

Chennai » Coimbatore » Bengaluru » Hyderabad » Madurai » Noida » Visakhapatnam » Thiruvananthapuram » Kochi » Vijayawada » Mangaluru » Tiruchirapalli » Kolkata » Hubballi » Mohali » Malappuram » Mumbai » Tirupati » Lucknow » Cuttack » Patna

FROM DEHRADUN TO EGMORE The mega Indian railway makeover

Is the Railways' ₹24,500-cr. modernisation project signalling the end of the country's landmark heritage structures?

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Assad's exit? FAQ » PAGE 8



The new boss at Mint Street **PROFILES** » PAGE 9



Rain ruins day one of third Australia-India Test in Brisbane SPORT » PAGE 13



Police use water cannons, tear gas on farmers

CHANDIGARH The Haryana Police on

Saturday used tear gas and water cannons to disperse farmers and farm-labourers after they attempted to enter the State as part of their 'Delhi Chalo' march in support of their demands. » PAGE 3

Protests return to Kolkata streets over R.G. Kar case

KOLKATA

Protest demonstrations and rallies seeking justice for the doctor raped and murdered at the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital returned to Kolkata on Saturday, a day after a court gave bail to two accused in the case. » PAGE 3

Prime Minister says Congress subverted spirit of Constitution

During Lok Sabha debate on 75 years of the Constitution, Modi accuses the Nehru-Gandhi family of 'subversion attempts'; Constitution is 'basis of our unity', BJP-led government's amendments only strengthened the spirit of the Statute, he says

Nistula Hebbar NEW DELHI

he Constitution is the "basis of our unity", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in the Lok Sabha on Saturday, accusing the Congress and its past governments of attempting to subvert its spirit.

Speaking for over an hour and 45 minutes at the end of a two-day debate on the 75-year journey of the Indian Constitution, the Prime Minister emphasised that - unlike past Congress governments – any amendments made by his government and the previous NDA governments had been done to strengthen the spirit of the Constitution.

Mr. Modi said that former Congress Prime Ministers had repeatedly raised first family, having "tasted blood", then repeatedly objections to reservations for marginal communities, wounded the Constitution, while his government had Mr. Modi said extended it to the economically weaker sections (EWS), with "no objections" from any section of society. Significantly, a major plank of the Opposition during the recent Lok Sabha election was the accusa-



Sharp words: Narendra Modi speaks in the Lok Sabha during the discussion on the 'glorious journey' of the Constitution. PTI

'Your supreme leader tional institutions. Launching a sharp attack on the Nehru-Gandhi preferred Manusmriti' family, Mr. Modi said that the first amendment to the Constitution, made to the fundamental right to ex-The Hindu Bureau pression by former Prime NEW DELHI Minister Jawaharlal Nehru Hindutva ideologue in 1951, was the beginning Vinayak Damodar of this "subversion" of the document. The Congress's Savarkar believed that

Constitution of India and preferred the religious text Manusmriti, Leader of the **Opposition Rahul Gandhi** said in the Lok Sabha.

> **FULL REPORT ON** » PAGE 4

ment was in power. Mr. Modi emphasised that leaders like him who came from ordinary families could never have reached where they did but for the strength of the Constitution.

His government, Mr. Modi said, had repealed Article 370 to unify the country and bring Jammu and Kashmir under the ambit of the Indian Constitution more fully, brought in GST to roll out a "one nation, one tax" regime, along with digital architecture... health insurance for the poor, as well as free food grains. Mr. Modi ended his speech by asking parliaon the vote. mentarians to take 11 san*kalps* (resolutions). These to rule on Mr. Yoon's future include a resolve to hoand Chief Justice Moon Hvnour the Constitution and ung-bae vowed to hold "a not weaponise it politically, a swipe at the Opposition campaign.

S. Korean President Yoon impeached over martial law bid

Agence France-Presse SEOUL

South Korean lawmakers on Saturday impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his failed martial law bid, with the Opposition declaring a "victory of the people".

The vote capped more than a week of intense political drama in the democratic South following Mr. Yoon's failed attempt to impose martial law on December 3.

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of the capital Seoul in rival rallies for and against Mr. Yoon on

Saturday. In a televised address following the vote, the impeached Mr. Yoon said he would "step aside" but did not apologise for his botched bid to impose martial law.

Out of 300 lawmakers, 204 voted to impeach the PPP lawmaker Kim Sang-President on allegations of wook told broadcaster insurrection while 85 vot-JTBC that Mr. Yoon had "completely betrayed the ed against it. Three ab-



Protesters gather outside the National Assembly in Seoul on Saturday. AFP

peachment to pass, and opposition lawmakers needed to convince at least eight parliamentarians from Mr. Yoon's conservative People Power Party (PPP) to switch sides.

'Betrayal of values'

Georgia chooses far-right loyalist as new President

TBILISI

Georgia's ruling party on Saturday installed Mikheil Kavelashvili, a far-right loyalist, as President, amid deepening constitutional crisis that broke out since the Georgian Dream Party claimed victory in polls held in October. » PAGE 12

Stating the case

The Prime Minister cited several examples of this: the imposition of the Emergency by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi; the passage of the tion that the BJP-led go-Muslim Women (Protecvernment was seeking to tion of Rights Under Disubvert the Constitution vorce) Act under the Rajiv through a big majority, Gandhi government, rewith plans to end reservaversing a Supreme Court tions in jobs and educaverdict on post-divorce

maintenance for Muslim women; and the setting up of the National Advisory Council under the UPA government which he said asserted the power of then-Congress president Sonia Gandhi over then-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He claimed that the Congress was fond of the "word jumla", especially the slogan "Garibi Hatao (remove poverty)", which

there was "nothing

Indian" about the

had brought them to power though the situation of the poor remained the same.

"Their next generation is also into the same game," he said. Without naming Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, he said that an "arrogant" person had torn up the decision of the Cabinet when the Manmohan Singh-led UPA governstained whereas eight values of conservatism". votes were nullified.

"That is why we, as rul-Mr. Yoon has now been ing party lawmakers, have suspended from office decided to remove him while South Korea's Constiourselves," he said. tutional Court deliberates

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo - now the nation's interim leader - said in an address to the nation that he "deeply acknowledges the heavy responsibility for the current situation" and "sincerely

were needed for the im-

The court has 180 days

swift and fair trial". Two hundred votes apologises to the people".

Cong. should 'justify' leadership role in | Commission accuses Sheikh Hasina of INDIA bloc as there is 'disquiet': Omar forced disappearances in Bangladesh

"Our existence can't just

be about six months before

Parliament elections. Our

existence has to be so-

mething more than that.

The last time we met was

when the Lok Sabha re-

sults had only just come

out. There has been no for-

mal or informal sort of

work that has been done

for the INDIA bloc," he

Mr. Abdullah's com-

ments suggest underlying

said.

Press Trust of India NEW DELHI

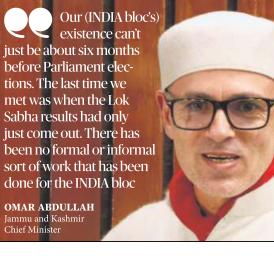
Acknowledging growing discontent among INDIA bloc partners with the Congress, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has asked the party to justify its leadership role in the alliance. In an interview with

PTI, he emphasised that leadership "has to be earned" and could not be taken for granted. He suggested that the party raise the issue of restoration of Statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

"By virtue of being the single-largest party in Parliament, and also having the [positions of] Leader of Opposition in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, the fact that they have a pan-India footprint, which no other party can lay claim to, they are natural sort of leaders of an Opposition movement," he said.

Yet there is a sense of disquiet among some of

YK



the allies because they feel the Congress is "not doing enough to justify it or to earn it or to keep it (the position of leading the INDIA bloc)". "That's something the Congress might wish to consider," he said. Mr. Abdullah stressed

the need for sustained interactions beyond the electoral cycle, noting that the alliance's current approach appeared sporadic and ineffective.

tensions within the Opposition alliance, indicating that infrequent meetings could potentially magnify minor disagreements.

"If we had a more regular process of interaction, perhaps these smaller irritants wouldn't assume proportions," he larger said.

He praised former Conpresident Sonia gress Gandhi, describing her as a leader of unparalleled stature within the Opposition alliance. "She plays an important leadership role," he said.

Mr. Abdullah chose not to give a direct answer to a question on the statements made by some leaders including Sharad Pawar and Lalu Yadav, in favouring West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as the better leader, but highlighted the INDIA bloc's lack of consistent engagement, warning that the coalition risked becoming a mere election-time convenience.

Kallol Bhattacherjee NEW DELHI

In a new turn of events, the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearance set up by the interim government of Bangladesh filed a report on Saturday stating that it found the "involvement of Ex-PM Sheikh Hasina" in enforced disappearances of individuals during her tenure.

The report recommended disbanding the anti-terror outfit Rapid Action Battalion that was instrumental in crackdown against terror suspects and was accused of human rights abuse. The commission said it has recorded 1,676 cases of disappearances and that the total number of such cases during the Hasina-era could cross 3,500.

Earlier in the day, the authorities arrested four persons in connection with attacks on the minority Hindu community on December 3. The arrests



Drawing ire: The commission said the total number of cases of disappearances during the Hasina-era could cross 3,500. REUTERS

came days after the Indian arrested in this incident Foreign Secretary visited are Ali Hossain (19), Sultan Dhaka and urged the authorities to "acknowledge" Hossain (31) and Shajahan the attacks on minorities in Hossain (20).

The case of violence against Hindus involved a social media post by one Akash Das which created communal tension in Sunamganj district, leading to attacks against Hinduowned businesses and a

ficials of security forces and her government, including her defence adviser, Major General (retd.) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, the in enforced disappearances."

The commission said that it would bring out another interim report in March and would require another year to complete the scrutiny of all the complaints received so far.

Apart from Ms. Hasina and Mr. Siddique, the commission also found the involvement of former director general of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre and sacked Major General Ziaul Ahsan, senior police officers Monirul Islam and Md. Harun-Or-Rashid with "several incidents of enforced disappearance".

Submitting the report, the commission's chairman said it had detected a "systematic design" to avoid detection of the casenforced es of disappearances.

Bangladesh.

places of worship. Those

•••

Ahmed Raju (20), Imran

On the inquiry, a statement

from Chief Adviser's Office

said, "The commission

chairman said they had

found the prima facie in-

volvement of former Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina

and some high-ranking of-

'Officials involved'

THE HINDU **States**

BREE

2



Punjab women's commission summons SGPC chief Dhami

The Punjab State Commission for Women issued a notice to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) president Harjinder Singh Dhami on Saturday for his alleged derogatory remarks against his predecessor, Bibi Jagir Kaur. Commission chairperson Raj Lali Gill has directed Mr. Dhami to appear before the panel in person and submit a written explanation by December 17. Mr. Gill took suo motu (on its own) notice of the matter involving alleged derogatory remarks targeting Ms. Kaur. PTI

AAP launches campaign for Jalandhar civic body polls

Ruling AAP in Punjab launched its poll campaign for the Jalandhar Municipal Corporation on Saturday. Elections to five municipal corporations and 44 municipal councils and nagar panchayats are scheduled to be held on December 21. The Punjab unit chief of AAP, Aman Arora, said a manifesto has been prepared for Jalandhar following extensive public consultations. Mr. Arora promised to introduce 100 electric buses with charging stations to tackle rising pollution and improve the public transport situation in the city. PTI

RJD promises to launch monthly cash transfer scheme for Bihar women

Women will get monthly assistance of ₹2,500 under Mai-Behan Maan Yojana if party is voted to power next year: ex-deputy CM Tejashwi Yaday; pledges scheme within a month of govt. formation

Amit Bhelari PATNA

ashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader and former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav on Saturday announced that his party would launch a cash transfer scheme for women within a month of forming the government if it wins the Assembly election due next year.

In neighbouring Jharkhand, the Maiya Samman Yojana - a similar cash transfer scheme for women - is said to have helped the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-led Hemant Soren government retain power. In Maharashtra, the recent victory of the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance was also aided by its Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana, under which women got a monthly assistance of ₹1,500. Similarly, the Madhya Pradesh go-

by porters. Taking a dig at

the BJP's "ek hai to safe

hai" slogan, he said even

temples are not safe in the

tion about the temple, Mr.

Fadnavis, who was at the

'Pune Book Festival 2024',

pointed out: "The process

of classification of temples

is under way. Ancient tem-

ples are preserved. The is-

sue of Dadar Hanuman

temple will be discussed

with the railway adminis-

tration and a solution will

Frozen block

Responding to a ques-

saffron party's regime.



A step ahead: RJD leader Teiashwi Yaday at a press conference in Darbhanga on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

vernment's Mukhyamantri Ladli Bahna Yojana helped the BJP continue in power in 2023.

Mr. Yadav, who is also the Leader of Opposition in the Bihar Assembly, called a special press briefing in Darbhanga to make the announcement. Under the proposed scheme -Mai-Behan Maan Yojana eligible women would get a monthly assistance of ₹2,500 each, he said. "We want to empower

every woman of Bihar. During my visits, I realised one thing - that people are suffering from inflation and price rise. People are expressing their pain about the daily struggle for their livelihood," Mr. Yadav said. "With the blessings of crores of mothers and sisters of Bihar, today I have taken this decision that when our government is formed in 2025, we will give ₹2,500 per month to the women of the State under the Mai Bahin Maan Yojana."

Benefits entire family The RJD leader said the foundation of the reconstruction of Bihar would be incomplete without the prosperity of women. "When women receive cash, they will invest more money in their family's well-being, such as nutritious food for the whole family, healthcare, and children's education. The positive effect of cash transfers is significant in terms of improved economic conditions for women, and benefits the entire family and

community," he said. Mr. Yadav said the cash transfer scheme would be designed with complementary support such as financial literacy training, which would further promote women empowerment and long-term economic independence.

Former Tamil Nadu Congress president Elangovan no more

<u>T. Ramakrishnan</u> CHENNAI

Erode (East) MLA and former Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) chief E.V.K.S. Elangovan died in Chennai on Saturday after a brief illness. He was 73. He is survived by his wife and a son.

Mr. Elangovan, a former Union Minister of State, would have turned 74 next Saturday. He was admitted to MIOT Hospital, where he

breathed his last. Mr. Elangovan had represented the Erode (East) Assembly constituency – a seat that was previously held by his son E. Thirumahan Everaa, who died in Ja-

nuary 2023. Hailing from a prominent political family of Tamil Nadu, Mr. Elangovan was the son of E.V.K. Sampath, one of the foundermembers of the DMK who broke ranks with the Dravidian major in 1961 and subsequently joined the Congress. The former Union Minister was also a grand-

nephew of 'Periyar' E.V. Ramasamy. Mr. Elangovan held the

twice - from 2000 to 2002, and 2014 to 2016 - when the party was increasingly getting marginalised in the State politics. He was elected from the Sathyamangalam Assembly constituency in 1984.

E.V.K.S. Elangovan

Twenty years later, he was elected from the nowabolished Gobichettipalayam Lok Sabha constituency. It was then that he was made a Union Minister of State, holding the subjects of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Commerce and Industry.

Despite being a schoolmate of Jayalalithaa at Church Park and his mother Sulochana Sampath being in the AIADMK, Mr. Elangovan's ties with the leader of the AIADMK were not always smooth.

post of TNCC president

Dadar Hanuman temple will be regularised, says Fadnavis

Press Trust of India MUMBAI

BJP leaders on Saturday claimed that a demolition notice issued by the Railways to a temple outside Mumbai's Dadar station has been staved, with Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis saying it would be regularised as per rules.

The assertions by the ruling party leaders came a day after Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhay Thackeray

BJP legislator Mangal Prabhat Lodha said the Dadar Hanuman temple will be protected. Mr. Lodha vi-

sited the shrine near Platform No. 12 at Dadar East, adjacent to Central Railway Station, and interacted with the temple trustees.

Mr. Lodha said he had spoken with Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and an order has been issued to halt the demolition.

Mr. Thackeray on Friday claimed that the Railways had issued a 'fatwa' (edict) to bring down the 80-yearold Hanuman temple built Wife of techie who ended his life files anticipatory bail plea

Press Trust of India PRAYAGRAJ

Engineer Atul Subhash's estranged wife and her family members, whom he had accused of harassment, have filed anticipatory bail pleas in the Allahabad High Court.

Subhash, a 34-year-old engineer, ended his life in Bengaluru on Monday, allegedly due to harassment by his estranged wife and

has been filed against his wife and her relatives.

The anticipatory bail applications have been filed by Subhash's wife, her mother, brother and uncle. The bail pleas came af-

ter Bengaluru City Police on Friday issued summons to his wife and asked her to appear before it within three days.

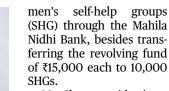
Those in distress may contact Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health suicide

BJP govt. working for women's empowerment: Rajasthan CM

The Hindu Bureau JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma on Saturday said the "respectable status" of women in the State was a symbol of a strong society, even as his government had been working for women's empowerment since he assumed office a year ago.

Mr. Sharma said women had played an important role in bringing the BJP to power in the 2023 Assemb-



Mr. Sharma said crimes against women had decreased under the BJP's regime as significant actions had been taken in accordance with the promises made in the ruling party's manifesto.

"The Kalika patrolling units, 250 of which have started operating, are providing round-the-clock security to women," he said.

slammed the BJP over the notice.

be found. We will regularise it as per the rules."

her family members. A case of abetment to suicide

prevention helpline 011-40769002.

ly election. Mr. Sharma was address-

fare and released loans worth ₹100 crore to wo-

Bhajan Lal Sharma

ing a Mahila Sammelan

(women's conference) in

Udaipur, organised as part

of the BJP government's

first anniversary celebra-

tions. He launched new

schemes for women's wel-

Everyone is equal before law, says Telangana CM

The Hindu Bureau HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has defended actor Allu Arjun's arrest, saying that the "law applies equally to all citizens, irrespective of their status".

During a discussion, organised by a media organisation in New Delhi, on Friday, the Chief Minister spoke about the stampede during the premiere of Pushpa 2 at Sandhya theatre that resulted in a woman's death.

Mr. Reddy clarified that police acted according to law and denied any political reasons for the arrest. "A movie star or a political star, our government doesn't care. We only care about who committed the crime. A woman died in the incident. Who is responsible for this?" he asked.

"Allu Arjun arrived at the theatre without informing the police, leading to chaos among fans. If he had come to the theatre quietly and watched the movie without creating a commotion, this tragedy could have been avoided,"

Revanth Reddy says actor Allu Arjun could have reached the theatre quietly and watched the

movie Pushpa 2

he said, adding that the actor's rally-like arrival caused fans to rush, resulting in the fatal stampede. He also dismissed alle-

gations of personal bias.

I respect law: actor

Meanwhile, Allu Arjun, who was released on Saturday from the jail, thanked his followers and others across the country for their love and support and said he "is a law-abiding citizen and respects the law".

"I'll cooperate with them and I'll do the needful. And very importantly, I would like to give my condolences once again to the family. It (death of a woman) is very unfortunate," he told the media. Allu Arjun said he was watching the movie along with his family when the unfortunate incident happened. He said it was a challenging time for his family. (With inputs from PTI)



Winter album: Tourists pose for photographs near a frozen waterfall in Lahaul-Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh on Saturday. A cold wave has swept the hill State with temperatures continuing to drop. PTI

Agencies to probe leak of question papers in Kerala

The Hindu Bureau

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Director of General Education has lodged a complaint with the Kerala Police Chief in connection with the leak of question papers for the half-yearly examinations in State schools.

At a press conference here on Saturday, Minister for General Education V. Sivankutty said the leak of SSLC English and Plus One Mathematics question papers on YouTube channels ahead of the examinations was a serious issue and a challenge to the education sector. It would be investigated by various agencies.

said the question papers could not leak without the knowledge of teachers who prepared them or school authorities who were responsible for its distribution. Question papers of some subjects were leaking more often. The matter would be examined considering past experiences.

Mincing no words, he

On the nexus between teachers and tuition centres, he said all assistant education officers and deputy education officers would be asked to inquire about the teachers who taught at private tuition centres. Action would be taken against the YouTube channels too, he said.

riot) of the IPC in the com-

plaint against Mr. Jarkiholi,

the court said the petition-

er's statement nowhere

would meet the ingre-

dients of Section 153".

Case against Satish Jarkiholi for remarks on word 'Hindu' quashed

The Hindu Bureau BENGALURU

The Karnataka High Court quashed a defamation case filed against Congress leader and Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi for allegedly defaming and hurting feelings of Hindus by his

public statement made in 2022 in which he said that "the word Hindu has a dirty and insulting meaning" in Persian language.

'This is a case where not a definite class of people is alleged to be defamed, but an indefinite class. The very concept of

defaming an indefinite class cannot lead to the offence punishable under Section 500 (punish for defamation) of the Indian Penal Code, as the purport of Section 499 (defamation)

and the Explanation-II is that it should be against a definite class of people,"

the court said.

Justice M. Nagaprasanna passed the order while allowing a petition filed by Mr. Jarkiholi challenging the private complaint filed by Bengaluru-based advocate Dilip Kumar.

The court said the offence of defamation can-

...(

not be laid against an indeterminate group as it is a settled principle of law interpreted by the top court way back in 1972 in the case of G. Narasimhan and others vs T.V. Chokkappa.

On invoking Section 153 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause

Mr. Jarkiholi made the statement during a rally held at Nippani in Belagavi district in November 2022.

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YK

A IN-X

ISSN 0971 - 751X

Centre's air rescue payment demand stirs row in Kerala

The Hindu Bureau THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A bitter stand-off between the Centre and Kerala is unfolding with a communication sent by the Ministry of Defence on October 22 urging the Kerala government to pay up the outstanding charges of ₹132.61 crore for air evacuation operations carried out by the Indian Air Force (IAF) as part of the disaster response between 2006 and September 2024, evoking sharp reactions from the Left and the Congress leaders.

Communist Party of India (Marxist) MP K. Radhakrishnan told reporters in New Delhi on Saturday that the Centre has insulted Keralites by demanding cash for the IAF's disaster relief operations when the State was struggling to rehabilitate the disaster-hit people in Wayanad.

Revenue Minister K. Rajan viewed the letter as part of a move to push the State into a crisis for political reasons.

Later in the day, MPs from the State demonstrated outside the Parliament against the Centre's alleged reluctance to release aid for Wavanad.

Leader of the Opposition in Kerala Assembly V.D. Satheesan accused the



The Special Operations Group

landslides and floods. However, BJP leader V. Muraleedharan said the

Centre would ensure the cost incurred by the IAF for relief and rescue operations during disasters was set off against federal aid.

would balance the books and not distress the people of Kerala.

after the floods of 2018."

NC lacking in courage to

govern J&K, says Mufti

and IAF carrying out rescue operations in Wayanad. PTI

Centre of mocking the people of Kerala by demanding the State underwrite the cost of the humanitarian search and rescue operations undertaken by the IAF during the Wayanad

He said the Centre

Hindu that the State had time and again written to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to meet the cost of these airlift operations directly, as the Ministry had "committed to bearing these costs

CHANDIGARH

Official sources told The

Haryana police use tear gas, water cannons on farmers

Protesters suspend their third attempt to resume foot march to New Delhi after over a dozen of them sustained injuries; they tried to enter Haryana through the Shambhu-Ambala boundary

The Hindu Bureau

he Haryana police on Saturday used tear gas and water cannons to disperse farmers and farm-labourers after they attempted to enter the State at the Shambhu-Ambala boundary with Punjab as part of their Delhi Chalo foot march in support of their demands. They suspended their

march for the day after around a dozen of the 101 farmers suffered injuries following tear gas shelling. The group of farmers and farm labourers began their march from Shambu toward Ambala in Harvana. As the farmers' group attempted to make their way by pushing and throw-

ing away the multi-layer barricades, the Haryana police resorted to tear gas shelling. The injured were taken

to a nearby hospital in ambulances stationed at the protest site.

Groups of farmers under the banner of the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political), the two umbrella bodies that are spearheading farmer's agitation in Punjab, have

The PDP resolution

brought to the notice of the

Centre and the broader In-

dian populace the issues of

"disempowerment, depriv-

ation, and humiliation" re-

sulting from the unconsti-

tutional revocation of J&K's

constitutional rights, after

the abrogation of Article

"We note that the initial

The PDP resolution also



Stopped at the boundary: Security personnel use water cannons to disperse farmers agitating at the Shambhu boundary in Patiala. A total of 101 farmers resumed their march to Delhi on Saturday. PTI

been, since February 13, camping at Shambhu-Ambala and Khanauri-Jind, the boundaries between Haryana and Punjab, after being stopped from entering Haryana. They had been attempt-

ing to march to New Delhi to press for their demands. A legal guarantee for purchasing their crops at a minimum support price and a farm-loan waiver are among their key demands.

KMM coordinator Sarwan Singh Pandher said more than a dozen demonstrating farmers had sustained injuries, after which the march was suspended. He alleged that the police used water mixed with chemicals through cannons to target farmers. Rajat Gulia, the Deputy Superintendent of Police of Ambala cantonment, dis-

'Govt. used force'

farmers, who were march-

ing peacefully. Even the Opposition parties are not raising our concern in the ongoing session of Parliament. On December 16, we will hold tractor-march outside Punjab across the country. And on December 18 we will block railway tracks in Punjab," Mr.

This was the third attempt by the farmers after their attempts to restart the foot march to New Delhi on December 6 and December 8.

Drive against power theft, encroachment near Sambhal masjid

<u>The Hindu Bureau</u> LUCKNOW

The local administration in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal on Saturday conducted an anti-encroachment drive and investigated electricity theft in the Shahi Jama Masjid locality and adjoining areas.

While officials said multiple instances of power theft were discovered in homes and religious sites during searches, fear gripped residents who worry about high-handedness and victimisation by authorities. The surprise drive revealed an illegal powerhouse on the roof of the Ladaniya Mosque in the Nakhasa police station area that supplied power to multiple houses, offi-

cials said. "A checking on loudspeakers was conducted on Saturday and uncovered illegal electricity connections in 250 to 300 houses and mosques," District Magistrate Rajender Pensiya told presspersons. The searches were conducted in the Deepa Sarai and Miyan Sarai areas with teams of the district administration along with power distribution officials and a large number of police personnel.

"Earlier, the electricity department teams faced

Patnaik asks BJD to fight for Odisha's tribes, opposes Polavaram project

Press Trust of India BHUBANESWAR

Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president Naveen Patnaik on Saturday urged party members to intensify their fight for justice on behalf of Odisha's tribal communities, who are likely to be severely impacted because of the Polavaram dam project in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh.

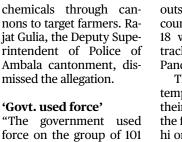


launch an agitation from Ianuary."

He claimed that the Po-Moyurie Som lavaram project would sub-KOLKATA

merge around 200 tribal villages in the Motu and Pa-Ruptaj Yeasmin, a 23-yearold acid attack survivor, di blocks of Malkangiri district due to the backwater will finally receive the full created by the dam. He alcompensation of ₹15 lakh so highlighted the potenshe is entitled to from the tial environmental dam-West Bengal government's legal services body, over

Acid attack survivor gets full relief after 5-year delay



Pandher said.



Opposition parties

described the action as selective targeting

aimed at persecuting

resistance, we requested

administration to initiate

checking to stop electricity

theft," said Electricity De-

partment Executive Engi-

neer Naveen Gautam. The

administration also con-

ducted a drive to address

encroachments around

ing fear in us. Large contin-

gent of police personnel

are visiting the area every

day," said Sarfaraz Ahmed,

found a temple that had al-

legedly been encroached

Sambhal are aimed at pola-

rising society. The attempt

is to selectively single out

the Muslim community.

Our leader Akhilesh [Ya-

dav] ji is continuously

pointing out that the BJP is

trying to create friction in

society through surveys,

selective so-called anti-en-

croachment drives and

police actions, to commu-

nalise the society for 2027

Assembly polls," Samajwa-

di Party spokesperson Ameeque Jamei said.

The administration also

"Continuous actions in

"These drives are creat-

Shahi Jama Masjid.

a local.

upon.

Muslim community

3

despite the massive mandate of voters" in recent Assembly election.

Former Jammu and Kash-

mir Chief Minister and Peo-

ples Democratic Party

(PDP) president Mehbooba

Mufti on Saturday targeted

the ruling National Confe-

rence for "failing to deliver

<u>The Hindu Bureau</u>

SRINAGAR

Speaking at the general council meeting of her party in Srinagar, Ms. Mufti said, "When we had just 16 or 28 MLAs with us, we implemented our agenda even as the BJP was ruling at the Centre. The NC has 50 MLAs and three Members of Parliament, even then its not able to deliver. It lacks courage," Ms. Mufti said.

She asked party leaders to stick to the PDP's political goal of self-rule. "When

actions of the current J&K we had no majority, we implemented self-rule. Self government have not fully rule means de-facto freemet expectations. We urge dom in J&K. The PDP leadthe J&K government to reers need to go back to the self-rule document. We should not be worried.

PDP meeting The passed a joint resolution

cognise the mandate's true essence and lead effectively," a joint resolution-This is a test," Ms. Mufti passed during the meeting said. said. asked the Prime Minister

that called for reinvigorating its struggle for peace with dignity for J&K by "using all democratic and constitutional methods to re-

to leverage his influence "to curb violence, dispel false narratives, and halt

the targeting of Muslims through what we perceive solve the Kashmir issue". as judicial overreach".

Mr. Patnaik's call came after a delegation of party leaders met him to brief him on their recent visit to Delhi, where they raised concerns with the Centre regarding the project's potential impacts.

In a post on X, Mr. Patnaik said, "The Polavaram project will submerge many areas of Malkangiri and will greatly affect the tribal brothers and sisters. I met and discussed with the delegation of @bjd_odisha There could be environmental damage, as a large area of flora and fauna will be submerged by the river's backwaters. FILE PHOTO

who submitted the demand letter to the Central Government. I advised them to continue fighting for the rights of the people. #BJDWithOdisha."

Delegation leader Debi Prasad Mishra said they apprised Mr. Patnaik regarding their interaction with Union Ial Shakti Minister C.R. Patil and senior officials from the Ministry of

Tribal Affairs, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, as well as the chairpersons of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and the Central Water Commission.

Agitation from January Former MP and prominent tribal leader Pradeep Majhi said, "The party will

age, noting that a large area of flora and fauna in five years after it was initial-Malkangiri will be subly recommended, and a demerged by Godavari river's cade after she suffered the backwaters. horrific attack.

Mr. Majhi said the The State Legal Services Centre is being pressured Authority (SLSA) has diby Andhra Pradesh Chief rected that Ms. Yeasmin be Minister Chandrababu Naigiven ₹12 lakh by December du to continue the project, 21 this year, in addition to the ₹3 lakh already reas the TDP has become a key ally of the BJP after the ceived, through the enhanced compensation re-2024 Lok Sabha elections. commended by the The Centre has allocat-Criminal Injuries Compen-

ed ₹12,000 crore in its 2024 Budget for the completion of the Polavaram project, according to BJD leaders.

sation Board in 2019. Ms. Yeasmin was a minor at the time of the incident, according to Shaheen Malik, founder and director of Brave Souls Foundation and an acid attack survivor herself who helped with her rehabilitation.

"Her elder sister's brother-in-law used to harass her with marriage proposals. Yeasmin and her parents did not agree to the demands," she said. "Then one night in 2014, around 2 a.m. when she was asleep, the man's father threw acid on her."

Ms. Malik added that the survivor's nose and one ear were badly burnt, and she had to undergo many surgeries.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board had adopted a resolution in its meeting held on December 23, 2019, that Ms. Yeasmin be given a total compensation of ₹15 lakhs.

"However, this was neither communicated to Ms. Yeasmin nor provided to her in all these years," advocate Dibyayan Banerji said. A writ petition was filed on her behalf in the High Court.

The SLSA took cognisance of the representation students' wing of the CPI and, after several hearings, said she would be given full (M), took out rallies across compensation.

Bastar village tunes in to TV for first time

Puvarti, a Maoist violence-affected village in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district, received TV sets under a govt. initiative; children, women, and the elderly watched programmes for hours, says Collector

Shubhomoy Sikdar RAIPUR

uvarti, a Maoist violence-affected village in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh, tuned in to a TV broadcast for the first time in its history.

Though television broadcasts began in India in 1959 and OTT platforms are now a common sight in most urban households, for Puvarti, a community event to watch a host of programmes on Doordarshan was its first introduction to the humble television set.

The Chhattisgarh government, in a statement, called the event a transformative milestone for the Bastar region that comprises seven districts, including



A new horizon: Children at Puvarti gather to watch television for the first time in the village. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

100% implementation of

government schemes in

As part of the initiative,

through the Chhattisgarh

State Renewable Energy

(CREDA), solar-powered

Development Agency

Central and State

these areas.

Sukma. The initiative was launched under the State government's Niyad Nellanar Yojana to promote development and extend benefits of welfare schemes to remotest villages. The main objective was to ensure

appliances such as lights and fans were distributed to families in Puvarti.

Additionally, the villages of Puvarti, Tekalgudiyum, and Silger received two television sets each.

"Children, women, and the elderly from Puvarti eagerly gathered around the TV sets to watch programmes for hours," Sukma Collector Devesh Kumar Dhruv said.

The statement also carried comments of the first-time TV audience.

"Watching news, serials, and films for the first time feels like being connected to the world. The solar lights and fans will brighten our nights and ease the heat. This is nothing short of a miracle for us," Banjam Madgu, a villager, said.

Protests return to Kolkata streets over R.G. Kar case

The Hindu Bureau KOLKATA

Protest rallies and demonstrations demanding justice for the doctor raped and murdered at the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital returned to Kolkata on Saturday, a day after a court granted bail to two accused in the case.

Junior doctors, under the banner of the West Bengal Junior Doctors Front (WBJDF), took out a rally from Karunamayee to CGO Complex in Salt Lake area, where the office of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is located. The parents of the trai-

nee doctor joined the rally and blamed the CBI for the bail granted to former principal of the hospital Sandip Ghosh and ex-officer in-charge of the Tala police station Abhijit Mondal.

Kolkata on Saturday, alleging lax investigation by the CBI. PTI

"If the CBI did not have evidence against the accused, why did it arrest them in the first case? Why are they playing with sentiments," asked Debasish Halder, one of the key members of WBJDF.

The Court of Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate, Sealdah, on Friday granted

bail to both the accused who were arrested on charges of tampering with the evidence in the case. Not only the junior doctors, but also the supporters of the SUCI (Communist), Congress and SFI, the

the city.

A IN-X

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THE HINDU News

PM Modi is a 'distorian' par excellence, says Congress

Press Trust of India NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday termed the 11 resolutions articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Lok Sabha speech as "hollow" and called him a "distorian" par excellence who "puts WhatsApp University to shame."

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra likened his speech in the Lok Sabha to a "double period of mathematics" from school that "bored us." She slammed Mr. Modi's 11 resolutions as "hollow" and said if there is zero tolerance towards corruption then why doesn't the BJP agree to a discussion on the Adani issue.

Congress general secretary in charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, said: "Today in the Lok Sabha, he [Mr. Modi] showed that he is also a distorian par excellence. Some people lie in their self-interest, but our selfstyled non-biological PM does so because it is in his very nature. He puts WhatsApp University to shame," he said.

BJP wants to run the country by *Manusmriti*, says Rahul

Drawing parallels to the Eklavya story, Rahul claims govt. policies are 'chopping off' the thumbs of youth, tillers, backward classes, poor people; he promises justice for kin of Hathras rape victim

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

indutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar believed that there was "nothing Indian" about the Constitution of India and preferred the Hindu religious text Manusmriti, Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi said in the Lok Sabha on Saturday. He added that the BJP was ridiculing its own "supreme leader" when it talked of protecting the Constitution.

Participating in a debate on the "Glorious journey of 75 years of the Constitution of India", Mr. Gandhi framed the current political battle as one in which the Congress and its allies were protectors of the Constitution while the BIP wanted to run the country according to Manusmriti.

"It is nice that all of you are so-called defending the Constitution. But I want to ask you, do you stand by your leader's words? But when you speak about defending the Constitution,



Making a point: Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi speaks during the Lok Sabha debate on the Constitution on Saturday. ANI

you are ridiculing Savarkar, you are abusing Savarkar, you are defaming Savarkar," Mr. Gandhi said.

Responding to Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Shinde's claim that former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had praised Savarkar in a letter, Mr. Gandhi said his grandmother had told him that Savarkar had compromised with the British. In his 26-minute speech,

narrating the story of Eklavya, who had to chop off his thumb as "Guru Dakshina" to Dronacharva, Mr. Gandhi drew a parallel with contemporary policies and politics.

He said the government was "chopping off" the thumb of the youth, tillers, backward class people, and the poor.

The Opposition leader also said that he had met the family of a 19-year-old woman who was gangraped and killed in Hathras, and learnt that the accused perpetrators of the crime were roaming free while the victim's family members were scared to step out of their homes.

"Where is this written in the Constitution that the family of the person raped be confined to a house? This would be written in

your [BJP] book, not in the Constitution," he said.

"I want to say in this House, the people who believe in Ambedkar's Constitution - the INDIA bloc we will collectively ensure that the family is relocated if you fail to do so," Mr. Gandhi announced.

He spoke of his meeting with the victims of the recent communal violence in Sambhal and accused the BJP of resorting to the politics of division and hatred. "Wherever you go, you

incite religious discord and spread hatred. Where is it written in the Constitution that one religion must fight another," he asked, pointing to the BJP benches. The Opposition leader

concluded his speech by quoting B.R. Ambedkar's words on how political equality without social and economic equality eventually destroyed political equality as well.

"It is clear that political equality has ended and there is no social and economic equality either," Mr. Gandhi said.

Cong. never gave its due to Ambedkar, should apologise to 'lessen its sins', says Rijiju

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Saturday said the Congress had not given due respect to B.R. Ambedkar and asked the party to apologise to him to "lessen its sins".

Participating in the debate in the Lok Sabha on the 'Discussion on the glorious journey of 75 years of the Constitution of India", Mr. Rijiju questioned the Congress's claims that minorities were not safe in the country.

Mr. Rijiju said that while India has given equal voting rights to all, some claim that minorities had no rights in the country.

"Article 15 of the Constitution has given every Indian equal rights and opportunities. Whether the Congress or our government, all have worked in their own ways," he said noting that India was one country which gave voting rights to all before many

others such as the U.S. Mr. Rijiju, who is also the Minority Affairs Minis-



ter, said that Dr. Ambedkar

was first kept out of the Ca-

binet, but later he along

with Syama Prasad Moo-

kerjee was included at Ma-

hatma Gandhi's insistence.

He also alleged that the

Congress "made" Dr. Am-

bedkar lose the 1952 Lok

Union Minister said that

while Dr. Ambedkar want-

ed reservation indefinitely

till equality was achieved,

Jawaharlal Nehru advocat-

ed for it to be in place for

10 years. "Nehru was al-

ways for Muslims, Ambed-

kar said," the Minister

Citing a document, the

Sabha election.

added.

Mr. Rijiju said that while there had been 75 Constitutional amendments during Congress rule, during BIP governments, only 25 were done. "You must have forgotten how many times you have used Article 356," he quipped pointing to the Congress members in the House.

plemented it, he said.

Participating in the debate, DMK member A. Raja said while Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had said in the House that there were many leaders who contributed to the making of the Constitution, but have not been given their due, can he name one instance when the RSS or the Hindu Mahasabha contributed to it.

He said Hindutva ideologue V.D. Savarkar invented the two-nation theory, which Dr. Ambedkar opposed, but the Centre had put Dr. Ambedkar and Savarkar on the same pedestal.

While the Mandal Commission report came in He said that while his 1980, the Congress governparty does have grievances ment did not touch it till with the Congress, it is sitthe V.P. Singh government ting with it to uphold the supported by the BJP im-Constitution.

Are we not a part of this nation, asks Manipur MP in Lok Sabha

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

At the discussion on the Constitution's 75 years continued in the Lok Sabha on Saturday, Outer Manipur MP Alfred Kanngam Arthur cited the Oting killings of 2021 in Nagaland and the ongoing conflict in Manipur to raise questions about the government's commitment to the Constitution. The first-time MP

from Uttar Pradesh's Nagina, Chandrashekhar Azad asked whether certain sec-

tions of society in India were as free as the Constitution envisioned them to

"Where was the Constitution on the day of the Oting massacre," asked Mr. Arthur. "Are we not a part of this nation? Why is it that till today, my PM, someone who this nation believes in, why is it that till

date he is not answerable to the people of Manipur?" he said.

Mr. Azad hailed the Constitution and its framers, saying that whatever progress the most marginalised sections had made was because of the Constitution. However, he asked: "Constitution prescribes freedom of religion. Where is this freedom for Dalits, Muslims, Jains, Christians,

Buddhists?"

BJP trying for one-party system: J&K leaders

The Hindu Bureau

SRINAGAR

Opposing the proposal for simultaneous polls, several Jammu and Kashmir leaders said on Saturday that it was actually aimed at creating a "one nation, one party" situation.

Former J&K Chief Minister and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti accused the BJP of "destroying the Constitution of India" while addressing a party function.



"India is a federal country. There is a federal structure here. One nation, one election is undermining this federal structure. They want to take us back to dic-

The proposal is against the spirit of the idea of India and its federal structure, which gives protection to the country's huge diversities M.Y. TARIGAMI

tatorship," she said.

National Conference leader Hasnain Masoodi, a former MP, said that the proposal seemed to pave the way for a nation with a

one-party system. "The huge diversities. These di-Constitution is clear that versities are the real face India is a Union of States. and real strength of India, The proposal of 'one nation, one election' is against the federal structure and in contrast to the Constitution," Mr. Masoodi said at another event. Communist Party of In-

dia (Marxist) leader and le-

gislator M.Y. Tarigami also

the spirit of the idea of In-

dia and its federal struc-

ture, which is giving pro-

tection to the country's

"The proposal is against

opposed the move.

which thwarted all attempts to disintegrate the country," Mr. Tarigami said at a press conference. He pointed out that the issues raised during the Lok Sabha and State elec-

tions were completely different. "The proposal will

cause cracks in the federal and democratic system and strengthen the dictatorship," the CPI(M) leader said.

Maharashtra prepares for Cabinet expansion

Abhinay Deshpande MUMBAI

The expansion of the Devendra Fadnavis Cabinet in Maharashtra is likely to take place on Sunday, with new Ministers from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Shiv Sena, and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) set to take the oath of office at a function in Nagpur, official sources said.

The Cabinet expansion comes as the ruling coalition looks to finalise its power-sharing formula ahead of the Winter Session of the State legislature, which begins in Nagpur on December 16.

According to sources, over 30 MLAs are expected to be sworn in as Ministers during the ceremony. The Maharashtra Council of Ministers can accommodate up to 43 members. Sources indicate that the BJP is expected to secure 20 Cabinet positions, while the Shiv Sena could get 11 or 12 and the NCP nine or 10. However, differences persist, with the Shiv Sena reportedly pressing for the Home portfolio for Mr. Shinde, a demand Mr. Fadnavis is said to have resisted. "Mr. Fadnavis is very particular that a few MLAs from the Shiv Sena should not be part of his Cabinet for various reasons, a message that he had conveyed to Mr. Shinde," a senior BJP leader told The Hindu.

YK

Ready to fly



Unbound joy: Indian Air Force flight cadets celebrate after their graduation parade at the Air Force Academy in Dundigal on the outskirts of Hyderabad. A total of 204 cadets, including 26 women, graduated on Saturday. G. RAMAKRISHNA

Row erupts after Bengal Minister says Muslims will soon become majority

Shiv Sahay Singh KOLKATA

A fresh controversy has erupted over remarks of West Bengal Minister and Mayor of Kolkata Municipal Corporation Mayor Firhad Hakim who is heard saying in a video that soon "we will become majority".

In a video that has surfaced on social media, the prominent Trinamool Congress leader is saying that by the "grace of Allah we will become soon majority".

"We come from such a community, that in West Bengal we are 33%, and across the country, we are only 17% and we are called minority community in India. But we do consider ourselves as a minority. But in the coming days, we will no longer remain a minority. We believe that if

Allah has grace on us and education is with us then we will become the majority," Mr. Hakim is heard saying in a video. It is not clear when the Minister made the remarks.

The Bharatiya Janata Party leadership reacted sharply to the remarks and accused the Kolkata Mayor of "inciting communal hatred and pushing a dangerous agenda". "Pure venom from the

inciting communal hatred and pushing a dangerous agenda. This isn't just hate speech - it's a blueprint for creating a Bangladesh-type situation in India. Why is the INDI Alliance silent? I challenge them to voice their opinion on this," West Bengal State BJP president Sukanta Ma-

Kolkata Mayor, Trina-

mool's Firhad Hakim open-

jumdar posted on social media.

Pakistani national awaits deportation after spending 17 years in Bengaluru jail

Mohammad Fahad

with legal troubles. In

2007, Mr. Fahad was ar-

rested in Mysuru for alleg-

edly attempting to forge

documents to establish his

Indian identity. He was

convicted and spent eight

years in Parappana Agrah-

nued when, in 2012, he

was charged under the Un-

lawful Activities (Preven-

tion) Act (UAPA) and the

Arms Act for alleged invol-

vement in a terror conspi-

racy. During his time in pri-

son, he, along with Afsar

Pasha – the accused in the

2005 IISc attack case- was

accused of radicalising a

rowdy-sheeter named Syed

Abdul Rehman. While

Pasha and Rehman were

convicted, Mr. Fahad was

On September 25, the Kar-

nataka High Court ruled

that Mr. Fahad should be

deported following his ac-

quittal, stating: "Accused

Bureaucratic delays

acquitted.

His legal battles conti-

ara Central Prison.

Shreyas H.S. BENGALURU

Mohammad Fahad, who has been awaiting deportation after spending 17 years in Bengaluru's Parappana Agrahara prison, sat on a hunger strike for about a week inside the foreigners' detention centre at Nelamangala demanding action by the authorities to send him back to his country.

Mr. Fahad, who has been acquitted in all the cases, including a terror case, was on a hunger strike from December 4 to December 9 until he was force-fed as his health condition deteriorated.

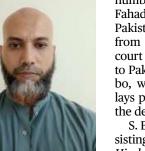
An official in the detention centre said, "We convinced him to take food as he fell sick and his health condition worsened."

Cross-border family

Mr. Fahad's story traces back to his roots in a crossborder family. Born to a Pakistani mother and an Indian father from Kasaragod, Kerala, his father had moved to Pakistan in the 1970s and married a local woman. In 2006, Mr. Fahad came to India to reconnect with his relatives in Kasaragod. During his visit, he decided to stay back after reportedly falling in love with a woman.

However, his stay in India soon became fraught

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number two, Mohammed Fahad, shall be deported to Pakistan after his release from jail." Despite the court order. Fahad's return to Pakistan remains in limbo, with bureaucratic delays prolonging his stay in the detention centre.

S. Balan, an advocate assisting Mr. Fahad told The Hindu as authorities did not show any interest even after more than 50 days into the High Court order, the Pakistani national sat on a hunger strike to draw attention.

While on strike, he wrote to the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) and Pakistan High Commission explaining his plight and how urgent it was for him to travel to Pakistan to be with his ailing mother. Mr. Balan said Mr. Fahad's mother is on her death bed and he has been yearning to meet her.

According to a source in the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi, the Pakistan authorities are regularly in touch with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). "Mr. Fahad's citizenship was cleared way back in 2011 and the commission is awaiting MEA to fix a date for deportation."

On the other hand, an official in the FRRO said, "There is a process which we have to follow and as soon as the process ends he may be deported."

News

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NIA files chargesheet against accused in Katra attack case

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday filed a chargesheet against an accused in the Katra attack, which left eight pilgrims dead on June 9 this year. An NIA spokesperson said, the accused, Hakam Khan, alias Hakim Din, was charged under various Sections of the Indian Penal Code and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. "The accused confessed to being part of the conspiracy behind the attack, which was executed by three terrorists with his support. Besides providing them food and stay arrangements, he had helped the terrorists in identifying the attack spot," the NIA said. It added that the attack was aimed at "unleashing terror" among the public and pilgrims.

BJP veteran Advani admitted to hospital, condition stable

Senior Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Lal Krishna Advani was admitted to Apollo Hospital in New Delhi on Friday, due to deteriorating health. According to hospital sources, the leader's condition is stable. This is the fourth time the veteran politician has been hospitalised this year. The leader is under observation and is curently stable, said hospital sources. He has been admitted under Dr. Vinit Suri, a senior consultant in the neurology department. The hospital, however, did not disclose any information on the reason for his hospitalisation.

CBI summons senior IAS officer in bribery case

Bishnupada Sethi, senior Odisha-cadre IAS officer and secretary of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Department, has been summoned by the Central Bureau of Investigation in connection with bribery case. Mr. Sethi also heads ST and SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare Department. The summon was served davs after Chanchal Kumar Mukheriee, group general manager of the Bridge and Roof Corporation of India (BRCI), was arrested following his alleged demand of ₹10 lakh for awarding work orders, clearing bills, and obtaining undue advantage. Mr. Sethi's official driver was also questioned by the CBI.

Caught in the vortex of Golden Triangle

Several people from India, Pakistan and Myanmar have been trapped in Southeast Asia and forced to commit cybercrime; Indian Embassy officials have reported a sharp increase in jobseekers cheated by unregistered agents, who charged between ₹2 lakh and 5 lakh to provide a foreign job

Samridhi Tewari NEW DELHI

n February this year, 31-year-old Suresh Singh*, a resident of Telangana who was on the lookout for employment abroad, stumbled upon a sales job in Laos. He found Ali International Services, run by one Kamran Haider, which promised him the job that offered a decent salary, food and accommodation. But a week later, he realised that he was cheated and trafficked to the Golden Triangle's Special Economic Zone in Laos, where he was forced to cybercrime commit against Indians even as his Chinese bosses abused and threatened him.

offered me "They ₹60,000 because I knew Tamil and Telugu. I paid ₹1.60 lakh to the agent, who arranged my ticket," Mr. Singh said. Along with two others from Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, he traveled to Thailand via Kolkata, secured SIM cards, and crossed the border into Laos by bus and boat.

Mr. Singh said he felt like he was living his dream until he was taken to the Golden Triangle, a Special



fraudulent employers, returned home in May 2024. @INDEMBCAM

Economic Zone, which, he said, had "big buildings, fancy cars, massage parlours, jewellery shops, and business areas, and people with iPhones but no signboards." Inside a building, he had to give English grammar, spelling, reading, and typing tests. When he asked why these were necessary for a sales job, he was silenced. Soon, he realised that the dream nothing but was а nightmare.

Several people from India, Pakistan and Myanmar were seated on desks, with multiple mobile phones and desktops, "and committing cybercrime", Mr. Singh recalled. He said the agent who took him to the Golden Triangle "sold him off" to Chinese agents for ₹2 lakh. They took away his passport and the ₹35,000 cash he had.

On December 7, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Special Cell of Delhi Police arrested Mr. Haider in connection with trafficking of victims like Mr. Singh. Officials said the agent had arranged flight tickets, documents, and illegal border crossings with contacts in the Golden Triangle, forcing victims into scams targeting Europeans and Americans. He also extorted money through cryptocurrency

wallets from victims who

wanted to return home. Mr. Singh, who comes from a family of farmers, returned to India in April with the help of the Indian Embassy. Till date, he has not told his family that he was cheated.

The Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Laos's Bokeo province is known for its Chineseowned casinos and hotels. In August, according to media in Laos, 489 men and 282 women of 15 nationalities were arrested for their involvement in a cyberscam network near Myanmar and Thailand.

Indian Embassy officials reported a sharp increase in jobseekers cheated by unregistered agents through fake offers. These agents charged between ₹2 lakh and ₹5 lakh to provide jobs.

This growing trend was highlighted by the Interpol in June, when it said that tens of thousands had been trafficked in Southeast Asia, while many more were defrauded in different parts of the world. In August, a UN Human Rights Office report took up the issue and found that the fraud ranged from romance-investment scams and crypto to illegal gambling. The employees in these centres are told to carry out phishing, extortion, credit card fraud, and scams related to jobs, social media, cryptocurrency and investment.

Trafficked and tortured

In December last year, the

Interpol arrested 281 per-

sons from different coun-

tries for human trafficking,

passport forgery, corrup-

tion, telecommunications

fraud, and sexual exploita-

above said that victims en-

dured a range of violations

and abuse - they were

threatened with their safe-

ty and security, and many

The UN report cited

tion.

were subjected to torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, arbitrary detention, sexual violence, forced labour, and other human rights abuses.

The report said that at least 1.2 lakh people across Myanmar were held in situations where they were forced to carry out online scams, with estimates in Cambodia around 1 lakh. The report identified countries such as Laos, the Philippines and Thailand as destinations where people have been involved in running cybercrime syndicates generating annual revenues amounting to billions of dollars.

Interpol said that over the past year in Myanmar, authorities had reported the rescue of trafficking victims who came from 22 countries. NIA chargesheets, filed in these cases, said that on refusing to commit cybercrime, the trafficked youths were starved, lashed and locked in rooms. "Some youths were even given electric shocks if they failed to meet their target of befriending prospective victims on social media," it added.

(*name changed)

IndiGo sends two planes to IndiGo flight diverted to Karachi due to emergency

<u>The Hindu Bureau</u> NEW DELHI

An IndiGo flight from Delhi to Jeddah was forced to divert to Karachi last night following a medical emergency on board.

IndiGo's 6E 63 flight departed from Delhi at 8.30 p.m., but two hours later deviated from its path to turn towards Karad

bring back passengers who were stranded in Istanbul

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

IndiGo on Saturday sent two aircraft to Istanbul to ferry nearly 500 stranded passengers to New Delhi after its Boeing 777 aircraft developed a technical glitch the previous day, re-



The airlines had cancelled flights due to technical snags.

people waiting for flight in Istanbul airport, but still they are not able to board us on flight even after paying lakhs to travel. They are not even providing accommodation and food," @koushikbhuma posted on

"People are stuck at Istanbul airport for more

'Conclude EU-India FTA to counter forces of protectionism'

<u>Suhasini Haidar</u> NEW DELHI

An early conclusion of the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is necessary to "counter" global the trends of protectionism and transactionalism, Portuguese Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel told The Hindu during a four-day visit



AIIMS and Wipro to establish **AI Health Innovations Hub**

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) on Saturday signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Wipro GE Healthcare Pvt. Ltd., to establish an AI Health Innovations Hub at the Centre. The new hub will focus on the development of products and solutions that enhance healthcare delivery and outcomes through more precise diagnosis, innovative treatment protocols, and real-time patient data tracking. A joint working committee from both organisations, the technological partner Wipro GE Healthcare and clinical partner AIIMS will oversee the collaboration, which will include clinical research and academic engagement.

"The captain diverted the flight to Karachi, where a doctor attended to the passenger upon arrival. After completing the necessary formalities, the flight

departed Karachi and returned to its origin to provide further assistance to the medical passenger," the airline said in a press statement.

According to Geo News, the passenger was a 55year-old Indian man.

The air traffic control allowed the aircraft to land in Karachi on humanitarian grounds.

sulting flight cancellation.

The airline's flight 6E 12 scheduled to take off from Istanbul at 8.15 p.m. local time was cancelled on Friday after a technical "snag" on the 538-seater Boeing 777 aircraft it has leased from Turkish Airlines. This is the second time this week that this flight was cancelled because of a

malfunction. IndiGo operated two 222-seater Airbus A321s to

bring back the passengers. One of these planes also had to make a fuel stop on its way back at Ras al Khai-

mah because of the aircraft's shorter range. The airline did not mention how many passengers were stranded in Istanbul, nor could it confirm how many were being flown back.

On Thursday, the same flight was cancelled because of a snag, but the airline arranged another Boeing 777 aircraft the following day, it said. However, some com-

plained of being stuck at the airport for more than 24 hours.

"From past 35 hours there are more than 500 than 3 days without any support and help. No action from Indigo," wrote @ait jitendra on Saturday.

Early in 2023, IndiGo had leased two Boeing 777 aircraft from Turkish Airlines to operate a daily flight each from Mumbai and New Delhi to Istanbul as part of its efforts to overcome the grounding of over 70 planes on its fleet because of issues with Pratt & Whitney engines. These are the only widebodied planes the airline has on its fleet of Airbus A320 and ATR aircraft.

to India.

The visit, Mr. Rangel's first since the new Social Democratic Party-led government was sworn in after elections in Portugal in April 2024, came a month after Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Portuguese Prime Minister Luis Montenegro on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Brazil.

In talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in Delhi on Friday, Mr. Rangel discussed plans to mark 50 years of India-Portugal ties next year, which were marred in the 1950s as India fought Portugal to regain control of Goa and other former Portuguese colonies.

Mr. Rangel visited India during his first trip to Asia, just days after the European Union concluded talks for an FTA with the South American common market. or MERCOSUR, and said the EU-India talks for a Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA). or FTA, under way since 200 and relaunched in 2022, must be concluded soon as well.

"When you look at a world where protectionism is gaining ground, the capacity to counter this tendency and align on economic terms has geopolitical value," Mr. Rangel told The Hindu during an interview in Delhi after a meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. "It is crucial to have an EU-India FTA to the benefit of both sides. China and U.S. are economic engines of the world – but the EU with South America, or EU with India will change the balance in geopolitical terms," Mr. Rangel added.

Paulo Rangel

In response to a question about the incoming Trump administration's impact on global trade, he warned that "transnational diplomacy or multilateral diplomacy is growing more transactional".

Asked about Mr. Goyal's statement in October this year that the EU-India FTA had only made "marginal" progress despite nine rounds of talks due in part to the EU's "irrational standards", Mr. Rangel said that the situation called for "pragmatism" and an agreement to allow concessions on both sides.

India's bilateral trade in goods with the EU was \$137.41 billion in 2023-24, making it the largest trading partner of India for goods. India's trade with Portugal is only about \$1.2 billion, and the Portuguese Foreign Minister said Mr. Goyal and he had discussed the next round of official trade talks to be held in January 2025 in Lisbon.

He said that while India and Portugal had major disparities in terms of size, they shared a common approach towards multilateralism, and strengthening the United Nations.

"Mistakes were made and we must admit that, but it is necessary to see our common heritage, culture and language that enriches us, especially as we see with Goa," he said. "We have done this across the last 50 years, and there's so much room for us to improve our cultural ties between Portugal and India... two cultures that have a history of 500 years," Mr. Rangel said.

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING:

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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CM YK

Selection committee to interview 10 shortlisted candidates for TISS V-C

Maitri Porecha NEW DELHI

After a delay of more than a year, a permanent Vice-Chancellor is set to be appointed for the Mumbaibased Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) with the selection committee slated to conduct in-person interviews with 10 shortlisted candidates on Sunday, in a confidential process.

According to official sources, the interviews are scheduled on the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Mumbai campus. The selection panel consists of top officials from the University of Delhi and the IIM-Kolkata and one TISS executive council member.

Of the 127 persons who had applied for the post, 10 have been shortlisted, of



TISS has been in controversy through this year due to its allegedly centralised administration style. FILE PHOTO

which five are TISS teaching staff. Official sources said the in-house candidates have been shortlisted from the Schools of Health Systems, Development Studies, Management and Labour Studies, Law and Governance and Habitat Studies.

cluding the University of Mumbai and University of Allahabad.

"After the interviews, three candidates are slated to be further shortlisted and the three names will then be relayed to the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry may take another few days to issue The other five belong to Central universities, inan official order of selection," a source said.

After Shalini Bharat retired as Vice-Chancellor in 2023, the position has remained vacant. Manoj Tiwari, Vice-Chancellor of the IIM-Mumbai, is currently the Acting V-C. "Because he holds a full-time position in IIM-Mumbai. the institute is majorly headed by Pro V-C Shankar Das," a senior TISS professeeking said, sor anonymity.

TISS has been in controversy through the year as students and faculty have alleged that the style of administration has become more centralised.

"Administrative delays including that of delay in convocation, and students unable to submit their degrees in time to their employers have plagued the institute over the year," the professor added.

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THE HINDU -

News in Frames



Bee magnet: A mustard field in full bloom in Morigaon district of Assam. Honeybees are drawn to the abundant nectar of the flowers.



Breakfast time: A honeybee dips in for the nectar in mustard flowers. Every day they travel up to five km for nectar.



Delicate task: Beekeepers lifting trays out of a bee box to extract honey.

As busy as a bee

<u>Itinerant workers from other States flit</u> from one location to another in Assam to plant bee boxes and let the honey flow, in a win-win deal for them and local farmers



₩ ₩

<u>Ritu Raj Konwar</u> rituraj.k@thehindu.co.in

Bengal, has been in the beekeeping business for over eight years. Since 2016, he has been travelling from his home State to Morigaon district of Assam with 250 bee boxes, drawn to the abundant nectar of the vibrant mustard fields there. He is not alone in this journey. Several groups of beekeepers from Bihar and West Bengal converge in Assam every winter, and their numbers are steadily growing. Barpeta, Bajali, Bilasipara, Nagaon and Morigaon districts in Assam witness this trend every year.

ushanta Mandal from Malda, West

Mustard flowers cannot self-pollinate and need the help of insects to carry pollen between flowers. This is where the bees come in. Rearing *Apis mellifera*, the most common

of the honeybee species around the world, requires a team of at least four or five persons to ensure the smooth operation of the honey production process – scouting, camping, and production. Therefore, a farmer needs to maintain at least 200 bee boxes for the work to be financially viable.

There is a growing industry of migratory beekeeping in Assam where beekeepers move

from one location to another, across the State, in search of blooming flowers for nectar. Assam's extensive mustard cultivation and low competition attracts an increasing number of farmers to the State each year.

Mustard blossoms early in Assam, prompting beekeepers to shift there. The journey is not set to a specific route and can vary based on the availability of flowers. The migration process involves scouting potential sites for suitable flowers and accommodation. Once the promising locations are identified, beekeepers conduct inspections and engage with the local residents to assess flower availability and the feasibility of housing the apian colonies.

Production of crops such as mustard, coconut, areca nut, lychee and mango is increasing in the village due to the presence of bees. The role of honeybees and other insects is not limited to agriculture, food security, and nutrition. Without them, wild plants and the ecosystems that make the planet habitable would collapse.

Even farmers who do not keep bees have benefited as the bees' activities have increased the fertility of the region's crops and fruit trees.



Honey hunt: Workers check the trays in the bee boxes.

...(

News in Frames









Combing out: Beekeepers take out the trays to retrieve honey. They can extract honey once a week under favourable conditions.



Golden produce: Freshly extracted honey being poured into storage containers.





Group effort: A team of beekeepers have lunch in their temporary shelter.

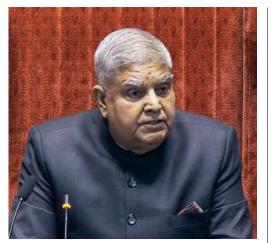
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Fertile ground: Assam's extensive mustard cultivation and low competition is attractive for migratory beekeepers.



Fresh and sweet: A beekeeper from West Bengal extracts honey in the middle of a mustard field.





In session: Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar conducts the House proceedings on November 25. ANI

Can the Vice President be *impeached?*

Why did the Opposition submit a notice to move a no-confidence motion against Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar?

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

n December 10, the Opposition submitted a notice to move a no-confidence or impeachment resolution against Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar. The notice accuses him of engaging in "partisan" conduct and being an "impassioned spokesperson" of the government's policies at public fora. A similar motion had been considered by the Opposition during the Budget session in August but was ultimately shelved as the session drew to a close.

What is the procedure for impeaching the Vice President?

As the second-highest constitutional authority (after the President), the Vice-President draws his or her powers from Article 63 of the Constitution. Article 64 further confers upon the post the power to serve as the "ex-officio Chairman of the Council of States (Rajya Sabha)." Thus, the Vice-President discharges the

'The resolution can only be considered for discussion once the constitutionally mandated 14-day notice period has duties of both the Vice-President and Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha. The process for the

removal of both the Vice President and Rajya Sabha chairperson has been laid down under Article 67. The provision elapsed' stipulates that the

Vice-President will hold office for a term of five years from "the date on which he enters upon his office" However, he o she may leave mid-term by submitting a resignation letter to the President. Additionally, Article 67(b) provides for the removal of the Vice-President if a majority of Rajya Sabha members pass a resolution to that effect, which must then be "agreed to" by the House of the People (Lok Sabha). However, the provision specifies that no such resolution can be moved unless at least a 14-day notice has been given. "The resolution can only be considered for discussion once the constitutionally mandated 14-day notice period has elapsed. It must then be approved by a simple majority in both Houses for passage and implementation," P.D.T. Achary, former Secretary General of the Lok Sabha, told The Hindu.

What lies ahead for Syria after Assad's exit?

How was the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham led by ex-al Qaeda leader, Abu Muhammed al-Jolani, able to defeat the Syrian armed forces? Why did the priorities of Syria's greatest allies, Russia and Iran, change in recent years? What has been the role of Turkey in the fall of the Syrian President?

Syria has

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significance.

Stanly Johny

The story so far:

ashar al-Assad, President of Syria for 24 years, has fallen. He and his family have taken refuge in Russia. Syria now has a transitional government, headed by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an Islamist militant group that was controlling the northwestern province of Idlib. Many Syrians are celebrating the collapse of Mr. Assad's dictatorial regime, but remain anxious about what is to come. Turkey, as the main backer of the HTS, sees an opportunity to expand its influence in West Asia, while Iran and Russia, the main backers of the Assad regime, have taken a setback. Israel, in the meantime, is exploiting the vacuum in Syria to grab more territories.

Why did the Assad regime fall?

Mr. Assad held on to power for 13 years after the civil war broke out in 2011, only for his regime to collapse in 12 days. By 2017, the Assad regime had taken over most of its lost territories, with help from Russia, Iran and Hezbollah. But he hadn't defeated the militants. The strongest of them was the HTS, which was formerly called Jabhat al-Nusra, the al-Qaeda arm in Syria. Abu Muhammed al-Jolani, today the 'emir' of the HTS, was an al-Qaeda leader. The HTS-controlled Idlib emerged as a rebel stronghold. Jolani established a mini-administration in Idlib – the Syrian Salvation Government. He had been planning a large-scale offensive against the regime forces for months, if not years.

On the other side, a host of domestic, regional and international factors weakened Mr. Assad's position. Syria's economy is in a very bad shape. Its GDP shrank by 87% in the past 13 years, from \$68 billion in 2011 to just \$9 billion in 2023. Western sanctions stifled an already deteriorated economy further. The poorly paid



Sudden ouster: A shoe rests on top of a bust of Hafez al-Assad, as militants inspect the damage at a site in Damascus Syria on December 14 RELITERS

soldiers of the Assad regime lacked motivation to preserve it. Syrian armed forces were also weakened by repeated Israeli air strikes, which picked up pace over the past year, after Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack. Mr. Assad was heavily reliant on his external allies for security. However, their priorities also changed in recent years. Russia's focus is now on the Ukraine war. Iran is involved in a hot and cold war with Israel Hezbollah lost most of its leaders and thousands of fighters in its year-long war with Israel. The militants knew Mr. Assad was weak.

They launched an offensive on November 27 in the western outskirts of Aleppo, probably aimed at cutting the underbelly of his decaying regime. What happened next was a rapid collapse of the regime itself.

Who is in charge now?

Syria today has roughly four militant coalitions. The first one is the HTS, led by Jolani. The HTS says it has broken its ties with al-Qaeda, and promises to respect Syria's ethnic and religious diversity. But its rank and file comprise transnational jihadists, who travelled to Syria from across the world, to fight "jihad" against the Assad regime. The HTS's main ally is the Syrian National Army (SNA), another northern militia. The core of the SNA is the Free Syrian Army, a Turkish proxy that was formed with defected Syrian soldiers and officers. The HTS and the SNA launched the November 27 offensive together.

The second group is the Southern Front, a loose coalition of dozens of militias in Syria's south (Daara and Quneitra). Some of them were backed by Jordan, which shares a border with southern Syria. When the HTS-SNA combine advanced towards regime-held cities from the north, the southern militias started an offensive from the south. And they reached Damascus first, on December 8. The third main group is the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The core of the SDF is the People's Protection Units (YPG), the armed wing of Syrian Kurdistan. The SDF enjoys relative autonomy in the Syrian Kurdish region. The SDF was armed by the U.S. in the past in its fight against the Islamic State. The fourth group is the Alawite militias in the coastal region. Alawites are Mr. Assad's sect, who enjoyed power for over five decades in the country. The HTS, a Sunni Islamist group, had in the past targeted Alawites, who make up roughly 15% of Syria's population. The HTS has asked the Alawite community to cut ties with the fallen regime. Of these four, the HTS is the most powerful force now. The transition government in Damascus is a replica of the HTS Salvation government in Idlib.

Why does geopolitics matter?

Syria has immense geopolitical significance. It hosts Russia's Mediterranean naval base in Tartus, its only naval base outside the former

Soviet territory. Russia also has built an air base in Syria. For Russia to project force, from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean and then to the Atlantic, it is essential to retain access to the Tartus base. It could also be one of the reasons Russia made a military intervention in Syria in 2015, to protect the Assad regime. Now that the regime has collapsed, Russia's focus would be on protecting its bases. For Iran, a sworn enemy of America and Israel, Syria was its only state ally in West Asia. Syria was also a key conduit between Iran and Hezbollah, the Lebanese militia. The fall of the Assad regime could disrupt Iran's supply networks in the region, which could invariably weaken the country's deterrence.

Turkey, on the other side, appears to be stronger. For years, it had tried to pull down the Assad regime. When the Russian intervention made it immediately impossible, Turkey shifted its focus towards playing a long game with its proxies. Now that Mr. Assad is gone and the HTS-SNA coalition is in Damascus, Recep Tayyip Erdogan seems to have outwitted Vladimir Putin, and extended his influence from Ankara to the borders of Iraq, Jordan and Israel.

Will the militants build a new Syria?

Many think the fall of a dictatorial regime would lead to a new dawn. For now, Syria's militants have made the right noises - about respecting the country's diversity and rebuilding its dilapidated institutions and welcoming back refugees. But Syria still remains a complex case – with or without Mr. Assad. Before Hafez al-Assad, Bashar's father, captured power in 1971, Syria had seen multiple coups and counter-coups. It was Hafez and his Ba'ath party that stabilised the country and built its modern institutions. Today, the challenge the militants face is to rebuild the country once again, by demobilising the militias. But the HTS neither has ideological clarity for an inclusive Syria nor the resources to demobilise other militias. The HTS is a Salafi-jihadist outfit, which wants to remake secular Syria and retain its tight grip over state institutions. If the HTS's rule in Idlib is an example, the group is not any less dictatorial than Mr. Assad. The southern militias, backed by Jordan, would want to get their due share of power. And in the east, the SDF, the Kurdish militia, wants to keep their hard-earned autonomy. But Turkey sees the SDF as a terrorist outfit, and Turkish-backed militias have already started attacking the SDF.

In Afghanistan, throughout the 1980s, the U.S. and Pakistan-backed Mujahideen fought together against the communist regime as well as the Soviet troops. But after the Soviet withdrawal and the collapse of the communist rule, Afghanistan fell into deeper chaos. In Libya, NATO made a military intervention in 2011 to "liberate" the country from Mohammed Gaddafi. After Gaddafi's regime, one of the most stable governments in Africa, was toppled and he was killed, the country fell into a bloody civil war - which is still going on. Iraq never recovered from the scars of America's regime change war of 2003. None of these examples are encouraging for Syri

Will the no-confidence motion be taken up?

It is unlikely that the no-confidence motion will be taken up for discussion in the House since the Winter Session of Parliament is scheduled to conclude on December 20, which is less than 14 days away.

For instance, in 2020 then Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu dismissed a no-confidence motion against Deputy Chairman Harivansh on the ground that it required a 14-day notice. Even if the motion is taken up in the House, it is unlikely to yield any result since the Opposition lacks the requisite numbers for its passage. Ultimately, this move appears to be more of a symbolic protest against Mr. Dhankar's purported partisan conduct.

"Since it is a constitutional resolution, it does not lapse when the session is prorogued. It can be taken up in the next session of Parliament, or even in a special session convened specifically for that purpose," Mr. Achary clarified.

Can the Vice President preside over the motion in the Upper House?

Notably, even if the motion is taken up in the House and the Opposition's grievances are discussed, it would be difficult for Mr. Dhankhar to preside over those proceedings in the Rajya Sabha. Mr. Achary pointed out that Article 92 of the Constitution explicitly bars the Chairman or Deputy Chairman from presiding over proceedings while a resolution for their removal is under consideration. However, the provision permits the Chairperson to speak and participate in the proceedings although he or she is barred from voting "on such resolution or any other matter" during it.

These provisions however come into effect only if the motion is accepted by Deputy Chairperson Harivansh Narayan Singh.

YK

How can gene therapy cure haemophilia A?

What is replacement theory and how effective is it as a form of treatment for haemophiliacs? What is Roctavian? How is using a lentivirus as the vector in gene therapy different from using an adenovirus? Are medicines for treating haemophilia affordable and accessible?

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Jacob Koshy

The story so far:

edical researchers at the Christian Medical College, Vellore have reported successfully applying gene-therapy to treat severe haemophilia A, a rare, hereditary condition that results from a faulty gene which triggers severe, spontaneous and fatal bleeding episodes.

What is the usual treatment?

The primary approach to treating haemophilia is called replacement therapy. As the disease is a condition resulting from low levels of clotting factor - necessary to prevent bleeding replacement therapy involves slowly dripping, or injecting into a vein, concentrates of clotting factor VIII (for haemophilia A) or clotting factor IX (for haemophilia B). Clotting-factor concentrates can be derived and manufactured from human blood, which must be properly tested and screened to prevent the spread of diseases, such as hepatitis. It is also possible to



use clotting-factor concentrates that aren't made A March 2024 from human blood reducing, the albeit very small risk, of contracting diseases from injecting blood. These are called recombinant clotting factors and can be easily stored, mixed, and used at home. Haemophiliacs can regularly inoculate themselves with replacement therapy to prevent bleeding, and is meant to protect in India to be against unexpected bleeding episodes. Among the challenges with clotting factors is that the body's own antibodies can destroy the clotting factor before it has a chance to work and defeats the whole idea of replacement therapy. Other forms of treatment include desmopressin (DDAVP), a man-made hormone used to treat people who have mild haemophilia A. DDAVP isn't used to treat haemophilia B or severe haemophilia A. This hormone increases the level of clotting factor in the blood.

What is gene therapy in haemophilia?

Among the emerging approaches to fix diseases such as haemophilia, which is due to a defective gene on the X chromosome, is gene therapy. Here copies of a 'corrected' gene are introduced into the cells of a patient, the idea being that this would result - in the case of haemophilia normal expression of the necessary clotting factor. So far there is only one U.S. Food And Drug Administration-approved gene therapy for haemophilia. Called Roctavian, it is an adeno-associated virus vector-based gene therapy and approved only in 2023 for treating adults with severe haemophilia A, and that too only for those without pre-existing antibodies to adeno-associated virus. Roctavian consists of a viral vector carrying the necessary gene for clotting Factor VIII. The gene is expressed in the liver to increase blood levels of FVIII and reduce the risk of uncontrolled bleeding. The effectiveness of the treatment was established based on results from 112 patients followed up for at least three years after Roctavian treatment. Following the infusion, the mean,

annualised bleeding rate decreased from 5.4 bleeds per year at baseline to 2.6 bleeds per year. The majority of patients who received Roctavian also got corticosteroids to suppress the immune system for the gene therapy to be effective and safe. Treatment response to Roctavian may decrease over time.

How was the Vellore trial different?

The main difference in this approach is the use of a lentivirus as the vector, instead of an adenovirus. Because adenovirus infections are fairly common in people, the chances of having antibodies are fairly high and this could actually be counter-productive to those using treatments such as Roctavian. Lentivirus infections being less common, it is expected that fewer people will have antibiodies to them, making them more effective in treatment. Further the Indian approach relies on gene transfer into adult stem cells with the lentiviral vector that integrates with the body's cells instead of in vivo transfer to a hepatocyte, or a liver cell, through a non-integrating AAV vector. The advantage of this approach is expected to be a reliable, life-long production of the clotting factor in necessary quantities without side-effects. Though tested in only five patients in Vellore, none of them reported bleeding episodes over an average follow-up period of 14 months.

Is haemophilia treatment affordable?

A March 2024 research study in the journal Heliyon, estimates the per-patient cost of treating a haemophiliac in India to be \$3,00,000 over a 10-year period. Based on various estimates, there may be about 1,00,000 haemophiliacs with type A and type B conditions, with the former being more common. This is the reason why treatments can be expensive. Roctavian is also not cheap and costs nearly \$2 million. Whether the gene-therapy product tested in the India will be affordable remains to be seen, though that is the hope. "It is too early to talk about costs but in principle it will need to be something that will make sense in the Indian healthcare system," Dr. Alok Srivastava, Head, Haematology Research Unit. St John's Research Institute, Bangalore, told The Hindu. He led the trial at Vellore.

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PROFILES

Yoon Suk Yeol

The impeached leader of South Korea was able to manage a successful transition from state prosecutor to national politician, but could not learn the give-and-take of democratic politics, nor give up thinking like a prosecutor

G. Sampath

round half past ten on the night of December 3, Yoon Suk Yeol, South Korea's President and leader of the conservative People Power Party (PPP), appeared on national television to declare "emergency martial law". The decree meant that all political meetings, rallies, and strikes would be banned and media would come under military censorship. Local media reported that law enforcement and intelligence agencies got instructions to round up Opposition lawmakers and seal the National Assembly. Mr. Yoon, 63, justified the move by claiming that the Opposition, the liberal Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) was engaged in "anti-state activities" and collaborating with "North Korean communists"

But the news was received by ordinary Koreans with shock, for they believed they had put the days of military rule firmly behind them. It is a testament to how deeply the democratic ethos had taken root in the country that the martial law lasted barely six hours. During this dramatic interlude, Lee Jae-myung, the leader of the DPK, rallied his party members, asking them to rush to the National Assembly building. He also began a live stream from his mobile, getting the general public directly involved as his party scrambled to save the country from a looming dictatorship.

The live stream helped. Soldiers despatched to secure the National Assembly were held up by thousands of protesters blocking their way and demanding immediate restoration of democratic government. The delay and the consequent confusion enabled 190 of the 300 members the National Assembly to sneak into the premises, with some even climbing in through the windows. In a special session, all the 190, including members of Mr. Yoon's PPP, voted against the martial law. As per the Korean constitution, if the legislative majority strikes down martial law, the President must comply. Left with no alternative, Mr. Yoon withdrew his proclamation by 4.30 a.m. on Wednesday.

The Opposition brought an

impeachment motion against him on December 7, but it was thwarted by a mass boycott by all the PPP lawmakers. The PPP has 108 members in the 300-member National Assembly, and a two-thirds majority vote (200) is required for an impeachment. The Opposition put the impeachment to vote again on December 14, and this time, 204 voted in favour. As a result, Mr. Yoon's presidential duties have been suspended, and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo will serve as acting President.

Review by court

Korea's Constitutional court will now review the Assembly's impeachment decision and has 180 days to deliver its verdict. If it strikes down the impeachment, Mr. Yoon will return to office. If it upholds it, Mr. Yoon will be permanently removed from office and elections must be held within 60 days. Simultaneously, Mr. Yoon also faces an investigation into whether his martial law decree amounts to insurrection, a crime that carries a death penalty.

As per the Constitution, martial law can only be invoked in extreme circumstances, "to cope with a military necessity or to maintain the public safety and order by mobilisation of the military forces in time of war, armed conflict or similar national emergency." These conditions were not in evidence when Mr. Yoon made his move. Given that members of his own party spoke out against his decree, Mr. Yoon seemed to have misread the fiercely democratic culture of his people, for whom the very idea of 'martial law' evokes traumatic events from the past, such as the 1980 Gwangju Uprising and the massacre of pro-democracy activists.

In fact, the public mood became evident almost instantly on social media, which was replete with 'trending' posts that questioned Mr. Yoon's mental fitness, with users suggesting he might require psychiatric evaluation for "delusional disorder" and "paranoia". So, what explains Mr. Yoon's extraordinary act of overreach, one that has not only derailed his political career but has the potential to land him in jail or worse? Korean politics in recent times has



been marked by extreme polarisation, with political incumbents often using their tenures to seek vengeance on their rivals. For Mr. Yoon, frustration with his prime rival, Mr. Lee, had been building up for a long time.

Unlike Mr. Lee, Mr. Yoon never held elected office until he became President. Again, unlike Mr. Lee, whose parents were sanitation workers, Mr. Yoon comes from a privileged background. He studied law at an elite university before embarking on a stellar career as a prosecutor, sending two former Presidents to jail for abuse of power. In March 2021, Mr. Yoon resigned as the prosecutor general. In June, he announced his candidacy for the 2022 Presidential

race. And by March 2022, he defeated Mr. Lee by the closest margin in Korean history (48.56% to 47.83% of the vote) to become President. His campaign, and political posturing, especially on issues related to gender parity, have prompted comparisons with Donald Trump.

In stark contrast to Mr. Yoon's political trajectory of privilege to conservative politician, Mr. Lee began as a factory worker, and worked as a labour lawyer, following the path of rights-based politics to the centre-left of the DPK. Not surprisingly, the personality clash and political rivalry between Mr. Yoon, a conservative, and Mr. Lee, a liberal, also had an ideological edge.

Under Mr. Yoon's presidency, the political cleavage between the two sides found expression in state prosecutors vigorously pursuing bribery and breach of trust investigations against Mr. Lee, who has denied these charges, terming them politically motivated. Mr. Yoon also rebuffed Mr Lee's attempts for a direct meeting to figure out a working relationship.

Mr. Lee, having lost the Presidential race to Mr. Yoon, bounced back with a seat in the National Assembly where he has emerged as the dominant figure in the Opposition. He has used the DPK's Parliamentary majority to repeatedly block Mr. Yoon's Budgets and impeach several of his key administrative officials – a tactic Mr. Yoon has described as "legislative dictatorship".

Lame duck President

Mr. Yoon did not enjoy a Parliamentary majority when he became President in 2022. He had a chance to get it in the general elections in April this year but failed, as the DPK won a landslide. South Korean Presidents are limited to one five-year term, and Mr. Yoon was facing the dubious prospect of serving out his entire term as a lame duck President without a majority, or even a working relationship, in the National Assembly. For most of this year, Mr. Yoon has complained bitterly about a non-cooperative National Assembly controlled by the Opposition, whom he has called "monsters" and a "den of criminals". It would appear that mounting frustration over "legislative dictatorship" was weighing heavily on Mr. Yoon's mind, and perhaps triggered the impulse for a tit-for-tat executive dictatorship, in the form of martial law.

In South Korean history, prosecutors have generally served as useful weapons for authoritarian leaders - they are typically not viewed as friendly to democracy. Mr. Yoon has demonstrated why. He was able to manage a successful transition from state prosecutor to national politician, but could not learn the give-and-take of democratic politics, nor give up thinking like a prosecutor.

THE GIST

South Korean politics in recent times has been marked by extreme polarisation, with political incumbents often using their tenures to seek vengeance on their rivals. For Mr. Yoon, frustration with his prime rival, Mr. Lee, had been building up for a long time.

Under Mr. Yoon's presidency, state prosecutors vigorously pursued bribery and breach of trust investigations against Mr. Lee, who has denied these charges, terming them politically motivated. Mr. Yoon also rebuffed Mr. Lee's attempts for a direct meeting to figure out a working relationship

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Mr. Lee has used South Korea's parliamentary majority to repeatedly block Mr. Yoon's Budgets and impeach several of his key administrative officials — a tactic Mr. Yoon has described as 'legislative dictatorship'

9

'Popular' suspect

Luigi Mangione

The 26-year-old Ivy League graduate, who allegedly shot the CEO of a medical insurance company in the U.S., has found support among many, while it shows the public's eroding trust in institutions

<u>Adithya Narayan</u>

ot long after an election that polarised the nation, civil society in the U.S. stands divided yet again over a man: 26-year-old Luigi Mangione, who allegedly shot UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson outside a hotel in Manhattan on December 4.

Mangione was picked up from a McDonald's outlet in Pennsylvania, on December 9 when a member of the restaurant staff spotted and identified him.

From ridiculing the employee and McDonalds to lionising Mangione as an "anti-capitalist" hero and describing his act as "vigilante justice", social media was awash with reactions that glorified the killing of the father of two.

So much so that Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro felt compelled to spell out the morality: "He is no hero. The real hero in this story is the person who called 911 at McDonald's." "We do not kill people in cold blood to resolve policy differences," Mr. Shapiro said.

That it took a Governor's statement for people to see through a crime that happened in broad daylight is a telling sign. Regardless, observers and columnists attribute the sympathy pouring in for Mangione to the hatred re-

YK (



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

found a "folk hero" who

stood up for them against

an industry that has long

become a target of public

ire. With a market valua-

tion of \$560 billion, Un-

itedHealth ranks 19th on

Forbes' list of the world's

biggest companies. Howev-

er, look past the insurance

firm to see that the indivi-

duals involved are mired in

report, Thompson had a

modest working-class up-

bringing in rural Iowa. He

graduated with a Bache-

lor's degree in business ad-

ministration from the Un-

iversity of Iowa in 1997. He

is a certified public accoun-

tant and worked for six

vears at the accounting

Coopers (PwC) before join-

ing the United Group in

2004, according to Forbes.

to the privileged upbring-

ing of Mangione, someone

believed to have carried

out an "anti-capitalist" at-

tack. Born into a promi-

nent real-estate family in

This is in stark contrast

firm

Pricewaterhouse-

According to a Reuters

a strange paradox.

served by the public for insurance companies.

Recovered from the crime scene were bullet casings that had the words 'Deny', 'Defend' and 'Depose' written on them – a play on the phrase 'Delay, Deny, Defend', tactics used by insurance firms to refuse claims. Also found in his possession was a handwritten manifesto that criticised corporate greed.

"Frankly these parasites simply had it coming," the note stated. UnitedHealthcare, however, has said Mangione was not its customer. As police try and figure

out if Mangione, who had a back problem and did correction procedure, acted out of self-interest or handed out "vigilante justice",

public support has swelled. His X account grew by 4,00,000 followers since the shooting, \$31,000 was raised on GiveSendGo and "#FreeLuigi" and "hot assassin" tags spread on social media. In Mangione, people

Baltimore, Mangione received Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the Ivy League University of Pennsylvania. He also served as head counsellor at a precollege programme at Standford. He worked as a software engineer at True-Car, an online marketplace based in California.

Six months ago, he fell off the public radar with his mother filing a missing complaint in November.

Investigators are scouring his social media accounts for further clues and a concrete motive. Save for a goodreads account where he posted a review commending the "prescient" nature of Unabomber Ted Kaczynski's Industrial Society and its future, Mangione's political standing can be described as heterodox at best.

The fact that Mangione's motive and ideology have not been deciphered so far is worrisome for it then leaves only one plausible explanation. Much like the 2021 Capitol attack, it shows the public's eroding trust in institutions. A fallout of that is the common man disregarding civic sense and becoming emboldened to take the law into his own hands. Mangione, who spoke about a "symbolic takedown" in his manifesto, then becomes a hero for those disenchanted with the system.

The new boss at Mint Street

Sanjay Malhotra

RBI's 26th Governor took charge this week in the midst of a growing clamour for monetary policy makers to ignore high inflation and cut interest rates

Vikas Dhoot

ecember 9 began as a routine day for North Block mandarins, with questions pertaining to the Finance Ministry to be answered in the Lok Sabha. But for avid observers of the economy and financial markets, the big question of the day was neither starred nor unstarred. It revolved around the Governorship of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The incumbent Shaktikanta Das, in his sixth year at the RBI, had just delivered a monetary policy that disappointed a government rooting for an interest rate cut, particularly after GDP growth slipped to just 5.4% between July and September. Mr. Das, whose tenure

was to expire on December 10, said the growth-inflation balance was off but asserted persistently high inflation also hurt consumption and growth. By Monday, reporters who had been running stories about another extension for him, had changed course in the absence of any official communiqué, floating names of senior bureaucrats who may replace Mr. Das. None had an inkling that name would turn out to be Union Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra.

They were not the only ones surprised – even Mr. ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR



Malhotra is learnt to have been informed just hours before his appointment was made public. The Rajasthan cadre, 1990-batch IAS officer is not the usual Finance Ministry insider picked for the top role at Mint Street. Like his predecessor, most such appointees had handled departments such as Economic Affairs, or held the Finance Secretary's role, like the late R.N. Malhotra, who was the 17th RBI Governor.

Mr. Malhotra, who has spent almost all his life in North India, is a computer engineering graduate from IIT Kanpur, with a Master's degree in Public Policy from Princeton University. His new role brings him to the heart of India's financial markets Mumbai for at least three years.

"Not a whole lot is known about Mr. Malhotra's views on current economic issues, so he is a relatively unknown figure from that perspective," economists at Nomura Securities said. Others

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echoed the sentiment, chiming in with stuff like 'we don't know how he feels about growth and inflation but if the government has chosen him at this juncture, he could oblige them with a quicker and bigger rate cut cycle'.

Soft-spoken, inquisitive A cricket and coffee aficionado, Mr. Malhotra is one of the most affable and soft-spoken, yet no-nonsense officials in service, known not just for his crystal-clear responses to questions, but also for his inquisitiveness. In media interactions, after one's queries are done and dusted and if time permits, he would extend the chat over a cup of Coffee Board brew to glean some ground-level feedback on issues and perceptions doing the

rounds. On his Day One in office, Governor Malhotra revealed no bias towards either growth or inflation, saying he does not like to start playing his shots from

icy pillars that mattered for people – growth, stability, certainty and trust, he noted. Mr. Malhotra may be a mystery for Mint Street watchers, but having served as the Department of Financial Services Secretary, he has been on the central bank's board, and is an authority of sorts on banking and financial sector reforms. Moreover, his Revenue role probably affords him a unique vantage point of the economy's growth and consumption impulses, having overseen not just direct tax flows from corporates and households, but also the trends in goods and services trade that only granular details of GST, Customs and Excise trends can reveal. It is then not for nothing that the Centre's revenue math (that hinges on growth assumptions) he has worked on in recent Budgets, has generally been spot on.

the first ball of a match. But

he promised to "put the

best foot forward in public

interest" once he gets a

clear sense of the pitch,

with an eye on the four pol-

Mr. Malhotra knows a lot more about the economic terrain than many realise, and in his new innings, where constant communication plays an important role, the world is about to find that out – with or without rate cuts.

THE HINDU

SCIENCE

Solid phase alloying can turn metal scrap into high-value alloys

The Hindu Bureau

10

Metal scrap can be directly transformed and upgraded into high-performance, high-value alloys without the need for conventional melting processes, according to a new study published this week in the journal Nature Communications. The study demonstrates that scrap aluminum from industrial waste streams can produce highperformance metal alloys.

The upcycled aluminum performs on par with iden-

tical materials produced from primary aluminum, indicating that this approach can provide a lowcost pathway to bringing more high-quality recycled metal products to the marketplace. By converting waste into high-performance aluminum products, the new method, called solid phase alloying, not only enhances material properties but also contributes to environmental sustainability. The innovative solid-

phase

converts aluminum scrap blended with copper, zinc, and magnesium into a precisely designed highstrength aluminum alloy product in a matter of minutes, compared to the days required to produce the same product utilizing conventional melting, casting, and extrusion. The research team used a PNNLpatented technique called Shear Assisted Processing and Extrusion, or ShAPE, to achieve their results. However, the re-

alloying process searchers noted that the findings should be reproducible with other solidmanufacturing phase processes.

Longer lifespan

Within the ShAPE process, a high-speed rotating die creates friction and heat that disperses the chunky starting ingredients into a uniform alloy with the same characteristics as a newly manufactured aluminum wrought product. The solid phase ap-

proach eliminates the need for energy-intensive bulk melting, which combined with the low-cost feedstocks originating from scrap, has the potential to sharply reduce the cost of manufacturing these materials. For consumers, this means recycled aluminum products will have a longer lifespan and better performance at a lower cost, whether they are part of a vehicle, a construction material, or a household appliance. According to the re-

searchers, the solid phase alloying process could be

used to create custom metal wire alloys for various 3D printing technologies. "Solid phase alloying is theoretically applicable to any metal combination that you can imagine, and the fact that manufacturing occurs wholly in the solid state means you can begin to consider totally new alloys that we've not been able to make before," Cindy Powell, a researcher at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, U.S. and a coauthor of the study said in a release.

Bovine H5N1 displays pronounced neurotropism in many mammals

Pronounced neurotropism of the 2024 H5N1 virus belonging to the 2.3.4.4b clade is highlighted by high viral loads in the brain and minimal or no viral presence in the lungs of several species, suggesting a significant shift in virus behaviour

The H5N1 clade

human infections

Aerosol

exposure

to 2004 and

2024 H5N1

strains was

uniformly

fatal in

nice

2.3.4.4b has caused

widespread infection in

over 90 species of wild

and domestic birds and

more than 21 mammaliaı

species, including several

detected in the brain tissue

Mice exposed to the 2024 bovine isolate

exhibited clinical signs consistent with central

mammalian hosts

neurological signs in cats

The difference in the tissue

underscores the potential for

altered disease outcomes in other

The 2.3.4.4b clade of H5N1 virus

is strongly linked to respiratory and

nervous system infection; infectious viruses

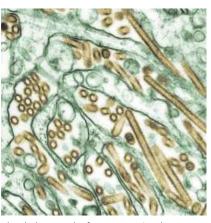
R. Prasad

study investigated and compared the tissue tropism of a 2004 H5N1 strain isolated from a fatal human case and the 2024 bovine strain of H5N1 that is currently circulating in mice and found that the two strains displayed significantly different abilities to infect different tissues. While replication of the 2004 virus was largely in the respiratory tract with "limited" replication in the central nervous system, the 2024 bovine strain successfully replicated in the respiratory tract as well as various regions of the brain. Also, mice challenged with the 2024 bovine H5N1 isolates exhibited clinical signs consistent with central nervous system infection, and infectious viruses were detected in the brain tissue. The 2004 H5N1 virus was used for comparison as the virus strain has been extensively studied in ani-

mal models. The study

Shift in tissue tropism

Replication of the 2004 H5N1 isolate was largely in the respiratory tract with "limited" replication in the central nervous system



The clade 2.3.4.4b of 2024 H5N1 virus has spread to 832 cattle herds across 16 State in the U.S. CYNTHIA GOLDSMITH

served with the H5N1 isolate from 2004. This difference in tissue tropism, accompanied by distinct cytokine responses in mic the brain, underscores the potential for altered disease outcomes in other mammalian hosts," the authors of a study posted in a preprint server BioRxiv write. Preprints are yet to be peer-reviewed. The H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b has caused widespread infection in over 90 species of wild and domestic birds and more than 21 mammalian species, including several human infections. The virus has caused fatal infections in many different mammals. In March 2024, the 2.3.4.4b clade was first detected in dairy cattle in Texas. The virus has since spread rapidly; as of December 12, the virus has spread to 832 cattle herds across 16 States in the U.S., with 617 herds in California alone.

| rus has 6 States | lions have displa | ks, minks, red foxes, and sea /ed significant neurological esence mainly in the brain | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| lates via aer a more natu fection. Up mice in bo played redu pidly lost we While the m the 2024 | two H5N1 iso- osols to mimic iral route of in- oon exposure, th groups dis- ced activity, ra- eight, and died. iice exposed to bovine strain | showed systemic infection with lesions and viral anti- gens in multiple organs. "Higher viral RNA and anti- gen in the brain indicated pronounced neurotro- pism," they write. The authors note that while earlier H5N1 clades | | | |
| showed neu | rological signs | in cats caused subclinical | | | |

mainly in the brain. "Though neurotropism and neurological signs were observed during the 2024 bovine strain outbreaks of previous successfully replicates clades of H5N1 viruses, the pronounced neurotropism of the current H5N1 clade various regions of the 2.3.4.4b is highlighted by high viral loads in the brain and minimal or no viral presence in the lungs of several species, suggesting a significant shift in virus behaviour," they write. tropism of the 2024 bovine isolate

ataxia, with viral presence

It must be noted that unlike in mice, central nervous system involvement has not yet been reported for dairy cows, either via natural or experimental infection by the bovine H5N1 strain (2.3.4.4b clade). The H5N1 transmission within and between cattle herds is hypothesised to be associated with milking practices. In cows, the H5N1 virus replication has been limited to the mammary glands when lactating cows were inoculated via the mammary gland.

Notable shift

"The growing list of sus-

SNAPSHOTS



Why deep sleep is helpful for long-term memory

It has been known for nearly 20 years that slow, synchronous electrical waves in the brain during deep sleep support the formation of memories. Why that is so was previously unknown. While we sleep, our brains replay the events of the day, moving information from the location of short-term memory, the hippocampus, to the long-term memory located in the neocortex. According to a study, the slow waves make the neocortex, the location of long-term memory, especially receptive to information.



Exposure to air pollution linked to blood clots in veins

A large longitudinal study of over 6,600 U.S. adults who lived in or near one of six major metropolitan areas found that exposure to long-term air pollution was linked with increased risks for blood clots that can occur in deep veins, which, if untreated, can block blood flow and cause serious complications, even death. About 248 adults (3.7%) developed blood clots in deep veins. Participants with greater overall exposure to tiny air pollution particles had a 39% increased associated risk for blood clots in deep veins.



ed that both the 2004 and the 2024 H5N1 isolates were uniformly fatal in mice when infected through aerosol exposure. But the tissue tropism was vastly different - the 2004 strain was largely restricted to the respiratory tract predominantly and caused respiratory disease, while the 2024 bovine strain showed preference to both the respiratory tract and the brain and caused inflammation in the brain and nasal cavity.

'Our findings reveal that the bovine isolate exhibits enhanced neurotropism, unlike the respiratory-restricted replication ob-

Mice were exposed to

disease was absent in mice exposed to the 2004 isolate. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the virus titers were high in the brain tissue of mice exposed to the bovine strain compared with mice exposed to the 2004 strain.

of disease, neurological

'Heavily linked'

In April this year, 10 cats died in a rural South Dakota residence, showing respiratory and neurological symptoms. Lab testing of two cats confirmed H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b infection. As per a paper accepted for publication in the journal Emerging Microbes & Infections, dead cats

characterised by ease pneumonia and encephalitis, the 2.3.4.4b H5N1 virus strain has also been "heavily linked to respiratory and neurological signs in cats in France, Poland, South Korea, and the U.S.".

infections or clinical dis-

Unlike the 2004

H5N1 virus, the

in the respiratory

tract as well as

brain in mice

The authors note that animals infected with clade 2.3.4.4b H5N1 viruses commonly exhibited pneumonia and meningoencephalitis, with neurological signs predominating in several animal species. Mammals such as dolphins, skunks, minks, red foxes, and sea lions have displayed significant neurological signs such as tremors, convulsions, and

ceptible mammalian hosts highlights the virus's ability to cross species barriers, raising concerns about its potential impact on wildlife and domestic animal populations," the authors of the accepted paper write. "There is a notable shift in the neurotropism of H5N1 viruses, particularly with the emergence of clade 2.3.4.4b in cats and wild carnivores like foxes... These cases have documented viral adaptations that facilitate central nervous system involvement, with some infections exhibiting viral mutations indicative of enhanced neurotropism."

Detecting premalignant pancreatic lesions with MRI

Precursor lesions of pancreatic cancer are very difficult to characterise with magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). But now, in a new study, researchers have shown, for the first time, that a particular form of MRI called Diffusion Tensor Imaging (DTI) is capable of robustly detecting premalignant lesions in the pancreas. Their study could open the way to early clinical diagnosis in people at risk, and to treatment assessment of pancreatic cancer.



Do giraffes really struggle with slopes?

A new study analysing the movements of 33 GPS-collared giraffes across five reserves in South Africa has found that giraffes avoid steep terrain and are unable to navigate slopes with a gradient of more than 20 degrees, most likely due to the energy required and the risk of falling. Researchers found that giraffes will tolerate terrain of up to 12 degrees, but only if it leads to favourable vegetation. The findings highlight a mismatch between the ideal, flat habitats of giraffes and the areas they're being conserved

in. Using the newly discovered 20-degree gradient threshold, the researchers were able to calculate the proportion of habitats in key African countries where giraffes are currently found that are inaccessible to the animals. They found that of all the countries that were mapped, one in three had more unusable areas in protected areas than outside of protected areas. Giraffes are currently found in 21 African countries but despite their wide distribution, populations have been declining.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



Time was when we elders wrote our letters and other correspondence using pen and paper and sent them across through the post office. Today, other than sending greeting cards by post, we have even started using digital devices such as smartphones and digital computers, typing out the alphabet and numbers for sending applications, messages, and responses. Even today, when we are in the e-age, primary and secondary school children while learning to write lessons, do homework, answer tests, and write essays by

YK (

hand, and once done, use their smartphones to talk friends and use to WhatsApp.

An article by Charlotte Hu, in the Scientific American citing some research

publications says that writing by hand activates a wide range of interconnected brain regions responsible for learning and memory. Let me cite the findings of some of these publications. Studies in education research by a group of technologists from Trondheim, Norway, in the journal Frontiers in Psychology point out that handwriting but not typewriting leads to widespread brain connectivity. In other words, handwriting affects the brain in more positive ways than typing the same material

on a keyboard. First, hand-



Gains: Writing by hand facilitates better memory. GETTY IMAGES

writing training not only improves spelling accuracy but also facilitates better memory and recall.

They studied a group of schoolchildren, attached electronic sensors to their heads, and monitored the brain activity while the students were writing by hand, and when they were

using a computer. Such an electroencephalographic study revealed that writing or drawing by hand causes more activity and involves larger areas of the brain, as opposed to typing on a keyboard. Writing was thus seen to 'light up' more brain regions than typing. When the students were al-

most commercially availaso given a challenging word game (e.g., 'scrabble', 'wordle'), their memory levels were found to be higher.

Handwriting also helps in recognising and understanding the shapes and sizes of letters of the alphabet. In a study involving about 30 students, they asked the participants to use a digital pen to write in cursive by hand directly on the touchscreen and a keyboard to typewrite the presented words. Here too, the shape and size of the letters written by hand

were better than typing.

Languages where the al-

phabets differ from those in English (for example those in the Middle East, Far East, and some Indian languages as well) are easier written by hand and are not easily available on

ble computers. In most schools across India, the medium of in-

struction in most schools is the local language for students from primary all the way up to the tenth class, and English is taught as an additional language from the secondary school level. However, the children already use mobile phones which have English alphabets in them. Some Indian languages have unique letters and alphabets that the English alphabets do not.

Likewise, some Urdu/ Arabic words used in Hindi and Punjabi are not typable on a keyboard. And when we in India use mobile phones or computers to write something, we find it hard since these devices have only English alphabets.

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THE HINDU **Business**



ASSOCHAM secretary general Deepak Sood steps down

Deepak Sood, secretary general of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) is moving on to pursue other interests, the industry body said on Saturday. "Mr. Sood made important contributions to rebuilding a healthy balance sheet, delivering quality and a better national footprint for the chamber in recent years. The past presidents and I thank and wish him the best for the next phase," ASSOCHAM president Sanjay Nayar said.

Aurobindo Pharma arm's biosimilar gets EMA panel nod

Aurobindo Pharma's subsidiary CuraTeO Biologics has received nod for Zefylti, its biosimilar of filgrastim, from the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) of the European Medicines Agency (EMA). The CHMP has adopted a positive opinion for Zefylti (BP13) recommending the granting of a marketing authorisation. Zefylti will be available as 30 MU/0.5 mL and 48 MU/0.5 mL and is intended for the treatment of neutropenia.

LIC pares stake in NMDC from 7.6% to 5.59% in 14 months

The Life Insurance Corporation of India, as an investment function, reduced its shareholding in State-owned iron ore miner NMDC from 7.61% to 5.59% in a little over 14 months. The net decrease of 2.01% in the holding happened from September 26, 2023, to December 12, 2024, through open market sale at an average cost of ₹209.61 per share, LIC said in a filing. In terms of number of shares, LIC's holding in NMDC has come from over 22.31 crore to over 16.40 crore.

MFN clause freeze won't hit investments in India: Switzerland

Country's suspension of the 'Most Favoured Nation' tag for India won't impact the India-EFTA trade deal: India says tax treaty to be reworked

<u>Suhasini Haidar</u> NEW DELHI

witzerland's deci-sion to suspend the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment for India under the two countries' 30-years old doubletaxation avoidance agreement (DTAA) from January 1 will neither affect the free trade deal recently reached between the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) nations nor affect Swiss investments into India, the country's officials told The Hindu.

While Indian officials said they will go into the details of the Swiss move, they indicated that double taxation treaty with the EF-TA-bloc nation is going to be renegotiated in light of the EFTA-India Trade and Partnership Economic Agreement (TEPA) agreed upon this year. In a statement dated De-

cember 11, Swiss authorities had announced that the MFN clause under the DTAA was being suspended, as India's apex court had held that it does not get automatically triggered until it is notified by the government under the Income Tax Act of 1961. Indian companies operating in Switzerland currently benefit from a reduced tax rate of 5% on dividends and other incomes, but will be liable to pay 10% tax



Randhir Jaiswal

from the coming year.

The TEPA signed with the four-nation EFTA bloc is a unique free trade agreement, as it includes a binding commitment of \$100 billion investment and the creation of one million direct jobs in India by companies from those four countries over the next 15 years.

Asked if the MFN clause suspension could dent the TEPA pact hopes, a Swiss embassy official in New Delhi said there is no direct impact on the EFTA-India TEPA. "In particular, this week's decision does not negatively affect investment from Switzerland to India," the official said.

"The question of the interpretation by Switzerland and India of the mostfavoured-nation clause concerns the residual tax rate applicable to dividends based on the double taxation agreement paid by a company of one contracting state to a resident of the other contracting state. However, the change

M&M severs business ties with **Lokesh Machines** over U.S. sanctions

<u>N. Ravi Kumar</u> HYDERABAD

in this residual rate has no

impact on the validity of

the double taxation agree-

ment as such, or on any

other treaties under inter-

national law concluded

between Switzerland (in-

dependently or under the

EFTA framework) and In-

dia," the official empha-

India's External Affairs

Randhir Jaiswal said the

double taxation treaty with

Switzerland is to be rene-

gotiated because of the TE-

PA deal with EFTA nations.

MFN clause by Switzerland

was triggered by an Octob-

er 2023 ruling against its

validity by the Supreme

Court on 11 petitions that

were combined with a plea

cally adapts the Swiss inter-

pretation of the most fa-

voured nation clause to the

one taken by India and

confirmed by its Supreme

Court," explained a Swiss

in 2021, granted the 5% re-

sidual tax rate for Indian

firms retroactively with ef-

fect from July 2018, the In-

dian competent authority,

on the other hand, did not

grant reciprocity in apply-

ing the MFN clause to-

wards Switzerland, and

this decision was upheld

by the apex court last year,

he pointed out.

While Switzerland had,

trade expert.

"This suspension basi-

by Swiss major Nestle SA.

The suspension of the

spokesperson

sised to The Hindu.

Ministry

Mahindra and Mahindra (M&M) has decided to discontinue sourcing of auto components from Lokesh Machines in the wake of the supplier figuring in the United States Department of the Treasury's OFAC sanctions list.

"We have received communication from one of our customers regarding discontinuance of transactions owing to the fact that while there are ongoing efforts towards delisting from United States Department of the Treasury's OFAC sanctions list, the timeline for this process is not suitable for the customer," machine tools and small arms maker Lokesh Machines said on Saturday.

The move of M&M is expected to impact around 8% of total revenue, compared with the previous financial vear. The company is, however, determined to add other customers to compensate for the loss of business resulting from the development and remains optimistic about achieving this goal particularly given its recent defence foray, the Hyderabad-based firm

said in a filing. Machine tools and auto components and defence divisions are two business segments of the company.

As part of the auto components business, it manufactures cylinder blocks, cylinder heads, connecting

Section of Akasa Air pilots flags

unfair practices; airline denies

Extra long staple cotton imports rebound

M. Soundariya Preetha COIMBATORE

India's imports of Supima cotton, exported by the U.S., is rising following the withdrawal of import duty on extra long staple (ELS) cotton earlier this year.

India had imposed an 11% import duty on cotton in the 2021-2022 Budget.

Marc Lewkowitz, president and CEO, Supima, told The Hindu this crop year (August to July), Indian imports had crossed one lakh bales. Export of Supima (a marketing brand of the U.S.-grown Pima cotton) by the U.S. to India had grown 'dramatically' in the last few weeks.

India needs imports as it has a shortage of ELS cotton. India buys 60,000 to two lakh bales of Supima cotton annually, he said.

Farmers cultivating the Pima cotton in the U.S. are able to just break even or not able to meet the production costs at the current price levels, and the prices are likely to go up so that the area under cultivation does not decrease.

"We are working with brands and retailers to give stability to value across the supply chain," he said.

As per William Bettendorf, director of Cotton USA Supply Chain, South Asia, Cotton Council International, India imported 1.2 million bales of U.S. cotton in 2019. In the last three to four years, share of the U.S. in India's cotton imports had come down since there were supplies from Australia, Brazil, and the west African countries.

'Drones transforming farming, market to touch \$631 mn by 2030'

Lalatendu Mishra

tion via subsidies, loans

in promoting drone adop- a substantial market share of 25-30% in physic drones and 45-50% in drone services with our

Press Trust of India



airline since October 2023

1%

324 pilots have joined the consistently reported the highest leve

In India, Lokesh Machines manufactures and supply small arms to the Armed Forces. ANI

rods and forgings. The company operates through five manufacturing units in Hyderabad and 1 in Pune.

Following the October 30 sanctions list, in which its name figured with a clutch of other entities from India, Lokesh Machines said it was in the process of reaching out to the OFAC, after becoming aware through media reports, to gather more information and provide clarifications, including that it has been exporting machines to Russia since 2011. "Our machines are be-

ing sourced by distributors who stock these or further sell. None of our distributors are featured on any sanctions list.

The news articles stated we have been sanctioned for supplying Russia with technology and equipment that could be used for military operations. It must be noted that we are not aware of any machines being used or dealt with any sanctioned entities or individuals," the company had said in a filing.

11

After tractors and farm equipment, drones are now transforming the way farming is undertaken in India by offering solutions to several challenges faced by farmers today.

With a fleet of about 7.000 drones deployed in this sector, the Indian agricultural drone market, currently valued at \$145.4 million, is expected to reach \$631.4 million by 2030, growing at CAGR of 28.1%. said Agnishwar Jayaprakash, founder and CEO of Garuda Aerospace, a key player in this segment.



Agnishwar Jayaprakash

He said the factors fueling this growth include labour shortage for spraying pesticides and applying fertilizers, precision and efficiency by drones in such activities at far lower cost, government support and training programes and increased awareness.

'Explosive' growth

"The Indian agricultural drone market is poised for explosive growth. Drones are set to become an indispensable tool for Indian farmers, ensuring a more efficient, sustainable, and profitable agriculture in

the future," he said. "With over 10 lakh flight hours, 2,500 drones sold, and six DGCA approvals, Garuda Aerospace leads the nation in drone utilisation, particularly in agriculture. We have captured Drone as a Service (DAAS) model," he said. "Our focus on indigenisation, affordable drone solutions, securing government subsidies, and partnerships with global giants termed the allegations as like Lockheed Martin and Thales has helped. We are positioned as a key player in shaping the future of

drone technology in India and beyond," he added. It is believed that drone adoption in Indian agriculture will reach 80% from about 1% now within the next 5-7 years.

A section of Akasa Air pilots has raised concerns about alleged training and safety issues at the airline and sought the intervention of the civil aviation ministry, while the carrier

untrue. Akasa Air, which has been flying for over two years, had faced pilot issues earlier also, and this time, the section of the pilots has also claimed that 84 pilots have resigned on one-day notice.

"We categorically deny these allegations as base-

In October, the DGCA imposed a ₹30 lakh fine on Akasa Air for lapses in crew training. PTI

less and untrue. Nor do they represent the views of Akasa pilots," an airline spokesperson said in a statement on Saturday.

Akasa Air also said that

and during this period, it faction, highlighting the efhas recorded an annualfectiveness of our supporised attrition of less than tive culture. for this employee "This dedication is

further evidenced by the group. minimal number of pilots In a letter dated Decemseeking opportunities outber 11, written to Civil Aviaside of Akasa Air throughtion Minister K. Rammohan Naidu, the section of out 2024," it added. In October, the aviation the pilots has sought an independent probe into the regulator Directorate Genmanagement eral of Civil Aviation airline's practices, training meth-

ods and safety standards. Seeking to counter the allegations, Akasa Air, in the statement, also said its monthly employee survey reveals that pilots, among all employee groups, have

(DGCA) imposed a fine of ₹30 lakh on Akasa Air for certain lapses in the training of crew. Akasa Air has a fleet of 26 planes and flies to 27

destinations, including five overseas cities.

German lens maker Zeiss eyes double-digit growth in India vision-care business

N. Anand

CHENNAI

German lens maker Zeiss India is hopeful of posting double-digit growth in its vision care business during the current fiscal, said a top executive.

"For the past five years, we have been posting double-digit growth. We are confident of posting double digit growth this fiscal too," Zeiss India Vision Care business head for India and neighbouring markets Rohan Paul said in an interaction.

Mr. Paul was in the city to open the Zeiss first Vision Centre in Chennai/Tamil Nadu and 12 nationwide. Most of the Vision

YK



Zeiss India, partnering Image Optical Company, opened a Vision Care Centre in Chennai

Centres were located in the south. The company is planning to open more Vision Centres in the metros

and tier-II cities. However,

Mr. Paul was not willing to

disclose further details.

The company is planning to open more Vision Centres in the metros and tier-II cities

In Chennai, Zeiss in collaboration with Image Optical Company has opened the first Vision Care Centre in Chennai Phoenix Mall. The Vision Centre is owned and operated by Image Optical while diagnostics tools are supplied

by Zeiss. "We don't own any stores in India. We also have one Vision Centre operating in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka," according to Mr. Paul.

AGI Greenpac opens office in Dubai

N. Ravikumar HYDERABAD

Packaging products company AGI Greenpac expanded its global footprint with inauguration of its regional office in Dubai recently to position itself better to serve customers in West Asia and capitalise on the region's growing demand for high-quality packaging solutions.

The glass packaging sector in West Asia is projected to reach \$12.44 billion by 2029, growing at a CAGR of 5.41%. Food and beverage sectors are largest consumers followed by pharma and personal care, creating an ideal environment for AGI Greenpac's high-quality, durable glass packaging and security caps and closure products, the company said.

'AI is rapidly transforming the Indian security industry'

Lalatendu Mishra MUMBAI

The Indian security sector is rapidly transforming, driven by technological advancements and evolving threats, industry executives and experts said.

Artificial intelligence (AI)-powered solutions are revolutionising security systems, while strategic partnerships are fostering innovation in critical areas like quantum technology and cybersecurity, they said. With growing demand for advanced security solutions, the domestic market is expanding, positioning Indian companies as global leaders through their technological expertise and manufacturing prowess, they pointed out.

"The global security industry is valued at \$120 bilAI enhances the functionality of cameras by offering real-time monitoring, and proactive alerts

lion, growing at 8% CAGR annually until 2030. As security becomes an essential focus for governments, institutions and private sectors alike, the demand is set to increase exponentially in the coming years," pointed out Shashank Sambyal, zonal head for the north and east region at Godrej Enterprises.

"Government regulations like Standardisation Testing & Quality Certification (STQC), are strengthening industry standards, ensuring secure data management," Mr. Sambyal said.

Mamata Machinery fixes OFS price band at ₹230-243

Mamata Machinery Ltd. has announced the offer for sale (OFS) of its equity shares in the price band of ₹230 to ₹243 per share.

The company is offering for sale 73.82 lakh shares of promoter shareholders.

At the upper price band, the size of the issue is estimated at ₹179 crore.

Bids will open on December 19 and the issue will close on December 23.

Bids can be made for a minimum of 61 shares and 61 shares thereafter.

A discount of ₹12 per equity share is being offered to eligible employees.

imately ₹9,000 crore, growing at rate of 30% annually. The potential for further expansion is immense, and Indian brands are gaining global attention as the world increasingly looks towards India for surveillance solutions." 'Demand for cameras' "The integration of AI technologies is revolutionising

the industry. AI enhances

the functionality of came-

ras by offering real-time

alerts, and data analytics.

We are also witnessing

how the demand for came-

ras has expanded beyond

traditional security appli-

cations," he added.

proactive

monitoring,

M.A. Johar, president of strategic business at CP Plus, said, "The CCTV surveillance sector in India is currently valued at approx-<u>Lalatendu Mish</u>ra MUMBAI

World

WASHINGTON

Time has come for U.S. to act on Dhaka: Congressman Thanedar



Raising the issue of attacks on minority Hindus in Bangladesh, Indian-American Congressman Shri Thanedar has said that the time has come for the U.S. Congress to act. "The time has now come... every possible tool in our hands needs to be used to ensure that such atrocities in Bangladesh stop right away," he said. PTI

BRASÍLIA

Brazil ex-Defence Minister arrested as part of coup plot probe: police



Brazilian authorities on Saturday arrested Braga Netto, a former Defence Minister and close ally of ex-President Jair Bolsonaro, as part of an investigation into an alleged coup plot, a police source said. Brazil's Federal Police said it had detained "people who would be obstructing" the investigation. AFP

WASHINGTON

Trump calls for end to 'spring forward, fall back' clock changes



President-elect Donald Trump said on Friday he would work to end the "inconvenient" custom of moving clocks forward one hour every spring, which he said was imposing a financial burden on the U.S. "The Republican Party will use its best efforts to eliminate Daylight Saving Time," Mr. Trump posted on Truth Social. AFP

WASHINGTON

Pelosi undergoes hip replacement surgery in Germany after a fall



Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had hip replacement surgery on Saturday at a U.S. military hospital in Germany after falling while at an event in Luxembourg with other members of Congress. Ms. Pelosi, 84, "is well on the mend," said Ian Krager, a spokesperson for the California Democrat, in a statement. AP

Georgia chooses far-right loyalist as its new President

Mikheil Kavelashvili, known for his vehement anti-West diatribes, is the leader for a five-year term; Opposition denounces the poll as 'illegitimate'; sitting President Zurabishvili refuses to step down

Agence France-Presse TBILISI

eorgia's ruling par-ty on Saturday in-stalled a far-right lovalist as President in a controversial election process, amid a deepening constitutional crisis and weeks of mass pro-EU protests.

The Black Sea nation has been in turmoil since the governing Georgian Dream party claimed victory in contested October parliamentary elections. Its decision last month to delay European Union membership talks ignited a

fresh wave of mass rallies. An electoral college, controlled by the ruling Georgian Dream party and boycotted by the Opposition, elected Mikheil Kavelashvili with 224 votes as the country's next figurehead leader for a five-year term, central election commission chair Giorgi Kalandarishvili said.

The Opposition has denounced Saturday's election as "illegitimate" and



Crisis deepens: An electoral college controlled by the Georgian Dream party elected Mikheil Kavelashvili with 224 votes. REUTERS

popular figure among prot-

esters, who view her as a

beacon of Georgia's Euro-

vote, Ms. Zurabishvili

called it "a parody. It will

be an event entirely devoid

of legitimacy, unconstitu-

tional and illegitimate," she

Opposition groups ac-

cuse Georgian Dream of

rigging the October 26 par-

liamentary vote, backslid-

ing on democracy and

told a press conference.

Ahead of Saturday's

pean aspirations.

Salome Zurabishvili remains the country's sole legitimate leader.

Pro-Western Zurabishvili – who is at loggerheads with Georgian Dream has refused to step down and is demanding new parliamentary elections, paving the way for a constitutional showdown.

On Saturday morning, protesters began gathering outside the Parliament building - which was cordoned off by police ahead of a rally scheduled

network. The Ukraine mili-

Saturday morning that Ky-

"It is one of the largest

is part of a "military indus-

trial complex" that sup-

there were no casualties in

Russian territory.

General Staff said.

the attack.

moving Tbilisi closer to for the evening. Russia – all at the expense A former dipl of the Caucasus nation's constitutionally mandated

bid to join the EU. Mr. Kavelashvili, 53 the sole candidate for the largely ceremonial Presidential post - is known for his vehement anti-West diatribes and opposition to LGBTQ rights.

Georgian Dream scrapped direct Presidential elections in 2017.

With Ms. Zurabishvili refusing to leave office, Opposition lawmakers boycotting Parliament, and protests showing no signs of abating, the legitimacy of Mr. Kavelashvili's election has been undermined from the outset.

On Friday, Amnesty International said protesters had faced "brutal dispersal tactics, arbitrary detention and torture". There have also been raids on the offices of Opposition parties and arrests of their leaders.

Washington has imposed fresh sanctions on Georgian officials, barring entry for around 20 people accused of "undermining democracy in Georgia", including ministers and par-

UN envoy warns against Syria collapse at crisis talks

Agence France-Presse AQABA

A UN envoy on Saturday urged foreign powers to work to avoid a collapse of vital Syrian institutions following the downfall of leader Bashar al-Assad, as diplomats gathered in Jordan for a conference on the crisis.

Geir Pedersen, the UN's special envoy for Syria, also backed a "credible and inclusive" political process to form the next government as he met U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

"We need to make sure that state institutions do not collapse, and that we get in humanitarian assistance as quickly as possible," Mr. Pedersen said.

Syria war monitor reports Israeli hits on military sites

Agence France-Presse BEIRUT

A Syria war monitor said Israel launched strikes early on Saturday targeting military sites in Damascus and its countryside, in the latest such raids since rebels brought down Bashar al-Assad almost a week ago.

"Israeli strikes destroyed a scientific institute" and other related military facilities in Barzeh, in northern Damascus, and targeted a "military airport" in the capital's countryside, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Strikes also targeted "Scud ballistic missile warehouses" and launchers in the Qalamun area, as well as "rockets, depots and tunnels under the



A fighter of the ruling Syrian body inspects the damage at a military site after an Israeli strike in Damascus on Saturday. REUTERS

mountain", according to the Britain-based Observatory.

The Observatory said several rounds of bombardment targeted "military sites of the former regime forces, as part of destroying what is left of the future Syrian Army's capabilities".

Since Mr. Assad's fall, Israel has launched hundreds of strikes against Syrian military sites, targeting everything from chemical weapons stores to air defences. Israel also seized a UN-patrolled buffer zone on the Syrian Golan Heights just hours after the rebels took Damascus.

Seven killed in Israeli strike on Gaza school +

Reuters CAIRO

At least seven Palestinians were killed and 12 wounded after an Israeli strike on a former school that was

ple in Gaza City, the civil emergency service said on Saturday.

The Israeli military is looking into the report, a spokesperson said. Earlier on Saturd

a school compound in Gaza City and that it had taken measures to reduce harm to civilians.

ing to medics. It was unclear whether the other fatalities were Hamas

The Palestinian Islamist group denies embedding its fighters among civilians

targeted Hamas militants who were operating within

fighters. The dead include

12

said the sitting President, Zurabishvili is a hugely

liamentarians

sheltering displaced peo-

Israeli military said it had

man and her baby, accord-

in Gaza.

Russia battles blaze after Ukraine claims strike on oil terminal

Agence France-Presse MOSCOW

Russian authorities said on Saturday that firefighters were battling a blaze caused by a drone attack in the western Oryol region after Ukraine said it struck a major oil terminal there.

Ukraine has been targeting fuel depots in Russia in retaliation for Moscow's bombardments that have wreaked massive damage on its power generation Fatal impact



The French Civil Security in Mayotte, one of the overseas departments of France, out of tackle impact of Cyclone Chido, which resulted in at least two deaths and extensive damage on Saturday. This cyclone is reported to be the most violent in the territory since 1934. AFP

U.S. has made 'direct contact' with Syria's HTS, claims Blinken

Agence France-Presse AQABA

The United States has made "direct contact" with Syria's victorious Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) rebels despite designating the group as terrorists, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Saturday, as he sought international unity on a peaceful transition.

"We've been in contact with HTS and with other

Iran confirms increase in IAEA

nuclear inspections at Fordo

reporters after talks on Syria in the Iordanian Red Sea resort of Agaba. He did not give details about the contact, but when asked if the U.S. reached out directly, he said: "Direct contact yes."

parties," Mr. Blinken told

Mr. Blinken said that the contact was partly related to the search for Austin Tice, the United States journalist who was kidnapped in 2012 near the start of the brutal civil war.

OpenAI whistleblower found dead in his San Francisco flat

Press Trust of India NEW YORK

A 26-year-old Indian-origin former employee of the artificial intelligence giant OpenAI has died by suicide in San Francisco, authorities said.

Suchir Balaji was found dead inside his Buchanan Street apartment in San Francisco on November 26 on Thanksgiving Day.

The medical examiner's office determined the manner of death to be suicide and police officials said there is "currently, no evi-

YK



Suchir Balaji

dence of foul play". "The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) has identified the decedent as Suchir Balaji, 26, of San Francisco," the office's Ex-

ecutive Director David Serrano Sewell said.

OpenAI was "devastated" that Balaji had passed away, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

Balaji, known for whistleblowing against OpenAI, died three months after accusing the company of violating U.S. copyright law while developing ChatGPT, a generative artificial intel-

ligence programme. (Those in distress and seeking assistance may call TeleMANAS: 1-800-891-4416 / 14416 for confidential support)

'Philippines provoked trouble in South China Sea with U.S. backing'

Reuters BEIJING/MANILA

China accused the Philippines on Friday of having "provoked trouble" in the South China Sea with U.S. backing, which Manila denied, as tensions between the two neighbours continue.

"The Philippine side, with U.S. support and solicitation, has been stirring up trouble in many spots in the South China Sea," Wu Qian, a spokesperson for

China's Defence Ministry, said on its official WeChat account.

The Philippines denied China's claims. "Such statements coming from the Ministry of Defence are clear evidence of bullying," Jay Tarriela, Philippine Coast Guard spokesperson said. Beijing and Manila have

faced multiple confrontations this year over contested reefs and outcrops in the South China Sea, which China claims almost entirely.

Agence France-Presse TEHRAN

Iran confirmed on Saturday that it has allowed watchdog the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to increase the number of inspections it carries out into Tehran's nuclear programme, state media reported.

"We have increased capacity - it is natural that the number of inspections should also increase," the official IRNA news agency quoted the country's nuclear chief Mohammad Es-

•••

Iran insists on its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes

lami as saying.

"When we carry out nuclear activities, and where we deal with nuclear materials, changing the scale will naturally change the monitoring level," he added.

Mr. Eslami's comments came after an IAEA report said that Iran had agreed to increased monitoring.

Last week, the UN nuclear watchdog said Iran had revamped Fordo enrichment plant so it could "significantly increase the rate of production of uranium enriched up to 60%", close to the 90% needed to make a nuclear weapon.

Iran insists on its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and denies it is seeking an atomic weapons capability.

Britain, France and Germany had on Tuesday "condemned" Tehran's latest steps to expand its nuclear programme.



WAIT ENDS

Hendricks' century powers SA to series win over Pakistan



South Africa won a bilateral T20 series for the first time in more than two years when it chased down Pakistan's 206 at Centurion. Opener Reeza Hendricks scored his maiden T20 century, 117 off 63 balls. The scores: Pakistan 206/5 in 20 overs (Ayub 98 n.o.) lost to South Africa 210/3 in 19.3 overs (Hendricks 117). Toss: Pakistan.

HIGHS & LOWS

New Zealand wastes good start, finishes first day at 315/9



New Zealand squandered a good start, slumping from 172 for two to 231 for seven before rallying to 315 for nine at stumps on Saturday on day one of the third Test against England in Hamilton. The scores: New Zealand 315/9 in 82 overs (Latham 63) vs England. Toss: England.

DONATION

Neeraj's T-shirt inducted into WA's heritage collection



Neeraj Chopra is among the 23 athletes whose competition artefacts have been inducted into the World Athletics Heritage Collection, currently on display in the online 3D platform of the Museum of World Athletics (MOWA). Neeraj has donated the competition t-shirt he wore at the Paris Olympic Games this year.

TIGHT FINISHES

Titans gets the better of Giants: Dabang wins against Steelers

13



Telugu Titans rode on Pawan Sehrawat's 12 points to roar back from nine points down at one stage, to get the better of Gujarat Giants 36-32 in the PKL in Pune on on Saturday. Titans went one step closer to achieving qualification for the playoffs. Dabang Delhi beat Haryana Steelers 44-37 in the other match of the day.

Rain reigns on the opening day at the Gabba, steady start for Aussies

Openers Khawaja and McSweeney keep the India pacers at bay after Rohit elects to field; bad weather allows only 13.2 overs of play; more interruptions expected over the next few days; Jadeja, Akash replace Ashwin, Rana in Indian line-up

INDIA IN AUS

K.C. Vijaya Kumar BRISBANE

t was a Saturday of rains here at the Gabba. And it came in all types: drizzle, feathery, downpour and pitter-patter. The weather's liquid sense of wicked humour was on full view as the wet spell would pause for a while and just as the umbrellas were folded, the clouds would burst forth again.

This was tease and torment at its worst and it was more than enough to largely smother the third Test's opening day's play. A mere 13.2 overs were bowled, and that too was split by a rain break. Stepping in level at 1-1 in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series, Australia scored 28 for no loss with openers Usman Khawaja and Nathan McSweeney at the crease.

The morning dawned with yellow streaks and dark clouds Rohit Sharma sought his clues from the brooding skies and on winning the toss, elected to field. India effected two changes with Ravindra Ja-



Soggy affair: Rain had a huge say on the proceedings. AP

deja and Akash Deep replacing R. Ashwin and Harshit Rana. Soon it was time for Jasprit Bumrah to steam in as Khawaja was all eyes and a waiting bat.

Contrasting styles From the other end, Mohammed Siraj bowled a and soon the sun was out

down the leg, Khawaja was bowling a tighter line. ready with his flick. The Akash too probed on and around off-stump and crowd was settling in, applauding runs, booing Siraj McSweeney dallied once and just as the day seemed on the drive and then reto be warming up, the treated into his shell. But rains moved in. Australia the weather turned whim-19 for zero, Rohit watching sical, a downpour ensued, the skies, having a banana the players ran to the

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA - 1ST INNINGS Usman Khawaja (batting) 19 (47b, 3x4), Nathan McSweeney (batting) 4 (33b). Extras (lb-5): 5; Total (for no loss in 13.2 overs): 28.

INDIA BOWLING Bumrah 6-3-8-0, Siraj 4-2-13-0, Akash Deep 3.2-2-2-0. Toss: India.

the roof. Commentators scouted for their caffeine fix. Legends like Sunil Gavaskar, Allan Border and Ian Botham exchanged notes. Most had one eye on the skies and the other on the ground. For the fans, especially the Indians clad in blue, it was all about peering at the pavilion, trying to figure out if their sporting heroes were still there.

At 4.06 p.m., local time, umpires Richard Illingworth and Richard Kettleborough stepped out and met the curator and groundstaff on the sidelines. And at 4.14 p.m., play was called off for the remainder of the day. The se-

Garden City gets ready to host WPL mini auction

N. Sudarshan BENGALURU

A total of 120 names will go under the hammer to fill all of 19 slots at the Women's Premier League mini auction at the ITC Gardenia here on Sunday.

Among the 29 overseas players, England captain Heather Knight, West Indies all-rounder Deandra Dottin and South Africa's Lizelle Lee have chosen the highest reserve price of ₹50 lakh. Other notable names include England's Lauren Bell and Maia Bouchier, Australia's Darcie Brown and Lauren Cheatle, and South Africa's Nadine de Klerk - all in the ₹30 lakh bracket.

In the list of 91 Indians, there is expected to be keen interest for the likes of Sneh Rana (₹30 lakh), Poonam Yadav (30), Shubha Satheesh (30), Mansi Joshi (30) and Tejal Hasabnis (30). Recent performers in domestic cricket like 16-year-old G. Kamalini, Raghvi Bist, Jagravi Pawar and Nandini Kashyap may attract attention.

Delhi's Anshu Nagar, a 13-year-old left-arm seamer who caused a flutter in the women's Delhi Premier



Cricket carnival: 120 players will go under the hammer on Sunday. FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

Purse and slots remaining DC: Four slots (one overseas) (Purse remaining: ₹2.5 crore) GG: Four slots (two overseas) (Purse remaining: ₹4.4 crore) MI: Four slots (one overseas) (Purse remaining: ₹2.65 crore) RCB: Four slots (zero overseas) (Purse remaining: ₹3.25 crore) **UPW:** Three slots (one overseas)

(Purse remaining: ₹3.9 crore)

crore)

have a total kitty of ₹15 crore, up from ₹13.5 last year. Of this, Gujarat bottom-dweller Giants, both in 2023 and 2024, has the biggest purse of ₹4.4 crore. Delhi Capitals, twice runner-up, has the least amount to spend (₹2.5

Samaira Dharnidharka and Theertha Satish from the United Arab Emirates, and Scotland's Sarah Bryce can fill this slot for teams.

It will be particularly interesting to see how the Giants rebuild their bowling pack after having released Sneh Rana, Lea Tahuhu, Kathryn Bryce and Cheatle. Mumbai may look at some middle-order reinforcements to assist Harmanpreet Kaur and Nat Sciver-Brunt.

Defending champion Royal Challengers Bengaluru, the only side with no overseas vacancy, and Capitals appear more or less settled while UP War Unlike IPL, WPL teams riorz will hope for a quality can have as many as five foreplacement for Bell and a reign players in the playing couple of solid Indian bat-XI, provided one of them is ters. from an associate nation. Auction starts at 3 p.m.

touch short and wide and Khawaja pulled with panache. though, preferred to dig in. When Bumrah strayed

Virat Kohli had an animated chat with his teammates, Rohit and the rest McSweeney, listened, and on resumption, Siraj seemed to be

dressing room and an early lunch was taken.

The fans in the open parts of the stands dished out a muted Mexican wave and then huddled under

cond day will commence half an hour earlier at 9.50 a.m. (5.20 a.m. IST) but there is forecast for rains over the next few days.

League three months ago, is also in the mix.

For the third edition which is set to be held in early 2025, franchises will

Women in Blue seek a reboot against West Indies

Shayan Acharya NAVI MUMBAI

The last few days have been excruciating for India's women's cricket team. After suffering an embarrassing ODI series defeat against Australia earlier this week, the team had to travel for more than seven thousand kilometres - from Perth to Navi Mumbai - and gear up for a T20I home series against the West Indies, beginning at the DY Patil Stadium on Sunday.

A jet-lagged India captain Harmanpreet Kaur admitted on the eve of the series opener that it's difficult to prepare with such a short turnaround time. However, she evaded questions on the scheduling.

Having lost all the three games against Australia, Harmanpreet's captaincy has been under scanner and as the team aims to bounce back, it needs to fix the weak links.

Smriti Mandhana scored four centuries in a calendar year in women's ODIs, even though the overall batting department has failed to step up in crunch situations. "It's really tough when you are going through this patch.

YK (



Time running out? Harmanpreet would hope to be at her best. PTI

has won nine of its 13 T20Is

this year. Deandra Dottin's

return will boost the visit-

Harmanpreet Kaur (Capt.), Smriti

Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh

Sharma, Sajeevan Sajana, Raghvi

Mandhana, Nandini Kashyap,

(wk), Uma Chetry (wk), Deepti

Bist, Renuka Thakur, Priya

Mishra, Titas Sadhu, Saima

Yadav.

Williams.

Thakor. Minnu Mani and Radha

West Indies: Hayley Matthews

(Capt.), Shemaine Campbelle

(Vice-capt.), Aaliyah Alleyne,

Crafton, Deandra Dottin, Afy

Chinelle Henry, Zaida James

Qiana Joseph, Mandy Mangru,

Match starts at: 7:00 p.m. IST.

Fletcher, Shabika Gajnabi,

Ashmini Munisar, Karishma

Ramharack and Rashada

Shamilia Connell, Nerissa

ing team's confidence.

The teams (from): India:

While coming back from Australia, we had good talks on the flight and we discussed how to start afresh against the West Indies," Harmanpreet said.

India has won each of its last eight T20Is against the West Indies in the shortest format since November 2019, but now, the batters need to take more responsibility, in the absence of Shafali Verma, who was dropped despite scoring 531 runs in 20 T20Is this year. The captain, with two fifties in her last two T20I innings, needs to anchor

the middle-order. While Harmanpreet was confident that her team would bounce back in familiar conditions, it won't be easy as the West Indies

CHESS

P.K. Ajith Kumar SINGAPORE

Maurice Ashlev was one of the most familiar faces at the World Chess Championship.

The first move was made in each game after these words from him, as he stood between Ding Liren and D. Gukesh: "Let the game begin."

The American Grandmaster has been a commentator and presenter for major chess events for over three decades, but that isn't his biggest achievement.

In 1999, he became the first African-American person to become a Grandmaster.

Some 25 years later, of the 2000-odd Grandmasters in the world, only four are of African heritage.

Ashley is proud that he is the first African-American Grandmaster but is disappointed that not many have followed in his footsteps.

He would like to have the kind of influence on his community - and he is working hard towards his goal by supporting children - what Viswanathan



Ashley. P.K. AJITH KUMAR



Gukesh will be an inspiration for millions around the world

Anand has had on Indian chess.

Ashley comes from a sporting family. His sister Alicia is a former World boxing champion and brother Devon is a former World kick-boxing champion.

"But I never was tempted to be a boxer," said Ashley in an interview with The Hindu at World Resorts Sentosa. "I fell in love with playing chess and have been enjoying talking about the game."

His first big assignment as a commentator was the 1995 World championship

Gukesh could go down as a GOAT of the game: Ashley match between Anand and Garry Kasparov. That

match was played at the World Trade Centre. "And the first game was played on September 11," he said.

"That was a big match, as has been this one, despite the criticism from some about the number of draws and the Ding's blunder in the final game."

He said it was an absolutely thrilling match. "A blunder may have ended it, but that is chess," said the Jamaica-born Grandmaster. "It is the pressure, the intensity of the moment, having to live up to the expectations of millions of fans that could get to you."

Legacy

He believes Gukesh is going to create a legacy not just for India but for the "Even beyond world. chess, in fact, as you are getting such a young World champion," added Ashley.

"He will be an inspiration for millions around the world.'

Ashley believes Gukesh has the potential to be a much stronger player. "He is still growing, he still has years before he reaches his peak," said Ashely. "I think he could go down as a GOAT of the game".

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In focus: FIDE provided live coverage on its YouTube channel. FIDE

Gukesh-Ding match, a hugely followed event

<u>P.K. Ajith Kumar</u> SINGAPORE

The biggest tipping point for chess was the 1972 World championship between Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky. It was the match that actually put chess in focus on a global level for the first time.

Since the Cold War was at its peak, a contest between the United States and the former Soviet Union was going to be big news. As was the presence of Fischer, a genius to whom modern chess owes a lot; he brought money to the game, and made it popular beyond the erstwhile USSR.

Turning point

The latest World championship, which concluded at World Resorts Sentosa on Thursday, could be another turning point for

the mind game.

The live streams - on multiple websites and You-Tube channels - were watched by millions. Apart from FIDE's official channel, the match was aired live, among others, by chess24 and ChessBase India.

Raking up the numbers

Thursday's final game attracted a total of 38 lakh views on the ChessBase channel. On chess24 it was 14 lakh and on FIDE 6.4 lakh.

Besides the live streams. there were also recap videos of each match, by top players like World No.1 Magnus Carlsen, Hikaru Nakamura, which were popular.

The recap of the final game on Carlsen's newly launched Take Take Take app has been viewed 6.4 lakh times so far.



THE HINDU

Sport



India enters final with an easy win over Japan

Defending champion India asserted its dominance with a 3-1 victory over Japan to secure a place in the final of the Women's Junior Asia Cup hockey tournament in Muscat on Saturday. Mumtaz Khan (4th), Sakshi Rana (5th), Deepika (13th, in pic.) were on target in the first quarter, while Niko Maruyama scored a consolation goal for Japan in the 23rd minute. India will take on the winner of the second semifinal between China and South Korea in the title showdown.



Amir announces retirement from international cricket

Pakistan left-arm pacer Mohammad Amir bid adieu to international cricket on Saturday, months after coming out of retirement to play in the T20 World Cup. Amir, who was banned for five years between 2010 and 2015 on spot-fixing charges and was briefly jailed for his crime, had retired from all forms of international cricket in 2020. However, he changed his mind and returned to play in the T20 World Cup earlier this year.



Southee equals Gayle's tally of sixes in Test cricket

New Zealand's Tim Southee on Saturday equalled Chris Gayle's tally of sixes in Test cricket to move to joint-fourth spot in the all-time list, with his 98th hit over the fence in Hamilton Southee reached the milestone against England. Ben Stokes leads the all-time list with 133 sixes in 110 Tests so far, followed by Brendon McCullum (107, 101 Tests) and Adam Gilchrist (100, 96 Tests).

Mumbai holds all the aces ahead of the final against Madhya Pradesh

The Rahane-led batting line-up is firing on all cylinders and will be a force to reckon with in the summit clash; MP will hope its talisman Patidar can produce a magical innings when it matters the most

MUSHTAQ ALI TROPHY

Ashwin Achal BENGALURU

t will take a herculean effort from Madhya Pradesh to stop Mumbai in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy final at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Sunday.

Barring a loss to Kerala in the group stage, Mumbai has been an unstoppable force. No target is out of reach, as the batting lineup consisting of Prithvi Shaw, Ajinkya Rahane, Shreyas Iyer, Suryakumar Yadav, Shivam Dube and Suryansh Shegde can all pack a mighty punch.

Opener Rahane, in particular, has been a standout success. The highest run-scorer of the tournament, Rahane has taken the game away in the PowerPlay with electric strokeplay. Shegde, meanwhile, has emerged as a

fine finisher, going at a tournament-high strikerate of 256.7. New ball bowlers Mohit

Avasthi and Shardul Thakur have come good with 13 wickets each. Madhya Pradesh de-

pends heavily on Rajat Patidar to produce a magical knock. The Royal Challengers Bengaluru batter has four fifties in nine matches, including an unbeaten 29ball 66 against Delhi in the semifinal here.

Patidar relies on Harpreet Singh for company in the middle-order. A stable presence, Harpreet provides the ideal foil for the attacking Patidar.

Venkatesh Iyer has moved down the order in this tournament and could be called into action early in the event of a collapse.

MP's left-arm spinner Kumar Kartikeya is the second-highest wicket-taker of the tournament, even if his efficiency has dipped in the knockout stages.



Aggressive bunch: Madhya Pradesh will have to make sure that the likes of Rahane and Shreyas don't run away with the game. K. MURALI KUMAR

India men finish fifth, women seventh in World squash team c'ship

<u>Sports Bureau</u>

India men defeated Hong Kong 2-0 to finish fifth while the women's team downed France 2-1 to be placed seventh at the World squash team championships in Hong Kong on Saturday.

Best ever

This is the best finish ever for the men's team and the best finish since 2012 for the women's team at the tournament.

The results: Men (fifth place play-off):

India bt Hong Kong 2-0 (Abhay Singh bt Tsz Kwan Lau 12-10, 11-7, 11-4; Velavan Senthilkuma bt Henry Leung 12-10, 8-11, 5-11, 11-1, 11-8).

Women (seventh place play-off): India bt France 2-1 (Akanksha Salunkhe bt Marie Stephan 12-10, 11-9, 11-0; Nirupama Dubey lost to Enora Villard 11-0, 11-3, 11-5; Anjali Semwal bt Lauren Baltavan (Fra) 6-11, 11-8, 5-11, 14-12, 11-7).

Late Jota goal salvages a draw for Liverpool

EURO LEAGUES

Reuters LIVERPOOL

Liverpool's Diogo Jota bagged a last-gasp equaliser to salvage a breathless 2-2 Premier League draw for the 10-man Reds at Anfield on Saturday, with Arne Slot's men twice roaring back from a goal down. Liverpool remains top

of the table on 36 points and with a game in hand after the postponement of last weekend's match at Everton



Super sub: Jota, right, about to score Liverpool's second against Fulham, AP

side hammered Leicester (Cunha 72) lost to Ipswich Town 2

Bagan cements top spot with a stunning comeback

ISL

Amitabha Das Sharma KOLKATA

Alberto Rodriguez's piledriver in the last minute of injury-time helped Mohun Bagan Super Giant secure a stunning 3-2 comeback win over the visiting Kerala Blasters FC in a match week 12 ISL-11 encounter at the Salt Lake Stadium here on Saturday.

This was the fourth consecutive win for Mohun Bagan as it cemented its position on top of the current standings with 26 points from 11 matches. Mohun Bagan recovered from a sluggish start and secured the lead off after an error by the Blasters goalkeeper Sachin Suresh, who spilled a long-ranger from host's defender Asish Rai allowing Jamie Maclaren to tap home. The 33rd minute goal happened quite against the run of play as Blasters were dominant all over the park and had also missed two chances to move ahead in the first 10 minutes. The real action hap-



Starting things off: Jamie MaClaren scores Bagan's opener against Blasters. DEBASISH BHADURI

pened after the break as es bringing in Ashique Blasters got the equaliser Kuruniyan and Jason Cumoff a fine opportunistic mings. strike in the 51st minute The former set up the from Spanish forward Jilatter to bring up the equalmenez, who picked up his iser in the 85th minute beninth goal of the season. fore Rodriguez found the The visitor continued to winner with a rasping longpress for more and found ranger from top of the box the lead in the 77th minute in injury-time. off its centre-back Milos

Rashid, Nabi seal win for Afghanistan over Zimbabwe

Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi scored seven off three balls in the final over at Harare Sports Club to deliver a three-wicket T20I win over Zimbabwe on Saturday.

The scores: Zimbabwe 127 in 19.5 overs (Bennett 31, Rashid 4/27) lost to Afghanistan 128/7 in 19.3 overs (Omarzai 34); Toss: Afghanistan; PoM: Omarzai; PoS: Naveen-ul-Haq.

Robertson was shown a red card for a lunging tackle on Harry Wilson that denied an obvious goal-scor-

ing opportunity. Arsenal spurned several chances as it was held to a 0-0 draw at home by a defensively resilient Everton.

Newcastle United for-

ward Jacob Murphy netted

a goal in each half as his

Lee scored in each half against an uncharacteristi-The hosts dominated possession but lacked its cally poor Bayern, which is typical intensity and was now just four points clear after Bayer Leverkusen's often left frustrated by goalkeeper Jordan Pick-2-0 win at Augsburg. ford, who made a string of

James' Park.

The results:

Premier League: Arsenal 0 drew with Everton 0; Newcastle 4 (Murphy 30, 60, Guimaraes 47, Isak 50) bt Leicester 0; Wolves 1

ny his first league loss.

City 4-0 in their clash at St (Doherty 15-og, Taylor 90+4); Liverpool 2 (Gakpo 47, Jota 86) drew with Fulham 2 (Pereira 11, Two goals from Jae-sung Muniz 76) Lee took Mainz to a shock

Bundesliga: Augsburg 0 lost to 2-1 home win over Bayern Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Terrier 14, Munich on Saturday, hand-Wirtz 40): Mainz 2 (Lee 41, 60) bt ing coach Vincent Kompa-Bayern Munich 1 (Sane 87); Borussia M'Gladbach 4 (Kleindienst 1, Hack 26, Plea 43, 79) bt Holstein Kiel 1 (Gigovic 30). Serie A: Cagliari 0 lost to Atalanta

1 (Zaniolo 66) On Friday: La Liga: Valladolid 1 (Tuhami 20) bt Valencia 0. Serie A: Empoli 0 lost to Torino 1

(Adams 70). Bundesliga: Freiburg 3 (Kubler 42, 51, Gregoritsch 61) bt Wolfsburg 2 (Wind 75, Svanberg

83).

Drincic who made the The results: most of a glaring error by

Mohun Bagan 3 (Maclaren 33, Cummings 86, Rodriguez 90+5) bt Kerala Blasters 2 (Jimenez 51, Drincic 77)

At Bengaluru:

Bengaluru FC 2 (Williams 71, Pereyra Diaz 83) drew with FC Goa 2 (Jhingan 7, Tavora 66).

A competitive field for Tata Manipur upends defending champion Services Steel World 25K Kolkata

fine saves.

Sports Bureau KOLKATA

A competitive field, including the in-form defending champions Daniel Ebenyo and Sutume Kebede, poses a threat to event records on a flatter course and in cooler weather in the Tata Steel World 25K Kolkata to be held here on Sunday.

Ebenyo and Sutume are keen to run fast and lower their own event records, 1:11.13 and 1:18:47, in men's and women's events respectively and claim the winner's purse of \$15,000 each, and the record bonus of \$5,000.

Apart from the return of the defending champions for the world's richest 25K race, offering a total prize money of \$142,214, the participation of Olympic bronze medallist Benson

YK



Ebenyo and Kebede. FILE PHOTOS: SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP & AP

Kipruto has lifted the profile of the first World Athlet-

ics Gold Label event. The Indian field looks competitive too due to the presence of title holder Sawan Barwal, 5,000m and 10,000m National recordholder Gulveer Singh, former champion Abhishek Pal in the men's section and TCS World 10K winner Sanjivani Jadhav and Delhi

half-marathon winner and

local girl Lili Das in the wo-

men's section.

The Indian winners will get ₹3 lakh each. An event record will fetch an additional ₹1 lakh. The event records for In-

dians stand in the names of Olympian steeplechaser Avinash Sable (1:15:17) and L. Suriya (1:26:53) in men's and women's categories respectively.

Altogether 20,537 runners have registered for the event.

SANTOSH TROPHY

Sports Bureau HYDERABAD

Manipur shocked defending champion Services 1-0 in the inaugural match of the Santosh Trophy national football championship at the Deccan Arena (Aziznagar) here on Saturday.

In other matches, West Bengal recorded a 3-1 win against Jammu & Kashmir, which is playing in the final round for the first time since 2015-16, while host Telangana salvaged a oneall draw against Rajasthan.

In the biggest upset of the day, last year's semifinalist Manipur won a closely-fought contest with the match-winner coming through Shunjanthan Ragui in the 96th minute with



Intense battle: Manipur and Services players vie for possession. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

a perfectly-placed header that looped into the top corner following Zahir's

giving Rajasthan the lead in the 53rd minute.

Tejavath Sai Karthik netted the equaliser.

Manipur 1 (Shunjanthan Ragui) bt Services 0.

Rajasthan 1 (Amit Godara) drew with Telangana 1 (Tejavath Sai Kartik).

West Bengal 3 (Robi Hansda, Naro Hari Shrestha, Bikram Pradhan) bt J & K 1 (Arun Nagial).

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Amitabha Das Sharma debut season.

Will Mohammedan

haul itself up from

Mohammedan Sporting will hope to regroup and haul itself up from the bottom of the standings when it hosts the reigning cup winner Mumbai City FC in a match week 12 fixture of the ISL-11 at the Kishore Bharati Stadium here on

the bottom?

Mohun Bagan 'keeper

Visha Kaith to send home a

Kerala appeared to be

cruising to a win when Mo-

hun Bagan coach Jose Moli-

na made a couple of chang-

corner.

KOLKATA

Sunday. This will be a match of contrasting situations as Mumbai City comes in on a comparatively strong run of form. This will be the first meeting in the tournament between the two sides and Mumbai City FC has a better record when facing new opponents in the ISL, while Mohammedan SC is still searching for its first home victory in its

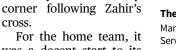
It has played five at home so far and have only faced disappointment because of its inability to keep a clean sheet in its own backyard.

Mumbai City is currently ninth with 14 points from 10 matches and will be looking to regain its winning touch (after playing its last match goalless against Odisha FC) to better its position in the standings.

Being one of most successful teams in the last four seasons of ISL, Mumbai City will try to take inspiration from its highly favourable record in Kolkata where it lost just once in its last nine outings.In the remaining eight it has recorded an impressive six wins and two draws.

The results:

In the dying minutes,



was a decent start to its campaign to rally from a deficit with Amit Godara

TAMIL NADU



Arming women with higher education

The monthly stipend scheme of the Tamil Nadu government – *Pudhumai Penn* – has come as a gift for many girl students who otherwise might have missed the opportunity to take up higher education. Through this initiative, the govt. has aimed to bring about a transformative behavioural change. **Sangeetha Kandavel** and **Meghna M.** investigate the extent of benefits the scheme confers

or 21-year-old S. Pandiyammal, a native of Theni district, higher education would have remained an unattainable dream but for timely support. She was married at the age of 19 and moved to Coimbatore, her husband's hometown, and soon had a child. "When I expressed my desire to continue my education, my in-laws agreed because of the ₹1,000 monthly financial support from the Pudhumai Penn scheme. Without it. I would not have pursued my degree and would have remained financially dependent on my husband. This scheme now covers all my college expenses and even allows me to have some money in hand for personal needs," said Ms. Pandiyammal, now a third-year B.A. Tamil Literature student at the Government Arts and Science College for Women in Coimbatore.

It will be

better if the

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offered to

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For 20-year-old M. Devadarshini, becoming a Chartered Accountant had been a long-standing aspiration. However, as she entered Class 12, it became clear that pursuing her dream would be unfeasible due to the high examination cost. When she sought support from her parents, they informed her that they could only afford to fund one basic degree. Her father, a painter with a modest income, and her mother, a homemaker, were unable to provide further financial assistance. Additionally, her brother, who recently completed his degree, had assumed responsibility for the family's loans and was unable to support her education. "I had nearly given up on my dream, but then I learned about the Pudhumai Penn scheme through my college," said Ms. Devadarshini, who is currently in the third year of her B.Com course at a government-aided college in Tiruvallur district. "For the past two years, I have been saving money to cover the costs of my CA exam. While I won't be able to afford coaching, I plan to self-study and at least pay the exam fees while working part-time to support my family," she said.

Pudhumai Penn scheme

YK

The Tamil Nadu government launched the Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Higher Education Assurance Scheme, also known as the *Pudhumai Penn* scheme, to enhance the enrolment of girls from government schools in higher education institutions. Former Finance Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan, who is now the Minister for Information Technology and Digital Services, announced this scheme during his Budget speech in the Assembly on March 18, 2022.

Under this scheme, all girl students who studied from Classes 6 to 12 in government schools would receive ₹1,000 per month, which would be deposited directly into their bank accounts until the completion of their undergraduate, diploma, ITI, or any other recognised course. By offering financial support, the State government aims to bring about a behavioural change by reducing the incidence of early marriage, increasing enrolment in higher education, and more importantly, retaining girl students in higher education.

According to data from a recent study carried out across Tamil Nadu by the State Planning Commission, around 2,30,820 girl students benefited from this scheme as on May 2023.

According to the study, among 38 districts, Salem had the highest number of students who benefited from the *Pudhumai Penn* scheme, accounting for 17,032 (7.38%) beneficiaries. Salem was followed by Namakkal with 13,312 (5.77%), Dharmapuri with 11,915 (5.16%), Chennai with 11,468 (4.97%), Tiruvannamalai with 11,146 (4.83%), and Coimbatore with 10,777 (4.67%) beneficiaries.

Higher Education Minister Govi Chezhiaan said the scheme had helped girl students in rural pockets. He pointed out that even students from the remotest villages benefited, and many children from single-parent households also received support through the scheme. He further highlighted that efforts were under way to raise

awareness and educate more students about *Pudhumai Penn*. Minister for School Education Anbil Ma-

Students say the money from the scheme has taught them how to manage their finances and budget their spending efficiently

hesh Poyyamozhi emphasised the critical importance of educating children, with a particular focus on empowering girls. He added that since the launch of this scheme by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, enrolments in schools had increased, and dropout rates had decreased.

He also said the School Education Department, in collaboration with headmasters, was providing career guidance to students regarding higher education opportunities. "We organise field visits to colleges for school students, where we showcase the available facilities, including laboratories and sports grounds. During these visits, we engage with students to understand their preferred courses of study after school, which motivates them to aspire for higher education," Mr. Anbil Mahesh said. Since its launch, the scheme has led to a 34% increase in the enrolment of girl students in higher education, he added.

"With the rising cost of commodities and essentials, managing educational expenses was a struggle. However, now that my daughter's education is taken care of, I can focus on supporting my family," said S. Mani, an autorickshaw driver from Chennai, whose family had benefited

from the scheme. Ani Vishalini, a second-year B.A. Tamil student in Tiruchi, said the Pudhumai Penn aid had come as a blessing and also helped her with household expenses. She further hoped to pursue a postgraduate degree. F. Sindhuja, a third-year B.A. Tamil student of Nagapattinam Government Arts and Science College in Sellur, said: "I get the money by the 10th of every month and give it to my mother, who uses it for gold savings."

S. Malar, a second-year chemistry student at the Government Arts College, Salem, said she used the money to

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purchase books. In Madurai, M. Divya Bharathi, a first-year B.B.A. student and K. Anushya, a second-year B.Sc. student, shared that the money deposited into their bank accounts had taught them how to manage their finances and budget their spending efficiently.

Access to banking

The Pudhumai Penn scheme has been instrumental in empowering girl students by also helping them open bank accounts and gain knowledge about the banking ecosystem. Banks have also benefited with many students opening new accounts. Indian Bank said 74,700 beneficiaries of the Pudhumai Penn scheme hold accounts with them. Additionally, a total of 50,000 RuPay cards were issued to the beneficiaries, further enhancing their access to financial services. When asked about the challenges, the bank said: "Aadhaar seeding in the beneficiary accounts is a herculean task, which is a hurdle in direct transfer through the Aadhaar Payment Bridge system." In cases where the Aadhaar would be seeded to one account and the beneficiary had given the same Aadhaar for other accounts held by them, the amount is credited to the old account, defeating the objective of targeted money transfers, it added. "Also, some beneficiaries were minors, and the accounts were opened by their guardians years ago. Banks had to help the beneficiaries realign the accounts in order for them to receive the benefits," it said.

Naseem John, principal of the Government Arts and Science College in Kangayam, said the scheme had motivated dropouts to rejoin the college as it eased the financial burden on them. "An increasing number of students are enrolling in certificate courses that interest them. The availability of additional funds is allowing them to explore various options," said G. Kalvikkarasi, principal of the Dharmamurthi Rao Bahadur Calavala Cunnan Chetty's Hindu College.

Social activists, however, have flagged that ₹1,000 is not enough for the students. "It will be better if the government offered to cover the entire fee instead of just providing ₹1,000. For many, it's like pocket money unless the student is from a very poor background," said Sheelu Francis, president of the Tamil Nadu Women's Collective. However, experts agree that the scheme has made a significant contribution to the overall empowerment of women in Tamil Nadu.

(With inputs from Sabari M. from Salem, Sibi Sreevathson T.C. from Coimbatore, B. Tilak Chandar from Madurai, Nahla Nainar and M. Nacchinarkkiniyan from Tiruchi)

IEGHALAYA



Students on a hunger strike that was called off after 16 days in November, at the North Eastern Hill University in Shillong, Meghalaya. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold

The North Eastern Hill University in Shillong, Meghalaya, faces a crisis as students, teachers, and non-teaching staff allege that the Vice Chancellor is making biased appointments and hindering tribal representation; while a committee probes the turmoil, Rahul Karmakar reports on the university's cultural and political tensions

> um Sohpetbneng, lording over the man-made Umiam lake about 20 kilometres short of Meghalaya's capital Shillong, is one of the most revered The peaks for the matrilineal Khasi tribe. Sohpetb-Registrar neng, meaning 'navel of heaven', is believed to started have had a mythical umbilical cord connecting interfering heaven and earth before human pride and sin sein academic vered the link. Every second Sunday of February, the Khasi community, adhering to the indigenous matters, and faith, trek 7 km to the peak, pledging to keep writing their unique traditions alive. comments

Everything else that bears the peak's name in on the files



of teachers

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PRASENJIT

Professor of

NEHUTA vice

president

Philosophy and

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BISWAS

The NEHUTA also petitioned Nirupam Chakma, a member of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, saying in the letter: "He [Shukla] has attempted to completely change the harmonious tribal, ethnic, and other Indian character of NEHU into a monolith of a Hindu Brahmanical university."

Questioning appointments

The NEHUTA says the Vice Chancellor appointed Col. Singh about a year ago as the Controller of Examinations by keeping out qualified and academically experienced candidates of ethnic origins from Meghalaya. It says Singh did not have any experience of working in a college or university and his "serious lack of understanding of the functioning of the university system" led to delays in the declaration of results of the CUET exams. After six months into his job, Singh was made the Registrar and he appointed himself the supervisor of the university's CUET centre. "The Registrar started interfering in academic matters, and writing comments on the files of teachers and researchers despite not being qualified to do so," NEHUTA vice president and Professor of Philosophy, Prasenjit Biswas says. He adds that Gupta was brought from a private institution and made the Deputy Registrar (Academics) without any qualification to handle the responsibility. "He made it difficult for the teachers and non-teaching staff to work and created a suffocating scenario for usual welfare activities by not clearing bills, including leave travel concessions," says Biswas. Both the students' and teachers' organisations claim that Shukla denied qualified tribal teachers their right to be appointed as Deans. They allege he appointed 87 teachers in 2023, most non-tribal and from outside Meghalaya. This led to court cases for procedural lapses and bias towards candidates from northern India. Their claim is that Shukla constituted selection committees with members outside of the empanelled list approved by the statutory bodies of the NEHU; that he arbitrarily fixed a two-year probation period for newly appointed tribal faculty members in violation of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Regulation of 2018. This denied pay fixation and service protection to the newly recruited tribal teachers.

He allegedly also did not fill up vacancies in some departments like Botany and vetoed NE-HU's research collaborations with foreign universities such as Heidelberg, Kyoto, Bologna, and Indiana, and scotched a move to set up an offshore campus in Thailand's Chiang Mai. They say the V-C stayed away from the university often, resulting in denying promotions to 18 senior professors who retired without getting their dues, a NEHU-TA dossier on the Vice Chancellor revealed.

The non-teaching staff, too, have been unhappy with the V-C's style of functioning. The confrontation began with the appointment of Rohit Prasad as a technical officer from outside the State in 2022, without any advertisement, constitution of a screening committee, interview, or terms and conditions of employment. The appointment was cancelled in 2023 after a Joint Action Committee (JAC) of the students, teachers, and non-teaching staff protested the violation of the model cadre recruitment rules for non-teaching posts of Central universities.

A day before the students started their indefinite hunger strike on November 5, the NEHU Non-Teaching Staff Association went on an indefinite pen-down strike.

"There has been an inordinate delay in the recruitment and promotion of the non-teaching staff. According to the UGC norms, the employment ratio of the teaching to non-teaching staff should be 1:1.1. Our strength is now 250, much less than the sanctioned posts that need to be filled up for academic excellence," the association's president W.R. Synrem says. The NEHU website claims the teaching faculty strength is more than 300.

spread false and fabricated news about NEHU with the "aim to harm the university's reputation... to gain political advantage and enter electoral politics."

He also accused a coterie of NEHUTA members of hatching a plan in September to "create chaos on the campus". He said they disrupted a crucial Academic Council meeting, instigate the students to lock the offices of the "rightfully appointed" Registrar and Deputy Registrar (Academics), and push the non-teaching staff association to revolt against him. He singled out NEHUTA president Lakhon Kma for his political ambition, referring to his failed attempt to bag the Shillong Lok Sabha seat in April as an Independent. He also said the NEHUTA vice president has a "strong leftist ideology" while trashing theories that he toes the RSS-BJP line.

The NEHUTA trashed Shukla's letter as a web of lies spun to cover his administrative blunders and autocratic style of functioning.

Community support

NEHU initially catered to Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland apart from Meghalaya. Its jurisdiction over the other three States ceased after the establishment of their respective universities over the years. Largely specific to Meghalaya today, its activities are divided unequally between two campuses one in Shillong and the other in Tura, the headquarters of the State's western half dominated by the Garo tribe. The 1,225-acre Shillong campus, a "gift from the Meghalaya government" as per the NEHU website, is a community reserve forest within the ter-

Meghalaya is expected to be sacred. Occupying an uneven glade surrounded by pine trees, the Sohpetbneng Hostel is no longer ethereal. It used to be a coveted accommodation for some 500 postgraduate students of the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) at Umshing-Mawkynroh on the outskirts of Shillong. Today, the hostel blocks stand like haunted houses, the walls and roofs covered with moss and an outgrowth of plants. Chhinlung, the adjoining hostel named after a mythological place believed to be the ancestral origin of the Mizo and Chin people, looks similar.

'The boarders of these two blocks were evacuated more than three years ago, after the buildings were marked unsafe. This sums up what's wrong with our university," says Ram Toi, adviser of the NEHU Students' Union (NEHUSU).

Students say the hostels fell into disrepair around the time Prabha Shankar Shukla took over from S.K. Srivastava as NEHU's Vice Chancellor, in July 2021. In the early 1990s, the university - the first Central institution in the Northeast and the oldest in Meghalaya – shifted to its present address from two prime locations in Shillong.

On November 5, 2024, the students temporarily locked the gates of the university to protest Shukla's alleged mismanagement. The crumbling infrastructure was not the only reason. The irregularities, they say, made NEHU slide from the list of India's top 100 universities, from 59th spot on the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIFR) in 2021 to 66 in 2022 and 80 in 2023, before dropping off the list in 2024.

"In the past, we produced brilliant students who are occupying top positions in government and corporate jobs across the globe. A decade ago, we had our best NIFR ranking of 15," says Nirmalendu Saha, the Dean of Life Sciences. He has been asked to fill in for Shukla until a twomember inquiry committee constituted by the Education Ministry submits its report by December 13. Shortly after the hunger strike that was called off on the 16th day, Shukla and other administrative officials in the line of fire were asked to go on leave during the probe by the panel headed by former University Grants Commission Chairperson D.P. Singh.

The students were not the first to revolt against Shukla who they alleged hand-picked incompetent officials, including the Registrar, Colonel (retired) Omkar Singh; and Deputy Registrar (Academics) Amit Gupta. Weeks before the students went on strike demanding the removal of the trio, the NEHU Teachers' Association (NEHUTA) wrote to the Prime Minister's Office underscoring the need to save the academic atmosphere in the university by taking action against the Vice Chancellor.

YK



The poor condition of the hostels in North Eastern Hill University in Shillong, Meghalaya, causing those to be abandoned. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Right and left

Congress MLA Ronnie V. Lyngdoh says the graph of NEHU, as with a few other higher education institutions in the northeast, began nosediving after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power at the Centre. "There has been an attempt to place unqualified people in posts only because of their RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] and BJP backgrounds. NEHU should remain a centre for learning and academics, not a platform to bolster any political ideology," he says.

The Meghalaya unit of the BJP, a constituent of the State's coalition government, threw its weight behind the agitating stakeholders of the university but dismissed allegations that the RSS and BJP were behind the ongoing turmoil in NEHU. "A conclusion cannot be drawn when the matter is under investigation," senior BJP leader and the State's Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Minister, Alexander Laloo Hek says.

The JAC did not delve into Shukla's ideological background, but said NEHU needs a V-C with empathy and a track record of leadership. They want the person to have an understanding of the cultures of the tribes of the Northeast, most of who follow Christianity and indigenous faiths.

The NEHU fraternity said the rot in the university set in during the tenure of the previous V-C, whose administration ran from 2015 to 2021. Shukla said in his letter to the Principal Secretary of Higher Education in New Delhi on November 27: "Before my tenure, nearly 50% of the faculty positions at NEHU were vacant, which were significantly affecting the university's academic and research capabilities."

In his letter, Shukla attempted to debunk various accusations. He denied flouting guidelines to appoint administrative officials and said his "commitment to creating a positive atmosphere in teaching and learning" despite difficult conditions saw NEHU earning a "perfect score of 100" in the QS World University Rankings Asia 2025, one of only two Indian universities to achieve the feat. He attributed the low research output to the reliance on "a small group of dedicated faculty members" and "underperforming" teachers.

He said efforts to improve the low PhD graduation score of 18.14 (out of 40) were "often disrupted by strikes and interruptions" and blamed the "significant drop in NIRF ranking in the peer perception parameter" on some teachers who

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ritory of the dor-(traditional bar village council) of Mawlai town.

Under the Sixth Schedule, the Mawlai Town Dorbar wields constitutional authority and it stepped in only when the Vice Chancellor was non-responsive

The turmoil within NEHU spilt beyond its walls midway through the students' hunger strike when the Mawlai Town Dor-

bar declared Shuk-

la a persona non

grata. Herlambok

War, the *dorbar*'s

says,

president,

HERLAMBOK WAR President, Mawlai Town Dorbar

'The NEHU campus falls within the jurisdiction of our dorbar (area) and we do not want the Vice Chancellor to come back and further complicate things in the university," he says. He adds that much of Meghalaya's land, including the forest in which NEHU was established, is managed by the community and their dorbars.

"Under the Sixth Schedule, the Mawlai Town Dorbar wields constitutional authority and it stepped in only when the Vice Chancellor was non-responsive to appeals to address the grievances of the students who were falling sick with fasting," he says. He adds that the involvement of the local community was to help find an acceptable solution to the problem.

Besides the Mawlai Town Dorbar banning Shukla's entry into NEHU, the Meghalaya Indigenous Tribes Constitutional Rights Movement - a conglomeration of tribal village heads, women's groups, and civil society organisations - resolved to boycott him across Meghalaya. It conveyed its resolution in a letter to President Droupadi Murmu while seeking her intervention as the university's Visitor to help clear the mess in NEHU.

Shukla hinted at his detractors trying to take advantage of the Sixth Schedule. "As far as I know, NEHU is a Central university. The land had been transferred to it. So, Central rules will be applicable," he says. His priority is to ensure the postgraduate students and research scholars complete their assignments, he says. "I am an academician. I don't know what their [those against him] agenda is," he said.

The students, teachers, and non-teaching staff of NEHU feel reviving the university is tougher than the climb up the steep Sohpetbneng.

