But that is anonymous leadership. What we want is leadership with a voice

ASADUDDIN OWAISI
AIMIM chief

Assam needs BJP for peace, says Himanta

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma sought the support of voters for the BJP to ensure the peace and development that generates jobs. He said that Assam was free from explosions, shutdowns, and agitations. "This is why Assam needs a BJP government for peace and development," he said.

If you criticise the government, you are put in jail, cut off from schemes. This is not the politics of democracy but fascism. People of Assam deserve better

GAURAV GOGOI
Congress leader

Twist in tale: The United People's Party Liberation led by Pramod Boro walked out of its alliance with the BJP recently. FILE PHOTO

Lone rangers flex their muscle against alliances in Assam battle

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

The "non-aligned" political parties may become the dark horse in Assam's electoral battle between two blocs – the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the Asom Sonmiloto Morcha (ASM).

Mandate 2026 is largely expected to be a straight fight between the Bharatiya Janata Party-led NDA and the Congress-led ASM across Assam's 126 constituencies.

The BJP has three allies – the Asom Gana Parishad, the Bodoland People's Front (BPF), and the Rabha Hasong Joutha Mancha. The Congress has five partners in the ASM – two of the Left Front, two sired the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act stir of 2019, and a hill-based tribal party.

The two blocs are gung-ho about victory on April 9, the day of voting. However, the neutral parties have been gaining in confidence as the D-Day approaches.

The most confident among these parties are the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), which was part of the Congress-led Mahajot (Grand Alliance) during the 2021 election, and the United People's Party Liberation (UPPL), which was the BJP's ally five years ago. Both walked out of their respective alliance, the UPPL less than a fortnight ago.

Best strike rate

The AIUDF had the best strike rate in 2021, winning 16 of the 20 seats it contested. Mohammed Badruddin Ajmal, the party's chief and candidate from central Assam's Binnakandi seat, said the AIUDF had the firepower to at least match its 2021 performance.

The AIUDF is contesting 27 seats, the bulk of them in Muslim-dominated areas.

"Assam's political landscape will undergo a major shift this time, as the minority people know both the BJP and the Congress have been exploiting them. The people also know today's Congress is the A-team of the BJP," he said. The UPPL, which won six of the 11 seats it contested in 2021, is equally upbeat about a good show. The party is contesting 18 seats, three beyond its core area covered by the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

"We are fighting this election independently because our grassroots supporters, our strength, wanted us to. We played a key role in restoring peace in the BTR, which is relapsing into violence," UPPL president Pramod Boro said. Elected to the Rajya Sabha a few days ago, he is contesting the Tamulpur seat in the BTR.

The UPPL ruled the Bodoland Territorial Council, which governs the BTR, in alliance with the BJP for five years until the BPF defeated it in the September 2025 council polls.

Other parties

Four other non-aligned political entities in the fray are the Trinamool Congress (contesting 23 seats), the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (21 seats), the Aam Aadmi Party (14 seats), and the National People's Party (NPP) headed by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, which is contesting three seats.

These neutral parties do not face each other in many constituencies, raising hopes that they could cause an upset or two.

The Trinamool Congress and the NPP drew a blank in 2021.

Game of throne: surfeit of faces for CM's post in Cong. in Kerala

P.J. Kurien endorses Chennithala, but leader downplays it, says final decision rests with high command; K.C. Joseph warns against potential divisiveness; Congress has 'a galaxy of leaders' capable of executing any political task, says Satheesan

IN FOCUS

G. Anand
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Speculation is rife in the Congress over who will be the Chief Minister if the party-led United Democratic Front (UDF) wins the Assembly election in Kerala, despite the best efforts of the party leadership to tamp down such "schismatic" conjecturing.

P.J. Kurien, veteran Congress leader and former Deputy Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, on Wednesday pushed the organisational contestations over the Congress's choice, at times muted and at times loud, into the public domain.

At a UDF election convention in Thiruvalla, Mr. Kurien said the UDF would win on May 4, the poll results day. Pointing at senior party leader Ramesh Chennithala, who shared the dais with him, Mr. Kurien said, "I have no doubt that Mr. Chennithala will be the Chief Minister. He [Mr. Chennithala] might protest, saying that the party will decide," he said.

Looking ahead: Congress leaders Sunny Joseph, V. D. Satheesan, Ramesh Chennithala and K.C. Venugopal at a party event in Thiruvananthapuram. A. JAYAMOHAN

Varghese Mammen, a Kerala Congress leader contesting as the UDF candidate from Thiruvalla, sat next to Mr. Chennithala. Glancing at them, Mr. Kurien quipped: "Mr. Mammen will sit on the right of Mr. Chennithala on the Treasury bench in the Kerala Legislative Assembly after the polls."

Mr. Kurien's statement sent the political rumour mill into overdrive. His averment went viral, with some channels claiming that the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee's senior leadership, including K. Sudhakaran, among others, backed Mr. Chennithala over Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan and All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary K. C. Venugopal, to the high office.

Mr. Chennithala later made light of Mr. Kurien's statement. He echoed the AICC's line that the party's national high command would take the final call in consultation with the members of the Congress Legislature Party. "The Congress and the UDF are marching in lockstep to end Left Democratic Front (LDF) rule. The aim of winning the elections gains primacy over everything else," he said.

Senior Congress leader K.C. Joseph said senior leaders should "desist from broadcasting self-defeating conjectures" about the prospective Chief Minister.

'Live-or-die battle'

In a Facebook post, Mr. Joseph said the party was locked in a "live-or-die" electoral battle. "Tens of thousands of UDF workers are braving hostile circumstances, including the sweltering summer, to win the fight for the party and not to capture the Chief Minister's post for any individual. Leaders should respect their sentiment and sacrifice," he said.

Mr. Joseph said he was not offering any counsel, but merely reminding leaders that they know how the Congress decides the party's Chief Ministers.

Mr. Satheesan sought to sidestep the debate. He told presspersons in Palakkad that the Opposition was fighting the polls as "Team UDF".

He noted, somewhat cryptically, that the Congress had "a galaxy of leaders" capable of executing any political task given to them by the party.

Singapore report ignites Zubeen death issue in Assam

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

In poll-bound Assam, Singapore coroner's inquiry report has fuelled a debate over Assamese cultural icon Zubeen Garg's mysterious death.

In a judgment on Wednesday, the island country's State Coroner, Adam Nakhoda, said Garg drowned accidentally and he found no reason to disagree with the Police Coast Guard's findings about the nature of his death. Earlier, the Singapore General Hospital cited drowning as the cause of his death on September 19, 2025.

Reacting to the coroner's report, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the judgment and the chargesheet filed by the SIT of the Assam police were similar. However, he said in November 2025 that Garg had been murdered.

State Congress president Gaurav Gogoi said the Singapore ruling challenged the Chief Minister's murder theory. "The Indian government coordinated with its Singapore counterpart on this matter, and the Assam government sent a police team to Singapore to investigate. The Singapore verdict is a gift for those accused of killing him," he said.

India's 'newest voters' caught in SIR adjudication trap in West Bengal

Shiv Sahay Singh
DINHATA

Dinhata residents Manmohan Barman and Mohammad Mujjamel Khandakar are among India's newest voters, with their citizenship recognised through an international agreement, but that has not stopped the Election Commission from putting them in the uncertain category of "electorate under adjudication".

Mr. Barman, 66, and Mr. Khandakar, 64, are both now residents of the Dinhata constituency in Cooch Behar district. Just over a decade ago, however, they lived in Dasiarchara, an Indian enclave located deep within Bangladeshi territory.

In July 2015, they were among 989 people scattered across 111 such Indian enclaves who chose to relocate to India after the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) was signed, when the territory of those enclaves was absorbed into Bangladesh.

At the same time, 14,854 residents of 51 Bangladeshi enclaves located within Indian territory also became Indian citizens as per the LBA.

Mr. Barman and Mr. Khandakar have voted in several elections, but they have little hope that they will be able to vote in next month's Assembly poll, given the hurdle posed by the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

Left out: Manmohan Barman and Mohammad Mujjamel Khandakar at a camp in Cooch Behar. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

When the EC kicked off the SIR process in West Bengal in October 2025, residents of the settlement camp were sceptical about participating in the process. Their families have no legacy data to trace their ancestry to the 2002 voter list, since they had an effectively Stateless existence before 2015. Sure enough, their names cropped up in the "logical discrepancies" list after the first phase of the SIR.

Not in list

Now, nine members of the Khandakar family and four from the Barman family have found their voter status "under adjudication". Their names were not included in the EC's first list of those cleared through adjudication on March 23, so their right to vote still hangs in the balance.

"If we were to be denied voting, why were we brought here under the [bilateral Land Boundary] Agreement? By bringing in this SIR, we have been pushed towards uncertainty," Mr. Khandakar said.

The 58 families that have been living in the Dinhata enclave settlement camp since 2019, insist that they came to India through a bipartite agreement and thus should have not been subject to the SIR at all. Most of their youth have migrated for work and the elders fear that if their names are not cleared off the adjudication list, the youth may not return to vote.

Mohammad Saraul, who runs a small grocery shop in the camp, said women like his wife, who were born in India and have married erstwhile enclave dwellers now residing in the settlement camp, have been marked "under adjudication" in the lists.

'Are we outsiders?'

Hamida Begum, 60, and Namita Barman, 39, both residents of the settlement camp, are angry. "Why did they put us under adjudication? Are we outsiders? The government brought us and now says we have no voting rights," Ms. Barman said.

Osman Gani, a resident of the Dinhata camp, claims that that there is a communal design in the way voters from minority communities have been kept "under adjudication".

"There are three enclave settlement camps for people who came from Bangladesh, located at Dinhata, Haldibari, and Mekhliganj. The camps at Haldibari and Mekhliganj have Hindu majority so most of the people have been cleared as voters during SIR. It is in Muslim majority areas that the names of electors remains stuck," he said.

Residents of Madhya Masaldanga, a Bangladeshi enclave that became part of India during the 2015 LBA-sanctioned swap of enclaves, say that since their right to vote is doubtful in the run-up to this election, no candidate has even reached out to them.

'Names of 13 lakh Bengal voters under adjudication deleted'

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

A decision has been made on 32 lakh voter records of the 60 lakh under adjudication in West Bengal till Wednesday, according to sources in the State's Chief Electoral Office. Of the 32 lakh, names of at least 40% (about 13 lakh) have been deleted from the electoral rolls, the sources added.

Around 28 lakh voters under adjudication are still waiting for a decision.

The Election Commission had published the first supplementary list on March 23 midnight containing 10 lakh names.

No details were formally shared by the EC officials on Wednesday about the number of deletions nearly 40 hours after publication of the first list.

At least 60 lakh people across the State were put under adjudication with 700 judicial officers working to dispose of the pending cases.

Digital gap

While constituency and booth-wise data are available online, voters lament that the lists have not been displayed on paper in any government offices, leaving those without digital access scrambling for information. The names on the lists have to be verified individually after logging into the Election Commission's website.

Around 28 lakh voters under adjudication are still waiting for a decision in the State

Appeal to tribunals

The voters whose names have been deleted can make an appeal to the 19 tribunals set up across districts in the State. Their pleas will be reconsidered by these tribunals led by former judges.

According to sources, the EC officials have sought permission from the Calcutta High Court to publish supplementary lists every day instead of publishing them every Friday.

At least 522 voters were under adjudication in the Silampur 1 gram panchayat area in Sujapur constituency of Malda district where people alleged that 427 names have been deleted. "We have lived here for generations. My forefathers were born here. We are citizens of the place. What will we do now," said a man in his 70s whose name has been struck off the list.

Residents alleged large-scale deletions despite submitting documents during the special intensive revision (SIR) process.

INBRIEF

Sonia admitted to Delhi hospital; condition stable

Senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi was admitted to Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Delhi late on Tuesday, sources from the hospital said. Her condition is said to be stable. Dr. Ajay Swaroop, Chairman, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, said, "She is stable. Doctors are conducting further investigations to check for possible infection in the stomach and urinary tract. A team of doctors is closely monitoring her condition, and antibiotics have been administered." This is the second time that the Rajya Sabha member has been admitted this year. Ms. Gandhi was admitted to Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in January, after she experienced respiratory issues.

CJI objects to litigant's father calling up his brother

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Wednesday objected strongly to a litigant's father calling up his brother to question an order passed by the top court, at one point asking "how dare he do that". The CJI told the litigant's counsel in open court that he was inclined to initiate criminal contempt proceedings against the person who called his brother. The court was hearing the plea seeking minority reservation in medical admissions after converting to Buddhism. The court had directed Haryana to explain whether affluent general category candidates could claim quota benefits after converting to Buddhism.

2 resign from NCTP over Transgender Persons Bill

Ashna Butani
Ragavi M.
NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

Soon after the Rajya Sabha passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, which takes away the right to self-determination of gender, two members and community representatives resigned from their posts at the National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP). They cited the amendment Bill which they called "a step backward for our fundamental rights to self-identification and dignity."

Kalki Subramaniam, member and Southern region representative, submitted her resignation to the Union Minister, stating that she cannot continue to hold a seat at a table where "collective voice has been silenced on a matter of such existential importance." She said she will be filing a public interest litigation plea in the Supreme Court, with many others.

Rituparna Neog, member and North East region representative, said, "I cannot be a part of something that refused to listen to the community," she told *The Hindu* on Wednesday evening.

Transgender Bill receives RS approval amid uproar

DMK, Trinamool demanded the Bill be sent to a select committee of the House for scrutiny; Union Minister says it will ensure protection to persons who face discrimination due to biological issues

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, a day after the Lok Sabha cleared the legislation. The Opposition had demanded the Bill should be sent to a select committee of the House for further scrutiny as it had provisions that would have an impact on the dignity of the third gender people.

Union Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar, countering the Opposition's charges against the Bill, said it is an effort to take along all segments of the society together.

The Minister said the Bill will ensure protection to only those who face discrimination due to biological issues and added that transgender people will continue to get legal recognition and protection.

"The Narendra Modi government is committed to protecting all those people who are suffering due to biological reasons," he said adding that transgender welfare boards have been set up in over 30 States. "This Bill will bring administrative clarity and protect rights of the transgender persons," he said, adding: "This Bill is not merely a legal reform but a pathway to justice for those who have long faced social exclusion and discrimination due to their identity."

LGBTQIA+ community members during a protest demanding repeal of the Transgender Amendment Bill, 2026, in Mumbai. REUTERS

Takes away rights: DMK

DMK MP Tiruchi Siva argued that the amendments take away the right of self-identification and forces transgender persons to present themselves before a medical board for gender identification. "I am voicing for the people who cannot come to Parliament," Mr. Siva said and demanded that the Bill must be sent to a select committee for consultation with all stakeholders, legal experts, civil society and transgender community.

Trinamool Congress MP Saket Gokhale said that only 32,000 transgender persons out of their five lakh population (according to 2011 Census) have obtained certificates and identity cards so far under the existing Act. "They are afraid to come out in the first place," he said.

Social bias: Trinamool

Mr. Gokhale said that 31% of transgender people in India have attempted suicide and out of them, 50% were below the age of 20. "They are attempting suicide because of the discrimination that they are facing everyday," the Trinamool MP said adding that as if social discrimination was not enough, now the government is going to "start discriminating" against them.

CPI(M) MP John Brittas said the new legislation is an exclusionary restrictive measure.

"Recently, the Supreme Court-appointed committee conveyed to the government not to proceed with this piece of legislation. What happened to that? Why is it that the government is not considering the request of the Supreme Court-appointed committee?" Mr. Brittas asked.

SC panel calls to scrap Bill on gender choice rights

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

A Supreme Court-constituted Advisory Committee headed by former Delhi High Court judge Justice Asha Menon has sent a resolution to the Government of India, requesting that the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, be withdrawn as the proposal to "deny self-identification" of gender went against the decision of the Supreme Court in the 2014 *NALSA versus Union of India* verdict.

The Chairperson said that the amendment Bill had come as a "great shock" and would amount to a "tremendous setback" to efforts to mainstream transgender communities so far, *The Hindu* has learnt.

The Bill proposes to remove a section that recognised transgender people's "right to a self-perceived gender identity", redefine a transgender person, and introduce the requirement of a medical board's nod to acquire a transgender certificate and identity card. The Bill was passed by voice vote in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, amid an Opposition-led walkout.

Punjab BJP delegation meets State Governor, demands CBI inquiry into death of official

Press Trust of India
CHANDIGARH

A Punjab BJP delegation on Wednesday met Governor Gulab Chand Kataria and sought a CBI investigation into the suicide of an official of the warehousing corporation.

They submitted a memorandum stating that the death raised serious questions about the "abuse of power, administrative failure and attempts to shield influential individuals" by the Punjab government.

The delegation comprised State BJP president Sunil Jakhar and working president Ashwani Sharma, among others.

Gagandeep Singh Randhawa, district manager of Punjab State Warehousing Corporation in Amritsar, allegedly ended his life by consuming poison on Saturday.

Former Minister Laljit Bhullar, arrested in connection with suicide of an official, being produced before a local court in Amritsar. FILE PHOTO

Soon after, a video emerged online in which Randhawa was heard alleging harassment by then Cabinet Minister and Patti MLA Laljit Singh Bhullar.

Mr. Bhullar tendered his resignation, as demanded by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. He was arrested on Monday.

Mr. Mann on Tuesday virtually rejected the demand for a CBI investigation, saying Punjab Police was capable of probing the case fairly and asserting that no one will be shielded.

'Defunct govt.'

Speaking to reporters after meeting the Governor, Mr. Jakhar slammed the Aam Aadmi Party government and alleged that it is "completely defunct" in the State.

(Those in distress can contact Tele MANAS at 14416 to seek help)

Centre asks RBI to keep retail inflation target at 4% till 2031

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Union government on Wednesday asked the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to target retail inflation at 4% with a margin of 2% on either side for another five years ending March 2031.

To control the price rise, the government in 2016 gave a mandate to the RBI to keep the retail inflation at 4% with a margin of 2% on either side for five years ending March 31, 2021. Subsequently, in March 2021, the government maintained the same target. This is the second time the government has retained the inflation target.

The Union government, in consultation with the RBI, hereby notifies the inflation target for the period beginning April 1, 2026, and ending on March 31, 2031, a Gazette notification issued by the Department of Economic Affairs dated March 25 said. According to the notification, the inflation target is 4% with an upper tolerance level of 6% and a lower tolerance level of 2%. India adopted the inflation-targeting framework and formally tasked the central bank with it in 2016.

The inflation target is for the period from April 1, 2026 to March 31, 2031, as per the notification

In its first meeting in October 2016, the six-member Monetary Policy Committee was given the mandate to maintain annual inflation at 4% until March 31, 2021, with an upper tolerance of 6% and a lower threshold of 2%.

Congress questions Supreme Court order denying SC status to Christians, Muslims, others

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday questioned a two-judge Supreme Court Bench ruling that barred persons professing religions other than Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism from claiming the Scheduled Caste status.

In a statement, Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala said the judgment denying SC status to Christians, Muslims and other minorities had caused "deep consternation, disquiet and fear" among economically weaker sections of minority communities.

He described the question of granting or continuing SC status after religious conversion as a "sensitive issue" affecting several underprivileged people seeking to escape entrenched social prejudice, and argued that it cannot be decided through a "simpliciter interpretation" of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950.

Randeep Surjewala

Mr. Surjewala said the issue of SC status for converts has been pending before a three-judge Bench since January 21, 2011, in public interest litigation. "Then, how can a two-judge Bench of Supreme Court decide the issue, without reference to larger Bench? Why did the Modi government not bring this to the notice of the Supreme Court Bench regarding issue being under adjudication before a three-judge Bench? Was it done deliberately by the government?" he asked.

He pointed to the commission led by former Chief Justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan, set up in 2022 to examine the issue, noting that its report is still awaited. Mr. Surjewala alleged that the government had failed to place relevant facts before the court, and asked whether this amounted to "deliberate misleading".

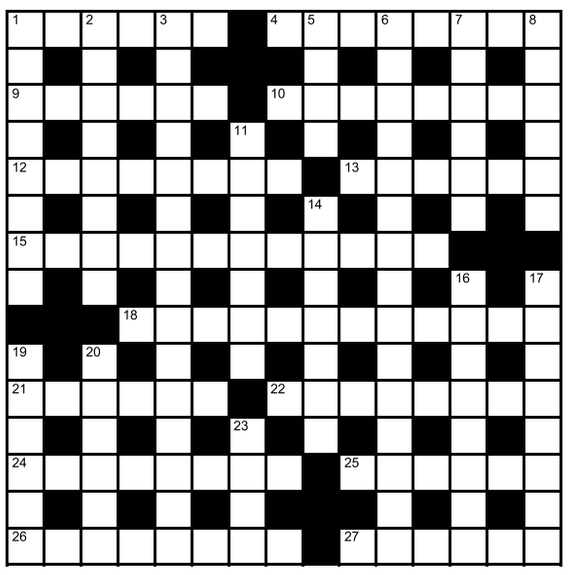
He rejected the argument that the case pertains only to the applicability of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and not reservation, terming such a distinction untenable.

TH CROSSWORD + 14751

(set by Arden)

Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at *https://thehindu.com/crosswords*

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

1 Port deck is exposed in general (6)
4 Can start with current location - pitch tents here (8)
9 Sleep disorder? Break open and get into a self-help group (6)
10 Laxative leaves Peter in a dizzy (8)
12 Hector at Hector the divine ruler (8)
13 South African wants a revolution (6)
15 Amusing to hear them - millions for charity, a prop is placed inside (12)
18 I need coastal police for suspension of hostilities (2-10)
21 Bring the wagon back - that is tough (6)
22 Fishermen had enormous catch of fish (8)
24 Go pack a banian - it's a poor imitation (8)
25 Review arts - takes a second for the tissue that forms the structure of an organ (6)
26 Memorial in place - not a phase (8)
27 Second copy - no work for the harvester (6)

Down

1 Live, let Marie go crazy (4-4)
2 Becomes hard when half the opposition party's on short leash, perhaps (8)
3 Macron perhaps makes a Parisian, say, to keep quiet (6,9)
5 Guarding a sherpa's place while climbing mountains (4)
6 Part of the nervous system providing caring support to a soldier (15)
7 Melt ice cap to help you throw up (6)
8 Catch associate's brief rise (6)
11 Ring us - intend to drink and make merry (7)
14 Keep in deficit - a delay accepted (7)
16 Spooner may object to the entertainer right at the very end (8)
17 Somehow unite, protect political group and overwhelm (8)
19 Systematic changes, losing seat as if by magic (6)
20 Police raid, no rule (6)
23 Tread softly - take enough precautions first of all (4)

SUDOKU

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

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle

M	Y	A	N	M	A	R		B	E	A	T	L	E	S
E		L		A		E		E		C		I		U
T	I	T	A	N		D	I	R	T	C	H	E	A	P
E		I		O		C		E		O		G		P
O	B	S	E	R	V	A	N	T		R	E	E	V	E
R		S				R				D				R
	T	I	E	D		P	A	C	H	I	N	K	O	
		M		I		E		A		O		I		
	C	O	R	V	E	T	T	E		N	I	C	K	
S				A				S				K		A
H	Y	I	N	G		S	E	A	H	O	R	S	E	S
O		V		A		K		R		W		T		H
W	A	I	S	T	L	I	N	E		I	D	A	H	O
E		E		E		P		A		N		R		R
R	E	S	I	S	T	S		N	I	G	H	T	I	E

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

5 causes of human actions

Some noble qualities such as love, affection, compassion, humility, gratitude, grace, kindness, straightforwardness, and a desire to help others elevate a person's character and personality. A person's wealth, education, name, fame and employment position may sometimes lead to self-pride or arrogance. Such attitudes reflect one's inner state and may arise due to a lack of self-awareness. These negative traits can hinder the development of devotion (bhakti). Thanneerpalli Sri Krishnan Swamy said in a discourse that life is like a cart wheel that constantly rises and falls. People should understand that both good and bad experiences are natural parts of life. One should neither become overly joyful in times of success nor fall into deep sorrow during difficult times. Scriptures explain that God acts in five ways in every human action: as the giver of abilities and senses (*Karayitha*), as the doer or overseer (*Kartha*), as the one who allows freedom without interference (*Upekshakan*), as the granter of liberty (*Anumanta*), and as the supporter who helps in accomplishing actions (*Sahakari*).

Sage Veda Vyasa, in the Mahabharata, teaches that God is the ultimate cause behind all our actions, and that events unfold according to His will, shaped by our karma. Yet, this truth should not lead us to idleness or complacency by shifting all responsibility onto the Divine. Human effort is essential. Lord Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita, explains that every action has five causes: the body, the individual soul, the senses, the vital forces, and the Divine. These five essential elements are necessary to understand how any action is performed.

INBRIEF

RBI scraps treasury bill sale to support banking liquidity

India's central bank rejected all bids at a treasury bill auction on Wednesday, its first such move in 13 months, in a step expected to support banking system liquidity ahead of the financial year-end on March 31. The government had planned to raise ₹350 billion ($3.72 billion) through the sale of 91-day, 182-day and 364-day treasury bills, but the Reserve Bank of India did not accept any bids. The latest move is expected to boost the liquidity surplus by ₹350 billion. REUTERS

Markets rally as investor optimism crawls back

Markets rallied for the second consecutive day on Wednesday, with benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closing nearly 2% higher, as crude oil prices dropped and global markets advanced amid hopes of de-escalation in the war in West Asia. BSE Sensex jumped 1,205 points, or 1.63%, to settle at 75,273.45. The 50-share NSE Nifty surged 394.05 points, or 1.72% to end at 23,306.45. The improving optimism in the market is seen as an outcome of easing crude prices.

SEBI partners Google to 'tick off' errant finfluencers

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has requested Google to leverage AI to take down rule-breaking finfluencers, Chairperson Tuhin Kanta Pandey said, launching the app label in Mumbai on Wednesday. The market watchdog, in collaboration with Google, unveiled a 'tick mark' that would appear next to applications of intermediaries. "The verified badge is being rolled-out over apps of registered stockbrokers and Google Play Store," he said.

India said to have bought Iran LPG after U.S. eased sanctions

Sanctioned tanker Aurora carrying Iranian LPG expected to shortly reach the west coast port of Mangalore, say sources, LSEG data; Indian official denies knowledge of the cargoes being bought

Reuters
NEW DELHI

India has bought its first cargo of Iranian liquefied petroleum gas in years after the U.S. temporarily removed sanctions on Tehran's oil and refined fuels, LSG trade flows and three industry sources said.

India had shunned Iranian energy in 2019 under pressure from Western sanctions. The tanker was initially bound for China, LSEG data showed.

Sanctioned tanker Aurora carrying Iranian LPG is expected to shortly reach the west coast port of Mangalore, the sources said and LSEG data showed.

The South Asian nation has been hit hard by the disruption of energy shipments via the Strait of Hormuz caused by the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran.

The Iranian LPG cargo will be shared among the three fuel retailers, Indian Oil Corp, Bharat Petroleum Corp, and Hindustan Petroleum Corp.

The cargo has been purchased from a trader, and payment will be made in rupees, the sources said, adding that India was exploring buying more Iranian LPG cargoes.

Guzzling down: The Iranian LPG cargo will be shared among the three major fuel retailers, say sources. REUTERS

Still, an official said he was not aware of Iranian cargoes being bought.

"[There are] no loaded cargoes from Iran, we have not heard of that," Rajesh Kumar Sinha, special secretary in the federal shipping ministry said Wednesday at a press conference.

The three firms and India's oil ministry did not respond to *Reuters* requests for comments.

The world's second-largest LPG importer is battling its worst gas crisis in decades with the government cutting supplies for industries to shield households from shortage of cooking gas.

India consumed 33.15 million metric tons of LPG last year.

Paradip set to receive 7 mn barrels of crude

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Amid the continuing crisis in West Asia, there is a note of reassurance. Off the coast of Odisha, Paradip Port is in midst of hosting four tankers carrying over 7 million barrels of crude oil, an amount exceeding India's average daily consumption.

While two ships are emptying crude oil at Paradip Port which will continue till Thursday evening, a mid-sized vessel carrying 3.296 metric tonnes will be docking at Paradip by Thursday evening.

According to Paradip Port sources, *San Ramon Voyage*, carrying 2,63,530 metric tonnes of crude oil from Angola and Nigeria, both members of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, has commenced discharge operations at the Single Point Mooring and is expected to complete unloading by Thursday evening.

Similarly, *Phoenix*, a crude oil tanker carrying 99,016 MT, which recently moored at Paradip, began discharging operations on Wednesday. The vessel had sailed from Nakhodka Anchorage in the Russian Far East.

Another tanker, *Alexandros*, is currently in the Bay of Bengal and is scheduled to berth at Paradip Port at 11 am on Thursday. The vessel is carrying 2.53 lakh MT of crude oil and had departed from Forcados Terminal in Nigeria on March 23, 2026.

Meanwhile, *Almi Titan*, carrying 3.296 lakh metric tonnes of crude oil, is expected to dock at Paradip Port around 10 pm on Thursday. The tanker had commenced its voyage from Panama in South America.

MoPNG issues directions to strengthen natural gas infra

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) has instituted reforms to ease provisions towards expanding piped gas network – both domestic and commercial. Late on Tuesday, the government invoked the Essential Commodities Act (ECA), seeking to accelerate the push for piped natural gas.

The Ministry stressed that the reforms were aimed at "addressing delays in approvals and access to land, and enabling faster development of natural gas infrastructure, including in residential areas", alongside instituting an investor-friendly network and improving last-mile connectivity.

The gazette notification underlines that in housing areas, the relevant entities would have to grant necessary permission to "lay, build or expand" a pipeline within three days of receiving an application. Further, they would have 48 hours to accord approvals for last-mile connectivity.

In public areas that are not housing areas, the gazette clarifies that if the entity concerned neither rejects nor grants permission for laying of pipelines within the stipulated timelines, the application would be "deemed approved".

FM defends Centre's right to levy cess, says Constitution allows it

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday emphatically reiterated the Centre's right to collect cesses and surcharges, saying the Constitution allowed it and the Centre would continue to use the provision.

However, she added that over the last six years, the government had spent on the States 105% of what it had collected through cesses and surcharges. That is, its spending has exceeded its collections.

Nirmala Sitharaman

She was replying to the Lok Sabha debate on the Finance Bill 2026, which was passed on Tuesday following the conclusion of her speech.

"The Constitution makers knew what they are doing, and we all pay respects to them," she said, in response to comments by several MPs about the Centre's levy of cesses and surcharges that are not part of the divisible pool that is shareable with the States.

'It's not a zero-one situation' for 2-wheeler industry: Gupta of TVS

Mini Tejaswi
BENGALURU

TVS Motor Company, like every other enterprise, government and supply chain player, was in the process of working out scenario analysis, scenario mapping and scenario planning, said Gaurav Gupta, president, Indian two-wheeler business at TVS to a query on the impact of West Asia crisis on two-wheeler business.

Responding to a query on how the West Asia crisis was impacting the export operations and margins of the two-wheeler industry, Mr. Gupta told *The Hindu*, "It is very difficult to give some kind of guidance on that aspect. We are evaluating, watching the scenario and trying to understand how it will all pan out. I won't be able to give any kind of forward guidance as nobody would be able to second guess at this point of time."

Gaurav Gupta

We are evaluating, watching the scenario and trying to understand how it will all pan out

Scenario planning

He said, the entire industry was focused on scenario planning, scenario mapping and scenario analysis: how many weeks does it continue? What gets impacted? If this gets impacted, then what will be the result? etc. "So, we all have to work this from all fronts and that's what is happening right now."

As per Mr. Gupta, it is not a zero-one situation yet for the industry. What if the whole situation ended in two weeks and therefore, it is tough to predict anything at the moment.

When asked about the possibility of increasing demand for electric bikes in the backdrop of the current fuel crisis, he said it was too early to predict consumer interest in different fuel types: whether it will be a movement of fuel A or fuel B.

Assessing impact

"We have seen in domestic homes, because of the LPG shortage, people are moving towards electric induction plates and ovens. In the two-wheeler space, as of now, we still have to look at the overall impact.

"We have to understand the continuity of the situation. How long will this continue, hence the impact," Mr. Gupta added.

However, he said, if there is a movement towards EV, TVS was certainly prepared to meet any changing customer trend.

LIC gets I-T order for ₹7,100 crore, set to appeal

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has received from the Assessment Unit of the Income Tax Department a demand order for almost ₹6,147 crore income tax as well as interest of over ₹953 crore.

Tax, interest

The order pertains to FY 2021-22 and consists of income tax demand of ₹61,46,71,18,015 and an interest component of ₹9,53,25,87,935, LIC said in a filing with the stock exchange on Wednesday.

The order is appealable before the Commissioner of Income Tax (Appeals), the State-owned insurer said in the filing.

Avantel bags ₹460-cr. Railways contract

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Avantel has received a rate contract valued at ₹459.9 crore from Bengaluru-based Zetwerk for the supply and AMC of Real-Time Train Information System (RTIS) devices for the Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS), Indian Railways.

Boosting efficiency

The contract covers supply and AMC of 12,000 RTIS devices over a period of three years, which will support real-time tracking and improve the efficiency of railway operations, director Siddhartha Abburi said on Wednesday. Shares of Avantel rose 7.60% to ₹130.20 apiece on the BSE.

RTIS is an Indian Railways project developed in collaboration with ISRO to automatically track train locations, speeds and arrival/departure times using satellite technology.

The contract covers supply and AMC of 12,000 RTIS devices over a period of three years.

CRIS is responsible for designing, developing, implementing, and maintaining critical information systems for Indian Railways, Avantel said in a release.

Watchdog cautions hotels against 'gas crisis levy'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Addressing levy of any forced surcharge amid the West Asia crisis' impact on LPG supplies, the Consumer Central Protection Authority (CCPA), in an advisory issued Tuesday, asked restaurants and hotels to not levy any unfair additional charges, as 'gas surcharge', 'fuel cost recovery' or 'gas crisis charge', over and above the final price of food.

The watchdog termed such levies as violation of existing guidelines and asked consumers to seek removal of any such levy from the bill amount and/or lodge a complaint with the National Consumer Helpline (NCH).

ICICI Prudential gets ₹391-cr. IT demand

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company has been issued an order by the Income Tax Department asking the company to pay up more than ₹391 crore.

The amount consists of I-T demand of ₹3,471,293,534 and interest ₹439,545,379. The order from the I-T authorities in Mumbai relates to Assessment Year 2024-25, the insurer said in a filing.

The company said it will file an appeal against the order before appropriate authority in due course.

Indian tech start-ups raised $9.1 bn in 2025, 23% rise: Nasscom-Zinnov study

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In 2025, Indian tech start-ups raised $9.1 billion, marking a 23% year-on-year increase, even as capital became more selective, milestone-linked and increasingly concentrated in scalable, commercialisation-ready ventures, said a Nasscom-Zinnov analysis.

Deep-tech funding surged 37% to $2.3 billion last year with AI driving 91% of investments. Over 140 tech mergers and acquisition deals were recorded in 2025, a near double rise over last year. Seed and early-stage deals accounted for 74% of total funding activity with AI capital deployment and innovation driving the momentum, said the study.

Deep-tech funding surged 37% to $2.3 billion, the report said.

Rajesh Nambiar, president, Nasscom, said, "India's start-up ecosystem is entering a more disciplined phase of growth, and AI is clearly at the centre of this transition, emerging as core infrastructure for India's next innovation cycle. This signals growing global confidence in India's ability to build, deploy and commercialise AI at scale across sectors ranging from enterprise software to defence and industrial systems."

AI to market

The next chapter would be defined by how effectively we translate AI innovation into market adoption, intellectual property and globally competitive platforms, he added.

The report titled "Momentum to Maturity" said India's Start-up Ecosystem at a Strategic Inflection Point, Indian Tech Start-up Report 2025," offers an in-depth analysis of the evolving dynamics of the country's technology start-up ecosystem.

As per the report, with an estimated 31,000-34,000 start-ups, new venture formation is increasingly concentrated in established hubs and proven sectors, highlighting investor preference for infrastructure readiness, talent density and faster commercialisation pathways.

Realtor Puravankara unveils 30 projects in South, Mumbai

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Real estate developer Puravankara Ltd. plans to unveil 30 projects in 24 months, primarily across South India and Mumbai.

The planned pipeline comprises almost 51.14 million sq. ft. of developable area with an estimated Gross Development Value (GDV) of more than ₹55,000 crore, marking a significant step-up in the firm's growth trajectory.

Of the 30 projects, a significant number are already in the approval stage while the balance are in the design stage with approval processes set to be initiated shortly, the company said.

Ashish R. Puravankara

Pre-sales, collections

As of 9MFY26, the firm reported pre-sales of ₹3,859 crore and customer collections of ₹3,045 crore. The company said its upcoming developments are likely to contribute meaningfully to economic activity.

"This pipeline is expected to generate about 8 million man-days of direct employment annually and give a fillip to more than 250 ancillary industries associated with the real estate sector," it said.

"As we enter our next phase of growth, we are poised for the next leap, backed by stronger capabilities, a professional and well-governed organisation and a high-quality project pipeline across Mumbai and South India," said Ashish Puravankara, managing director, Puravankara Ltd.

WASHINGTON

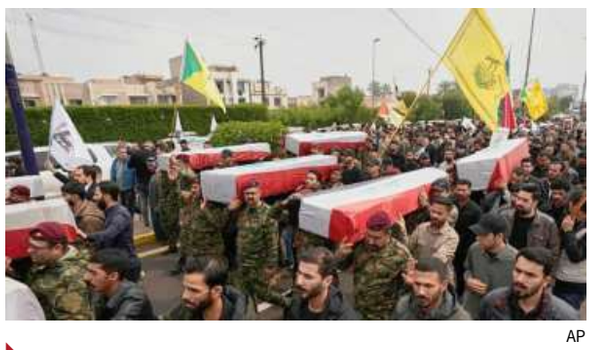
Trump reschedules his Beijing visit to May amid West Asia conflict

REUTERS

U.S. President Donald Trump will travel to Beijing for a rescheduled summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping on May 14 and 15, the White House announced on Wednesday. Mr. Trump had been scheduled to travel to China later this month but announced he was delaying the trip due to the ongoing conflict in West Asia. AP

BAGHDAD

New strike on base in western Iraq kills seven security personnel



AP

A new strike in western Iraq killed seven security personnel on Wednesday, a day after a deadly attack on the same base in Anbar province targeted members of the Popular Mobilisation Force. The Office of the Prime Minister said Iraq would submit a formal complaint over the latest strike to the United Nations. AFP

NEW YORK

UN designates African slave trade as 'gravest crime against humanity'

REUTERS

The UN General Assembly designated the transatlantic African slave trade as "the gravest crime against humanity," in a move hailed as a step towards healing and possible reparations. The resolution was adopted on Wednesday by a vote of 123 in favour, three against — the U.S , Israel and Argentina — and 52 abstentions. AFP

SEOUL

North Korea's Kim vows stronger ties, 'unshakable' support to Russia

AP

North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un said his country will continue to provide 'unshakable' support to Russia, state media reported on Wednesday. Ties between the two nations have grown closer since Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, with Pyongyang dispatching ground troops and weapons systems to aid Russia's war effort. AFP

'U.S. to deploy 1,000 elite troops to West Asia'

In a latest addition to the Iran war effort, U.S. officials say thousands of Marines as well as rapid response naval vessels will be heading to the region; Iran and Israel exchange strikes; Gulf neighbours Kuwait and Saudi Arabia come under fire; Iran's military says it also targeted a U.S. aircraft carrier

Agencies
WASHINGTON/TEHRAN/DUBAI

Amid the escalating strikes, counter attacks and rising tensions in West Asia, the United States military is preparing to deploy at least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division to the region in the coming days, according to people with knowledge of the plans.

The unit is considered the Army's emergency response force and can typically be deployed on short notice.

The force would include a battalion of the 1st Brigade Combat Team as well as Maj. Gen. Brandon Tegtmeier, the division's commander, and division staff, according to the people, who spoke on Tuesday on condition of anonymity.

Rising risk: Smoke plumes billowing near the Kuwait International Airport after drones hit a fuel tank on Wednesday. AFP

It's the latest addition of American troops to the Iran war effort after U.S. officials recently said thousands of Marines aboard several Navy ships will be heading to the region.

Diplomats from various countries said they were working behind the scenes to ferry messages between the warring parties. But there was no let-up in the military activity, with targets in Iran, Israel, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia all coming under fire.

Volley of attacks

The Israeli military said on Wednesday it had completed several waves of airstrikes in Tehran. The semi-official Iranian SNN News Agency said the strikes hit a residential area in the city, with rescuers searching the rubble.

Missile alert sirens sounded multiple times in Israel as Iran launched its own attacks.

Iran also kept up the pressure on its Gulf Arab neighbours. Saudi Arabia's Defence Ministry said it had destroyed at least eight drones in the kingdom's oil-rich Eastern Province.

Kuwait said it shot down multiple drones but the General Civil Aviation Authority said one hit a fuel tank at Kuwait International Airport, sparking a fire that sent a huge plume of smoke into the sky.

Iran's military said on Wednesday it fired a volley of cruise missiles at a U.S. aircraft carrier.

It said the cruise missiles aimed at *USS Abraham Lincoln* had "forced it to change its position", warning of "powerful strikes" when the "hostile fleet" comes into range.

Meanwhile, White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly deferred to the Pentagon when asked about the impending deployment but noted that "President [Donald] Trump always has all military options at his disposal."

Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee are scheduled to receive a classified briefing from Pentagon officials on Wednesday on Capitol Hill where the potential deployment is expected to be discussed, according to a U.S. official.

Officials previously have said the Japan-based *USS Tripoli* and the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit had been ordered to West Asia – shifting them from exercises near Taiwan.

They also confirmed that the Navy has rushed to deploy a set of ships carrying a rapid-response Marine force.

Israel continues to pound Lebanon as Hezbollah presses on

Agence France-Presse
BEIRUT

Israel launched strikes on south Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs on Wednesday, Lebanese state media said, as Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah said it kept up its attacks on Israeli troops.

Israel has intensified strikes across Lebanon and sent ground troops into the country's south since the latest bout of fighting began. On Tuesday, it said its military would take control of the border area up to the Litani River.

Hezbollah said its fighters on Wednesday targeted Israeli troops "massed in the border towns of Naqura and Qawzah" and in sites across the border "with more than 100 rockets".

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported Israeli strikes in several locations in the south on Wednesday.

Israel's military said it struck Hezbollah targets across Lebanon overnight "including a command centre" in Beirut's southern suburbs.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem said on Wednesday that negotiating with Israel under fire would amount to "surrender" for Lebanon.

Lebanon's Health Ministry said more than 1,000 people have been killed in more than three weeks of Israeli strikes.

Russia and Ukraine engage in tit-for-tat aerial barrages

Associated Press
MOSCOW

Russian air defences downed 389 incoming Ukrainian drones, Russia's Defence Ministry said on Wednesday, in what was the largest reported overnight attack on Russian regions and Crimea since Moscow's forces invaded Ukraine more than four years ago.

The drones were stopped over 13 Russian regions as well as the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

The attack underlined the growing capability of Ukraine's domestically developed and manufactured long-range drones.

It came a day after Russia fired almost 1,000 drones and 34 missiles at civilian areas of Ukraine, in one of its biggest aerial attacks of the war. At least six people were killed and around 50 people were injured, Ukrainian authorities said.

Moscow says it shot down close to 400 inbound drones, a day after it fired nearly 1,000 drones towards Ukraine

The escalation in aerial attacks comes amid a pause in U.S.-mediated talks between delegations from Moscow and Kyiv, as Washington's attention is diverted by the Iran war and as Ukraine anticipates a spring offensive by Russia's Army.

Alexander Drozdenko, Governor of the Leningrad region north of Moscow, said 56 drones were shot down there, and a fire broke out in the Baltic Sea port of Ust-Luga as the result of Ukraine's attack.

Ukrainian forces also carried out a missile strike on the Belgorod region on the border with Ukraine overnight, damaging energy infrastructure, its Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

Power, water and heating supplies were disrupted, he said.

In Ukraine on Wednesday, Russian drones smashed into residential areas of the second-largest city, Kharkiv, injuring at least nine people, according to Mayor Ihor Terekhov.

UN condemns Iran strikes on Gulf, demands 'reparation'

Agence France-Presse
GENEVA

The UN Human Rights Council on Wednesday condemned Iran's "egregious attacks" on its Gulf neighbours and demanded full "reparation" for all victims of its strikes.

The 47-member council backed a resolution brought by the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Jordan demanding Iran immediately "cease all unprovoked attacks".

The resolution was adopted by consensus, though some countries, while backing the text, criticised its scope and the fact that it made no mention of Israel or the United States.

U.S. judge questions govt.'s motives for labelling Anthropic as a security threat

Agence France-Presse
SAN FRANCISCO

A federal judge on Tuesday expressed scepticism over the government's retaliation against AI powerhouse Anthropic, which has sued over its designation as a national security risk because of a dispute over military applications.

Anthropic filed a lawsuit this month seeking to overturn the designation, which is typically reserved for organisations from unfriendly foreign countries and could seriously handicap its popular AI model Claude.

It had refused to let the Pentagon use Claude for pursuing autonomous lethal warfare and mass surveillance of Americans, but the government rejected Anthropic's proposed safeguards. Claude is the Pentagon's most-widely deployed frontier AI model and the only such model currently operating on its classified systems.

Agentic edge: Anthropic's Claude is the Pentagon's most-widely deployed frontier AI model. AP

After a short hearing, judge Rita Lin said she would issue her ruling "in a few days."

But she noted that "what is troubling to me about these reactions" by the government "is that they do not really seem to be tailored to the stated national security concern."

If the military was not happy with the contract, the government "could just stop using Claude," she said.

"It looks like defendants went further than that because they were trying to punish Anthropic...for criticising the government's contracting position in the press," she added, "which of course would be a violation of the First Amendment."

She also questioned a claim by a government lawyer that Anthropic's ethical fears raised the risk that the company could intervene in military operations. "I'm just wondering why it is that someone questioning the way things work leads to suspicion that they might build a back door," Ms. Lin said.

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER PWD CIRCLE KOTA
No. 4147 Date:- 16/03/2026
Short Term Notice Inviting Bid
(NIT No. 19/2025-26)
Bid for Construction of Various Road work in Distt. Kota (15 Works) is Invited from interested bidders up to 06:00 PM of 30.03.2026 (Monday). Other Particulars of the bids may be visited on the procurement portal (http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in, http://sppp.rj.nic.in) of the Rajasthan State. The approximate value of the procurement is **Rs. 2130.16 Lacs.**
UBN No. (PWD2526WSOB25736), (PWD2526WSOB25737), (PWD2526WSOB25738), (PWD2526WSOB25739), (PWD2526WSOB25740), (PWD2526WSOB25741), (PWD2526WSOB25742), (PWD2526WSOB25743), (PWD2526WSOB25744), (PWD2526WSOB25745), (PWD2526WSOB25746), (PWD2526WSOB25747), (PWD2526WSOB25748), (PWD2526WSOB25749), (PWD2526WSOB25750)
(J.P. Gupta)
Superintending Engineer
P.W.D. Circle Kota
DIPR/C/5749/2026

RajCOMP Info Services Limited (RISL)
C-Block, 1st Floor, Yojana Bhawan, Tilak Marg, C-Scheme, Jaipur
RISL invites bids from the eligible bidders for Short Term RFP for Selection of Agency for Annual Technical Support (ATS) of HCL AppScan and Procurement of Security Audit Tools with ATS for 3 Year **(UBN: RIS2526SLOB00096)**. Total estimated cost is INR 1.40 Cr. The details can be seen on the websites:
https://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in, **https://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in**, **https://risl.rajasthan.gov.in**, **https://doitc.rajasthan.gov.in**
Raj.Samwad/C/25/23210 **Additional Director**

GVK Power (Goindwal Sahib) Limited
Regd. Office: Plot No. 10, Paigah Colony, Sardar Patel Road, Secunderabad - 500003. Telangana, India CIN: U40109TG1997PLC028483
(A wholly owned subsidiary of Guru Amar Das Thermal Power Limited, GATPL)
(A step down wholly owned subsidiary of Punjab State Power Corporation Limited, PSPCL)
HOD - Electrical, GATP, Goindwal Sahib, invites E-Tender for the work of:
1 **Tender Enquiry No. 138/GATP/EMD/O&M/50007305 dated 25/03/2026 AMC for Routine/Preventive, Breakdown & Shutdown Maintenance of complete EMD Equipment/Instruments of BTG/BOP/AHP/CHP area at 2x270MW GVK Power Goindwal Sahib Ltd, Goindwal Sahib Plant as per details given in the tender specifications for a period of One year, at 2x270 MW Guru Amardas Thermal Plant (GATP), Goindwal Sahib, Distt.: Tarn Taran, Punjab as per details given in the tender specifications.**
For detailed NIT & tender specifications, please refer to **https://eproc.punjab.gov.in** from **25/03/2026** from **17:00 Hrs.** onwards.
Note: Corrigendum and addendum, if any, will be published online at **https://eproc.punjab.gov.in**
1079/12/2025-26/9898 **GATP - 31/26**

KARNATAKA POWER TRANSMISSION CORPORATION LIMITED
(CIN : U40109KA1999SGC025521)
No. CEE/T&P/SE-1/2025-26/11607-19 Date:25.03.2026
BRIEF SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION
(THROUGH KARNATAKA PUBLIC PROCUREMENT PORTAL ONLY)
Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited invites Bids on electronic mode for the following works against following enquiry number on **Partial Turnkey basis.**
Enquiry No. and Name of the works
KPTCL/2025-26/SS/WORK_INDENT3519
Combined Package for:
Work A: Establishing **2x20MVA,** 66/11kV sub-station at **Bommenahalli** with associated 66kV, 1000sqmm SC UG cable for a distance of **2.680Kms** along with construction of 66kV Terminal Bay in Bengaluru East Taluk, Bengaluru Urban District.
Work B: Establishing **2x31.5MVA,** 66/11kV sub-station at **Jnanabharathi Layout (Nagadevanahalli)** with associated 66kV, 1000Sqmm SC UG cable for a distance of **7.04Kms** and along with construction of 66kV Terminal Bays in Bengaluru South Taluk, Bengaluru Urban District
The bids will be received through electronic tendering mode only. The details regarding participation in the E-tendering process can be obtained by logging on to KPTCL website **https://kptcl.karnataka.gov.in** with hyperlink 'E Procurement KPTCL' or **https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in on or after 27.03.2026 @ 15:00hrs. Last date & time for receipt of Bids and any extension of Due date for Bid submission will be intimated in the Karnataka Public Procurement portal.** Any details required in this regard can also be obtained from the office of the undersigned during office hours.
All Corrigendum/Addendums shall be noticed by the bidders before the last date of submission of the Bids.
Sd/- Chief Engineer, Electy.,
Tendering & Procurement, KPTCL, 9th Floor,
Indhana Bhavan, Anand Rao Circle, Bengaluru-560 009

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER, FUTURE CITY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
NOTICE INVITING FOR (RFP) REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
No: FCDA/Plg./RFP/2025/007, Dt: 23.03.2026
Request for re-call of Proposal (RFP) is hereby invited from reputed consultancy firms for the project titled "Preparation of Vision and Comprehensive Master Plan 2047 for Future City Development Authority Area." The previous tender bearing ID 679993 has been cancelled due to technical reasons, and the revised tender is now issued under ID 688106.
Interested consultancy firms are requested to submit their RFP along with their credentials, relevant experience, list of similar assignments undertaken, technical capabilities. Further, details regarding submission timelines and evaluation criteria will be shared in the Request for Proposal to be obtained from **@tender.telangana.gov.in.**
The Interested consultancy firm may obtain Request for Proposal (RFP) from e-procurement platform i.e., **tender.telangana.gov.in.**

1	Start Date for downloading RFP document	23.03.2026 01:00 PM
2	Last date and time for downloading RFP document	10.04.2026 05:00 PM
3	Last date for Submission of RFP document (including Technical and Financial) along with Demand Draft for Rs. 50,000 drawn in favour of Commissioner FCDA [Non-Refundable]	10.04.2026 05:00 PM
4	Technical bid opening	10.04.2026 05:01 PM
5	Price bid opening	Will be intimated by FCDA

R.O. No. : 1280-PP/CL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2025-26 Dt: 25.03.2026 Sd/- Commissioner, FCDA

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BRIDCUL (ब्रिडकुल)
ब्रिज,रोपवे, टनल एण्ड अदर इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर डेवलपमेंट कॉरपोरेशन ऑफ उत्तराखण्ड लिमिटेड (उत्तराखण्ड सरकार का उपक्रम)
पूर्व में उत्तराखण्ड राज्य अवस्थापना विकास निगम लिमिटेड, प्रधान कार्यालयः अवस्थापना भवन, 583,ठ, राजकीय आई0टी0आई0 निरंजनपुर के सामने, माजरा, सहारनपुर रोड़, देहरादून, टेलीफोन नं. : 0135–2522941 ई–मेलः bridcul@gmail.com CIN No. U45203UR2008SGC032591
Ref No:-506/BRIDCUL–995(elect)/26 **E-Tendering** Date: 25/03/2026
On behalf of Hon'ble, Governor of Uttarakhand, E-Tenders are invited by Managing Director BRIDCUL, from the Contractors registered with any Govt./Semi Govt./PSU/Nigam in suitable Class & Category for the works given as below:-

S. No	Ref No.	Name of Project	Estimated Cost (In lac Including GST)	Earnest Money (In Lac)	Cost of Tender Document (In Rs.)	Time Period
1	BRIDCUL/HQ DDN/85/2025-26	SITC of 3 nos. lift at Sub District Hospital, Purola Distt. Uttarkashi.	93.10	1.86	5000+ 18% GST	18 Months

For above tenders, document download start date is **31.03.2026** and Bid submission end date is **15.04.2026** at 1500 Hrs. The details of e-tender of above works can be obtained directly from website **https://uktenders.gov.in**
Changes, if any will be intimated only through website **https://uktenders.gov.in**
DGM (HQ)

CALL-UP

Saini replaces injured Harshit in the Knight Riders squad

INSTAGRAM@NAVDEEP_SAINI10_OFFICIAL

Pacer Navdeep Saini has replaced injured Harshit Rana in the Kolkata Knight Riders squad for IPL 2026. "When I came to know about it last night, I didn't know how to react. I've been working hard and manifested it. It's a revival for me as I have gone through ups and downs in the last two to three years," said Saini.

MEANS A LOT

Royal Challengers pacer Mangesh happy to make his father proud

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

When I went to Delhi, my father (Ramavadh Yadav) had given me ₹24,000 with great difficulty. When my father supported me in cricket, my extended family and society thought he was a fool. I am just happy. That's what makes me emotional, my father can now walk with pride — Royal Challengers pacer Mangesh Yadav.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL

Playoff entry not enough, LSG has to win first trophy: owner Goenka

X@DRSANJIVGOENKA

Our true identity is still evolving. For any sports team, until you win, you don't receive the same level of respect or affection that comes with lifting the trophy. We've made the playoffs twice, but that's clearly not good enough. You win some, you lose some, but we've to win our first trophy — Sanjiv Goenka, Lucknow Super Giants owner.

FITTING TRIBUTE

Knight Riders retire talismanic all-rounder Russell's No. 12 jersey

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Kolkata Knight Riders paid tribute to West Indian all-rounder Andre Russell by retiring his jersey, No. 12. Russell donned the KKR colours from 2014 to 2025 and helped the side win two titles in 2014 and 2024. After retiring from the IPL, Russell has taken up the role of a 'power coach' in the franchise.

MI banks on a galaxy of stars to end drought

The power-packed Mumbai franchise is chasing its first silverware since 2020; finding the right combination early in the tournament is the key for the Hardik-led team

Amol Karhadkar

Mumbai Indians didn't win a title in the first five editions of the Indian Premier League. In the next eight seasons, it lifted the trophy five times to establish itself as the most successful franchise in the league's history.

Rough patch

But in the last five editions, MI didn't even come close to winning the silverware. Mumbai Indians would, however, hope that history repeats itself as it begins its quest to end another title drought.

The side reached the playoffs twice in the five-year phase, but ended up losing in Qualifier 2 on both occasions.

Still debated

The inconsistency in recent years has meant that the decision to hand the captaincy to Hardik Pandya – following the high-profile return to his alma mater – is still being debated, despite the team bouncing back to qualify for the last-four stage in 2025 after a disappointing 2024 campaign.

Heading into IPL 2026, though, Mumbai Indians appears better equipped. The balance of the squad makes it a strong contender for a playoff berth, if not more. Allah Ghazanfar, the mystery spinner who missed the previous edition, returns fit. The acquisition of Sherfane Rutherford adds middle-order muscle, while Mitchell Santner offers control and all-round depth.

The duo of Will Jacks and Corbin Bosch arrive on the back of impressive T20 World Cup campaigns. The presence of Trent Boult provides experience with the new ball, while Ryan Rickelton strengthens the top-order.

Quinton de Kock remains an able back-up for the wicketkeeper-batter's role, adding further depth.

Combine this overseas strength with one of the best Indian cores, MI is a force to reckon with.

A fit Rohit Sharma at the top, Suryakumar Yadav anchoring the middle-order, and Tilak Varma providing youthful flair give the batting unit solidity and explosiveness.

Add Hardik's finishing prowess and Jasprit Bumrah's unmatched artistry with the ball, Mumbai Indians looks formidable on paper.

Balance important

The key, however, lies in settling on the right combination early in the tournament.

Under Hardik and head coach Mahela Jayawardene, the team will be eager to shed its reputation of a slow starter – a recurring issue since IPL's inception.

If it can solve the problem of plenty and build momentum from the outset, the Mumbai franchise could once again become an unstoppable force.

Depth and experience

The squad has depth, experience and match-winners.

Can the team management get its act right? Will the players deliver collectively? And will history repeat itself for Mumbai Indians? It's time to wait and watch.

IPL-19 COUNTDOWN

Mumbai Indians

OVERALL NUMBERS

M	W	L
277	153	124

BY OPPONENT

	M	W	L
CSK	39	**21**	18
DC	37	**21**	16
GT	8	**3**	5
KKR	35	**24**	11
LSG	8	**2**	6
PBKS	34	**17**	17
RCB	34	**19**	15
RR	30	**16**	14
SRH	25	**15**	10

Mumbai Indians' remaining matches were against Deccan Chargers (10), PWI (6), RPS (6), GL (4) and KTK (1)

MI's 2026 LEAGUE CAMPAIGN*

March 29	vs. KKR	Mumbai	7.30 p.m.
April 4	vs. DC	Delhi	3.30 p.m.
April 7	vs. RR	Guwahati	7.30 p.m.
April 12	vs. RCB	Mumbai	7.30 p.m.

**announced so far*

MIRACLE MAN

Hardik Pandya: Ever since his high-profile return to Mumbai Indians for an astronomical sum, Hardik Pandya has been expected to perform miracles. But, the all-rounder is yet to deliver consistently, either as a top performer or a master tactician. As skipper, he will hope to lead from the front this season. If he does, managing the dressing room stacked with experienced campaigners will become easier.

THE SQUAD

Hardik Pandya (Capt.), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Tilak Varma, Ryan Rickelton (wk), Robin Minz (wk), Quinton de Kock (wk), Mitchell Santner, Corbin Bosch, Will Jacks, Naman Dhir, Sherfane Rutherford, Raj Angad Bawa, Shardul Thakur, Deepak Chahar, Trent Boult, Jasprit Bumrah, Allah Ghazanfar, Ashwani Kumar, Raghu Sharma, Mayank Markande, Danish Malewar, Mohammed Izhar, Atharva Ankolekar, and Mayank Rawat.

HARDIK PANDYA

CHAMPION 2013 | 2015 | 2017 | 2019 | 2020

COMPILED BY G. PRASAD & AMOL KARHADKAR

Man on a mission: A re-energised Rohit would hope to get back to his menacing best. MUMBAI INDIANS

Indian Premier League: The meeting was the first all-Indian captains' gathering ahead of a season. IPL

Impact Player rule to stay at least until 2027

Sports Bureau
MUMBAI

Despite calls to review the Impact Player rule and revert to traditional 11-a-side contests, Indian Premier League (IPL) officials have indicated that any reassessment will take place only after the 2027 edition.

At the customary pre-season captains' meeting held at the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) headquarters here on Wednesday evening, a majority of the 10 franchise captains expressed reservations about continuing with the rule.

It is understood that once one of the senior-most skippers raised concerns, he received vocal backing from several others during the first all-Indian captains' gathering ahead of an IPL season.

While IPL and BCCI officials listened to the apprehensions – ranging from creating an uneven playing field to potentially hampering the development of Indian all-rounders – they clarified that the rule would remain in place until at least after IPL 2027.

Introduced in 2023, the Impact Player rule allows teams to make a substitution at any stage during the match. In practice, this has led to teams replacing an additional batter with a specialist bowler or vice versa, effectively altering team balance and reducing the importance of all-rounders.

Meanwhile, a captain also raised the possibility of extending the option of a ball change midway through the second innings to counter heavy dew. However, Javagal Srinath and Nitin Menon – head of the IPL's match referees' and umpires' panels, respectively – declined the suggestion, explaining that the existing ball-change provision was already designed to address dew in the latter stages of a match.

Cummins joins SRH training, but doesn't overtly exert himself

Ashwin Achal
BENGALURU

Sunrisers Hyderabad's regular skipper Pat Cummins joined the team's training session at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Wednesday.

The Australian fast bowler, who is battling fitness concerns, did not overtly exert himself. The 32-year-old indulged in a light warm up, and took part in fielding and catching drills. He went on to deliver a few balls with a shortened run-up in an empty net.

While his Sunrisers teammates went full tilt, Cummins did a few sprints under the watchful eyes of head coach Daniel Vettori and his staff.

England all-rounder Liam Livingstone, signed for ₹13 crore at the auction, got into the groove with a batting stint.

Livingstone, who last featured for England a year ago, is searching for form and runs. South African Heinrich Klaasen struck big blows, sending the ball to all parts.

SRH is preparing for the IPL 2026 opener against defending champion Royal Challengers Bengaluru here on Saturday.

Given that Cummins will miss the first few games of the season, Sunrisers appointed wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan as the interim captain.

Abhishek Sharma will take charge as the vice-captain.

Kishan missed the SRH practice session on Wednesday as he was part of the IPL captains' meeting in Mumbai.

Cummins last played in the third Ashes Test in December, and did not figure in Australia's disastrous T20 World Cup campaign.

Stark contrast: While SRH sweats over the return of Cummins and form of Livingstone, Abhishek provides it hope. K. MURALI KUMAR

I've made mistakes, but that's history: Shaw on his journey

Vivek Krishnan
NEW DELHI

From the highest of highs to the lowest of lows, Prithvi Shaw has endured a whirlwind of emotions in his cricketing career.

Once touted as the next big thing to emerge from Mumbai's *maidans*, Shaw, now 26, seemed set to fulfil his vast promise when he led India to under-19 World Cup glory in 2018 and scored a century on Test debut in the same year.

But as his form waned and fitness troubles surfaced, the perception of Shaw succumbing to the pitfalls of early fame became hard to ignore.

He hit rock-bottom in the 2024-25 season when he was dropped from Mumbai's Ranji Trophy team on fitness and disciplinary grounds.

Not long after, he found no takers in the IPL auction after seven seasons with Delhi Capitals.

Shaw's desire for a reset saw him move to Maharashtra for the 2025-26 domestic season, and he had a promising start before runs tapered off.

Despite all that has unfolded, Shaw has a fresh shot at redemption as part of DC's roster in IPL-19.

The stylish batter was acquired by the franchise at his base price of ₹75 lakh in the mini-auction in December.

Shaw. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

"Humans make mistakes. I have also made mistakes. That's history. I like to be in the present. That's what I have learned," Shaw told the media on Wednesday.

"If I don't think of a comeback [for India], it will be wrong. Because I am playing for that. And for that, I am working hard."

Mentally prepared

According to Shaw, the enforced break from last year's IPL helped enhance his mental toughness.

"I went to a couple of destinations to refresh my mind a little, and then I came back.

"I practised, worked hard, whether it was training or batting. Whatever I used to do, I started doing three times as much. I can't say I took a step back. It was just a needed break, so that I could strengthen myself mentally," Shaw reflected.

South Africa has the last laugh against New Zealand

Reuters
CHRISTCHURCH

Connor Esterhuizen's 75 off just 33 balls (5x4, 6x6) helped South Africa secure a 33-run win over New Zealand in the fifth and final T20I on Wednesday and clinch a comeback 3-2 series victory.

Esterhuizen, who made his international debut earlier in the series, rekindled South Africa's innings after a muted start to help it post 187 for four.

Two-wicket hauls from Gerald Coetzee, Wiaan Mulder and Ottniel Baartman then restricted New Zealand to 154 for eight.

The scores: South Africa 187/4 in 20 overs (Hermann 39, Esterhuizen 75, Sears 2/37) bt New Zealand 154/8 in 20 overs (Jacobs 36, Coetzee 2/21, Mulder 2/28, Baartman 2/38).
Toss: New Zealand.
PoM & PoS: Esterhuizen.

Esterhuizen... a memorable debut series. AFP

IN BRIEF

Salah confirms his Liverpool exit after the season

Mohamed Salah will leave Premier League champion Liverpool at the end of the season, the Egypt forward announced on Tuesday as he started a farewell to what the club said were nine "illustrious" years at Anfield. The 33-year-old arrived at Anfield in 2017 before making 435 appearances for Liverpool, scoring 255 goals to leave him third on the Reds' all-time leading goalscorers chart. He has also won the Premier League Golden Boot award on four occasions while starring for Liverpool in both their 2019/20 and 2024/25 title triumphs as well as lifting the 2019 Champions League trophy. Salah, in a video on social media featuring highlights of his time with Liverpool, said: "Unfortunately, the day has come. This is the first part of my farewell. I will be leaving Liverpool at the end of the season".

Indian archers win two bronze at Asia Cup Stage-1

Indian archers claimed two bronze and ensured at least five more medals at the Asia Cup Stage-1 archery tournament in Bangkok on Wednesday. The country's recurve women's team – comprising Ruma Biswas, Kirti and Ridhi Phor – saw off Malaysia 5-1 while the compound men's team – consisting of Rajat Chauhan, Rishabh Yadav and Uday Kamboj – knocked out Bhutan 234-232 in bronze medal matches. The Indian recurve men's team and compound women's team reached their respective finals. In individual events, Ridhi secured a place in the recurve women's individual title clash, while Prathamesh Jawkar and Kamboj set up an all-Indian final in compound men's individual event. Chauhan and Tejal Salve made the compound men's and women's individual bronze matches respectively.

Patriots terminated from UTT for non-payment of dues

Jaipur Patriots, one of the two recent additions in the UTT, has been terminated for non-payment of dues to the promoters of the league. According to a statement issued by 11Sports, promoters of UTT, the termination was inevitable due to "repeated non-compliance with the terms of the executed franchise agreement and persistent payment defaults owed to 11Sports under the contract."

Zoravar left out for workload management: coach Wilson

India's foreign trap coach Peter Wilson said on Wednesday that the country's top trap marksman Zoravar Singh Sandhu has been left out from the season-opening ISSF Shotgun World Cup in Tangier from Thursday due to "workload management".

The team: Trap (men): Prithviraj Tondaiman, Kynan Chenai, and Bhowneesh Mendiratta; **Women:** Kirti Gupta, Rajeshwari Kumari, and Aashima Ahlawat.

Bhatia, Molinari in focus as Indian Open tees off at the tough DLF course

Defending champion Chacarra and Jarvis among the top players in the fray; Kartik, Shubham, Ahlawat and Shubhankar carry the host's hopes

Time to reboot: Molinari, who has been struggling in recent times, will look to find his range and rhythm at the Indian Open. GETTY IMAGES

GOLF

Uthra Ganesan
GURUGRAM

The 10th hole will be the centre of attention when Akshay Bhatia tees off at the Hero Indian Open on Thursday morning but the 24-year-old will not be the only one hoping to conquer what is generally considered one of the toughest courses on the tour.

The DLF Golf & Country Club has remained a difficult venue for even the best in the business. Besides Bhatia, the hottest talent on the PGA Tour at the moment, Italian Francesco Molinari will be the other top draw, the 43-year-old a former Open winner (2018) and part of the victorious European Ryder Cup team thrice but hasn't really peaked since then.

"There's been a bit of a dip but obviously I am trying to improve from where I am and trying to get some more wins.

"Even with the results not being what I wanted the last few years, I still enjoy practising on my own, trying to find something that might work," Molinari said on the eve of the event.

Other top players include Casey Jarvis (69), a two-time winner already on the DP World Tour this year and defending champion Eugenio Chacarra, who became the first Spaniard to win the title.

"It was a life-changing week last year and I feel like the good vibes again. I feel it's a really good test of golf. It's one of the few courses that you need to hit every shot that you have in the bag, you can't really have any negatives in your game or you get exposed very easily," Chacarra said.

Among the home hopefuls will be rising stars Kartik Singh and Shubham Jaglan along with Veer Ahlawat, joint runner-up last year, Shubhankar Sharma, Yuvraj Sandhu and Rayhan Thomas, aiming to become the first home champion since S.S.P. Chawrasia in 2017.

Gurindervir wins 60m gold in national record time

Pace is ace: Gurindervir outclassed the field in the men's 60m final while Harita emerged as the fastest woman. BISWARANJAN ROUT

ATHLETICS

Sports Bureau

Twenty-six-year-old international sprinter Gurindervir Singh held his nerve to secure the men's 60m crown on the concluding day of the inaugural National Indoor athletics championships at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday.

In a thrilling final reduced to five athletes after three false starts, Gurindervir crossed the line with 6.60. His time was better than the previous National 60m indoor record of 6.67 seconds, set by V.K. Elakkiadasan in 2022. Local lad Lalu Bhoi clocked 6.65.

National outdoor champion Animesh Kujur was among those who were disqualified for false starts.

Harita Bhandra won the women's 60m dash with a time of 7.32.

Swadhin Majhi recorded 2.18m to upset Olympian high-jumper Sarvesh Kushare, who managed 2.15m.

The results: Finals (winners only): Men: 60m: Gurindervir Singh (Rel) 6.60; **400m:** Mohammed Sinan (Rel) 48.27; **1500m:** Vinod Singh (MP) 3:46.13; **Triple jump:** Vimal Mukesh (Navy) 15.41m; **Pole vault:** Reegan G. (TN) 5.30m; **High jump:** Swadhin Kumar Majhi (Odi) 2.18m;
U-20: 60m: Kshitij Sunil (Mah) 6.78; **400m:** Umesh Sahani (UP) 49.14; **3000m:** Dolamani Chirgun (Odi) 8:39.13; **High jump:** Basant (Raj) 2.16m.
Women: 60m: Harita Bhandra (Mah) 7.32; **400m:** Kumari Saloni Nagar (UP) 55.73; **1500m:** Priyanka C. (Kar) 4:34.31; **Triple Jump:** Mallala Anusha (JSW) 13.20m; **High jump:** Payal Jamod (Guj) 1.71m.
U-20: 60m: Kajal Hirabhai Vaja (Guj) 7.50; **400m:** Sai Chinthana Senthil (TN) 59.96; **High jump:** Arpita Sarkar (WB) 1.68m.

Boxing coach Nieva believes team-building activities could make a big difference

Y. B. Sarangi
KOLKATA

Driven by the philosophy that team bonding is beneficial in an individual sport like boxing, head coach Santiago Nieva has engaged the Indian boxers in team-building activities during their preparation for the Asian championships in Mongolia.

The boxers were put through a photo contest during their camp at the NIS, Patiala. And on Tuesday, they enjoyed a visit to the statue of Genghis Khan, the founder of the Mongol empire, in Ulaanbaatar.

"I have always tried to create a positive environment. We want boxers to have long careers and enjoy their time in the national team. In Patiala, we had a team-building day once during the pandemic, and it was pretty successful," Nieva responded to a query from *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

"During my stint in Australia, we did a couple of such activities and the photo contest, and the boxers liked it very much. I thought that it could be a good idea to implement it in Patiala. Team support is as important in an individual sport as in team sports. There are studies that show this."

A day off: Indian boxers at the statue of Genghis Khan in Mongolia. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Recalling the photo contest in Patiala, Nieva said, "In the beginning, it was difficult to know how much effort they would put into it or how creative they would get. But pretty quickly, we started seeing different outfits. There were really great costumes. People started going to different places, even outside the NIS, to take great photos.

"They even started using AI photos. Then we had to put rules that we would not count the AI photos. Otherwise, they came up with some really crazy photos. The most extreme was when they started using paint on body and face to recreate super heroes. It was fun."

Nieva said that the team activities, apart from regular training, in Ulaanbaatar helped the athletes to collaborate, think strategically and outsmart each other and that it would boost the boxers' overall performance. "Now the problem is that we have set the bar pretty high. But we have a couple of surprises in store for them," he said.

NEW DELHI ROUND-UP

Nehru World School (Delhi) boys triumph

Nehru World School (Delhi) and Sacred Heart SSS (Ludhiana) won the boys' and girls' competitions respectively at the 2025-26 ACG Junior NBA 3v3 National Finals.

The six-day competition at the K.D. Jadhav Indoor Stadium marked the culmination of regional tournaments held across ten cities with participation from more than 8,000 kids across 900 schools.

The ACG Jr. NBA programme is a nationwide 3v3 tournament for under-14 kids and the largest school-based programme in the country, held in association with the Basketball Federation of India.

The results (winners only): National Finals: Boys: Nehru World School (Delhi); **Girls:** Sacred Heart SSS (Ludhiana).

All-Star Championship: Boys: Delhi; **Girls:** Bengaluru.

MVP: Boys: Jatin Sharma (Nehru WS); **Girls:** Jiya Sodhi (Sacred Heart SSS).

Gyan Bharati wins title

Opener Saksham Aswal struck an unbeaten 76 off 62 balls as host Gyan Bharati won the second Annual TCA Jayant memorial under-14 cricket tournament, defeating St. Thomas School by eight wickets in the final.

The scores: Final: St. Thomas 138/6 in 20 overs (Akshat Parashar 33, Swarnmol Ratna Nikky 28) lost to Gyan Bharati 140/2 in 19.2 overs (Saksham Aswal 76 n.o., Manav Chander Upreti 34).

Gulzar slams century

Player-of-the-match Gulzar Sandhu (108) helped Bright CC post a 72-run win over Delhi Colts CC in a league match of the first RPS T20 tournament.

The scores:
Bright 282/5 in 20 overs (Gulzar Sandhu 108, Rushal 49, Arjun Singh 3/46) bt Delhi Colts 210/6 in 20 overs (Samarth Singh 88, Aasshman Gulati 61).

AIFF announces partnership with Dream Sports Foundation

The All-India Football Federation (AIFF) signed a multi-year partnership with Dream Sports Foundation, designating it as the official Youth Development Partner to strengthen under-16 football in the country. As part of the deal, the AIFF Junior League regional rounds will continue as the qualification pathway to the national stage with DSF complementing through a range of value-added and developmental interventions including performance analysis, education and upskilling workshops for players, coaches and support staff and live streaming of the competition on FanCode.

LIVE TELECAST

Golf: Indian Open, Sony Sports Ten 2 & LIV, 1 p.m.

Football: European Qualifiers, Sony Sports Ten 2, 5 & LIV, 8.30, 10.30 p.m. & 1.15, 1.30 & 5 a.m. (Friday).

When technique is right, performance follows — Baranica's success mantra

Jayantho Sengupta
CHENNAI

In a 2023 interview, Baranica Elangovan had insisted she was not chasing the National Record (NR), wary that dwelling on it could shift her focus away from the technical aspects of her training.

On Tuesday, at the National Indoor Athletics Championships in Bhubaneswar, that clarity paid off. The Tamil Nadu vaulter cleared 4.22m in the women's pole vault final to break the NR and also register a Personal Best (PB), surpassing the mark held by Statemate Rosy Meena Paulraj. The breakthrough followed a series of near misses, with Baranica saying she had attempted to break the record at least five times before finally succeeding.

"I have been focusing on my technique rather than just performance. I'm not thinking about whether I can clear a height or not. I just wanted to listen and apply what I practice in training, and it has finally clicked for me," Baranica told *The Hindu*.

Set priorities: Baranica says she has been focusing on getting her basics right. BISWARANJAN ROUT

Baranica attempted 4.25m thrice on the day but fell short. She added that she has not yet peaked this season, having consciously prioritised technical refinement. This approach has already brought consistency. Days earlier, she cleared 4.10m at the Indian Open Jumps to breach the Athletics Federation of India qualification mark for the Asian Games.

"I'm focusing on getting my basics right. If I focus only on performance, technique suffers. When the technique is right, performance follows."

Baranica is also adapting to a more demanding domestic calendar.

"AFI wants athletes to be consistent. Earlier, we could pick competitions, but now we have to compete regularly," she said.

The Mayiladuthurai native also reflected on her formative years alongside Rosy Meena and Pavithra Vengatesh.

"We used to push each other. I was around the 3.80m mark then, and at National Championships, it would often be the three of us from Tamil Nadu competing for medals."

At the Indoor Championships, Baranica opened with comfortable clearances at 3.80m, 3.90m, 4.00m and 4.10m before opting to attempt 4.22m – a decision shaped by strategy and fatigue.

"My coach, Milber Bertrand Russel, asked me to focus on execution and technique," she said.

The execution held firm, and the long-standing record finally gave way.

No clash of dates between C'wealth TTC and UTT

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

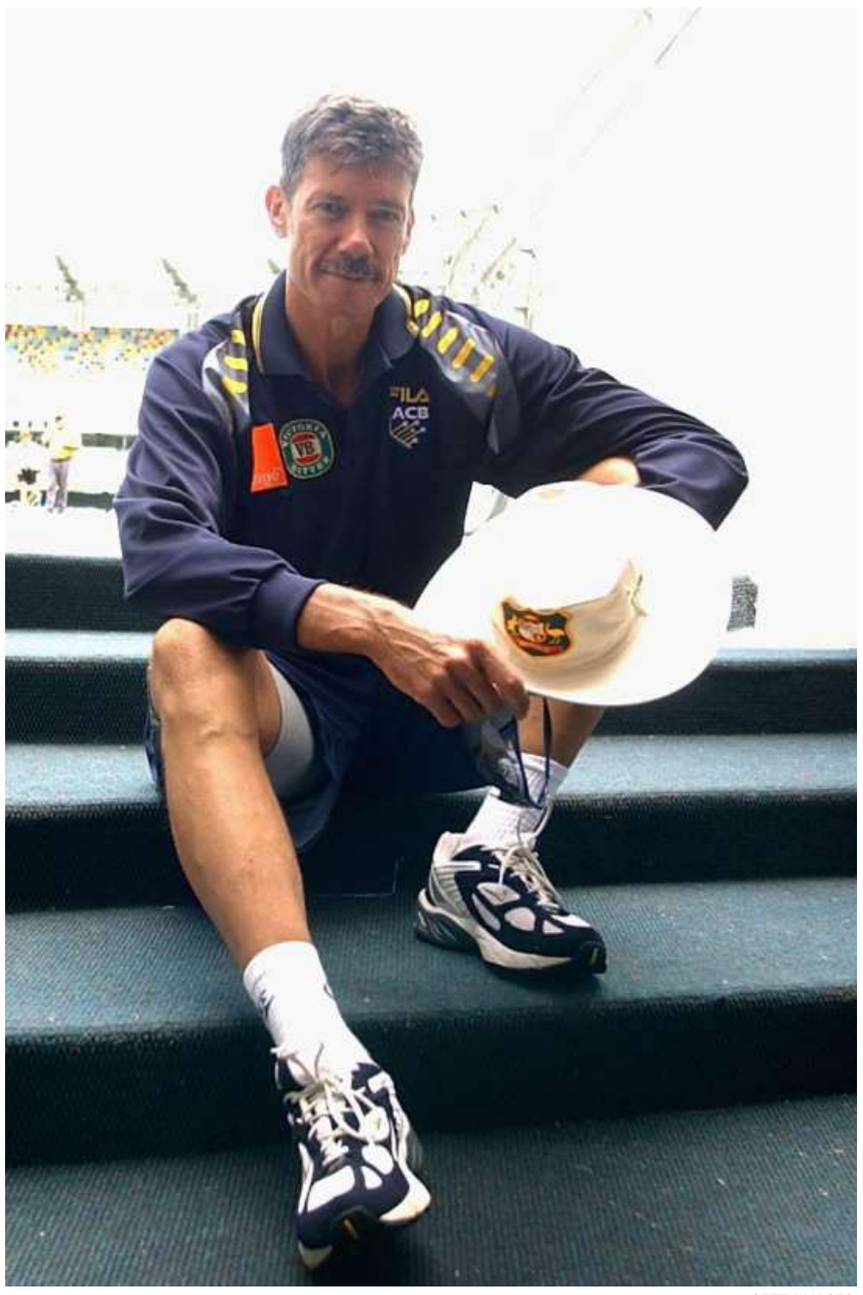
The potential clash of dates between the Commonwealth Table Tennis Championship (CTTC) and the seventh edition of Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) in July has been averted, with all stakeholders agreeing to ensure the two events do not overlap.

The Hindu understands that UTT executives met representatives of Commonwealth Table Tennis Federation (CTTF) and the Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) in New Delhi last week to work out a mutually acceptable solution.

Multiple officials, requesting anonymity, confirmed that the seventh edition of UTT will be held in Goa from July 9 to 26. The 22nd edition of the CTTC will then begin in New Delhi on July 27, with the finals scheduled for August 2.

Time for Australian cricket to do some soul-searching

Buchanan, the former coach, reflects on what it takes to build a successful unit; says he was fortunate to have worked with greats like Warne and McGrath; feels that the younger crop of Aussies has not able to survive at the highest level, particularly in the longest format



GETTY IMAGES

INTERVIEW

John Buchanan

S. Dipak Ragav

John Buchanan is one of the most successful coaches in international cricket. He presided over Australia's golden era, guiding the team to two World Cup titles in 2003 and 2007 – both achieved without losing a single match – and overseeing a side that won nearly three-fourths of the Tests it played during his tenure.

In this conversation with *The Hindu*, the 72-year-old reflects on what it takes to build a successful team, revisits some of the memorable battles against India, and shares his insights on the modern game. Excerpts

How do you assess the current state of Australian cricket?

They had a strong Ashes series before the T20 World Cup exit. They did win 3-1, but I thought it was a very disappointing series. The skill levels of both sides were not what I would term 'Test match standard.' And I say that not just because the matches lasted two or two-and-a-half days, but because, from both a batting and bowling perspective, I saw players unable to adapt and adjust their skills to the conditions.

Wickets always play a role, but the ones I saw shouldn't have dictated such short games. So, in a nutshell, I think it's time for Australian cricket to do some soul-searching. That includes taking accountability for both good and bad outcomes. Australia's record over the last three or four years across formats is still quite strong. Nonetheless, the results in T20 cricket are indicative of some underlying cracks in the system.

With players like Mitchell Starc, Steve Smith, and Josh Hazlewood nearing the end of their careers, how do you see the road ahead?

It ties back to what we just discussed. There will need to be turnover. In any team aiming for sustained success, you need a balance – experienced players alongside younger ones coming through.

Right now, particularly in Test cricket, Australia has a group dominated by older players, with very little infusion of young talent. The younger players who have come in occasionally, like Sam Konstas, haven't been able to survive at the highest level. A lot of this comes down to the domestic system – the Sheffield Shield, the BBL, and the One-Day competitions. The issue is that the best players often do not participate in these tournaments. When they do get opportunities, they may opt out due to injury, rest, or time away from the game.

So, when your domestic system is no longer the best indicator of whether a player is ready for international cricket, then you've got a problem. That's something Australia needs to examine very carefully.

Do you see any promising youngsters coming through?

I don't follow the under-19 level closely anymore. But broadly speaking, I believe there is enough talent. The key question is whether that talent can be consistently executed at a higher level.

At the moment, the competitions these players are involved in are not sufficiently testing them. So while talent exists, the challenge is nurturing it into players who can perform consistently in international cricket.

What separates a good coach from a truly successful one at the highest level?

You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear – you need talented players. We were fortunate to have greats like Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath, and someone like Ricky Ponting, who was close to that level.

Just below them were players like Jason Gillespie, Matthew Hayden, and Justin Langer, who were also outstanding performers.

Then you need strong leadership – Steve Waugh and Ponting, supported by senior players like Adam Gilchrist.

That leadership shapes the team culture – how you prepare, how you approach the game, and how you respond to both wins and losses. Losing hurts, but then you are ready to make amends the next time around.

I remember after the 2007 World Cup, I was asked if I had ever coached the perfect match. I said no – we came close a few times, but never perfect. What we did have, though, was the perfect team: players who constantly looked to improve themselves.

How did you manage a team full of big personalities and still raise the bar further?

It wasn't always smooth sailing. Like any family, there were disagreements. Initially, it was about working with a small core group – Warne, McGrath, the Waugh brothers, and Slater.

Others like Ponting and Gillespie were still establishing themselves, and Gilchrist was just starting. The first 18 months were about understanding how the group functioned before trying to make a significant impact.

Over time, I formed a close working relationship with Steve Waugh and Adam Gilchrist. Together, we focused on building the right culture, planning processes, and training methods. Even though we were winning, it took about 18 months for everything to really solidify.

Success played a key role – early wins helped players believe in the direction we were taking.

You were ahead of the curve with data and fitness. Was there resistance from players?

There's always resistance to change, especially when things are going well. But my view was that if we didn't evolve, other teams would catch up and surpass us. Take the example of our 'Target 400' approach. When I introduced it, players were enthusiastic, but they questioned how we would get there, given that our highest scores were around 340-350.

So we used data to show that we were only maximising about 50% of scoring opportunities. That meant there was untapped potential. From there, we focused on areas like running between the wickets. Technically, many players weren't efficient in that aspect. So that's where a physical change would come in. We needed to actually get them to understand how to get low and power out of their legs to give themselves momentum to get down the other end. These small improvements would help us extract more runs, either by converting singles into twos or scoring off previously unused deliveries.

What were the highlights of your coaching career?

Three moments stand out: Winning Queensland's first Sheffield Shield, coaching my first Test match in Brisbane, singing the national anthem, and finishing with the 2007 World Cup final. Those moments were deeply personal and meaningful.

Was there a player you were particularly fond of?

I'd say, Andrew Symonds. He wasn't necessarily the best or the most disciplined, but he brought something special to the team dynamic. He could bat, bowl both spin and medium pace, and was an outstanding fielder. More importantly, we shared a strong relationship.

Which current Indian players have caught your eye?

Jasprit Bumrah stands out immediately. Alongside Starc, he's one of the leading fast bowlers in the world. He's composed, humble, and consistently delivers. I also really like Shubman Gill. I think he's a very special player.

What advice would you give to Shubman Gill as captain during this transition phase?

First and foremost, he has to perform as a player. Leadership becomes very difficult if you're not contributing with the bat. From there, he needs to back himself and his decisions. If you look at Steve Waugh and Ricky Ponting, they had different styles. Steve was someone who would generally quietly confide in people, but then make the decision. Ricky Ponting would always confide in a way that was very obvious, but still make the decision. Gill needs to find what works best for him.

Your favourite India-Australia contests?

The 2001 and 2004 series stand out. 2004 was a real achievement for us. But it was on the back of 2001 for me, because I hadn't been to India before then. I remember learning from E.A.S. Prasanna, S. Venkataraghavan, and B.S. Chandrasekhar. I got to meet Bishan Singh Bedi, just listening to them talk about spin bowling and how you do it and how you play it, and watching the Indian batters, how they play spin. So 2004 was a real outcome of what happened in 2001. The 2003 World Cup final against India was also an incredible performance.

Any regrets on enforcing the follow-on in that famous Test in Eden Gardens in 2001?

I regard it as one of my poor decisions as a coach. But it was not just about enforcing the follow-on. The game was set up nicely, and we had a big lead (274 runs). My job was not to get caught up in the emotion of what was going on the field. Except, I did. My job was to sit them down quickly as the players walked in and explain our options. I think they still would have all gone there (to enforce the follow-on), but I didn't take the time to get them to think that if we had batted, we would have batted India out of the game. Our objective was to go there to win the series. But we enforced the follow-on.

It was the way we'd been playing, and that was the obvious choice for us to make. We'd won the first Test (in Mumbai), albeit that was a little bit masked by Hayden and Gilchrist's performances. When I look back, they were playing sweeps, the balls were landing [in between fielders], and we had things going our way, which we probably ignored a little bit. And so the obvious decision was to enforce the follow-on, which we did, and the rest is history.

Can you elaborate on the strategy behind the 2004 series win in India?

Our strategy was to cut down scoring opportunities. Indian players are strong on the leg-side, so we used specific field placements – like multiple mid-wicket positions – to create pressure. We focused on bowling at the stumps and back-of-a-length deliveries, forcing batters to take risks. We also mixed in short balls to disrupt the rhythm.

The idea was to restrict boundaries, force errors, and take the crowd out of the game. In India, once the crowd gets behind the team, it can be overwhelming for the opposition. And Warne's role was somewhat less; he was to play a supporting role, not necessarily a lead one, which didn't fit his ego.

But by that stage, he was very much governed by all the players around him, and so they didn't let him get away and let him go and do his own thing. And the other thing was that Adam Gilchrist really stuck to the plan (Ponting was injured for the first three Tests), which made a big difference as well.

What's your take on India's success, especially in white-ball cricket, and the overall state of Indian cricket today?

I may not follow it as closely as I once did, but my overall view is that Indian cricket is heading exactly where you would expect – a powerhouse of world cricket. There is an enormous pool of talent, and the competition to get into the national team is incredibly high. As a result, the players who do make it are generally very well prepared for international cricket. You can see that in their recent performances, including the T20 World Cup win. Their ODI side has also been performing very credibly. The depth of talent pushing through – whether into India-A or the senior team – will continue to ensure India remains a dominant force.

West Asia conflict: how finding oil changed the Persian Gulf's ecology

The Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz bring oil and war to mind, but until recently the region looked very different; to see how, it is only necessary to look at its shallow waters and precarious coasts, where many fragile ecosystems live amid heat, salinity, ships, and geopolitical tensions

Ipsita Herlekar

Birds take flight around vessels in Persian Gulf waters near Hormuz Island, Iran, in 2011. NINARA (CC BY-SA)

Military ships and oil tankers dominate how we imagine the Persian Gulf today. Yet beyond this familiar imagery of geopolitics and petroleum lies a mosaic of vulnerable ecosystems.

It wasn't always this way. Just six decades ago, these waters were busy not with warships but fishing boats, and the glittering megacities that now line the coast were then little more than fishing villages.

The Gulf coastline is remarkably young. Formed 3,000 to 6,000 years ago as the sea flooded the Arabian basin through the Strait of Hormuz, it is today a shallow, semi-enclosed sea spanning about 226,000 sq. km, with an average depth of just 30 m.

Its shallowness and limited water exchange with the open waters of the Arabian sea drive its extreme conditions. The summer temperatures regularly exceed 35 °C while the high rate of evaporation keeps the water salty to the tune of 44-70 parts per thousand – almost twice as salty as open sea water.

Yet life persists.

Life on the edge

At the boundary of land and sea lies the intertidal zone – shaped by cycles of exposure and submergence to heat and hypersalinity.

These are dynamic systems where organic matter breaks down and is recycled, helping microorganisms survive in the adjacent waters. Beyond them, lagoons host specialised microbes and commercially important species like shrimp. Mangroves are fish nurseries, migratory bird refuges, and carbon sinks.

The mudflats also sustain shrimp as well as coastal food webs while the offshore seagrass meadows are among the Gulf's most productive ecosystems, proving to be places where fish and pearl oysters spawn.

These meadows are also important feeding grounds for sea turtles. Five of the world's seven sea turtle species occur here, including the critically endangered Hawksbill sea turtle, and nest along parts of the coast despite the wars.

The Gulf's waters also support the world's second-largest population of dugongs outside Australia, with an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 individuals. Dugongs are marine mammals that depend almost entirely on seagrass to survive.

Scattered across these waters are coral reefs covering an area the size of Goa. They support several fish and invertebrate communities. Importantly, they can survive extreme conditions, making them a natural laboratory for scientists to understand how coral ecosystems might respond to climate change.

Together, the Gulf is a finely balanced ecological network adapted to extremes.

At its peak, in the 18th to the early 20th centuries, the Gulf's oyster beds supported a thriving economy that supplied nearly 80% of the world's Basra pearls, named after a port in Iraq. This system collapsed when Japanese cultured pearls entered the market in the 1920s.

Then people found oil. By the 1970s, oil had made West Asia one of the world's fastest-growing regions. Today, the Gulf region alone produces nearly a third of the world's oil, with around 800 offshore platforms and more than 25,000 tankers moving in and out every year. Nearly a fifth of the world's oil passes through these waters.

This wealth has driven rapid urbanisation. The number of people has tripled in four decades, with more than 85% of people and economic activity concentrated within 100 km of the coast.

Coastlines remade

Large-scale land reclamation, dredging, and engineering have transformed the shorelines. In Dubai alone, more than 60% of the natural coastline has been changed.

Projects such as Palm Jumeirah have altered currents and sediment flows, eroding sand in some areas and causing sand to accumulate in others, leaving beaches to be maintained constantly.

Nearly two-thirds of the salt flats have disappeared, mangroves have shrunk, and natural beaches have been replaced with seawalls that eliminate nesting grounds for birds and turtles. Seagrass beds and mudflats have been buried under land reclamation projects, removing important nursery habitats for marine life.

The consequences have also extended offshore. Coral reefs have been buried or smothered by sediments while dredging and construction have disrupted natural flows.

These physical changes have been compounded by industrial pressures such as desalination and pollution.

The Gulf hosts about half of the world's desalination plants, with over 200 facilities producing around 11 million cubic metres of freshwater every day. They produce hot, saline brine, often laced with chemicals and heavy metals, that is discharged into the sea, where it accumulates in the semi-enclosed basin, further raising temperatures and salinity.

The Gulf coastline is remarkably young. Formed 3,000 to 6,000 years ago as the sea flooded the Arabian basin through the Strait of Hormuz, it is today a shallow, semi-enclosed sea spanning about 226,000 sq. km, with an average depth of just 30 m

Intake systems also remove plankton and larvae, disrupting the base of the food web.

War and water

Algal blooms fed by sewage deplete oxygen and trigger mass fish deaths, such as those recorded off Kuwait's shores in 1999 and 2011. Chronic nutrient loading also disrupts coral physiology, increases bleaching, and suppresses the growth of seagrass.

Industrial pollutants further accumulate in marine life. The pearl oyster (*Pinctada radiata*), once central to Gulf economies, has borne the brunt of pollution and sedimentation, which have left behind degraded oyster beds.

Leaks, spills, and tanker traffic continue to damage ecosystems. The 1991 Gulf War spill devastated coastlines, mangroves, bird populations, and fisheries while oil fires spread pollutants far afield. The UN Compensation Commission awarded Kuwait $52.4 billion for a clean-up; decades later, the effort is still underway.

These threats persist even today. The oil infrastructure continues to be a target of drones and missiles, and rising temperatures trigger repeated coral bleaching, pushing already stressed ecosystems to the brink.

The consequences extend far beyond the sea. Across West Asia, the Arabian oryx, populations of the Asiatic cheetah, and the Arabian leopard have fallen sharply due to hunting and other conflicts. The Arabian oryx vanished from the wild by 1972. Then, the Phoenix Zoo in the U.S., Fauna & Flora International in the U.K., and the World Wide Fund for Nature reintroduced it in Oman in 1982, with populations later established across Saudi Arabia, Israel, the UAE, and Jordan. Meanwhile, the Asiatic cheetah survives in Iran in critically low numbers.

Repeated wars have also derailed conservation efforts. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 followed by the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 brought wildlife protection to a near halt, leaving protected areas to decay and wildlife populations to crash.

A narrowing window

Today, the Gulf is among the worst affected marine regions on the planet. But signs of awareness do exist. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar have imposed limits on shrimp trawling. The UAE and Saudi Arabia are also leading mangrove restoration efforts and, together with Kuwait, have established marine protected areas to conserve what remains of these ecosystems.

As marine biologist and New York University (Abu Dhabi) professor John Burt noted in his work on Gulf ecosystems, the region's highly centralised governance – for all its deficiencies – could also facilitate rapid environmental action. What is required is for ecological concerns to be prioritised at the highest levels.

Time is also limited. Ecosystems such as coastal swamps, saltpans, oyster habitats, and the nesting sites of endangered sea turtles are already approaching points of no return.

(Ipsita Herlekar is an independent science writer. ipsitaherlekar@gmail.com)

A truck carries the transportable antimatter trap during a road test at CERN near Geneva, Switzerland on Tuesday. AP

Antiprotons take a ride in novel test by CERN scientists

Associated Press

Scientists in Geneva took some antiprotons out for a spin – a very delicate one – in a truck, in a never-tried-before test drive that has been deemed a success.

If this so-called antimatter came into contact with actual matter, even for a fraction of an instant, it would have been annihilated in a quick flash of energy. So experts at the European Organization for Nuclear Research, known as CERN, over the course of four hours on Tuesday, brought about 100 antiprotons on the road. The antiprotons were suspended in a vacuum inside a specially designed box and held in place by supercooled magnets. After easing them from the lab and onto the truck, the scientists transported the antimatter on a half-hour drive to test how the infinitesimal particles could be transported by road without seeping out. The antiprotons were then taken back to the lab in the final stage that concluded with applause and a bottle of champagne.

For every type of particle that exists in the universe, there is a corresponding antiparticle, with an opposite charge. Manipulating antimatter, like antiprotons, can be tricky business

CERN spokesperson Sophie Tesauri called the experiment successful. It was not immediately clear how many antiprotons had survived the entire journey, but roughly 91 of 100 were still there after the truck's trip.

Manipulating antimatter, like antiprotons, can be tricky business. As scientists understand the universe today, for every type of particle that exists, there is a corresponding antiparticle, exactly matching the particle but with an opposite charge. If those opposites come into contact, they "annihilate" each other, setting off lots of energy, depending on the masses involved. Any bumps in the road on the test journey that are not compensated for by the specially-designed box could spoil the whole exercise. "The motivation behind these experiments is to compare matter and antimatter with extremely high accuracy and watch for differences which we might have not seen yet," said Stefan Ulmer, the leader and spokesperson for Tuesday's experiment.

The experiment was a first step toward making good on hopes, one day, to deliver CERN antiprotons to researchers at Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf, Germany, which is about eight hours away in normal driving conditions. The antiprotons were encased in a 1,000-kg box called a transportable antiproton trap. It was compact enough to fit through ordinary laboratory doors and fit on a truck. It used superconducting magnets cooled to -269°C that allowed the antiprotons to remain suspended in a vacuum – not touching the inner walls, which are made of matter. The mass in the test – slightly less than that of about 100 hydrogen atoms – is so little, experts say, that the worst possible outcome was the loss of the antiprotons. Even if they did touch matter, any release of energy would be unnoticeable. Only an oscilloscope, which picks up electrical signals, would have been able to detect it. The trap, says Ms. Tesauri, "is supposed to contain these antiprotons no matter what: if the truck stops, if it starts again, if it has to slam on the brakes – all that".

Work remains: the trap can contain the antiprotons on its own for only about four hours, and the drive to Düsseldorf is twice that.

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

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

Survival struggle: when and how animals go extinct

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

When the last individual of a species worldwide has died, it is said to become extinct. What is the single-word term for when the last individual of a species has died in a particular region even as the species persists in other areas?

QUESTION 2

_____ is a name for evolution within a single lineage where a population changes so significantly over time that it is reclassified as a new species. As a result of this, the 'old species' is said to end as the 'new species' begins. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 3

X extinction is when a species still exists but its population is so small that it no longer plays a significant role in its ecosystem. Y extinction is like X extinction taken to an extreme, i.e. when the species is so rare that its presence in the ecosystem can be ignored without consequence. Name X and Y.

QUESTION 4

Individuals of a species whose numbers have fallen below the _____ _____ _____ are sometimes called the 'living dead'. This is because the population no longer has the genetic diversity for the species to adapt well to new threats and/or it is losing too much habitat. Fill in the blanks.

QUESTION 5

A species is said to have an _____ ____ if an event in the past is bound to lead to the species being wiped out in future. Fill in the blanks with a description coined so because the species is 'owed' to extinction.

Visual: Name this fish. It's a good example of a Lazarus taxon, which denotes a species thought to be extinct but which is then rediscovered. AMELIA GUO

Answers to March 19 quiz:

1. Minimum amount of fissile material for a chain reaction – **Ans: Critical mass**
2. Method used to eliminate mosquitoes' breeding grounds – **Ans: Drain the swamp**
3. When too much NaCl in soil dehydrates plants – **Ans: Salting the earth**
4. Name for assets that threaten the health of institutions – **Ans: Toxins**
5. Temperature point when an environment is ready to combust – **Ans: Flashpoint**

Visual: **Runaway**

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