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## INSIDE



**Trade deal is 'possible' with China: Trump**

**WASHINGTON**  
U.S. President Donald Trump suggested on Wednesday that a trade deal was "possible" with China — a key target in the U.S. leader's tariffs policy. In 2020, the U.S. had already agreed to "a great trade deal with China" and a new deal was "possible", Mr. Trump told presspersons aboard Air Force One. » PAGE 14

**'Infiltration down post-Bangladesh regime change'**

**NEW DELHI**  
Infiltration along the Bangladesh border has "gone down substantially" after the political developments in the neighbouring country in August 2024, Border Security Force (BSF) chief Daljit Singh Chawdhary said on Thursday. He further said the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) stood shoulder to shoulder with the BSF to maintain peace and tranquillity throughout the "crisis" period. » PAGE 4

**OTT platforms warned against 'obscene content'**

**NEW DELHI**  
Union Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry on Thursday cautioned over the top-streaming (OTT) platforms against streaming content prohibited by law, stressing the importance of age-based classification under IT (Intermediary Liability and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The warning follows the Supreme Court's suggestion for government action on obscene social media content. » PAGE 6

# SC stays Lokpal order on power over judges

Special Bench terms top anti-corruption ombudsman's interpretation 'very disturbing' as it passed an order giving itself jurisdiction to investigate complaints against High Court judges; Bench issues notice to the Centre, the Registrar of Lokpal and the complainant on whose plea the January 27 order was passed; court lists the case for March 18

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday stayed a Lokpal order bringing High Court judges under its jurisdiction, terming the top anti-corruption ombudsman's interpretation "very disturbing".

Taking *suo motu* cognisance of the January 27 Lokpal order, a Special Bench of Justices B.R. Gavai, Surya Kant and A.S. Oka, three senior judges of the Supreme Court and Collegium members, said it impacted the independence of the judiciary.

The Bench, in a brief hearing, was offered assistance by senior advocates Kapil Sibal and B.H. Marlapalle even as Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta appeared for the Union

government. The Bench issued notice to the Centre, the Registrar of Lokpal and the complainant on whose plea the January 27 order was passed. The court listed the case on March 18. It enjoined the complainant from disclosing the name of the High Court judge in question and ordered the former to keep the contents of the complaint confidential.

Mr. Sibal said the court sorely needed to lay down the law on this issue. Mr. Mehta categorically submitted that High Court judges would never fall within the ambit of Lokpal.

**'Public servants'**  
The order of the Lokpal, chaired by a former Supreme Court judge, Justice A.M. Khanwilkar, was based on a complaint that an Additional High Court

## Redefining jurisdiction

Lokpal's January 27 order defines the rules and conditions under which it will inquire into complaints against High Court judges

- SC judges are public servants under the Prevention of Corruption Act but are not public servants under the Lokpal Act

- The SC was 'established' by the Constitution. The HCs pre-existed the Constitution and are only 'recognised' by it

- A judge of an HC established by an Act of Parliament will come within the ambit of expression 'any person' in Section 14(1)(f) of the Lokpal Act

- There is a precondition to consult the Chief Justice of India before initiating, under Section 20 of the Lokpal Act, a preliminary inquiry into a complaint lodged against an HC judge

judge had influenced an Additional District Judge, and later another High Court judge, to decide in favour of a private company. It was alleged that the company had been a client of the judge during the latter's earlier years as an advocate.

In a 13-page order, the

Lokpal concluded that High Court judges were 'public servants' and came within the ambit of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act of 2013.

The anti-corruption body assumed jurisdiction to inquire or investigate complaints about High Court judges on the ground that,

unlike the Supreme Court, the High Courts in India were constituted by British Parliamentary Acts — Indian High Courts Act, 1861 and Government of India Act 1935 — and Letters Patent of the British Monarch. In fact, the High Courts pre-dated the Constitution, the Lokpal reasoned.

Article 214 of the Constitution, which said "there shall be a High Court for each State", had only "inherently recognised" the existence of the High Courts. The Constitution did not establish the High Courts, the Lokpal argued in the January 27 order. On the other hand, the Supreme Court was completely a child of the Constitution, the ombudsman noted.

A few days before the January 27 order, the Lokpal,

in a decision on January 3, had declared that it had no power over Supreme Court judges, including the Chief Justice of India.

In the January 3 order, the Lokpal had explained that the Supreme Court was not a "body" established by an Act of Parliament or financed or controlled by the Central government. It had observed that Supreme Court judges, including the CJI, even though "public servants" in terms of the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1988, were not amenable to the jurisdiction of the Lokpal.

**Argument 'too naive'**

But, the Lokpal, in its January 27 order, found the argument that a High Court judge was outside the ombudsman's jurisdiction, "too naive". The Lokpal

said a High Court judge came within the ambit of clause (f) of Section 14(1) of the 2013 Act.

A clause of Section 14 notes the Lokpal has jurisdiction over "any person who is or has been a chairperson or member or officer or employee in any body or Board or corporation or society or trust or autonomous body (by whatever name called) established by an Act of Parliament or wholly or partly financed by the Central government or controlled by it".

The term 'any person' in the clause would include a judge of a High Court established by an Act of Parliament.

In this case, the judge in question was serving in the High Court of a State reorganised by an Act of the Parliament, it pointed out.

## Final flourish



**Welcome break:** A man walks down a snow-covered road in Shopian district of Kashmir, on Thursday. After nearly two months of an unprecedented dry spell, the Kashmir Valley received some rain and snowfall, raising hopes for improved water availability. IMRAN NISSAR

## Microsoft unveils chip for quantum computing

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Microsoft has announced a new chip, called Majorana 1, that it said showed quantum computing is "years, not decades" away, joining Google and IBM in predicting that a fundamental change in computing technology is closer than believed.

Quantum computing holds the promise of carrying out calculations that would take today's systems millions of years and could unlock important discoveries in medicine, chemistry, and aerospace, among others.

The biggest challenge of quantum computing is that its fundamental building block — called a qubit — is fast but difficult to control and is prone to errors. Microsoft said its new Majorana 1 chip is less prone to these errors than rival designs.

The chip has been in the works for nearly two decades. Its supposed fault-tolerant abilities come from the properties of an exotic subatomic particle called the Majorana fermion, which has been hard to find since it was first theorised in the 1930s.

Microsoft believes Majorana qubits will prove less prone to inadvertent flips between ones and zeros than qubits created by other approaches.

Harvard University physics professor Philip Kim, who was not involved in Microsoft's research, called the chip an "exciting development".

However, some other independent experts have voiced concerns over the lack of conclusive proof that Majorana 1 works as Microsoft has claimed it does. (With inputs from agencies)

## Rekha Gupta takes charge as 9th Chief Minister of Delhi



Narendra Modi with Rekha Gupta and other Ministers during the oath ceremony in Delhi on Thursday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

**Satvika Mahajan**  
NEW DELHI

Bharatiya Janata Party's MLA Rekha Gupta took oath as the ninth Chief Minister of Delhi at the Ramlika Maidan on Thursday. A six-member Council of Ministers were also sworn in to office in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior BJP leaders.

Ms. Gupta will handle key portfolios such as Finance, Revenue, Women and Child Development, Services and Vigilance, and other unallocated departments.

The Cabinet comprises Parvesh Sahib Singh, who will handle the Public Welfare Department and Water; Ashish Sood, who will take charge of the Home, Power, Education and Urban Development portfolios; Manjinder Singh Sirsa, given charge of Food & Supplies, Forest Environment and Industries; Ravinder Indraj, who will look after Social Welfare, SC and ST Welfare, Cooperatives, and Elections; Kapil Mishra, who has been handed the Law and Justice, Labour, Employment and Tourism Departments; and Pankaj Singh who will handle Health and Family Welfare, Transport and Information Technology.

Hours after the new Chief Minister and Ministers

were sworn in, BJP leaders offered prayers at the Yamuna Ghat. Cleaning of the Yamuna is expected to be BJP's top priority during their five-year tenure.

Three-time Rohini MLA Vijendra Gupta thanked the party for giving him the responsibility of Speaker of Delhi Assembly.

### Cabinet decisions

After her first Cabinet meeting, Ms. Gupta said the government would table 14 pending CAG reports in the first session of the new Delhi Assembly, and would also work towards implementing the Centre's flagship health insurance scheme Ayushman Bharat in Delhi as quickly as possible.

Earlier, the first-time MLA from Shalimar Bagh was administered the oath by Delhi Lieutenant Governor V.K. Saxena. The swearing-in ceremony was attended by the BJP's top brass, including Union Ministers Amit Shah, J.P. Nadda, and Rajnath Singh, and the Chief Ministers and Deputy Chief Ministers of several NDA-ruled States.

The BJP has come into power in the capital after 26 years, with 48 seats in the Assembly.

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# Governments of Opposition-ruled States in South India reject proposed UGC rules

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The governments of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana reaffirmed their opposition to the University Grants Commission (UGC) Regulations, 2025, at a convention held here on Thursday.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who inaugurated the event, said the proposed guidelines could undermine India's federal structure by diminishing the role of State governments in higher education. The CPI(M) leader noted that the regulations would infringe upon the powers of State legislatures, particularly regarding the appointment of

## Policy pushback

What each State said on the new guidelines

**Kerala:** Guidelines diminish State's roles, infringe legislature powers, and lower academic standards

**Telangana:** They undermine State autonomy, disadvantage marginalised students, and enforce unfair criteria

**Karnataka:** Guidelines impose foreign models, promote privatisation, and neglect economic accessibility concerns



**Tamil Nadu:** They exclude States from decisions, impose financial burdens, and centralise power

Vice-Chancellors of State universities.

**'Politically motivated'**  
Mr. Vijayan condemned the provisions allowing non-academics, including

industry and public administration professionals, to be appointed Vice-Chancellors, calling the move politically motivated and detrimental to academic standards.

Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka echoed these concerns, accusing the Centre and the UGC of undermining State autonomy in a matter on the Concurrent List. Opposing the proposed minimum enrolment criterion of 3,000 students per institution, the Congress leader said it would affect colleges serving backward areas.

Karnataka Higher Education Minister and Congress leader M.C. Sudhakar raised concerns over imposing foreign education models without considering India's diverse educational landscape. He warned against excessive privatisation, arguing that policies must prioritise ac-

cessibility for students from economically weaker sections.

Tamil Nadu Higher Education Minister and DMK leader Govi. Chezhiyan said it was ironic that the States were being excluded from the appointment process while making them bear the financial burden of universities.

Leader of the Opposition in Kerala, V.D. Sathesan, cautioned that the draft regulations would centralise power and compromise academic excellence. The Congress leader alleged that the punitive measures outlined in the regulations were covert attempts to inject ruling party ideologies into the education system.

## INBRIEF



## Uttarakhand budget lays focus on infra, innovation

Uttarakhand Finance Minister Premchand Aggrawal on Thursday presented in the Assembly a budget of over ₹1 lakh crore for 2025-26 with an emphasis on innovation, agriculture, connectivity and infrastructure development. The total budget size has been increased by 13% compared to budgetary allocation of ₹89,000 crore for the current fiscal. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said that the budget is based on the Prime Minister's basic mantra 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas and Sabka Prayas' and it will prove to be a milestone in the development of Uttarakhand. PTI

## Shinde receives death threat; police verifying its credibility

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Thursday received a death threat, the Mumbai police said. The threats, sent via e-mails, were directed to various police stations in Mumbai, including, J.J. Marg police station, Mantralaya, and two other locations in Mumbai. DCP Zone 1 Pravin Munde confirmed the bomb threat e-mails were received by Goregaon police station and MRA Marg police station. The e-mails reportedly threatened to blow up the Deputy CM's car. According to officers, security agencies are probing the credibility of the threat.

## Congress walks out of Rajasthan House over Minister's phone tapping charge

The Hindu Bureau  
JAIPUR

The Opposition Congress MLAs staged a walkout in the Rajasthan Assembly on Thursday after the government's statement on the allegation that Cabinet Minister Kirodi Lal Meena was under surveillance and his phone was tapped. Minister of State for Home Jawahar Singh Bedham denied the charge in his statement.

Speaking after Zero Hour, Mr. Bedham said a statement from Mr. Meena had appeared in the media, in which he talked about his phone being kept on surveillance. "I assure the House with full responsibility that Mr. Meena's phone has not been intercepted by the government. He has also publicly denied having made the charge," he said.

Mr. Meena's remarks at a public event at Amagarh temple near Jaipur had led to an embarrassment to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party



Minister Kirodi Lal Meena's remarks at a public event near Jaipur had led to an embarrassment to the ruling BJP. FILE PHOTO

and caused a turmoil in the State Assembly for the entire day on February 7. The maverick leader had tendered resignation from the State Cabinet in June 2024. The BJP issued a show-cause notice to him after his charge, to which he replied last week.

Mr. Bedham said the telephone interception was allowed under the law only for security of the State, maintaining public order

## U.P. eyes infrastructure, technology boost with ₹8-lakh crore budget

Focus on commitment of double-engine govt. to expand economy, says CM; outlay is 9.8% higher than previous year's: Finance Minister; it fails to address the needs of youth, farmers, poor, says SP

Mavank Kumar  
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government on Thursday presented the State Budget for 2025-26 with an outlay of ₹8.09 lakh crore. Focused on infrastructure, women, and religious tourism, the budget also laid stress on technological advancements.

"The budget of ₹8,08,736 crore, the biggest ever in U.P., offers a perfect road map for balanced development of the State. This year's budget is almost 9.8% higher than the previous one. Out of the total, 22% has been allocated for development purposes, 13% for education, 11% for agriculture and related services, and 6% for health," said State Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna, who presented the budget.

The government has also proposed the construction of four new expressways with an allocation of ₹900 crore. In the field of



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna before presenting the budget in the Assembly, in Lucknow on Thursday. PTI

education, the government has proposed the development of primary schools as smart schools, with an allocation of ₹300 crore.

The budget also allocated over ₹400 crore under the Chief Minister's Tourist Places Development Scheme, with ₹150 crore set aside for developing tourism infrastructure in Ayodhya. "Our budget focuses on the commitment

of the double-engine government to expand the economy and the Prime Minister's vision of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Vikas, and Sabka Prayas," said Mr. Adityanath at a press conference.

"Second last budget" However, the Opposition criticised the budget, with Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav calling it

the "second last budget" of the BJP government. Mr. Yadav said the budget lacks vision for U.P. and fails to address the needs of the youth, farmers, and poor. BSP chief Mayawati said the budget lacks intention and policy road map to eliminate inflation, poverty, unemployment, and rural distress. "It is aimed at appealing the well-off middle class," she said.

## Tech tonic

- ₹5 crore for Artificial Intelligence City
- ₹3 crore for Technology Translation Research Park
- ₹50 crore for science parks and science cities
- 58 urban bodies to be developed as model smart urban bodies
- 1 lakh micro enterprises to be established annually
- 500 MW solar power project in Jalaun district
- ₹968 crore for SC student scholarships
- ₹575 crore for Purvanchal region development
- ₹425 crore for Bundelkhand region development

## Gujarat Budget proposes tax relief totalling ₹148 crore

Press Trust of India  
GANDHINAGAR

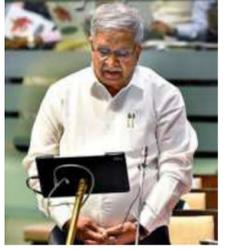
Gujarat Finance Minister Kanubhai Desai on Thursday presented a ₹3.70 lakh crore budget for the State for the financial year 2025-26, giving tax reliefs of ₹148 crore. Also, no new tax was proposed in the budget, presented by Mr. Desai in the State Assembly here on the second day of its Budget Session.

Mr. Desai informed the House that the budget outlay of ₹3,70,250 crore for 2025-26 indicates an increase of ₹3,785 crore, or 11.3%, compared to the previous fiscal.

The State government proposed a tax relief of ₹148 crore in the form of reduction in stamp duty on mortgage deeds and on motor vehicle tax on electric vehicles.

In his budgetary address, Mr. Desai announced a host of new schemes and projects and said the budget was based on five pillars – social security, human resource development, infrastructure development, green growth and development of economic activities.

Mr. Desai said the State government has prepared a road map for 'Viksit Guja-



Finance Minister Kanubhai Desai presents the Budget in the Assembly on Thursday. PTI

rat 2047' to realise Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision.

To transform Gujarat into a developed and prosperous State, six growth hubs, including Surat Economic Region will be developed, he said. For this, regional economic plans for Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Rajkot, Coastal Saurashtra region and Kutch are being prepared to facilitate the comprehensive and balanced economic development of the State, announced Mr. Desai.

Under the 'Garvi Gujarat High Speed Corridor' project, 12 new high-speed corridors of 1,367 kilometres will be developed. Also, two greenfield expressways will be developed in Gujarat, announced Mr. Desai.

## Tamil Nadu CM seeks Modi's intervention in releasing Samagra Shiksha funds

The Hindu Bureau  
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Thursday sought the intervention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in releasing the funds due to Tamil Nadu under the Samagra Shiksha scheme.

Reiterating the State's position on the two-language policy, he wanted the funds released "without linking" it to the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Linking the two Centrally sponsored schemes – Samagra Shiksha and the NEP exemplar PM SHRI schools – was "fundamentally unacceptable", Mr. Stalin said, adding that the Union government using the release of funds as a "pressure tactic to coerce a State" into adopting Centrally mandated programmes against its own time-tested State policies



Chief Minister M.K. Stalin wants the funds released 'without linking' it to the implementation of NEP 2020. FILE PHOTO

was a "blatant violation of cooperative federalism".

Mr. Stalin said it would "grossly undermine the States' rights to shape their own education policies, based on a State's specific needs".

Due to the non-release of funds under the ongoing programme, several vital components towards welfare programmes, inclusive education initiatives, RTE reimbursements for underprivileged stu-

dents, and transport for students in remote areas had been jeopardised, he said.

## ₹2,152 crore pending

"In the interest of cooperative federalism and the welfare of lakhs of students and teachers, I urge you to intervene in this matter," he said, addressing Mr. Modi. Pending funds to the tune of ₹2,152 crore under Samagra Shiksha for Tamil Nadu for 2024-25 had to be released immediately,

without linking it to the implementation of NEP 2020, to "dissipate the unrest caused due to this issue", he said.

Expressing deep concern over recent remarks by the Union Minister for Education that Samagra Shiksha funds for Tamil Nadu would not be released till the State implemented the NEP in its entirety and adopted the three-language policy, Mr. Stalin said it created "immense anxiety and unrest" among students, political parties, and the general public in the State.

"For many decades, Tamil Nadu has been steadfast in its two-language policy, which is deeply rooted in our educational and social milieu," Mr. Stalin said, and pointed out that Tamil Nadu had been exempted from implementing The Official Languages Act, 1963, as mentioned in The Official Languages Rules, 1976.

## Congress expels 7 leaders for 'anti-party activities' ahead of Haryana municipal elections

The Hindu Bureau  
GURUGRAM

Ahead of the municipal elections in Haryana, the State Congress unit on Thursday expelled seven leaders for "anti-party activities". A few of these leaders have already joined the Bharatiya Janata Party after they were denied the party's ticket for mayoral elections.

Prominent among those expelled include Tarlochan Singh and Ashok Khurana, both former district committee presidents, and Ram Niwas Rara, who had unsuccessfully contested the Hisar Assembly election last year on the Congress ticket.

## Prominent among those expelled include Tarlochan Singh, Ashok Khurana and Ram Niwas Rara

Both Mr. Singh and Mr. Khurana had recently joined the BJP in the presence of Chief Minister Nayab Saini after they were denied ticket for the mayor's election to Karnal municipal corporation.

Harvinder alias Lovely, the State general secretary of the Congress's Scheduled Caste Department, has been expelled after he withdrew his nomination from Gurugram municipal

corporation's Ward 22 on Wednesday, paving the way for the BJP's candidate victory. Ram Kishan Saini, also expelled by the Congress, was seeking ticket for the mayor's election to the Gurugram municipal corporation.

Similarly, Pradeep Chaudhary, North Zone Co-ordination Committee member, and former district Youth Congress president Madhu Chaudhary, have been expelled. While Mr. Chaudhary had alleged corruption in ticket distribution, Ms. Chaudhary has filed her nomination for the mayor's post from Yamuna Nagar municipal corporation after she was denied ticket by the party.

## Jharkhand cancels two exam papers over leak

Amit Bhelari  
PATNA

The Jharkhand Academic Council (JAC) on Thursday cancelled the Class 10 board exam for two subjects – Science and Hindi – following the alleged leak of question papers of these two subjects in advance on social media.

JAC Chairman Natwa Hansda said when the question papers were opened at 9.45 a.m., they matched with those circulating on social media.

"All the students related to the Secondary Examination 2025, their parents, concerned principals, centre superintendents and related officials are informed that the Hindi exam held in the first shift on February 18 and the Matric

## The JAC has sought a report from the DMs of Koderma and Giridih within 24 hours

Science subject exam held in the first shift on February 20 are cancelled. Information regarding the date of re-exam will be given later," a JAC notification stated.

Chief Secretary Alka Tiwari held a high-level meeting after the matter came to light. Mr. Hansda also ordered the Deputy Commissioners of Koderma and Giridih to investigate the matter as the news of the paper leak had first come from these two districts. The JAC has sought a report from the district administrations within 24 hours.

## Muslim delegation withdraws objection to Maharana Pratap statue in Himachal town

Press Trust of India  
HAMIRPUR (H.P.)

The Muslim community in Sujampur Tira town in Himachal Pradesh have withdrawn their objection to a proposed Maharana Pratap statue outside a mosque.

Nagar Parishad executive officer Ajmer Thakur on Thursday said the Muslim Sudhar Sabha supported the installation of the statue and some members of the community may even participate in the installation ceremony.

This comes barely two days after a delegation of the Muslim community submitted a memorandum to the Hamirpur administration, asking it not to in-



The head of Muslim Sudhar Sabha and members of the committee gave a letter saying many people are in support of installing the statue

AJMER THAKUR  
Nagar Parishad executive officer

stall a Maharana Pratap statue in the park being built outside the mosque at ward no 4.

Reacting to the memorandum, the Vishva Hindu Parishad called on the administration to not go back on its decision to install the

statue at the approved spot. The town was on edge over the developments and the Deputy Commissioner had asked the Sub-Divisional Magistrate to look into the issue.

Mr. Thakur said that the head of Muslim Sudhar Sabha, Nizamuddin, and members of the committee had come to his office on Wednesday and gave a letter saying "many people are in support of installing the statue".

According to Mr. Thakur, the committee's head said they wanted the two communities to live peacefully. Committee members also said they will take back the application opposing the statue, he added.

**Absence of V-Cs of Kerala universities at meet raises eyebrows**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government gained political mileage on Thursday by bringing together leaders from four States and across the political spectrum to oppose the Draft UGC (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment and Promotion of Teachers and Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for the Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulations, 2025, but the conspicuous absence of most Vice-Chancellors from State-run universities stuck out like a sore thumb.

The absence highlighted the strained relationship between the government and the interim V-Cs, appointed by former Governor Arif Mohammed Khan.

Some V-Cs had earlier expressed reservations over a circular issued by the Principal Secretary of Higher Education for university participation in the convention "against" the draft regulations. The directive sparked objections. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan intervened and the event was subsequently repositioned as a forum for discussing the UGC regulations with the word "against" omitted from official communication.

Referring to the V-Cs' absence, Higher Education Minister R. Bindu said they would have attended had they possessed a sense of propriety.

**Multi-State organ retrieval operation saves many lives**

A soldier from Kerala was declared brain dead after an accident; in an operation facilitated by a Bengaluru hospital, his corneas, liver, kidney, heart and lungs reached recipients in other cities

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

An accident victim from Kerala gave a new lease of life to many, thanks to a major organ retrieval and transportation operation facilitated by a Bengaluru hospital on February 19, involving health facilities in other parts of India.

According to a press release, the donor, a serving soldier on leave, suffered severe head injuries in the road accident at Kasaragod in Kerala. He was shifted to the Command Hospital Air Force Bangalore (CHAFFB) for treatment on February 17 and was subsequently declared brain dead. After his relatives selflessly



**Lifeline:** The team behind the organ retrieval and transportation, at the Command Hospital Air Force Bangalore. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

agreed to donate his organs, in coordination with the Jeevasarthakathe, Karnataka's State Organ and Tissue Transplant Authority, an organ-retrieval team flew in from the Army Hospital (Research and Referral), New Delhi, on an Indian Air Force aircraft. The team retrieved the

soldier's corneas, liver, and kidneys. One of his kidneys was transplanted locally at the CHAFFB. A team from Chennai arrived on flight to retrieve the heart and the lungs for the MGM and Gleneagles hospitals respectively to help patients in need, the release added. To ensure seamless

transportation, the CHAFFB closely coordinated with the Bengaluru Police to establish a "green corridor", which facilitated swift and uninterrupted transfer of organs from the operation theatre to the airport, significantly reducing time and preserving organ viability, the release said.

"This is the first time organs were transported to multiple cities, underscoring the growing collaboration between military and civilian medical institutions in addressing critical healthcare needs," it added. The CHAFFB has been a key institution in organ donation initiatives and has previously conducted multiple organ retrieval procedures, it said.



**Better deal:** The State Finance Minister had said the government's idea was to provide a compensation higher than the market price of the land identified for the airport project. FILE PHOTO

**Airport project: T.N. to provide relief for local landowners**

**T. Ramakrishnan**  
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu government is finalising a compensation package for the people who will be affected by the proposed second airport project for Chennai at Parandur in Kancheepuram district.

As pointed out by State Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu on various occasions, the government's idea is to provide a compensation to the project-affected people (PAP). It would be higher than the market price of the lands that have been identified for the project.

**More than envisaged**  
In this regard, the government is working out the compensation in such a manner that the eventual amount would be more than what the compensation package had envisaged under the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act,

2013. It is learnt that the proposed package will be unveiled "at an appropriate time".

According to the law, one of the components of the package is to multiply the market value by a factor of one in case of urban areas, and by one to two for rural areas depending on the distance of the project site from urban areas.

Apart from the base value of the land and other assets, land owners get a 100% solatium and a 12% additional market value or interest.

In an interview with *The Hindu* in January, the Finance Minister said that the State government had also planned to rehabilitate the PAPs to protect their livelihood.

In October 2023, the State issued an order giving administrative sanction for the acquisition of about 3,774 acres of patta lands. As the total extent of land required is approximately 5,746 acres, the remaining portion would be the government's.

**MUDA case: HC reserves verdict on pleas of CM's wife, Minister**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

The High Court of Karnataka on Thursday reserved its verdict on the petitions filed by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife, B.M. Parvathi, and Urban Development Minister Byrathi Suresh, who have questioned the legality of the summons issued to them by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with the case of illegal allotment of sites by MUDA to various individuals.

Meanwhile, the ED made it clear to the court that its investigation in the MUDA case was not confined to only the allegation of allotment of 14 sites illegally to Ms. Parvathi but also the illegal allotment of hundreds of sites by MUDA to various individuals.

Additional Solicitor General K. Arvind Kamath on behalf of the ED said, even though Ms. Parvathi has returned the 14 sites to MUDA, this action of hers does not change the character of the sites as "proceeds of crime". He also clarified that the ED, at this stage, is not bound to state whether she has been summoned to record her statement as a witness or an accused as it would depend on the evidences collected in the investigation.

Justice M. Nagaprasanna, who heard the arguments, reserved the verdict on the separate petitions filed by Ms. Parvathi and Mr. Suresh.

**Ex-councillor's husband killed in Telangana; family points fingers at local leaders of BRS**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
JAYASHANKAR BHUPALPALLY

Nagavelli Rajalinga Murthy, 47, husband of the former municipal councillor Sarala, and also a social activist, was allegedly stabbed to death by masked assailants in the heart of Bhupalpally in Telangana on Wednesday night.

The gruesome murder of Murthy, who had filed a petition in the local court

against the persons at the helm in the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government last year over the sinking of piers of the Medigadda barrage of Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP) during the BRS rule, has sent shock waves in the coal town.

The family members of the deceased blamed some local leaders of the BRS of masterminding Murthy's murder, a charge rejected

outright by the BRS former MLA Gandra Venkatarama Reddy.

The relatives staged a sit-in on the highway in the town late on Wednesday demanding a discreet enquiry to unravel what they termed as a "conspiracy" behind the chilling murder. Sarala, wife of the deceased, on Thursday lodged a complaint with the Bhupalpally police. She accused Renukuntla San-

jeev, Pingali Srimanth, Kothuri Kumar and another person of stabbing her husband to death over a land dispute.

Ms. Sarala told the media that her husband "was brutally killed by the BRS local leaders for waging a legal battle against corruption".

Based on her complaint, the Bhupalpally police have registered a case.

**INBRIEF**



**Chandrababu Naidu, Pawan meet Union Minister C.R. Patil**

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan met Union Minister of Jal Shakti C.R. Patil in New Delhi on Thursday. Mr. Naidu said they requested speedy reimbursement of the expenditure incurred on the construction of Polavaram left and right canals, and sought support to complete the project soon. He also requested Mr. Patil to extend support for the Polavaram Banakacherla link project, which is aimed at transferring 200 tmcft of floodwater from Godavari at Polavaram to Banakacherla through a link canal.

**Rallying point**



**Novel demand:** Folk artists perform at a rally taken out by the Left parties in Hyderabad on Thursday, urging the Congress government to fulfil its election promises. G. RAMAKRISHNA

**Positive breathalyser results among loco pilots baffle officials**

**Dhinesh Kallungal**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Southern Railway authorities were recently caught off guard by a sudden increase in positive breathalyser results among loco pilots during mandatory tests before start of duty. However, subsequent blood tests at the chemical examiner's laboratory revealed that alcohol content in almost all blood samples was nearly zero.

This has forced the Southern Railway, Thiruvananthapuram, to issue a circular instructing all running staff (loco pilots) to avoid consumption of homeo medicine, soft drinks and tender coconut

water, plantain, cough syrup, mouthwash and so on before signing on for duty. The circular grabbed headlines and has been trolled on social media platforms.

However, sources in Railways told *The Hindu* that a section of loco pilots seemed to be taking Railways for a ride by consuming products such as mouthwash and cough syrup shortly before the test to give false readings.

Railways cannot employ loco pilots for duty if the presence of alcohol is detected.

This causes strain on the crew links of Railways as the utility will have to arrange additional staff in a short period of time.

**Woman held with MDMA in Hyderabad; supplier at large**

A Bengaluru-based woman was arrested with 60 gram of MDMA in Hyderabad on Wednesday in a joint operation by the Cyberabad Police and the Telangana Anti-Narcotics Bureau. The accused was identified as Shatabdi Manna, a 24-year-old unemployed resident of Sola Devanahalli in Bengaluru and a native of Jharkhand. The seized MDMA was valued at ₹6 lakh. Probe agencies said she was part of an inter-State drug syndicate operating under Warren Kokarango, a suspected Nigerian national, who remains at large.

**Telangana CM appears before special court in multiple cases**

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy appeared before a special court in Hyderabad on Thursday in connection with multiple cases, including alleged violations of the Model Code of Conduct during past elections. During examination, he denied the allegations and opted for trial in the cases. The court scheduled the cases for hearings on different dates. Earlier, the court had issued summons to Mr. Reddy and others in connection with poll code violations and certain remarks against the police. PTI

**Karnataka BJP rebels now decide to adopt a 'cautious approach'**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

In a strategic move, the Karnataka BJP rebels - who have created a flutter in the party through public tirades by their leaders against the party State leadership - have reportedly now decided to adopt a "cautious approach".

The decision is learnt to have been taken at a meeting of the party rebel leaders that was held here on Thursday. According to sources, the meeting was of the view that they should desist from making frequent statements through the media as that would project them as vio-

lating the party discipline. The meeting felt that they would not tone down the intensity of their struggle, but would communicate with the party high command, instead of issuing media statements.

The decision taken when just a few days are left for the election of the new State president for the party is being seen as a "strategic" one to avoid being projected as violators of party discipline.

Before the meeting, MLA R. Patil Yalnal lashed out at party State president B.Y. Vijayendra and said neither him nor his father (B.S. Yediyurappa) can do any harm to him.

**Turning a page in Malayalam in cyberspace**

Devoted to Malayalam language and its literature, open website thaalilakkam.in, started in the year 2020, has a vast collection of useful resources for teachers, students, and language lovers

**A.S. Jayanth**  
KOZHIKODE

An open website fully devoted to Malayalam and its literature with a vast collection of useful resources for teachers, students, and language lovers. What thaalilakkam.in has in store is that and much more.

The website has sections such as library, 'bhasha' (language), 'sahityam' (literature), 'puthiyava' (what is new), 'mattullava' (others), 'kalakal' (arts), and links to websites of various platforms working for the



promotion of Malayalam. The library section has online (Malayalam, Sanskrit, and Tamil literary works) and offline (pdf versions of Malayalam books, links to 'Granthapura' website, titles sourced from the digital library of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, among

others) options. The 'bhasha' section has dictionaries and Malayalam grammar books. 'Sahityam' has articles on language and literature; poems and essays that appeared on defunct magazines; research papers from various universities; book

reviews; and links to the websites of writers. The 'mattullava' section has information on the literary works of eminent writers, apart from proverbs and riddles. 'Kalakal' has details on art museums in Europe, U.S. and U.K., Asia, and Australia, and information on Kathakali songs, among others.

M.K. Praveen Varma, who is behind the initiative, says the website was started in December 2020 to help Malayalam literature grow in the cyberspace. "Acquiring knowledge is the right of every individual and its distribution should be free for everyone," he says.

## 'Ambedkar Chair' will be set up at University of Mumbai: Minister

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Union Social Justice Minister Virendra Kumar on Thursday said the government would set up an "Ambedkar Chair" at the University of Mumbai, which would promote research on B.R. Ambedkar's contributions and his vision for the nation.

He was speaking at an event held as part of the *Samvidhan Amrit Mahotsav*, being organised by the government to commemorate 75 years of the adoption of Constitution.

The Minister said, "We must recognise that while we focus on our rights, we must equally embrace our duties towards society. This balance is essential for the true realisation of the democracy Dr. Ambedkar dreamt of."

"Dr. Ambedkar's journey from a student in this very institution to becoming the architect of our Constitution is a testament to his determination and vision for India. His work did not just provide a legal framework but envisioned a social and economic de-



Virendra Kumar

mocracy that is still the guiding force behind the government's policies."

### New coaching centre

Mr. Kumar said the university would also get a dedicated coaching centre to prepare students from marginalised communities for competitive examinations. Two new hostels would also be set up.

Ministry Secretary Amit Yadav, said, "This event is a reminder of the powerful role Mumbai University has played in India's legal and social evolution. One of the finest leaders this university produced was Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, who not only earned his degree here but also taught, leaving behind a legacy of change."

## Surrender looted arms in 7 days or face action, says Manipur Governor

Ajay Kumar Bhalla emphasises the need for peace and urges all communities to work towards restoring normalcy in the State; he says the government is committed to a peaceful resolution

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Thursday appealed to members of all communities to surrender looted police weapons and illegally held arms at the nearest police station within seven days. He said if the weapons were not surrendered, strict action would follow for possession of arms.

Manipur came under President's Rule on February 13.

In a statement, Mr. Bhalla said, "People of Manipur, both in Valley and Hills, have suffered immense hardship for the last 20 months due to a series of unfortunate incidents affecting peace and communal harmony."

He said that in the greater interest of restoring normalcy, all communities



Action ahead: Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla seen during his meeting with top officials on February 17. PTI

in the State must come forward to ensure the cessation of hostilities and maintenance of peace and order in the society.

### 'Powerful gesture'

"It is in this regard that I sincerely request the people of all communities, particularly the youths in

the Valley and Hills, to voluntarily come forward and surrender looted and illegally held weapons and ammunition to the nearest police station/outpost/security forces camp within next seven days, with effect from today [Thursday]. Your single act of returning these weapons can

be a powerful gesture towards ensuring peace. I want to assure you that no punitive action would be initiated if such weapons are returned within the stipulated time. Thereafter, strict action will be taken for possession of such weapons," Mr. Bhalla said.

He said the government was committed to ensuring a peaceful resolution of the situation and safeguarding the future of the youth. "Let us rebuild our State together with hope and trust for a brighter future. Come forward and choose peace," the Governor appealed.

More than 6,000 police weapons were looted after ethnic violence erupted in the State on May 3, 2023. Though similar appeals to surrender weapons were made earlier also by the State government, only 2,000 weapons could be recovered from the public.

## Amit Shah appeals to Northeast insurgents to join mainstream

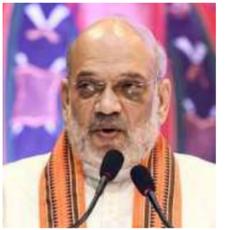
The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday appealed to the last of the remaining insurgent groups active in Northeast India to lay down arms and join the mainstream.

He also said by 2027, all the northeastern States will be connected by air and rail.

Mr. Shah said that since 2014, more than 10,500 militants have laid down arms in the Northeast and 12 peace accords have been signed in the region between 2019 and 2024. He said that many disputes had been going on in the region for decades, but the Narendra Modi government took two steps forward and made the youth believe that a lot of opportunities were available for them.

The Minister attended the "Unity Utsav - One Voice, One Nation" event organised by Assam Rifles. Many dignitaries including the Director-General of Assam Rifles, Lieutenant-General Vikas Lakhera, were present.



Amit Shah

The Minister said 212 teams and 1,500 students took part in the sports competitions in the event and more than 150 students also participated in the cultural programmes. He said that today most of the prizes had been bagged by Manipur, which shows the importance of sports in the State. He said that keeping in mind the popularity of sports in the Northeast, Prime Minister Modi decided to establish the country's first sports university in Manipur.

He expressed confidence that in 2036, India will host the Olympic Games, and the country will be in the top 10 with the Northeastern States playing a key role in this achievement.

## Infiltration has 'gone down substantially' after change of Bangladesh regime, says BSF chief

Vijaita Singh  
NEW DELHI

Infiltration along the Bangladesh border has "gone down substantially" after the political developments in the neighbouring country in August 2024, Border Security Force (BSF) chief Daljit Singh Chawdhary said on Thursday. He further said the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) stood shoulder to shoulder with the BSF to maintain peace and tranquillity throughout the "crisis" period.

After the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 3, 2024, the BSF and BGB held their Director General-level talks for the first time from February 16 to 20. The meeting concluded with the signing of a joint record of discussions.

The BGB Director-General, Major General Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui, said that reports of attacks on



Crucial step: The border-guarding forces agreed to share real-time information and investigation reports of traffickers. FILE PHOTO

Hindus and other minorities in the neighbouring country were an exaggeration and that the law and order incidents were part of a political problem.

Responding to a question by *The Hindu* on the issue, he said, "To be honest, such attacks on minorities per se did not happen. The substantiation of that was the recently held Durga Puja. For example, the law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh were very precisely and strictly

tasked by the government so that the Hindu community could perform the festival. To elaborate on this, BGB jurisdiction is within 8 km of the International Boundary, we have several *puja mandaps* where BGB personnel provide security. Overall, the law-and-order situation was not on minority, it may be some kind of political problem."

The border-guarding forces of India and Bangladesh agreed to share real-

time information and investigation reports of human traffickers to ensure effective border management without deaths on either side, a statement by the BSF said. The BSF and BGB will also begin joint inspections of areas to resolve the issues of fencing.

The BSF had raised the issue of attacks on its personnel at the meeting. Mr. Chawdhary said, "We raised the issue of attack on BSF personnel. We share the responsibility to secure the sanctity of the border. At the same time, the Government of India follows non-lethal (weapon) strategy at the border with Bangladesh. At times, taking advantage of night cover, some miscreants try to enter our territory by breaching the fence. We do not use unnecessary lethal force against anybody but when the circumstances come, in self-defence we need to use lethal force as a

last resort and we exercise that power with full restraint. During this meeting, we urged the BGB that the border remains absolutely secure and no infiltration happens on the border so that such incidents do not happen."

The BGB chief said there was no discussion on changing the 1975 border agreement with India. He stated that any kind of permanent construction within 150 yards of the international border was not allowed. "There are some development works taking place on both sides and concurrence of both sides are taken and due to some communication gaps, if one of the forces is not informed, then objection is raised from the other side. If it happens on the Indian side, BGB raises objections and vice versa and then we stop that work and resolve the issue mutually," he said.

## Sugar exports helped in clearing arrears to cane farmers, says millers body

A.M. Igeesh  
NEW DELHI

Barely a month after the Centre's decision to allow the export of 10 lakh tonnes of sugar, the Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) has claimed that almost ₹21,096 crore of arrears due to sugarcane farmers have been paid.

Terminating the opening up of sugar exports as a "wonderful decision", ISMA director-general Deepak Ballani said the foreign exchange that sugar millers had received is being used to clear the arrears.

According to data provided by ISMA, as on February 17, the total amount payable is ₹61,848 crore of which the arrears are just ₹14,038 crore. "In January, 69% of the payments were made, but in February, this



A file photo of a vendor arranging a price tag over a sack filled with sugar at a wholesale vegetable market in Ahmedabad. REUTERS

has increased to 77.3%," Mr. Ballani said, adding that ₹21,096 crore was paid within the last month.

The Centre allowed sugar exports to resume on January 21. Many farmers are watching the policy change with suspicion. The leader of the All India Kisan Sabha D.P. Singh said the benefits have not reached the farmers. "Look at the State-adviced

price (SAP) of sugarcane in Uttar Pradesh. It has not been changed for the last three years. When they announced the new SAP on Tuesday, we hoped that there will be some increase, but it is unchanged at ₹370 per quintal. There is huge increase in the input cost," he said, adding that the government's policies are in favour of the sugar millers.

## Defence Ministry signs contracts worth ₹1,917 crore for radios, forklift trucks

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Defence Ministry on Thursday signed two contracts worth ₹1,917.47 crore for the procurement of 149 software-defined radios (SDR) for the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and 1,868 rough terrain forklift trucks (RTFLT) for the three Services.

The contract for 149 SDRs is with defence public sector undertaking Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Bengaluru at a total cost of ₹1,220.12 crore. "Induction of SDRs marks the transition from present single purpose radios to multi-band, multi-mode and multi-role radios of the future. ICG units require high-speed secure communication along with secure networking capability for seamless information exchange for coordinated operations at sea," the Ministry said. "SDRs will enable se-



Ministry officials sign contracts with ACE Ltd. and JCB India in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh. PTI

ecure and reliable information sharing, situational awareness and network-centric operations through high-speed data and secure voice communication capability."

The SDRs are indigenously designed, developed, and manufactured providing a significant boost to the country's ma-

nufacturing capabilities for advanced military-grade communication systems. The statement added that this will strengthen the ICG's capability to fulfil its core responsibilities including maritime law enforcement, search and rescue operations, fisheries protection, and marine environment protection. Ad-

ditionally, these radios will enhance interoperability for joint operations with the Indian Navy.

### Critical equipment

The other contract for 1,868 RTFLT at a total cost of ₹697.35 crore was signed with ACE Limited and JCB India Limited. It is a critical equipment which will assist in various combat and logistics support tasks by avoiding manual handling of an enormous number of stores thereby enhancing the operational effectiveness of the three Services.

The present case being a buy Indian case will enhance national defence equipment manufacturing capabilities, the Ministry said in another statement adding that this project has immense potential of direct and indirect employment generation by encouraging Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises sector through component manufacturing.

## NGOs aligned with Congress attempted to influence polls in country, says BJP

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Thursday alleged that NGOs aligned with the Congress and against Prime Minister Narendra Modi have attempted to influence elections in India, citing the remarks of U.S. President Donald Trump about the previous Biden administration's decision to allocate \$21 million to fund "voter turnout" in India.

Former Union Minister and BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad sought to draw a link between Mr. Trump's comments and certain remarks made by Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, during a recent foreign visit.

"It is a matter of shame what the Congress has done. Rahul Gandhi has made a joke of Indian democracy abroad and sought help from democra-



Ravi Shankar Prasad sought to draw a link between Donald Trump's comments and certain remarks made by Rahul Gandhi. ANI

cies abroad. It means he sought support to help him win as the Congress keeps losing elections," Mr. Prasad said.

### Foreign fund influence

He said that the U.S. President had confirmed that \$21 million was being given to influence "voter turnout" in India. "Rahul Gandhi used to go abroad and say that democratic

countries do not worry about the 'threats' to Indian democracy..." he alleged. "If people do not vote for them, they conspire to use foreign money to influence the elections in India and defame Indian democracy. We condemn it outright, this blatant foreign money interference in India's democratic process. It is a matter of great shame," he said.

The BJP's IT Cell in-charge Amit Malviya posted on X, alleging there was a "systematic attempt to influence the 2024 general election to ensure an alternate outcome".

"USAID funding has been linked to influencing political outcomes, particularly during election years. Under the UPA government (2004-2013), the Indian government received \$204.28 million, while NGOs received \$2,114.96 million. Under the NDA (2014-2024), government funding dropped to \$1.51 million (as of 2015), while NGO funding increased to \$2,579.73 million," he said.

"Funding for 'Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance' spiked in 2022, coinciding with Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra. USAID stopped funding the Government of India after 2015," Mr. Malviya claimed. (With inputs from agencies)

## Maharashtra Minister convicted in cheating case, granted bail

Snehal Mutha  
MUMBAI

The Nashik District Court on Thursday sentenced Maharashtra Agriculture Minister Manikrao Kokate and his brother Vjay Kokate to two years' imprisonment and imposed a fine of ₹50,000 on them in a 1995 cheating case. The court later granted bail to Mr. Manikrao, who is set to approach the Bombay High Court against the order.

The district court ordered the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority and the Deputy Collector (Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation—ULC) of Nashik to take action to cancel the allotment of flats to the Kokate brothers and restore possession after the appeal period is over.

Among the four accused, Popat Sonawane and Prashant Govardhane were acquitted.

### 'Will appeal'

Mr. Manikrao, who represents the Sinnar constituency, told presspersons in Nashik, "I have received bail in the case. We will go to the High Court and file an appeal against the order." He alleged political enmity with the person who filed the petition.

The chargesheet says the Kokate brothers showed lower income than the prescribed limit of below 30,000 a year and committed fraud with the government. Popat Sonawane and Prashant Govardhane owned flats under the scheme were



No doubt, Manikrao Kokate being a Minister... may ruin his reputation if he is punished. The law cannot condone such illegal acts merely because the person has a reputable position in society

### COURT ORDER

transferred to the Kokate brothers.

The verdict comes after a case was filed against them for allegedly tampering with documents and cheating in 1995. Former Minister Tukaram Dighole had filed a petition against the brothers for fraudulently acquiring flats in the Nirman View Apartment.

The complaint was related to showing lower income to purchase the house from the government's 10% quota in 1995. Mr. Dighole, a three-time MLA and Minister from the Congress, died in 2019.

The order mentioned, "No doubt, Manikrao Kokate being a Minister of the State in the agriculture department may ruin his reputation if he is punished. But simultaneously, the law cannot condone such illegal acts merely because the person has a reputable position in society."

The decision has put Mr. Manikrao in a spot, where his ministerial and legislative positions are at risk because any public representative sentenced to two years or more in prison cannot remain in office.

# Delhi Cabinet decides to implement Ayushman Bharat, table CAG reports

Asked about BJP's poll promise of giving aid for women, new CM said it was discussed at meeting, but more talks were required for taking a call on which categories of women would get benefit

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Thursday said that the Cabinet had decided in its first meeting to implement the Ayushman Bharat Yojana, and also to table the 14 pending Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) reports in the Delhi Assembly.

"Two main decisions have been taken. First, Ayushman Yojana, which was stalled by the earlier government and because of the AAP (Aam Aadmi Party) government, people of Delhi did not get it. Today's first Cabinet meeting has taken a decision to implement Ayushman Bharat Yojana in Delhi with ₹5 lakh top-up from the Delhi government. Also, ₹5 lakh will be given by the Central government. It'll be implemented as early as possible," Ms. Gupta said, briefing the media after the Cabinet meeting.

"Second, 14 CAG reports which were pending and not tabled by the earlier government will be tabled in the first Assembly session," she said.

Asked about the Bharatiya Janata Party's campaign promise of providing ₹2,500 a month to women, the Chief Minister said that it was discussed at the Cabinet meeting, but more



Taking charge: Rekha Gupta assuming charge as Delhi Chief Minister in the presence of senior BJP leaders at the Delhi Secretariat on Thursday. ANI

discussions were required for taking a call on which categories of women would get the benefit.

### 'Will fulfil all promises'

Earlier in the day, after assuming office, Ms. Gupta said, "I have taken charge of the Chief Minister's Office after the oath taking. The mission of *Viksit Delhi*, to complete it, we will keep working towards it. We won't wait even a single day. And we will complete every commitment we had made."

On February 10, even before the Chief Minister took oath, the Chief Secretary had asked all departments concerned to prepare draft Cabinet notes based on the BJP's manifes-

to, wherever it was required. He had also asked all departments to prepare a "100 days' action plan" based on the BJP's manifesto, officials said.

The AAP government not tabling the 14 CAG reports had become controversial with the then BJP Opposition MLAs filing a petition with the Delhi High Court in 2024. They sought direction from the High Court to the Speaker to call a sitting of the Assembly for the tabling of the reports.

During a hearing held on January 13, the court had said the CAG reports should have been promptly placed before the Assembly for discussion and the State government

"dragging its feet" on the issue raised "doubts on its bona fides".

Senior AAP leader and former Chief Minister Atishi alleged that the BJP had betrayed women of Delhi by not taking a decision on the promise of giving them aid. "Mr. [Narendra] Modi and Amit Shah along with entire BJP had promised that in the very first Cabinet meeting they will approve the scheme of ₹2,500 per month to all women in Delhi. It is very sad that woman Chief Minister broke promise made to women of Delhi," she said. Responding to it, Ms. Gupta said the government would do the work and questioned what the AAP did during its tenure.

## Govt. prioritising PR, false ads over national security, says Kharge

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday slammed the Centre over news reports that China was settling 90 new villages along the Arunachal Pradesh border.

In an X post, Mr. Kharge accused the government of prioritising "PR stunts and false advertisements" over national security.

"Narendra Modi, you are adopting the policy of giving a 'red salute' to China instead of showing 'red eyes'. India's national security, territorial sovereignty and integrity are paramount, the Modi government is putting it at risk," he said.

"Our allegation is made with great responsibility

and is based on facts. China has started settling 90 new villages on the Arunachal border. Earlier, China had settled 628 such villages on our border, according to newspapers. The Modi government promotes the 'Vibrant Villages Programme' on the border a lot, you have exaggerated it in Parliament. But the truth is that 90% of the funds of the 'Vibrant Villages Programme' have not been spent in the last two years," he said, tagging the news reports of Chinese activity along the border.

He also raised the issue of China announcing plans to build the 'world's largest dam' on the Brahmaputra, which could prove disastrous for national security, environment, and the northeastern States.

## Congress seeks White Paper on USAID funds

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday demanded that the Union government bring out a White Paper on USAID funding of both government and non-governmental institutions in India.

The demand comes amid an ongoing row that the U.S. government aid agency had been funding campaigns to increase voter turnout in India. On Thursday, U.S. President Donald Trump had ques-

tioned USAID's alleged expenditure of \$21 million for "voter turnout" in India.

"USAID is very much in the news these days. Claims being made by the U.S. President are typically nonsensical to say the least," Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said on X.

"Even so, the Government of India should bring out a White Paper at the earliest detailing USAID's support to both government and non-governmental institutions in India over the decades," he said.

## Rush continues



No let-up: Pilgrims headed for Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj jostle to board an overcrowded train at the Patna railway station on Thursday. PTI

## Wanted BSP to join us in fighting BJP in 2024 LS polls: Rahul Gandhi

Mayank Kumar  
LUCKNOW

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said he wanted the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) led by Mayawati to fight the 2024 parliamentary polls together, adding an alliance would have prevented the Bharatiya Janata Party from securing victory.

"We wanted *Behenji* to join us against the BJP but Mayawati *ji* did not fight for some reason or the other. If the three parties [the Samajwadi Party, Congress and the BSP] had united, the BJP would never have won the election," said Mr. Gandhi, who is on a two-day visit to his parliamentary constituency Rae Bareilly.

The Congress leader



Constituency visit: Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi addressing a meeting in Rae Bareilly on Thursday. ANI

wondered why the BSP is not contesting elections properly in the present period. "I must admit that Kanshi Ram *ji* laid the foundation and *Behenji* carried on the work. But I have a question, why is *Behenji* not fighting the elections properly these days," asked Mr. Gandhi, address-

ing Dalit students at Mool Bharti hostel near Bargad Chauraha Civil Line in Rae Bareilly.

The Congress leader accused the ruling BJP of creating an atmosphere of hatred in society. "The BJP is deliberately building hatred in the country, aimed at dividing society.

They [BJP] talk about patriotism, but real patriotism is uniting the nation," said Mr. Gandhi, who praised Dalits for their role in shaping the country.

### Mayawati hits back

Reacting sharply to Mr. Gandhi's comments, Ms. Mayawati accused the Congress of adopting double standard.

"In the States where the Congress is strong or where it has governments, there is animosity and casteist attitude towards the BSP and its followers, but in a State like Uttar Pradesh where the Congress is weak, there is deceptive talk of alliance with the BSP, and if this is not the double standards of that party then what is it," she wrote on social media platform X.

## Cong. backs protest against amendments to Advocates Act

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday extended its support to the legal fraternity that is opposing the proposed amendments to the Advocates Act, 1961.

In a statement, the All India Congress Committee department on Law, Human Rights and RTI expressed solidarity with the lawyers.

It noted that the proposed Bill was not only "poorly drafted" but also failed to address the perti-

nent issues faced by the legal fraternity.

The Centre plans to amend the Act by making sweeping changes in the definitions of a legal practitioner and law graduate.

The Law Ministry has put the draft Bill on its website for public feedback and comments.

The party urged the Centre to put the amendments on hold until an extensive nationwide consultation process was conducted, and inputs from relevant stakeholders were sought.

## Expunge Mamata's remarks on Maha Kumbh: BJP MLAs to Bengal Governor

The Hindu Bureau  
KOLKATA

The controversy over Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's remarks on the Maha Kumbh continues to rage across political circles of the State, with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislators meeting West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose on Thursday.

BJP MLAs led by the Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, Suvendu Adhikari, urged the Governor to take measures so that the Chief Minister's remarks could be expunged from the proceed-

**Mamata had on Tuesday described the Maha Kumbh as 'mrityu Kumbh' in the State Assembly**

ings of the West Bengal Assembly.

Participating in a discussion in the State Assembly, Ms. Banerjee had on Tuesday described the Maha Kumbh as "*mrityu Kumbh*" (a Kumbh of deaths), and alleged that hype had been built over the religious gathering without much planning. Speaking to pressper-

sons after the meeting with the Governor, Mr. Adhikari said that the Chief Minister had shown no remorse over her remarks made on the floor of the House.

"The Governor should direct the Speaker to expunge the remarks. The comments are an insult to over 100 crore Hindus," Mr. Adhikari said, adding that such a comment should not remain in the records of West Bengal Assembly.

Earlier in the day, BJP legislators held protests in the House over the CM's remarks. State BJP president Su-

kanta Majumdar had on Wednesday written to the Governor, urging him to expunge the remarks made by the Chief Minister. Ms. Banerjee during her speech had added that she respected "the Maha Kumbh and *maa* (mother) Ganga" but was opposed to the hype created over the event that had led to deaths.

Apart from West Bengal BJP leaders, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath and Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Mohan Yadav have criticised the remarks made by Ms. Banerjee on the Kumbh.

## Either develop north Bengal or grant us Statehood: BJP MLA

The Hindu Bureau  
KOLKATA

A BJP legislator from north Bengal on Thursday raised the demand for a separate State for the region.

"People of north Bengal are deprived day after day. The demand of the people is to either develop the region or let us live separately," BJP MLA Sikha Chatterjee told presspersons in the Assembly. "We are the representatives of the people. What the people say, it needs to be conveyed here [in the Assembly]," said

Ms. Chatterjee, the MLA from Dabgram Phulbari seat in Jalpaiguri district. She also said that the region faced several issues, including river erosion, but the State government was not looking into it.

The MLA had raised the demand while participating in a discussion on the Budget. Trinamool Congress leader and Minister Sovande Chattopadhyay dismissed the demand, stating that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had said that there would be no division of the State.

**IN BRIEF**



**NHRC issues notice to Bengal govt. over death of 2 workers**

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Thursday took *suo motu* cognisance of reports regarding the death of two persons after inhaling toxic gas while cleaning a septic tank in Nandigram block in Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal. According to reports, the person who first entered the septic tank to clean it cried for help after inhaling poisonous gas. Three of his family members rushed to rescue him but they also inhaled the toxic gas and lost consciousness. All four were rushed to the hospital but only two of them survived. The Commission has issued notices to the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police, Purba Medinipur calling for a detailed report within two weeks.

**Two villagers killed by Naxals in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada**

Two villagers from a left-wing-extremism-affected region in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada were murdered by Naxalites on Wednesday evening, said the police. A senior police officer said that Baman Kashyap (29) and Anis Ram Poyam (38), both residents of Todma village in the Barsoor Police Station limits, were found dead in a deep jungle. Prima facie they were strangled to death, said the police. A pamphlet of the Aamdarai Area Committee of the East Bastar division of the Maoists was purportedly found at the spot. A copy of the said pamphlet that surfaced online has named Kashyap, who worked as a guest school teacher, as a police informer.

**I&B Ministry warns OTTs against 'obscene content'**

Ministry cites complaints from general public, MPs and statutory bodies; directs streaming services to enforce age-based ratings for mature content in accordance with 2021 IT Rules

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

**W**arning over-the-top (OTT) streaming services against transmitting "any content that is prohibited by law", the Union Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry on Thursday said they should ensure "age-based classification of content" under the Information Technology (Intermediary Liability and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

The OTT platforms should enforce age-gating requirements for mature content, the Ministry said in an advisory citing complaints from MPs, statutory organisations and the public.

It is unclear specifically what "obscene, pornographic and vulgar content" the circular is referring to. In December 2024, the Ministry flagged some shows "promoting, glamorising or glorifying the use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances through such portrayal by the main protagonist and other actors".

The IT Rules have extensive regulations pre-

**Screening content**

The I&B Ministry's latest advisory has issued the following directives to OTT platforms on 'obscene' content

- Ensure age-based classification
- Enforce age-gating for mature content
- Avoid prohibited content (obscene, vulgar, pornographic)
- Follow IT Rules, 2021 for content moderation
- Comply with laws such as POCSO Act, IT Act, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita



**Legal framework for OTT regulation**

- Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act
- IT Act - prohibiting obscene digital content
- IT Rules for streaming platforms
- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita expands content regulation

scribing age ratings for content on Indian streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. Those regulations require streaming services to have a formal grievance redress system. They should be part of a three-tier system, under which users who are offended by certain content can first approach the platform, then a self-regulatory body, and further an inter-departmental committee of the Union government.

**SC seeks action**

On Tuesday, a Supreme Court Bench, led by Justice Surya Kant, orally observed that the government needed to take some

action on obscene content on social media.

The present advisory has only been sent to online curated content platforms, the legal term for streaming platforms such as Netflix, as opposed to user-generated content platforms such as YouTube. The court was hearing a case on clubbing the FIRs against Ranveer Alahbadia, the podcaster who has been at the centre of a storm over a joke he cracked on the YouTube show *India's Got Latent*.

**Not completely banned**

The IT Rules do not completely ban swearing, sex or nudity; they instead require that shows and films

that feature these - along with substance abuse and violence - be rated for older audiences.

Apart from the IT Rules, the advisory points to other laws to warn streaming providers against content that features obscenity. "Attention is also invited to the provisions of the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986; Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023; the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act; and the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, wherein publication of obscene/pornographic content is a punishable offence," the advisory reads.

**Aspirants from India, abroad register for video game contest**

**Devesh K. Pandey**  
NEW DELHI

More than 150 developers from five continents and over 650 Indian aspirants are participating in the handheld video game design challenge organised by the Indian Digital Gaming Society under the World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES), 2025 initiative recently announced by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry.

The challenge has so far recorded registration from many countries, including the United States, Canada, and Brazil. Participants have registered from Singapore, Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, China, Hong Kong, Jordan, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Pakistan.

In India, students from 20 States and four Union Territories are participating. "The challenge's spread can be seen from the fact that districts which once lacked economic indicators have also shown participation in this complex challenge, thus indicating the success of the Digital India initiative," an official said.

Among the participants, there are not only professionals but also freelance



A boy plays an online game on his mobile phone. Video games are hugely popular. AP

developers and college and school students as well.

The participants are required to develop a complete gaming device, integrating game mechanics with physical hardware, making it an independent and adaptable solution for learning through play.

"The challenge is designed to bridge multiple domains, requiring expertise in programming, electronics, and mathematics, to create an efficient and cost-effective hardware solution. Unlike traditional software-based game development, working with microcontrollers allows developers to focus on gameplay logic and hardware integration, without the complexities of Android or Windows operating systems," the official said.

**Pilots could get weekly rest of 48 hours from July 1: DGCA affidavit**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI



Pilots have been demanding the scrapping of two consecutive nights of flying.

The weekly rest for pilots could be raised from 36 hours to 48 hours with effect from July 1, and revised night flying hours "rolled out" from November 1, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said in a detailed scheme for implementing relaxed duty norms for cockpit crew submitted before the Delhi High Court on Thursday.

The liberalised norms governing duty and rest periods for pilots to combat concerns over rising fatigue levels were announced in January 2024, and were to be implemented from June 1, 2024. But they were put on hold after stiff opposition from airlines, forcing pilots' unions to approach the court. After several rounds of court-ordered mediation held by

the DGCA between Air India and the pilot bodies, the regulator agreed to a phased implementation.

"Out of 22 clauses, 15 clauses would be implemented from 01.07.2025 and the remaining 7 clauses would be rolled out from 01.11.2025," said the affidavit before the Delhi High Court signed by the DGCA's Assistant Director

(Operations), Himanshu Srivastava. The next hearing is on Monday.

Key among the provisions recommended for implementation from July 1 is the weekly rest period of "continuous 48 hours". Night duty will be during the hours between midnight and 6 a.m. instead of the present midnight to 5 a.m. As airlines are allowed to assign pilots only to two consecutive nights of flying, this provision will bring down the time of night flying. Further, the DGCA has capped the number of night landings a pilot can do to two.

Pilots have been demanding the scrapping of two consecutive nights of flying, introduced in April 2019, as night duties disrupt the natural sleep-wake cycle, cause fatigue and impact alertness levels. They say that in the

recent past, due to increased international flying, the quantum of night flying has increased exponentially.

The DGCA has used the term "roll-out" and not implementation for the set of rules delayed until November 1, sources in pilots' unions said, indicating that the regulator could be planning a staggered enforcement. Airlines have strongly opposed the DGCA's proposal for restricting night flying. IndiGo had said in a submission to the DGCA in December that expanding the definition of night flying would have "a severe operational impact" and it should therefore remain unchanged.

Air India said it would implement the new definition after the regulator brought a modern, data-based fatigue risk management system.

**Key provision of DPDP Act infantilises PwDs: activists**

**Abhinav Lakshman**  
NEW DELHI

Disability rights activists in Delhi are building a coalition to get a key provision of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 dropped or amended. Section 9(l) of the Act has clubbed children with persons with disabilities (PwDs) to mandate that even in cases of disabled adults who have legal guardians, consent for use of any personal data must be obtained from the guardian concerned.

Disability rights experts and policy think tanks have argued that this infantilises PwDs, stems from a misunderstood notion of their guardianship and negates the decision-making capacity of PwDs recognised by the Rights of the PwD (RPwD) Act, 2016 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of

**Experts say that the need for consent of guardians negates the decision-making capacity of PwDs**

Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD).

Multiple sources told *The Hindu* that the office of the Chief Commissioner of PwDs under the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities will take up any further issues on the DPDP Draft Rules, 2025 that might exist with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

In the draft rules, the Ministry had said that the consent clause for PwDs would be limited to those who have "long term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment", are "unable to take legally binding decisions", and

who suffer from "autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, or a combination of any two or more of such conditions".

But despite this, several questions remain on the operability of the consent clause for PwDs. In a report put out by policy think tank PACTA and NGO Saksham Disability earlier this month, activists have questioned how this would work in cases of limited guardianship under the RPwD Act. Nipun Malhotra of the Nipman Foundation has said, "There might be someone with visual impairment using a guardian for very specific purpose like financial decisions above a certain amount. Why would this person want their guardian to provide consent while signing up for a fitness app or an e-commerce website? Would that not be a violation of privacy?"

**Govt. panel calls KIIT's founder over student unrest**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BHUBANESWAR

Achyuta Samanta, the founder of Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), has been summoned to appear before a high-level committee on Friday following allegations of ill-treatment of Nepalese students on campus.

The government has constituted the high-level panel under the chairmanship of Home Secretary Satyabrata Sahu to ascertain the circumstances leading to the alleged suicide, high-handed action by university authorities, reasons for issuing notice only to specific group of students and closing the institute *sine die* for them. Mr. Sahu had visited the campus and spoken to KIIT staff members and students.

**THE CROSSWORD+ 14414** (set by Afterdark)

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

**Across**

- 1 Can't gain if Stokes is out? Tempting (11)
- 9 Admit that debate ended early at school society (7)
- 10 Say, help comes in different form for one that's pretty (7)
- 11 Question the model (5)
- 12 Dissect a particle with chisels in the middle (9)
- 13 Bean obtained from Mexico coast (5)
- 15 Exit terms discord with hardliner (9)
- 18 Theatre assistant is a good person, at times takes responsibility (9)
- 21 Lamb's sweep yields a wicket, taken by Hasaranga at first (5)
- 22 Heartless Poles (2 of them) taking centre of house (9)
- 24 A sect? Could be confused with another (5)
- 26 Fact is assets drown one (7)
- 27 Our names almost got mixed up in appeal (7)
- 28 Safety feature in new jet's core corrodes mostly (7,4)

**Down**

- 1 Deal with companies' cosmetic treatments (4,5)
- 2 Broadcasts result in ship (5)
- 3 Drunk in Britain by mistake, took drugs and slept essentially (9)
- 4 As usage is compromised, it becomes moderate (7)
- 5 Darwin's tantrum controlled in a second (7)
- 6 Coming up on Aug; a fertilizer (5)
- 7 Killing a king is dicier, somehow should overcome elite guards at first (8)
- 8 As per sources, Bombay youth tear excerpt into eight bits (4)
- 10 Convener Charlie's lock taken by attendant (8)
- 16 Relaxed having tea and some raisin cake on a piece of furniture (4,5)
- 17 Classified information on violent protest besieging Election Commission (3-6)
- 19 Pain-reliever gets an approval ultimately by new lead examiner (7)
- 20 Investigate princess's school (7)
- 22 Hide in bay (4)
- 23 Animated boxer rivets essentially (5)
- 25 Grounds for grievance (5)

**SUDOKU**

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

**Solution to previous puzzle**

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

**Solution to yesterday's Sudoku**

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

**FAITH**

**Ganga to purify the soul**

All rivers are considered holy, with the Ganga revered as the holiest. Taking a holy dip in the Ganga, with the mind completely focused on the supreme power, is the gateway to heaven, said P. Swaminathan in a discourse.

The Ganga is considered to have the supreme property to not merely cleanse one's body, but also the mind.

One may wonder if a city or its holy waters can truly possess the power to impact such changes in an ordinary mortal. Scriptural history is replete with stories of saints and scholars who have benefited thus. One such evolved soul is Muthusamy Dikshitar, who was taken under his wings by Yogi Chidambaranathar. Muthusamy's father reluctantly agreed to let his son accompany the ascetic to Kasi where the boy found something invaluable: the grace of Goddess Saraswati. Muthusamy took to the life of a sishya to guru Chidambaranathar like a duck to water. Intrinsically endowed with bhakti he learnt everything that the saint taught him. Muthusamy's mind became calm with the spiritual exposure and with his mind set on the divine power, his ecstatic experiences resulted in an outpouring of devotional hymns. Realising that his sishya was fully equipped to guide other devotees on bhakti, Chidambaranathar one day asked Muthusamy to stand in the waters of the Ganga; the student did so, with his mind fully focused on the divine, when he found something caressing his arms. Upon opening his eyes he found a beautiful veena in front of him, with the words Rama inscribed upon it. It was Saraswati's way of acknowledging his devotion. Muthusamy went on to become a great devotional musician, emerging as one of the musical trinity of south India.

# The silent victims of cancer: the indirect consequences on children

While policies focus on reducing direct treatment costs, easing the indirect burden — through caregiver aid, educational support, and employment protections — is equally crucial. These interventions improve treatment adherence, mental well-being, and safeguard the next generation's opportunities

Vid Karmarkar

When Aarav an 18-year-old from Mumbai, was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma in 2018, he asked his mother, "Why me?" His dream of becoming an investment banker had shattered with the diagnosis. But he didn't just survive — he thrived. I heard him speak at an event organised by a leading cancer hospital in Mumbai for International Childhood Cancer Day, which falls on February 15.

Unlike most teenagers of his age, whose hands are busy scrolling through social media, while one of Aarav's hands received chemotherapy, the other clutched his accountancy books. He didn't let cancer slow him down. Instead, he conquered it — emerging as an All India topper in the Chartered Accountancy exams. But not all childhood cancer stories see a happy end.

Aarav reminded me of Meena, a 10-year-old from Pune, whose story took a different turn. Her mother, a domestic help, was diagnosed with late-stage breast cancer. Her father, an autorickshaw driver, worked hard to ensure Meena got an education, believing it was her path to a better future. But cancer rewrote their fate. Her mother could no longer work, and her father, needing to care for her, lost days of income. With their paltry earnings dwindling further, they had no choice but to pull Meena out of school. Unlike Aarav, she was not lucky — cancer did not just take her mother's life; it trapped Meena in a cycle of generational poverty.

A recent National Cancer Registry Programme (NCRP) report found that childhood cancers (0-14 years) account for 4% of all cancer cases in India, while adult cases near a million annually — and these numbers are expected to rise. This leaves lakhs of children vulnerable to the hidden financial toll of cancer. Whether battling the disease or affected by a parent's illness, children are the silent victims.

## Protecting the next generation

Children are the future of a nation. To build a strong nation, we need an educated and skilled workforce. Education is also a pathway to their economic empowerment. But cancer disrupts this journey.



Loss of opportunity for education is just one example of the indirect costs of cancer treatment. Photograph used for representational purposes only GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

When a child or parent is diagnosed with cancer, schooling takes a hit. Low-income families are often forced to pull children out due to financial strain, while older siblings in such households take on caregiving or work to supplement income, limiting their future prospects.

For instance, Sridevi, a second-year college student from a low-income family from Hyderabad, had to work as a fast-food crew member and tutor school children to cover her father's escalating oral cancer treatment costs. This impacted her academic performance and took a toll on her mental health.

Disruptions in education have a cascading effect. Studies show that children who drop out of school due to financial distress face lower lifetime earnings and higher rates of economic instability. In the context of cancer, the disease not only devastates the present generation but also risks trapping the next generation in a cycle of hardship.

## The other indirect costs

Loss of opportunity for education is just one example of the indirect costs of cancer treatment. Such costs include non-medical expenses and financial losses from diagnosis and treatment. These can be as debilitating as direct medical and non-medical costs.

Loss of income is one of the most significant burdens, as patients may need

**Many insurers offer plans with riders covering cancers. They provide income replacement or lump-sum payouts to offset lost wages, caregiving costs, and daily expenses. However, they are often excluded from standard policies, have strict criteria, or come with high premiums**

extended leave or even lose their jobs. Family caregivers, often spouses or children, may also reduce work hours or quit jobs entirely, worsening financial strain.

Travel and accommodation costs add to the burden, especially for patients from rural areas who must frequently travel to treatment centres in cities. Daily living expenses rise due to special diets, hospital visits, and caregiving demands, often requiring household help or costly services. The psychosocial and mental health impact further escalates the strain, with many patients and caregivers needing counselling or therapy, which is often unaffordable.

## Insurance and government schemes

Government-backed health insurance programmes such as Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) have played a crucial role in

reducing direct medical costs for cancer patients in India. These schemes provide financial coverage for inpatient costs, alleviating the immediate financial stress on affected families. But the indirect costs of treatment are insufficiently addressed.

Disability riders in insurance plans provide crucial financial support for cancer patients facing long-term disability. Many Indian insurers offer term plans with these riders, covering severe accidents and major cancers such as breast, lung, and liver cancer. They provide income replacement or lumpsum payouts to offset lost wages, caregiving costs, and daily expenses. However, they are often excluded from standard policies, have strict eligibility criteria, or come with high premiums, limiting access for those who need them most.

To ease non-medical expenses, Indian Railways and Air India are offering discounted fares for patients and caregivers, while Himachal Pradesh and Haryana provide free bus travel for cancer patients. Additionally, monthly pension schemes in states such as Haryana, Tripura, and Himachal Pradesh are helping mitigate the financial burden of indirect cancer costs.

## The way forward

While policies focus on reducing direct treatment costs, easing the indirect burden — through caregiver aid, educational support, and employment protections — is equally crucial. These interventions improve treatment adherence, mental well-being, and safeguard the next generation's opportunities.

Ensuring equitable education for cancer-affected families requires empathetic, multi-level action — from government policies and CSR funding to state income support and school-level interventions. Recognising that cancer brings not just medical but also financial and emotional distress, policies must address these broader challenges. Simple yet impactful measures — use of calculators, extra coaching, extended deadlines, free school meals, and mental health support — can make education more inclusive. By integrating such interventions, we can prevent cancer from becoming a lifelong barrier to economic and educational equity.

(Dr. Vid Karmarkar is the founder of Canseva Foundation. vid.karmarkar@gmail.com)

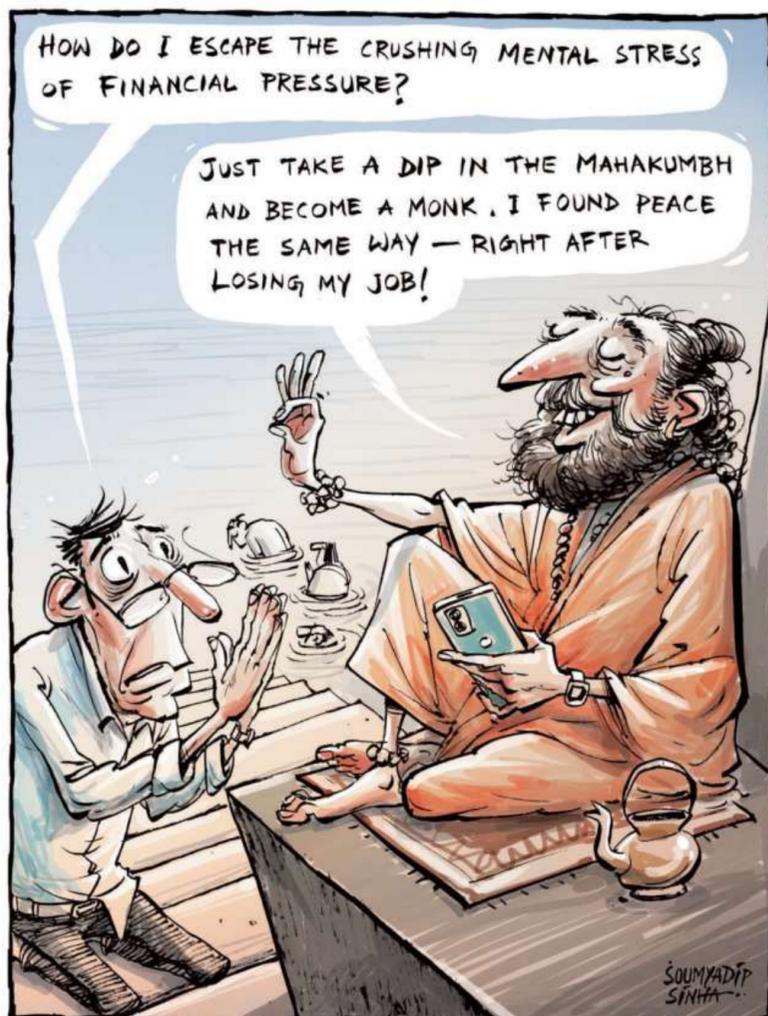
## THE GIST

Childhood cancers account for 4% of all cancer cases. This leaves thousands of children vulnerable to the financial toll of cancer. Whether battling the disease or affected by a parent's illness, children are the silent victims

Education is a pathway to economic empowerment for children. When a child or parent is diagnosed with cancer, families are often forced to pull children out of schools, while older siblings take on caregiving or start working, limiting their prospects

Disruptions in education have a cascading effect. Children who drop out face lower lifetime earnings and higher rates of economic instability. Cancer not only devastates the present generation but also risks trapping the next generation in a cycle of hardship

## HUMERUS



# AI-powered tools generate real time insights into antibiotic resistance

Ramya Kannan

A team of researchers from Indra-prastha Institute of Information Technology-Delhi (IIT-Delhi) have come up with AI-powered data integration and predictive analytics tools to understand patterns of antibiotic resistance in real time, enabling agencies to act on them speedily.

As part of a collaboration between IIT-Delhi, CHRI-PATH, Tata Img, and Indian Council of Medical Research scientists, the AI-driven tool AMRSense has been deployed to use routine data that is generated in hospitals to generate accurate and early insights on antimicrobial resistance at the global, national, and hospital levels.

In a paper, 'Emerging trends in antimicrobial resistance in bloodstream infections: multicentric longitudinal study in India,' published in *The Lancet Regional Health - Southeast Asia*, authors Jasmine Kaur, Harpreet Singh, and Tavpritesh Sethi show results from analysing six-years of data from 21 tertiary care centres in the Indian Council of Medical Research's AMR surveillance network retrospectively, establishing relationships between antibiotic pairs and the directional influence of resistance in community and hospital-acquired infections.

"There is a shared mechanism of resistance between antibiotics, we already know. Usually to do that, people use genomics, but that's an expensive proposition," explains Dr. Sethi. "We have proposed a way, which is inexpensive because it uses these routine data sets from hospitals. We show that by using routine data effectively, we can discern relationships between different antibiotics pairs and the direction AMR is taking —

whether it is rising or not. Say, for instance, if resistance to one specific antibiotic is going up, some months down the line, it is likely that resistance to an antibiotic pair might also shoot up. With these connections, we generated actionable evidence."

Dr. Sethi adds: "We have tried to go beyond the traditional way of looking at AI-asking how it can enable better decision-making for a given patient in a clinical setting or a public health setting. We think AI can also be used to understand AMR stewardship and surveillance aspects, from the hospital level, upwards. Hospitals already routinely send out patient isolates, for example, blood, sputum, urine, pus, etc., for culture sensitivity testing in order to make informed decisions on treatment courses. We are saying that these reports can be used to construct AI-based pipelines and methods that can lead to AI-driven or AI-enhanced antimicrobial stewardship."

The AMROrbit Scorecard that the team developed also won an award at the 2024 AMR Surveillance Data Challenge. Can we use these scorecards to make it more timely? Dr. Sethi explains: "It plots the orbit of resistance, say of every hospital or department, alongside a global median of resistance and a global rate of change. So around those global values, how well does a department, a hospital, or a certain country fare? That is what the scorecard will be able to provide real time data for."

The ideal quadrant for any hospital or country to be in is where there is low baseline resistance and low rate of change as well, said Jasmine Kaur, of IIT-D. Orbits spiral in or out, but the AI tool can offer information facilitating timely interventions that can bring it to a desirable range of resistance.

How accurate and reliable are these AI models? "In our paper, we have shown that

our models did capture the trends as observed in the period we collected data for. However, unless we have future data, we can't really say, like, for example COVID-19 upended things, right? The only evidence we have currently is that globally it seems that our models are capturing the increasing rate of resistance in various studies."

Clinicians can make informed decisions based on the visual image that OMROrbit provides them using the data generated by the hospital, explains Ms. Kaur. It has been proven that it can augment ongoing surveillance at various levels. Various kinds of comparisons can be done using the tool, she adds. For instance, if it is a chain of hospitals, then the tool can be used to compare AMR rates between different departments, cities and centres across the country. "The only possible limitation would be in circumstances and settings that do not have consistent, granular surveillance data. Then the AI model will not make sense. This could occur in countries where surveillance data is not digitally accessible," she adds.

"We know there are other environmental factors such as antibiotics being used as growth factors in the poultry industry or leachates in the soil, that can also lead to AMR. The ideal would be, if at the public health level, we should be able to use the data we have from the hospitals, matching it with antibiotic sales, and community-level data, and study the environmental factors too. We hope to do that soon, Dr. Sethi explains.

(ramya.kannan@thehindu.co.in)

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to [science@thehindu.co.in](mailto:science@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Daily page'



## New line in Delhi

Rekha Gupta should find the governance challenges easier to handle

**T**he Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s appointment of a first-time Member of the Legislative Assembly, Rekha Gupta, as the new Chief Minister of Delhi, is in line with its preference for relatively junior and fresh faces in leadership positions. Ms. Gupta has risen through the ranks of the Sangh Parivar and won Delhi University Students Union and municipal elections, before being elected to the Assembly from Shalimar Bagh. She has held positions in the party and its frontal organisations. Now, entrusted with the position of the Chief Minister, Ms. Gupta, 50, has her task cut out. She has to balance community and sectional interests within the party, command authority over the bureaucracy, and balance multiple power centres within the unique and complex governance architecture of Delhi. All levels of the government in Delhi are now under the control of the BJP, which might improve governance in the city. Ms. Gupta is the fourth woman Chief Minister of Delhi, the second woman Chief Minister of Delhi from the BJP, and the only woman among the party's 14 Chief Ministers across India. A woman in the top post allows the BJP to deflect other factional claims in the party, and possibly boosts its popular image. Ms. Gupta also represents the trader bania community which has been a bedrock of the BJP's politics in Delhi for decades. The new leader ticks many boxes for the party, and her success depends on how she grows into the challenging role.

The BJP has tried to balance caste and community representation in the new Council of Ministers. In Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, the party has found someone to represent the Jat community, in Manjinder Singh Sirsa, the Sikh community, in Ashish Sood, the Punjabi Hindu community, in Ravinder Indraj Singh, Dalits, in Kapil Mishra, Brahmins, and in Pankaj Kumar Singh, the Purvanchali community. The new government has a multitude of governance challenges awaiting it. The problems of air and water pollution are issues that need a solution that go beyond the boundaries of Delhi; issues such as law and order are under the purview of the Union Home Ministry. Ms. Gupta's experience of being a three-term municipal councillor could help, as would the fact that the neighbouring Haryana and Uttar Pradesh also have BJP governments. The BJP has returned to power in the national capital after 26 years, having offered the electorate a raft of welfare schemes to achieve that. There are the issues of unemployment and underemployment, and affordable housing and infrastructure that require the government's attention.

## Watering down

Pollution in Ganga needs long-term solutions, not denialism

**O**fficial estimates suggest that around 45 crore visitors, nearly a third of India's population, have already been to Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh Mela, which began in mid-January. With such a massive influx, even a small percentage of individuals who carry microbes could trigger extensive chains of disease transmission. The Ganga at Prayagraj, where devotees not only have ritual baths but also drink the water, inevitably becomes a complex receptacle of microbiomes. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), which is responsible for monitoring and controlling air, water and land pollution, has been assessing water quality at Prayagraj since the festival began. Its reports, which are publicly accessible, present a mixed picture. On January 14, which was Makar Sankranti, one of the most auspicious bathing days, faecal coliform levels, a key indicator of contamination from human and animal waste, were at a high - nearly 11,000 units at the Sangam Ghat, which is more than four times the permissible limit of 2,500 units. At the Old Naini Bridge Ghat, along the Yamuna, the count was even higher, at 33,000 units. However, on other days, these numbers dropped to as low as 200 and 780 units. Similar fluctuations were observed for other parameters of water quality such as biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and dissolved oxygen (DO). A CPCB report submitted to the National Green Tribunal on February 3 stated that the water quality on January 12-13, 2025 was not fit for bathing, let alone drinking, despite bathing having a higher tolerance limit. However, the report also noted a reduction in organic pollution due to freshwater intrusion upstream. It further observed that the sheer number of people bathing in the river during the Maha Kumbh Mela, particularly on auspicious days, led to an inevitable spike in faecal contamination.

These fluctuations are not exclusive to the Kumbh Mela. Routine monitoring of water quality by the CPCB has consistently recorded similar patterns, reinforcing the fact that, regardless of what the festival may be, water in the Ganga at Prayagraj is not fit for consumption, whether as a few drops or bucketful. The river's suitability for bathing fluctuates based on water flow and dilution. Considering these adverse findings, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's dismissal of this scientific data as "baseless" is misleading. The National Mission for Clean Ganga is based on a sustained effort to restore the river's health, and Uttar Pradesh, its largest beneficiary, must prioritise continuous cleanup efforts instead of undermining legitimate pollution concerns. The Kumbh Mela highlights the urgent need for long-term solutions, not denialism. Science can come to the aid of the faithful; it is in no one's interest to undermine scientific findings in the name of encouraging a spiritual journey.

# The transformation of Koraput's tribal food basket

**K**oraput, a district in Odisha, is a beautiful landscape, rich in biodiversity and home to a predominantly tribal population. But there is also a paradox. There is rampant poverty and undernutrition. There is no dearth of government schemes, in the form of direct feeding programmes or schemes for livelihood activities. Yet, undernutrition levels remain high. According to an estimate based on the National Family Health Survey-5 data (2019-21) 43% of children under five years of age are stunted (low-height-for-age) and 33% are underweight. Only 17% are fed an adequate diet. More than 50% of women are anaemic.

The question is what is it that people can do themselves order to have access to healthier diets and a better environment?

**A transformation toward nutrition security** Between 2013 and 2022, the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) embarked on a community-based model of nutrition literacy in order to empower tribal communities to take action in diversifying their household food basket with nutritious foods. The aim was to facilitate a transformative process, spearheaded by the community, to move towards nutrition security. As it is an agricultural population with small and marginal land holdings and engaged in subsistence farming, a nutrition-sensitive farming approach to maximise and diversify food production was adopted along with sanitation hygiene and Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices (IYCF). Since transformation begins at the individual level, it was decided to build the capacity of a core group of adult men and women through a residential training programme.

The first step was to sensitise the community to its own nutritional status. This involved assessing the nutritional status of women, children, adolescent boys and girls by taking their height and weight, consolidating secondary data and presenting them to the community. After subsequent discussions, villagers agreed to select a few men and women from every village, representing various caste groups, to undergo a residential training programme on key nutrition concepts, such as a balanced diet, IYCF practices, the role of dietary diversity, sanitation and hygiene, and enabling nutrition sensitive agriculture that included crop diversity, backyard poultry and, wherever possible, pisciculture.

A few residential training programmes, each about two and a half days long, were held at periodic intervals over six months. These were activity based and included group work, discussions, role play followed by an analysis of the situation and possible solutions.

The approach was to engage participants in a dialogue to discuss theoretical aspects from the perspective of their own knowledge rooted in the social, cultural, economic and political context. Participants discussed how caste, class and

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A community-based model of nutrition literacy is leading to change, with the predominantly tribal population in the district aware of the importance of nutrition security

gender dimensions affected nutrition security of different family members at the household level. They compared the new learning with their existing knowledge and were satisfied when some of their existing knowledge was reiterated. Their perception of dietary diversity was based on the 'dish count' rather than the 'food group' count.

As one participant remarked, 'we never thought about having both dhal and vegetables in the everyday diet. So long as one was there as accompaniment to rice we were satisfied.' They were happy to know that they were the custodians of a variety of traditional rice varieties.

### Collective power

While social spaces are usually hierarchically determined, the residential training gave them an opportunity to engage with people from other villages and with both genders. They planned how they could introduce and cultivate more nutritious crops on different types of land and in their home gardens. They explored the advantages of collective decision making and action rather than individual efforts in demanding government entitlements, and realised that their efforts to improve household nutrition security would have to go beyond the boundaries of their own villages to the panchayat level. Messages and songs were created and composed by the participants on various themes such as a balanced diet, dietary diversity, hygiene, sanitation and support to women. While they were aware of a few government entitlements, they were eager to learn about many more.

More than 200 men and women from over 70 villages were trained in the residential training programmes, becoming the 'community champions' in transforming themselves and their communities. They identified further training needs mainly to improve agricultural production covering seed treatment, vermi-compost use, the use of organic fertilizers, mushroom production, post-harvest technology and value addition. These training programmes were organised in the villages. Over 10 years, about 1,000 men and women were trained in various aspects of agriculture, animal husbandry and pisciculture such that a community resource base for nutrition security was created to address underlying issues of undernutrition through household nutrition security.

The community champions shared various health and nutrition messages with their families, friends and fellow villagers when engaged in agricultural work, on their way to the market, in women self help group meetings, or while at a tea shop or even during festival events. They also convened village meetings to discuss creating hunger-free villages.

They led by example. They undertook a range of activities, both individually and collectively. Those who had upland began cultivating a variety

of crops. Many of them started growing more vegetables and fruits. Home gardens were revived and the diversity of crops increased from about four crops at the beginning of the programme to nine crops at the time of completion.

One woman champion got her land back from lease in order to resume agricultural activities. Another, who was landless, took a piece of land on lease to grow food crops. Another landless woman began growing vegetables using the foundation of the house she was constructing. Paddy fields that had been kept fallow after harvest were now used for pulse cultivation, making use of the residual moisture.

Diversity in crop production was seen in Mothpera and Deragida (names changed) panchayats in Boiparida block. While earlier, 71% of households were cultivating only two to three varieties of crops, more than 60% were cultivating four to five varieties of crops at the end of the project. About 90% of households had operational home gardens for about five months at the start of the programme. Towards the end, in more than 50% of households, home gardens were operational for more than seven to nine months. From growing four varieties of crops earlier, households began growing nine to 11 varieties. Household dietary diversity improved. There was a significant increase in the consumption of pulses, leafy vegetables, tubers, fruits, poultry, fish and wild food.

Some prepared biocompost and used it for their home gardens. Most of the male champions began to make decision on agricultural decision along with their wives. Women champions worked closely with Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) and Anganwadi workers to spread nutrition messages. Sanya of Maligad village (name changed) said, 'I give my daughter leafy vegetables and ripe fruits, dhal, egg because she is anaemic and was recently discharged from hospital.'

### Facilitating change

Villagers also monitored the direct feeding programme under the Integrated Child Development Services. In Lecha (name changed) village, there was no anganwadi centre. The community women champions organised village meetings and spoke about the need for one. The villagers passed a resolution for the sanction of an anganwadi in their village and the male champions followed this up with the block office till the centre was sanctioned. They supervised the building construction, and upon completion organised an inauguration. They also revived defunct village structures for nutrition security such as the community grain bank, discussed their village situation in the gram sabha (village council) meetings and developed an overall plan for hunger-free villages.

The wheels of change have been set in motion in Koraput's villages with the people pursuing their health and nutrition security.

# The long and winding road of India-China relations

**I**ndia's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri was in China in January 2025, during which India and China made several announcements on the future of their bilateral relations. He met Wang Yi, who is China's Foreign Minister, the Director of the Office of Central Commission of Foreign Affairs and also a politburo member of the party, and also Liu Jianchao, Minister of the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party.

The Indian statement after this meeting indicated that the process of restoration of several aspects of bilateral relations including media and think tank exchanges, the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, and bilateral flights is on the cards for the summer of 2025.

### Possible reasons

India and China have attempted to move forward after more than four years of tense and stalemate-based relations since the clashes in Galwan in June 2020. Stalemates cannot be permanent. Both sides have made their points and moved to the détente. One can argue that there are several reasons for the timing of this bilateral agreement, the main being the election of Donald Trump, who is a known disruptor and unpredictable in his ways of doing business. The other is about economic concerns in China and in India in recent times.

India and China have been bracing for the Trump impact especially when by the middle of October last year his election was already beginning to look more likely to happen. This possibility may have pushed the October 2024 de-escalation agreement between India and China, and Mr. Trump's gigantic electoral victory in November 2024 may have pushed the January 2025 agreement between India and China. There is a historic logic to this as well. China agreed to



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Though India and China have attempted to move forward after Galwan, abundant caution may be the best way forward

normalising relations with India, after the 1962 war, only in the backdrop of the backlash in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Again, China may have agreed to normalise its relations with India given that it had to brace for the Trump impact. Thus, there is both internal and external logic around the restoration of normalcy.

However, since we do not know whether patrolling rights have been/are fully restored or whether demobilisation is in its advanced stages, such an absence of communication on the part of the government raises doubts and questions needlessly.

### At the LAC

The Government of India has maintained absolute silence on the status of de-escalation, demilitarisation and demobilisation of the fairly large number of troops. Troops were mobilised and deployed on the border, first during the tensions of May-June 2020, and then in even larger numbers in the aftermath of the June 15, 2020 clashes. These troops were on active duty or in newly created barracks close to the six points of tension along the border including in Galwan, Depsang Bulge, Charding Nala, Gogra Post and Hot Springs and on the north bank of the Pangong lake.

There is also no clarity whether the large number of People's Liberation Army troops on the Chinese side, before and after the clashes, have retreated to their bases. Confirmation of this would mean that the actual restoration of normalcy on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has been achieved. India has also made it clear in the aftermath of 2020 that it was China that had violated the several agreements and protocols the two sides had signed. One is not sure about whether these have been rectified in a verifiable

way. This in turn can only be established when patrolling rights have not only been agreed to but also exercised.

The briefing in October 2024, by the Foreign Secretary, prior to the 16th BRICS summit in Kazan in this respect, was already guarded. It only alluded to an agreement that would lead to the "process of disengagement and resolution of issues that emerged in 2020". A follow-up briefing on this issue would have been useful and necessary to make it clear that India had not given up on its position on the bilateral relations.

India's principled stand in dealing with China in the aftermath of the 2020 crisis has been that the stability on the border and the restoration of the status quo ante are the preconditions to progress in other aspects of bilateral relations. However, it was China that reiterated that India should move on from the clashes and not let the border standoff be a hindrance to the development of overall bilateral relations in the economic, political and social sectors.

### The need for clarity

India's silence on the progress on the status of restoration of status quo ante makes it appear as though the Chinese position of "moving on" is succeeding and that India is abandoning its position of stability and restoration before there is progress on other aspects. It was always known that the process of restoring normalcy would be long drawn and fraught with challenges. In addition, the worldviews of India and China will remain divergent as their ideas about the world order are not going to converge anytime soon. India-China relations have seen several cyclical ups and downs in the Xi Jinping era. Therefore, abundant caution would be the best way forward. The Indian government's lack of clarity does not boost one's confidence.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Delhi's new Chief Minister

That Rekha Gupta, a first-time MLA, has become the Chief Minister of Delhi, 'defying all odds' if I may add, needs comment. The so-called unanimous "selection" of the leader of BJP's Delhi legislature party, that took almost two weeks, smacks of the Congress's culture. There was hectic lobbying by the over half-a-dozen aspirants.

This is because the Delhi unit of the BJP has several defectors from other political parties. Giant killer Parvesh Verma could not make it perhaps because of the party's strategic policy to focus on women. Whether this will pay dividends to the BJP or not, only time will tell. The "unity" forged by the party's high command should last the five years for Ms. Gupta

to serve the people of Delhi. If the party's manifesto is not implemented in toto, the people of Delhi might go back to the Aam Aadmi Party, sooner rather than later.

**Govardhana Myneedu,**  
Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

Parties with an ideology that differs from that of the BJP's have obviously failed to learn important lessons

in political management to match the aspirations of young voters. A lack of dynamism, hard work and discipline in party management are what mark the political

opponents of the BJP.  
**M.V. Nagavender Rao,**  
Hyderabad

**A pat for Trump**  
Whatever Donald Trump's second term portends for

### Corrections & Clarifications

The expansion of BTR is Biennial Transparency Report and not Biannual Transparency Report, as mentioned in a report, "India prepares to submit updated greenhouse gas inventory to UN" (News, February 19, 2025).

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America, his vow to end the Gaza war came true. Again, the credit for the U.S. and Russia agreeing to ending the war in Ukraine goes to Mr. Trump. He deserves praise for the cessation of two mindless wars.

**Prabhu Raj R.,**  
Bengaluru

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## Is there a right to take offence?



**Justice Gautam Patel**

Former judge of the Bombay High Court



**Dushyant Dave**

Senior Advocate based in Delhi

### PARLEY

**T**he popular YouTube show 'India's Got Latent' has sparked controversy after criminal proceedings were initiated against its creators and participants over allegedly obscene remarks in one of its episodes. On February 18, 2025, the Supreme Court granted interim protection from arrest to podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia, one of the participants named in the FIRs. This has reignited the debate on whether stringent criminal sanctions are justified for contentious speech. Is there a right to take offence? Justice Gautam Patel and Dushyant Dave discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Aaratrika Bhaumik**. Edited excerpts:

#### Is there a right to take offence at any form of speech?

**Justice Gautam Patel:** No such right exists. The reasonable restrictions on free speech under Article 19(2) of the Constitution do not recognise offensive speech as a distinct category. Instead, the restrictions are narrowly defined and include security of the state, public order, decency, morality, and other specific grounds. Therefore, the notion of a right to take offence lies beyond the ambit of constitutionally permissible limitations. While the language used in the show is highly objectionable and unpalatable, it does not necessarily amount to a violation of decency or morality under Article 19(2).

**Dushyant Dave:** The right to free speech is always subject to certain exceptions, including decency and morality. However, these standards vary across jurisdictions and evolve over time. While I agree that the language used in the show was highly inappropriate, I have serious reservations about whether it meets the legal threshold to constitute a criminal offence. In reality, such language is widely used in everyday discourse and has become common parlance in society. Thus, the outrage surrounding it seems misplaced.

#### Should laws be paternalistic, or restrict speech only when it poses an imminent risk of public disorder?

**DD:** I believe that speech should remain unrestricted, except when it is seditious and incites violence. The Constituent Assembly debates reveal strong opposition to the restrictions imposed on free speech under Article 19(2)-19(6), with many members arguing that the government should not have the power to curtail expression. However, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar maintained that in the larger interest of the nation, some restrictions were necessary



Ranveer Allahbadia. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

as long as they remained narrowly defined. However, the irony is that politicians routinely engage in hate speech, yet constitutional authorities fail to take any action. Given this, I would rather grant citizens greater latitude to express themselves than condone such reprehensible conduct from our political leaders.

**GP:** The freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a) can be restricted only by the limitations explicitly prescribed in Article 19(2). While the right to free speech is expansive, the restrictions on it remain narrowly defined. Therefore, the state cannot impose restrictions beyond these constitutional limits. More importantly, speech cannot be curtailed through executive action – such restrictions must be imposed solely through duly enacted legislation.

#### Is constitutional morality a vital safeguard against the moral convictions of the majority?

**DD:** Constitutional morality upholds the spirit of the Constitution by reinforcing values like social justice and equality. However, restrictions on free speech are governed by statute law. Any evaluation of whether speech constitutes an offence must be confined to these narrowly defined legal parameters, rather than the shifting moral sentiments of the public. That said, society has every right to condemn the remarks made on the show. It can express discontent through criticism or boycotts. However, criminal sanctions are never the solution. Moreover, the increasing trend of filing multiple FIRs for the same offence constitutes harassment. It not only prejudices the accused but also undermines their right to a fair defence.

**GP:** Constitutional morality is a nuanced and evolving concept. It is not an inherent sentiment but one that must be cultivated. There is also ambiguity regarding its application to constitutional processes. For instance, Dr. B.R.



Profanity is not humour; it is an indication of thoughtlessness. Intelligent humour does not require offensive language. As a society, we must understand that divergent views are inevitable. We can engage with them or ignore them, but not silence the messenger.

JUSTICE GAUTAM PATEL

Ambedkar believed it was wiser to entrust the legislature with prescribing forms of administration rather than embedding them in the Constitution. That said, I agree that whether a form of speech qualifies as an offence is a matter strictly governed by substantive law.

#### Can profane speech necessarily be considered "obscene" speech?

**GP:** A speech laced with profanities is not necessarily obscene. This understanding has evolved over five decades of judicial interpretation. In 1964, the Supreme Court in *Ranjit D. Udeshi v. State of Maharashtra* applied the Victorian-era Hicklin test to ban *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D.H. Lawrence. It defined obscenity as anything with a "tendency to deprave and corrupt" those susceptible to immoral influences. Fifty years later, in *Aveek Sarkar v. State of West Bengal*, the Court embraced the "community standards" test, a more contemporary approach. However, community standards are amorphous and hard to define. Does it mean that discussions about sex in public discourse must be prohibited? If so, what does that imply for our ancient art and sculptures? These standards continue to evolve. Today, few would deem *Lady Chatterley's Lover* obscene rather than a literary masterpiece.

**DD:** Obscenity is not explicitly defined under criminal law or the Information Technology Act 2000. Instead, its determination is a matter of degree, shaped by society's evolving moral standards. Looking at the erotic art of Khajuraho and Konark. It seems that rather than becoming more progressive, our society has regressed over time. Justice Krishna Iyer captured this dilemma in *Raj Kapoor & Ors. v. State* (1979), where the court quashed criminal proceedings against the makers of the film *Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram*. He observed: "The relation between reality and relativity must haunt the Court's evaluation of obscenity, expressed in society's pervasive humanity, not law's penal perspective."

**A recent study by the research group India Hate Lab found a 74.4% surge in hate speech against minorities by politicians in 2024. Is the relentless targeting of comedians a case**

#### of misplaced priorities?

**DD:** Yes, definitely. Politicians continue to spew hate speech with impunity. During the Lok Sabha elections, several politicians, including the Prime Minister, made blatantly divisive remarks against minorities. Yet, the Election Commission and the State Police remained silent spectators. Opposition parties also failed to challenge these violations in court. Meanwhile, mainstream television journalists amplify hate speech daily. This should alarm every member of society. Comedians are targeted across political lines because they expose uncomfortable truths. Politicians perceive them as a threat. But dissent and criticism are fundamental to democracy. Silencing them paves the way for authoritarianism.

**GP:** Comedians play a crucial role in society by challenging authority and reflecting societal realities. I firmly believe in the Latin maxim "*In joco veritas* – In jest, there is truth." Thus, the targeting of comedians is not just unfortunate but reprehensible. However, profanity is not humour; it is an indication of thoughtlessness. Intelligent humour does not require offensive language. As a society, we must understand that divergent views are inevitable. We can either engage with them or ignore them, but not silence the messenger. I also agree with Dushyant that we are failing to penalise the rising instances of hate speech.

#### Efforts to regulate digital content, such as the Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, have intensified. What are your concerns?

**GP:** I do not endorse any such regulatory attempts. Once free speech is restricted, it sets a dangerous precedent. Censorship creates uniformity, compelling everyone to consume the same sanitised information. But the essence of free speech is to prevent such conformity. In a democracy, divergent opinions are essential. Else, we risk sliding into authoritarianism.

**DD:** My concern is the selective enforcement of laws. Why do censorship laws primarily target Opposition leaders and government critics? People are dragged to court for merely criticising the government, even when their speech falls short of sedition. Laws must be applied fairly and impartially – something the judiciary is failing to uphold. A vibrant democracy demands unwavering protection of free speech.



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### NOTEBOOK

## Covering a stampede

Even as the authorities were slow and confused in communicating facts with journalists, the post-mortems were conducted quickly

**Alisha Dutta**

**I**n India, nobody bats an eye when they see crowded railway stations or men hanging from the open doors of the general compartment of a train. So, when a video landed in my inbox on February 15 showing a jam-packed station and people jostling with one another to board a train, I found nothing unusual or alarming about it.

However, within the next few minutes, news wires announced that there was a "stampede-like situation" at the New Delhi Railway Station (NDLS). This was contradicted by the Chief Public Relations Officer of Northern Railways, Himanshu Upadhyay, who in a public statement claimed that news of a stampede was just a "rumour". At midnight, Delhi Lieutenant Governor V.K. Saxena made a public statement condoling the deaths of the victims of the stampede. However, within the next few minutes, Mr. Saxena edited his post, removing any mention of deaths or a stampede. The Railways Minister, Ashwini Vaishnaw, said on social media that the situation was "under control".

As one can imagine, these conflicting statements made it a challenging task for journalists working for national dailies. Our deadline was looming, but authorities continued to underplay the situation hours after it occurred, which meant that we could not communicate the facts of the night. As a result, readers across India woke up the next morning to multiple newspapers carrying headlines that did not confirm the number of casualties.

In sharp contrast to the speed in communicating factually correct information was the speed with which post-mortems were carried out that night. By 2:30 a.m. on February 16, while people continued to search for their loved ones at various hospitals, some post-mortems were completed. Having reported on a number of major disasters, I was taken aback at the pace at which this was happening. At the station too, urgency dictated the mood: all the markers of a stampede – shoes,

garment pieces, and blood marks – were removed or scrubbed off.

That night, I visited two hospitals where some bodies were yet to be identified and claimed. When I reached the third hospital around 3 a.m., I saw the police recording the statement of a man. The man had carried his daughter's blood-covered body to the hospital and was being asked to narrate the happenings of the night. As soon as his statement was recorded, he was quickly escorted by the hospital staff to the mortuary where his daughter's body lay. The post-mortem had been completed. I learned later that the body was released within the next hour and the man was given compensation of ₹10 lakh in cash.

While watching the distraught man, I realised that he had not got any time to process the tragedy. He looked confused and tired. In that moment, I learned a painful lesson – to pause and mourn the loss of loved ones is a luxury in India.

The next morning, I visited the hospitals again. By then, the bodies of the victims of the stampede had been released from the mortuaries. The families, accompanied by the police, had taken them. The families had been given compensation, as declared by the Railways Ministry, in cash, and had been sent off to their homes in Delhi, Bihar, and Haryana. They had been sent away before reporters could record their testimonies.

The injured were getting discharged, irrespective of the severity of their wounds. They were receiving compensation in cash from a railway official, and a man in civilian clothes was recording videos while asking the survivors whether they had got the full compensation.

The events revealed how desperately the government was trying to cover up the stampede – first by downplaying it and then by providing a picture of normalcy. The country may move on quickly from this stampede, just as it did from the Maha Kumbh stampede a fortnight ago.

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### PICTURE OF THE WEEK

#### Crushed in a crowd



Passengers board an overcrowded train headed to Prayagraj, at the New Delhi Railway Station, on February 15. A stampede occurred at the station, killing 18 people and injuring more than a dozen others. PTI

### FROM THE ARCHIVES

#### The ~~NDLS~~ Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 21, 1975

## Surplus Railway Budget, no fare rise

New Delhi, Feb. 20: There is no increase in the passenger fares in the Railway Budget proposals for 1975-76 presented to Parliament here this evening by the Railway Minister, Mr. Kamalapati Tripathi.

However, the Railway Minister announced proposals for "minor rationalisation" in the freight rates on certain commodities which would yield Rs. 39 crores. This will more than cover the deficit of Rs. 15.97 crores and leave a surplus of Rs. 23.03 crores.

The Railway Minister said that out of this Rs. 18 crores will be utilised for defraying expenditure chargeable to Development Fund and the balance of Rs. 5.03 crores will be credit to the Revenue Reserve Fund.

Mr. Tripathi said that the rationalisation proposals covered the tariff on foodgrains (including pulses) and iron ore and manganese ore for export. During 1974-75, the Railways would have suffered a loss of Rs. 34.5 crores in lifting 14.5 million tonnes of foodgrains and pulses which are carried at rates below the bare operating cost, since these were meant for public distribution. In 1975-76, this loss was expected to go up to Rs 35 crores on the movement of 15.5 million tonnes.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 21, 1925

## Canadian locomotives for India

Attention has been drawn by the Canadian Trade Commissioner in India to the question of the locomotives used there, and he appears to hold out some hope that Canada may have some chances of supplying a proportion of them to the Indian Railways, we are told by a *Pioneer* correspondent. He says that engineers in India are slowly awakening to the fact that the Canadian and American types of locomotives are more suitable in the country than the British, which appear to have almost the monopoly. He claims that the locomotives made here are more "get-at-able", and when taken off the road for repairs are said to spend much less time in the work shops than the English type.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**People given the capital punishment in Iran in 2024**

**975** Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) and French group Together Against the Death Penalty (ECPM) said that the figure was the highest since IHR began recording executions in Iran in 2008. This marks a 17% increase from the 834 people recorded in 2023. AFF

**The GDP growth rate in India as per Moody's Analytics**

**6.4** in per cent. In its report, Moody's Analytics said growth across the Asia-Pacific economy will slow in 2025 as trade tensions, policy shifts, and uneven recoveries knock the region's fortunes. The report stated that India's growth will slow down by 0.2%, from 6.6% in 2024. PTI

**Number of criminals killed in Uttar Pradesh since 2017**

**221** Criminals were killed in encounters while 8,022 others were injured in operations targeting criminal elements in various districts of Uttar Pradesh, said U.P. Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna on Thursday. The State also pursued cases against 68 identified mafia criminals. PTI

**Number of troops Keir Starmer plans to send to Ukraine**

**30** in thousands. The British Prime Minister said he is "ready and willing" to put U.K. troops on the ground in Ukraine as a security guarantee in the event of some sort of a ceasefire deal between Moscow and Kyiv in exchange for American protection. REUTERS

**Number of hostages still held captive by Hamas**

**66** Out of these, Israel has declared 30 to be dead. A total of 251 hostages were taken on October 7, 2023 by Hamas. So far 137 hostages have been freed, of which four died in captivity, and whose bodies were released on Thursday. AP  
COMPILED BY KUSHAL VARMA J. V.

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# Is consumption enough to drive growth?

An economy's growth depends on two factors. One is the supply or the production of goods and services, and the other is the demand or expenditure for purchasing these goods and services. Among the sources of demand, investment stands out for its ability to create 'multiplier effects'. Consumption can only follow, not lead, growth

## ECONOMIC NOTES

Jayan Jose Thomas

An economy's growth is like sailing on two boats tugged to each other. On one side is the supply or the production of goods and services. GDP, or gross domestic product, is the value the production process adds. On the other side, there is demand or expenditure for purchasing these goods and services from the market. Both the supply and the demand boats must move in tandem. If supply proceeds slower than demand, prices rise, leading to inflation. If demand falls behind, firms will be left with unsold inventories, which may lead to cuts in future production, job and income losses, and a worsening cycle of demand and growth slowdown.

The demand or aggregate expenditure in an economy comes from four sources. First is private consumption, which is the sum of expenditures by all individuals on items such as food, clothing, and mobile phones. Second is private investment, which is the amount spent by firms and households on installing new machines and constructing new factories or residences. Third is government expenditure, for consumption and investment. The former refers to the money spent on day-to-day government operations, including paying salaries to officers, teachers, doctors and others attached to public institutions. Fourth is net exports or exports minus import of goods and services while engaging in trade with the rest of the world.

### Investment and its multipliers

Among the sources of demand, investment stands out for its ability to create 'multiplier effects'. That is, an increase in investment of ₹100 could increase the economy's overall demand and GDP by more than ₹100 – let us say by ₹125, with the multiplier being 1.25. Consider, for instance, public investment in building a new highway network. The incomes received by workers and firms involved in the road construction project will generate fresh demand in the economy. But that is not all. The highways will trigger the establishment of new shops and create opportunities for new industries, all of which translate into a much bigger expansion of aggregate demand. The multiplier effect will depend on the nature of the investment and the state of the economy. The multiplier from an investment in a railway line is likely higher in an underdeveloped district than in a region with a well-developed transport network.

Compared to investment, the multiplier effect arising from increased consumption is much weaker. If incomes increase, consumption expenditures also increase, but the relation does not work strongly enough in the reverse direction. A rise in consumption cannot lift incomes as much in the rest of the economy. Therefore, according to Keynesian economists, consumption is a passive component of aggregate demand.

### Indian and Chinese experiences

In the early 1990s, the per capita incomes of India and China were almost the same. Both countries were equally poor, with the average income of an Indian or Chinese resident being approximately 1.5% of the average income of an American. But by 2023, China's per capita income has grown to five times as high as the Indian level (2.4 times as high if purchasing power differences between



Chart 1: Per capita income and investment rates in India and China

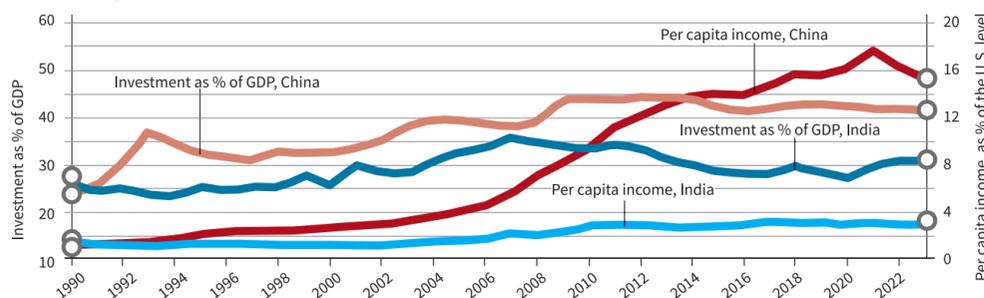


Chart 2: Investment as % of GDP in India by institutional sectors

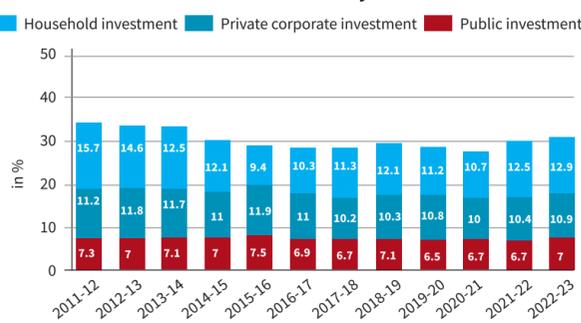


Table 1: Distribution (in %) of GDP by expenditure type: India and China, 2023

	India	China
Private consumption	60.3	39.1
Investment	30.8	41.3
Government consumption	10.4	16.5
Exports	21.8	19.7
Less imports	-24.1	-17.6
GDP	100.0	100
GDP per capita (current US\$)	2481	12,614

GDP = Value added in the production of all goods and services = C + (I + Ig) + Cg + E - M

Here, C = private consumption; I = private investment; Ig = investment by the government; Cg = government consumption; Cg + Ig = G or government expenditure; E = exports of goods and services; M = imports of goods and services.

Source: World Development Indicators, The World Bank, National Accounts Statistics 2024

the two countries are considered). As a proportion of U.S. levels, the per capita incomes of China and India were 15% and 3%, respectively, in 2023 (Chart 1). The speedy growth of incomes in China has been led by investment.

China's investment rates have been significantly higher than India's from the 1970s onward. In 1992, investment as a share of GDP was 39.1% in China compared to 27.4% in India, even though the per capita incomes of the two countries were nearly equal. The gap in investment rates between India and China narrowed during the first half of the 2000s, with India's investment rate climbing to 35.8% in 2007. However, the two countries responded to the global financial crisis of 2007-08 and its aftermath in starkly different ways. The investment rate took a big hit in India, especially after 2012. However, China battled its economic challenges with considerable expenditure, primarily through its state-owned enterprises, in areas such as infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, and artificial intelligence. By 2013, the

investment rate rose to 44.5% in China but dropped to 31.3% in India. In 2023, these rates were 41.3% and 30.8%, respectively, for China and India (Chart 1).

India's economic growth over the last decade has been driven mainly by expanding domestic consumption expenditures. In 2023, consumption as a share of GDP was 60.3% in India compared to 39.1% in China (Table 1). The dominance of consumption in India's GDP structure is mainly due to the weaknesses of the other components of aggregate demand in the country. The shares of investment and government consumption expenditure are relatively low. India also has a trade deficit, with its import of goods and services being larger than its exports, reducing domestic demand.

Economic growth driven by consumption is not only slower than investment-led growth, but it also aggravates inequalities. The growth of jobs, incomes, and consumption has remained depressed for many Indians, and they will be left behind.

There has been a stagnation in the growth of investment by the public and

private corporate sectors in India (it is too early to say if the marginal improvement in investment in 2022-23 is here to stay) (Chart 2). The only segment that has shown some vitality is household investment, especially in residential buildings, and that too during the early 2010s. The continued reluctance of private capitalists to spend more in the economy is a sign of their sagging 'animal spirits'. In times like these, the government needs to step in with its investments, particularly in critical sectors, to boost private sector confidence and help spread the benefits of growth to the broader population.

However, the government has not shown its resolve, including in the latest Union Budget, to provide an investment boost to the Indian economy. Instead, the tax concessions and the unwillingness to significantly raise government spending indicate a preference for a low-growth trajectory pulled by the consumption of the middle and upper classes.

Jayan Jose Thomas is a Professor of Economics at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi.

## THE GIST

Consider, for instance, public investment in building a new highway network. The incomes received by workers and firms involved in the road construction project will generate fresh demand in the economy.

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IN THE LIMELIGHT

# How prison dramas explore the human condition

No other setting lends more nuanced cinematic takes on the human condition as much as prisons do. As countless films and shows have reflected on, most prisons seem far removed from their rehabilitative purpose

Bhuvanesh Chandar

In August 1971, a psychology professor at Stanford University conducted a study in which college students were offered money in exchange for participating in a two-week prison simulation experiment. Philip Zimbardo wished to understand what such an environment would do to their psyche. Through coin-flips, the participants were segregated into 'prisoners' and 'guards'. In just 24 hours into the experiment, the crucible gave in, with prisoners rebelling against the guards, and the latter resorting to psychological abuse to show prisoners their place. The experiment reached unspeakable heights and was terminated on the sixth day, with the intervention of psychologist Christina Maslach.

In 2015, Kyle Patrick Alvarez made a cinematic retelling of the experiment, called *The Stanford Prison Experiment*, which incisively took viewers through the experiment; while every progressing situation reveals intriguing psychological results of life in prison, the epilogue is startling, where the participants spell out their experience. Several concurred that putting on a uniform of authority automatically brings out their worst, apathetic selves. From the beginning, we see Michael Angarano's prison guard character, the despicable John Wayne, 'enact' how he believes guards should be. When confronted, he expresses his disbelief in how his abusive authoritarian ship wasn't questioned enough.

Much of this echoes Tamil filmmaker Vetri Maaran's belief that the pyramid of power is such that it cannot function with empathy. As the high recidivism rates point toward, most prisons seem far removed from their rehabilitative purpose, now existing as a mere symbol of apathy, a reminder of human despicability.

**Prison, a microcosm of society**

As several films and shows have shed light on, the prospect of jailing someone is currency by itself, used for political and personal reasons. Filmmakers have captivantly explored the prison system, attempting to unearth hushed, perverse secrets of our civilised world. Though a sanitised retelling of real events, Netflix's *Black Warrant* explored the psychological nuances of life in prison and the politics that make the governing system anything but rehabilitative. When we first meet the infamous Bikini Killer, Charles Sobhraj (Sidhant Gupta), in the series, the pull his presence has on the guards of Tihar seems heroic; but when you see our honest hero (Zahan Kapoor, as Sunil Kumar Gupta) repeatedly ask favours from Sobhraj, the curtain drops. You also see the system for what it is when Sunil's attempts towards rehabilitation are hindered by his superiors. Like in a particular episode in which criminals Billa and Ranga are hanged, many scenes question our biases.

Several cinematic titles have taken swings at our moral contradictions. Reduced to their primal selves, humans perversely wish to feel liberated from their own social structures and step out of line, if they could face no consequences. They even self-condition their moral



Sidhant Gupta as Charles Sobhraj in *Black Warrant*. NETFLIX

compass to live without guilt. They would know better if they watched Ric Roman Waugh's 2008 drama *Felon*, which spectacularly shows how a man – imprisoned for accidentally killing an intruder – is brutalised by a debauched institution and forced to abide by gang rules to survive.

The character of Lieutenant Bill Jackson in *Felon* embodies a corrupt cog in the prison wheel, a superior who has succumbed to the pressure of prison life. Watching Jackson break down in a parking lot echoes Samuthirakani's

character in Vetri Maaran's *Visaranai*, which remains the most gut-wrenching depiction of the film running deep in our prison system. Post the release of the film, reports cited testimonies of viewers experiencing fear for men in khaki; the many news reports of fake encounters in southern India have only added to the image that *Visaranai* and successive Tamil films like *Jai Bhim* and *Viduthalai* have painted of our police.

**Prison, a primitive jungle**

In a confine, the only colleagues you have

are your prison mates. They could be your friend or enemy, but most importantly, they are the only resemblance of any human relationship you have during your time in jail. They can be your voice of consciousness – like Balaji Sakthivel's Bashir in *Sorgavaasal*, a cook who helps RJ Balaji's Parthiban find purpose – or prove to be ladders to the higher levels of prison hierarchy – like Selvaraghavan's Siga in the same film. Many Hollywood films have shown how normalised sexual abuse among inmates is in prisons, like 2000's *Animal Factory*. In the Steve Buscemi film, when Willem Dafoe's Earl Copen helps 21-year-old Ron Decker (Edward Furlong), the latter seems hesitant, wondering if all this kindness is a manipulation tactic. Copen, however, proves to be an angel; he educates Ron on the quagmire that is life in prison.

In *Felon*, when Wade Porter (Stephen Dorff) is lodged with a hardened criminal (Val Kilmer, as John Smith), in a Special Housing Unit, you understand Porter's paranoia. Surprisingly, in a place where you survive by teaming up with a gang and fighting at a pit, you realise that while Smith isn't an angel, he isn't a demon either.

A quote from Smith vividly paints how prison "desensitises" all: "The first time you see a guy's face cut up, you puke. The second time, you are concerned. After a while, you step right over and you could give a s\*\*\*. It's no different for them pulling the trigger. Make no mistake, we are all in prison."

Through films, we could also witness unnervingly how social evils like casteism, bigotry, and racism show their hideous faces within prison halls, like with the segregation between Whites, Blacks and Hispanics in many Hollywood prisons. *Black Warrant* too touched upon this, by setting its story during a sensitive period in India's history, showing the plight of the Sikhs in the aftermath of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984; a well-staged scene featuring Sunil and Paramvir Singh Cheema's Shivraj Singh Mangat, after being suspended for standing up for Sikhs like himself, shows how such hostility could break the best of us, even fissuring precious relationships.

**A redemption arc?**

On the mainstream Indian cinema front, prisons can be a launching pad for the wronged hero. 2023's *Sapta Saagaradaache Ello* told the story of a young couple whose lives turn tumultuous when the man is asked by his boss to take the fall for a murder. Manu (Rakshit Shetty) does it so he can come out soon and lead a good life with Priya (Rukmini Vasanth). Betrayed, his spirit is torn from within as the walls of the prison close in. Usually, it's the male hero, but in cases like Sriram Raghavan's *Ek Hasina Thi*, a heroine (Urmila Matondkar's striking performance) seeks vengeance after a wrongful conviction.

Prison escape dramas like *Escape From Alcatraz* and *The Shawshank Redemption* deliver nail-biting narratives, but what if the hero voluntarily enters the prison for a reason?

Nothing comes close to the explosive intermission sequence inside a prison in *Vada Chennai*. Vetri Maaran's command shines through in a scene set at a carrom board competition in the prison yard, in which a leading character is revealed as an insider.

No other setting lends such nuanced takes on the human condition as much as the state-approved confine. Given the long history of our prisons and the innumerable individuals whose stories are yet to make their way to our screens, prison dramas remain a potent genre that lets us understand our flawed selves.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Know your English

K. Subrahmanian  
S. Upendran

"This is a hopeless dictionary."  
"Why do you say that?"

"It doesn't even have the word 'Thrice' in it."

"That's not surprising. 'Thrice' is not used these days."

"What! I hear the word almost everyday. Why, only yesterday I heard on T.V. that some airline flies to Ahmedabad thrice a week."

"You're right. We in India use the word 'thrice' very often. But native speakers of English don't use it. It's considered old-fashioned and that's why some dictionaries don't include it."

"What do the native speakers use instead of 'thrice'?"

"Three times. It's once, twice, three times. A native speaker would say, 'I play tennis three times a week' and not 'I play tennis thrice a week.' But remember, you'll find the word 'thrice' used occasionally in poetry."

"I see. And speaking of tennis, what happened to your match? Did you win?"

"We were skunked."

"Skunked! I've never heard the word 'skunk' used as a verb before."

"When you say you've been skunked, it means you've been completely defeated by someone. For example, I can say, 'Last year at Wimbledon, Goran Ivanisevic was skunked by Sampras in the third set.'"

"He didn't win a single game in that set, did he?"

"No, he didn't. Thank goodness he didn't get skunked this year."

"True. Can I say, 'in the last election, some of the national parties were skunked by the regional parties'?"

"You certainly can. But remember, this use of the word 'skunk' as a verb is considered slang. It is used mainly in American English."

"Shall we drop this smelly subject of skunk and move on to something else?"

"Sure, why not?"

"What do you think of my new cap?"

"It fits you well."

"Thank you. I too think I look good in it."

"I said it fitted you. I didn't say the cap suited you."

"They mean the same thing, don't they?"

"No, they don't. When you say your shirt 'fits' you, it means it is of the correct size. It is neither big nor small."

"All of us want to wear clothes that fit us."

"But not all of us take care to wear clothes that 'suit' us. If your clothes suit you, they look good on you. The colour and the style of the clothes look good on you. For example, I can say, 'Yellow and red are colours that suit Siddharth well.'"

"Can I say, 'Pants don't suit Karthick. He looks better in a dhoti'?"

"You most certainly can. But if Karthick wants to get into a five star hotel, he'd better wear trousers and not a dhoti."

"That's true. I read the other day that a journalist wasn't allowed to enter a five star hotel because he was wearing a dhoti."

"The dhoti fitted the journalist, but it didn't suit the hotel management!"

Published in *The Hindu* on July 18, 1995.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Manipur has been in the news for political turmoil, but here's a quiz on some prominent people from one of India's most important border States

Srinivasan Ramani

**QUESTION 1**

Name this feminist social movement also known as the guardians of civil society in the Manipur valley, which has played a major role in fighting against drug abuse, alcoholism, crimes against women, and against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. What does the name of this movement mean?

**QUESTION 2**

One of India's outstanding boxers, this athlete who was also part of the Indian Navy, won the gold medal in the Bantamweight category at the 1998 Asian Games in Bangkok.

Name him.

**QUESTION 3**

A Padma Shri awardee and a Major Dhyana Chand Khel Ratna award winner, this weightlifter won the silver medal at the Tokyo Olympics in 2020 in the women's 49 kg event. Name her.

**QUESTION 4**

Considered a leading exponent of the Indian classical dance form of Manipuri, this artiste was awarded the Padma Shri in 1986 and the Sangeet Natak Akademi fellowship awarded by the National Academy for Music, Dance and Drama, besides the Tagore Award in 2014. Name him.

**QUESTION 5**

Name the politician who has served as the Chief Minister of the State for the longest period (15 years and 11 days).



**Visual question:**

Name this freedom fighter and later, a Padma Bhushan awardee in 1982.

**Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:**

- The Election Commission became a three-member body from this year. **Ans: 1993**
  - This mathematician served as the first Election Commissioner of independent India. **Ans: Sukumar Sen**
  - The distinction V. S. Ramadevi's tenure holds. **Ans: She had the shortest tenure as Election Commissioner, with 16 days**
  - The NOTA option was introduced under this person's tenure. **Ans: V. S. Sampath**
  - This person served as CEC for the longest tenure. **Ans: Kalyan Sundaram**
- Visual: Name this bureaucrat who is credited with reforming the poll body. **Ans: T. N. Seshan**  
**Early Birds:** Siddhartha Viswanathan| Arun Kumar Singh| Sumana Dutta| Tamal Biswas| Parimal Das

## Word of the day

**Assiduous:** marked by care and persistent effort

**Synonyms:** sedulous

**Usage:** Her assiduous attempts to learn French paid off.

**Pronunciation:** newsth.live/assiduouspro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /ə'sɪdʒu:əs/, /ə'sɪdʒu:əs/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Text & Context'



## Southwest's layoffs dent its worker-first culture



**Changed culture:** Putting employees first made Southwest stand out from its rivals. REUTERS

Reuters  
CHICAGO

Southwest Airlines' first company-wide layoffs in its nearly 54-year history are aimed at shoring up profits, but they run the risk of undermining a company culture of putting employees first that made it stand out from rivals and cultivated a loyal fan base.

Until this week, the U.S. carrier never resorted to mass layoffs and furloughs, even as the industry underwent crushing downturns. But soaring costs and sagging profits forced its hand on Monday to announce that it will slash 1,750 jobs, or 15% of its corporate workforce.

Conor Cunningham, an analyst at Melius, said the layoffs go against the company's long-built culture, which he described as "the special sauce that makes everything possible."

The layoffs also reflect a new reality at Southwest, where activist investor Elliott Investment Management's nominees currently hold five of 15 board seats and CEO Bob Jordan is under pressure to produce a fast turnaround.

At meetings with Southwest's unions last year, Elliott had emphasized the need to "right-size" the company's headquarters, according to a person who attended the meeting.

Mr. Jordan has outlined a strategy that seeks to lift Southwest's operating margin to at least 10% in 2027 from 2% last year.

Robert Mann, a former airline executive who now runs a consulting firm, said the job cuts suggest there is a greater urgency to deliver on those goals. "It's a nod to the pressure that they're under from Elliott," Mr. Mann said.

Southwest said while the layoff decision was "extremely difficult," it has tried to provide support and care to the affected employees.

"The strength of Southwest's culture is critical to the success of our business and our ability to serve our customers," the airline said in a statement. "Our people will continue to be what sets us apart as we drive the company forward."

### Activist investor's growing influence

Southwest boasted 47 consecutive years of profit before the pandemic. But planemaker Boeing's aircraft delivery delays, soaring labour costs and changed travel patterns after the COVID-19 pandemic have all combined to depress earnings.

Lackluster profits coupled with falling shares brought Elliott to Southwest's doorstep last year. The hedge fund launched a bitter boardroom battle, calling for new leadership and wholesale changes to its business.

Since 1971 when the airline started operations, it has operated with a philosophy that happier employees result in happier customers. It avoided layoffs even after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and during the pandemic, which brought the entire airline industry to its knees and led to mass job cuts across the board.

In the past, the popular airline relied primarily on early retirements and natural attrition to deal with overstaffing. Southwest's headcount declined by over 2,300 to 72,450 employees in 2024 through natural attrition.

Reuters

Stubborn inflation and President Donald Trump's hard-line trade policies have rekindled fears of stagflation, a worrying mix of sluggish growth and relentless inflation that haunted the U.S. in the 1970s, even as markets remain upbeat on his pro-growth agenda.

The potential return of stagflation, which would pressure a range of assets, has been flagged periodically over the past 50 years but not materialized as a real threat to investor portfolios. While economists and portfolio managers are not ready to say that this time is different, the dreaded scenario has crept back as a key risk for investors in recent weeks, as the prospect of trade wars and punitive tariffs cast a shadow over U.S. growth.

"Stagflation has definitely re-emerged as a possibility because we have these policies that could hurt consumer demand even while persistent inflation limits the Federal Reserve's ability to maneuver," said Jack McIntyre, portfolio manager for Brandywine Global's fixed income strategies. "It's not a zero-possibility scenario any more, by a long shot."

A key piece of the stagflation puzzle—inflation that refuses to cool down—lodged more firmly into place earlier this month, when government data showed consumer prices rose in January at their fastest monthly pace since August 2023.

# Bumpy road ahead for MSMEs as they try to sell to the EV industry

While the electric vehicle supply chain holds potential for micro, small and medium enterprises and startups, it is not an easy ride; from access to finance and technology to availability of skilled workers, there are several roadblocks for these entrepreneurs who are trying to cater to EVs

### NEWS ANALYSIS

M. Soundariya Preetha  
COIMBATORE

Vijayan Srinivasan of Eco Dynaamic in Coimbatore is into the manufacturing of electric three-wheelers for more than a decade and has sold over 4,000 vehicles that are operated within the premises of the buyers. It is only in 2022 that Tamil Nadu came out with a policy for electric three-wheelers and there are a lot of challenges even now in getting approval for commercial sale of e-rickshaws, he says.

Manikandan Palanimuthu, Chief Executive Officer of Greener Mobility Solutions, is one of the few electric vehicle (EV) startups in Coimbatore that has raised funds and develops displays for electric vehicles. Its additional requirement is almost ₹100 crores. "We develop a new model almost every six months," he says. However, a customer suddenly stops purchasing a particular model because of the change in product requirement and safety norms and the stocks of the older models become a financial burden on the company, he says.

Vijayan and Manikandan are among the early entrepreneurs in the growing ecosystem of startups in the EV space in Coimbatore, which is one of the major micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) clusters supplying components to the fossil fuel based automobile sector. While the EV supply chain holds potential for MSMEs and startups, it is not an easy ride, they say.



**Rapid boom:** More than 300 brands sell electric two-wheelers now across the country. THE HINDU

From access to finance and technology to availability of skilled workers, there are several roadblocks for these entrepreneurs. The government gave ₹6,825 crore in incentives under the second phase of FAME India scheme, intended to support the manufacture and adoption of EVs. 14.69 lakh two-wheelers and 1.78 lakh three-wheelers, were sold in India till February 19, 2025.

Earlier, there were just a handful of big names that were selling internal combustion engine (ICE) two-wheelers. More than 300 brands sell electric two-wheelers now across the country. Most of them prefer to source their component needs from the existing suppliers in the automobile vertical as these MSME units know



As long as sales of ICE vehicles continue to grow, component manufacturers will have orders. EVs will only be additional business.

K. ILANGO  
Auto components manufacturer

the quality standards and the general requirements of the industry, says a Bengaluru-based electric two-wheeler manufacturer, indicating the potential for MSMEs that are already in the automobile supply chain or those that want to enter this industry.

### Subsidy misuse

Another original equipment manufacturer (OEM) in Coimbatore says, while the FAME scheme is intended to support EV manufacturers develop a local or in-house supply chain for the component requirements, many brands use it to sell the vehicles at a lower price in the market. The component cost is multiple times higher when sourced locally compared with imports, he said.

Further, most of the EVs sold now are two-wheelers. The MSMEs in the automobile clusters supply components for four-wheelers and heavy vehicles too. As long as sales of ICE cars, trucks, and buses continue to grow, these component manufacturers will have orders. Supply to EVs will only be an additional business, says K. Ilango, an automobile component manufacturer.

Organisations such as the Coimbatore District Small Industries Association (CODISSIA), Southern India Engineering Manufacturers Association (SIE-MA), and the Scientific and Industrial Testing and Research Centre (Si'Tarc) are looking at cluster approach to develop common facilities that will support the MSMEs and startups to venture more into the electric vehicle sector.

### Exactng standards

The CODISSIA president M. Karthikeyan and its treasurer P. Ponram say they have conducted skill development programmes for MSMEs so that workers are able to meet the high precision needs of EV manufacturers. They are also exploring ways to make funds available for MSMEs that want to venture into the EV segment.

According to K. Mohan Senthil Kumar, president

of Si'Tarc, who is also supplying to EVs, Si'Tarc, CODISSIA and SIEMA are setting up a common testing and product development centre in Coimbatore with the support of the Tamil Nadu government, especially to support MSMEs to make motors for EVs.

However, Kanishka Arumugam, CEO of Ekki Pumps, says it is not easy for MSME motor manufacturers to start making motors for EVs. It requires more funds and OEMs are currently making the motors in-house or purchasing from large manufacturers. The entire supply chain ecosystem for EVs will take time to stabilise and MSMEs will have a clear path ahead only then.

K. Barathan, founder of Ozotec Automobile, says the vendor requirement ratio for electric and regular two wheelers is 1:5. 60%-70% cost in any electric two-wheeler is for battery pack. "If battery technology is developed in India, EV is the future," he says.

While the opportunities may be less at present for MSMEs that want to be part of the component supply chain for e-two wheelers, there are new technologies and new skill sets that are in demand. For instance, Ozotec's team of developers are all engineers who have landed their first job. "We need engineers, software developers, data analysts, etc," he adds.

## Will Western companies return to Russia?

Reuters  
LONDON

As Moscow and Washington discuss how to end the war in Ukraine, one of the many questions on investors' minds is whether the corporate exodus from Russia in opposition to the February 2022 invasion of its neighbour may be reversed.

As long as broad Western sanctions on Russia remain in place, that looks unlikely, but should U.S. President Donald Trump's administration seek to ease restrictions, it could open the door for some companies to return to what was once a high-growth market. Here is a rundown of the situation:

### Who exited and how?

More than a thousand companies from McDo-



**Homecoming:** Western companies could return to Russia, which was once a high-growth market. AFP

onald's to Mercedes-Benz have left Russia in the last three years by selling, handing the keys to existing managers or abandoning assets. Others like Danone and Carlsberg had their assets seized and a sale forced through. Western firms have acknowledged losses totalling \$107 billion in writedowns and

lost revenue, according to a Reuters analysis in March 2024. Kirill Dmitriev, head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, says U.S. firms have lost \$324 billion by leaving Russia.

Companies such as McDonald's, Renault and Henkel agreed buyback options when exiting. France's Renault sold its majori-

ty stake in Russian carmaker Avtovaz in May 2022 for reportedly just one rouble, but with a six-year option to buy it back.

Some food and healthcare companies, including Procter & Gamble, PepsiCo and Mondelez, say they stayed on humanitarian grounds to continue supplying Russians with basic goods.

### Why would companies not return?

Hundreds of Western companies including Carlsberg and Unilever issued statements condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine in the days and weeks after the invasion, framing their exit from the country or suspension of operations in moral terms.

Should a deal be reached that rewards Russia with Ukrainian territo-

ry, firms that criticised Moscow risk reputational damage by returning.

### How has the Russian market changed?

Some of the world's most popular brands from Starbucks to IKEA and Levi's have been replaced by Russian imitations. More than 800 McDonald's restaurants in Russia now operate under the brand Vkusno & tochka, owned by Alexander Govor and run in a similar fashion. Starbucks sold its business to restaurateur Anton Pinskiy and rapper Timati, and is now known as Stars Coffee. Recapturing the market may be particularly hard for carmakers, as Chinese competitors have established a more than 50% market share, up from less than 10% three years ago. It is not clear how willing

Russia would be to support the return of European carmakers at the expense of Chinese ones.

### Would Western companies be welcome?

Moscow has long promised to retaliate for what it views as the theft of Russian assets abroad and has seized companies in Russia through presidential decrees and the courts. Russia currently controls a handful of Western companies through the guise of "temporary management" and is this year quickening the pace of asset seizures of companies with foreign ownership links. Most companies exiting Russia were forced to sell at huge discounts. Convincing investors to dip their toes back into the Russian market may take time.

## 'Stagflation' fears haunt markets despite Trump's growth plan



**Key risk:** Trade wars and punitive tariffs cast a shadow over U.S. growth. AFP

The other piece of the puzzle, U.S. economic growth, hangs in the balance, with Mr. Trump's tariffs threatening to add inflationary pressure that

could tip the scale. "What continues to concern us more than the risk of inflation is stagflation," said Tim Urbanowicz, chief investment strategist at In-

novator Capital Management. "There is that sticky base of inflation to contend with but on top of that, tariffs have the potential to slow down the economy by

becoming a tax on consumers and weighing on profits and economic growth."

A Bank of America survey of global fund managers on Tuesday showed the proportion of investors expecting stagflation—defined by the bank as below-trend growth and above-trend inflation—over the next year stood at a seven-month high. At the same time, investors remained bullish on stocks, with a trade war seen as a low-probability risk, the survey showed.

Some investors believe any hit to growth from tariffs would be temporary.

Over a longer-term horizon, tariffs could even promote growth, said Maddy Dessner, head of asset class services at Capital Group,

boosting industries that will benefit from less competition globally. On the other hand, their initial impact could increase price pressures. "The truth is it's probably going to be somewhere in between those two things," she said.

### 'Not there yet'

Stagflation emerged as a source of anxiety as recently as 2022, when inflation rates spiked and stock and bond prices plummeted, but that scenario did not materialize as inflation eventually eased and growth remained resilient.

Many believe that the U.S. economy will once again steer clear of stagflation.

So-called core inflation at about 3% remains well below the levels hit in the

1970s, when the annual rate of core inflation averaged about 7%. This time around inflation expectations remain "anchored", meaning the long-term inflation picture is not fluctuating wildly with each fresh piece of economic data, said Evercore ISI in a recent note.

Still, Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, warned the market may be underestimating stagflation risks. The prospect of large-scale deportations of workers without visas or other work documents, another Trump campaign pledge, also would fuel inflation, he noted. "Tariffs and deportations are a recipe for inflation and hurt growth; both are negative supply shocks," he said.

**LONDON**  
**Britain, France propose European 'reassurance force' for Ukraine**



Britain and France are proposing a European "reassurance force" of under 30,000 troops to protect Ukraine post-ceasefire with Russia. This plan, driven by concerns over U.S. President Trump's potential favourable terms for Moscow, emphasises air and maritime defence while minimising ground troops. AFP

**COLOMBO**  
**Train in Sri Lanka runs over six elephants; no passengers hurt**



A Sri Lankan passenger train derailed on Thursday after colliding with a herd of elephants near a wildlife reserve, resulting in the deaths of six elephants. Fortunately, no passengers were injured. The government plans to implement measures to reduce such wildlife accidents in the future. AFP

**PRAGUE**  
**Teenager in Czech Republic held after two killed in knife attack**



A 16-year-old on Thursday killed two women in a knife attack at a shopping centre in Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic. The suspect, a Czech national, was apprehended near the scene, and a knife was found. Police are investigating the motive, and Prime Minister Petr Fiala expressed condolences. AP

**WASHINGTON**  
**Top Republican right-winger McConnell to leave Senate in 2026**



Senator Mitch McConnell, at 83, announced he will not seek re-election in 2026, concluding a four-decade Senate career. His retirement marks a significant shift in the Republican Party, reflecting its growing radicalisation. Mr. McConnell described his tenure as "the honour of a lifetime". AFP

**Israel grieves as Hamas turns over the bodies of four Gaza hostages**

Militants displayed four black coffins on a stage in Gaza surrounded by banners, including a large one depicting Prime Minister Netanyahu as a vampire; Hamas is set to release six hostages tomorrow in exchange for Palestinian prisoners

Associated Press  
JERUSALEM

Hamas on Thursday released the bodies of four Israeli hostages, said to include a mother and her two children who have long been feared dead and had come to embody the nation's agony following the October 7, 2023, attack.

The remains were presumed to be of Shiri Bibas and her two children, Ariel and Kfir, as well as Oded Lifshitz, who was 83 when he was abducted. Kfir, who was 9 months old when he was taken, was the youngest captive. Hamas has said all four were killed



Grim return: Armed Palestinian militants stand next to the coffins of Israeli hostages in Khan Younis on Thursday. AFP

along with their guards in Israeli air strikes.

"Our hearts - the hearts of an entire nation - lie in tatters," Israeli President Isaac Herzog said in a state-

ment. "On behalf of the State of Israel, I bow my head and ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness for not protecting you on that terrible day. Forgiveness for

not bringing you home safely." The militants displayed four black coffins on a stage in the Gaza Strip surrounded by banners, including a large one depicting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a vampire. Thousands of people, including large numbers of masked and armed militants, looked on as the coffins were loaded onto Red Cross vehicles before being driven to Israeli forces.

The military held a small funeral ceremony, at the request of the families, before transferring the bodies to a laboratory in Israel for formal identifica-

tion using DNA, a process that could take up to two days. Israelis have celebrated the return of 24 living hostages in recent weeks under a tenuous ceasefire that paused over 15 months of war. But the handover on Thursday was a grim reminder of those who died in captivity.

Hamas is set to free six living hostages on Saturday in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, and says it will release four more bodies next week, completing the ceasefire's first phase. That will leave the militants with some 60 hostages, all men, around half of whom are believed to be dead.

**New trade deal with China is 'possible', says Trump**

Agence France-Presse  
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump suggested on Wednesday that a trade deal was "possible" with China - a key target in the U.S. leader's tariffs policy.

In 2020, the U.S. had already agreed to "a great trade deal with China" and a new deal was "possible", Mr. Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One.

One month into his second term in office, Mr. Trump has threatened sweeping tariffs on allies and adversaries alike - targeting China as well as neighbours Canada and Mexico, and the European Union - and using levies as his main policy tool for lowering the massive U.S. trade deficit.

At the beginning of Fe-



Donald Trump

ests of people all over the world," Ministry Spokesperson Guo Jiakun said.

At a separate news conference, China's Commerce Ministry said Beijing "urges the U.S. side not to wield the big stick of tariffs at every turn, using tariffs as a tool to engage in coercion all around".

Mr. Trump is also threatening to impose 25% tariffs on all imported cars, and similar or higher duties on pharmaceuticals and semiconductors as he turns up the heat on some of the biggest U.S. trading partners. The President initially announced tariffs of 25% on all Canadian and Mexican imports, before U-turning hours before they were due to come into effect, granting a one-month reprieve in principle until March 1.

**EU defends Ukraine President after Trump calls him a 'dictator'**

Agence France-Presse  
BRUSSELS

The European Union on Thursday hit back against U.S. President Donald Trump's accusation that Ukraine's leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy was a "dictator".

Mr. Trump lashed out at Mr. Zelenskyy in a spiralling row after Washington launched peace efforts with Russian President Vladimir Putin to end the Kremlin's three-year war.

"We have a fairly straightforward and clear position on this: President Zelenskyy was legitimately elected in free, fair and democratic elections," EU spokesperson Stefan de Keersmaecker told presspersons.

"Ukraine is a democracy, Putin's Russia is not." Mr. Trump's broadsides

**There can be no solution for Ukraine without the involvement of Ukraine, says EU spokesperson**

against the Ukrainian leader have fuelled fears in Europe that Washington is abandoning its ally in Kyiv to secure a quick deal with Moscow.

The EU insists that both Ukraine and Europe must have a say during any negotiations.

"There can be no solution for Ukraine without the involvement of Ukraine, nor without the involvement of the European Union," Mr. de Keersmaecker said.

"Ukraine's security is the European Union's security."

**Caving in**



That sinking feeling: Giant sinkholes, measuring up to 20 metres, have caused major disruptions and led to the evacuation of residents from the Godstone area in England this week. GETTY IMAGES

**Zelenskyy calls for 'strong ties' with U.S. amid Trump spat**

Agence France-Presse  
KYIV

Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday called for a strong relationship between Kyiv and Washington, amid rising tensions with U.S. President Donald Trump.

"Strong Ukraine-U.S. relations benefit the entire world," Mr. Zelenskyy said after holding what he called a "productive meeting" with U.S. envoy Keith Kellogg on the "battlefield situation, how to return our prisoners of war, and effective security guarantees".

This meeting comes after Mr. Trump labelled Mr. Zelenskyy a "dictator" and criticised him for allegedly mismanaging U.S. aid, while claiming that Russia holds the upper hand in negotiations. The rift inten-

sified as Mr. Trump initiated discussions with Russia without Ukrainian involvement, alarming both Kyiv and European allies.

Mr. Zelenskyy accused Mr. Trump of succumbing to "Russian disinformation", asserting that Ukraine must be included in all negotiations regarding its future.

Mr. Trump's administration has pushed for a quick resolution to the war, which has drawn ire from European leaders who fear being sidelined.

In response to the ongoing conflict, Mr. Zelenskyy called for unity among Ukrainians and Europeans, stating that "together with America and Europe, peace can be more secure." The situation remains tense as both leaders navigate their complex relationship.

**Trump's support for island will remain 'very strong', says Taiwan security chief**

Agence France-Presse  
TAIPEI

U.S. support for Taiwan is "very strong", Taipei's security chief said on Thursday, as the self-ruled island seeks to head off President Donald Trump's threats of hefty tariffs on its semiconductor chips.

The United States is Taiwan's most important backer and biggest arms supplier, but Mr. Trump's recent warnings of chip taxes and criticisms of Taipei have raised concerns about his commitment to the island's security.

Taiwan lives under the constant threat of an invasion by China, which claims the island as part of its territory.

Mr. Trump has previously accused Taiwan of stealing the U.S. chip industry and suggested it should pay the United States for its defence.

Speaking at a security forum on Thursday, Taiwan's National Security Council chief Joseph Wu praised the United States for providing defence equipment to Taiwan, training its soldiers and boosting its international



Joseph Wu

presence. "I think the Trump administration's support for Taiwan will remain very strong," Mr. Wu told the HFX Taipei Forum. "I think it's very clear

that the United States is supporting Taiwan, and with the U.S. support, I think we will be more confident in defending ourselves."

Mr. Wu rejected Mr. Trump's assertion that Taiwan stole the U.S. semiconductor industry, a key driver of the island's economy.

Mr. Wu evaded a question about whether Taiwan planned to buy up to \$10 billion worth of U.S. weapons, saying the Trump administration was new and "eventually we will get together and discuss" the issue.

**Bangladesh security forces kill two men in crackdown, sparking rights concerns**

Agence France-Presse  
DHAKA

Bangladeshi security forces killed two men on Thursday in a crackdown on rising violent crime, a spokesperson said, rejecting fears the deaths appeared to mirror previous notorious tactics of extrajudicial killings.

Sami-Ud-Dowla Chowdhury, spokesperson for the security forces, said two men were killed in the early hours of Thursday morning after they shot at officers trying to arrest them in connection to a spate of

**The country has been struggling to control crime since Hasina's ouster in August 2024**

robberies. "The perpetrators opened fire from the roof of a single-story building, prompting the team to retaliate," the security forces said in a statement, saying officers "recovered two dead bodies" as well as machetes and a pistol. Five other men were arrested. "They were culprits," Mr. Chowdhury said.

Bangladesh has been struggling to control crime since former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was forced from power in August 2024 by a mass uprising against her iron-fisted rule.

Under her watch, Bangladesh law enforcement agencies faced accusations of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

Police in Dhaka said the number of robberies has doubled since January last year. During Ms. Hasina's rule, the feared paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) carried out scores of

killings. The force was slapped with U.S. sanctions in 2021, after which extrajudicial killings stopped.

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a leading Bangladeshi human rights organisation, warned against heavy-handed tactics. "We urge law enforcement agencies to conduct raids with caution to avoid loss of lives," it said.

"Over the last two decades, we have witnessed thousands of extrajudicial killings, which had zero impact on the law-and-order situation."



**Against copycats:** Birkenstock sandals are displayed in a Birkenstock store in Frankfurt, Germany. AP

## German court rules Birkenstock sandals are not pieces of art

**Associated Press**  
BERLIN

They are ubiquitous in summer, comfy and very German. Sometimes they look chic and sometimes shabby. But can these sandals be considered art?

That's the question Germany's Federal Court of Justice wrestled with Thursday, and it ruled they're just comfy footwear.

Birkenstock, which is headquartered in Linz am Rhein, Germany, and says its tradition of shoemaking goes back to 1774, filed a lawsuit against three competitors who sold sandals that were very similar to its own. The shoe manufacturer claimed its sandals "are copyright-protected works of applied art" that may not be imitated. Under German law, works of art enjoy stronger and longer-lasting intellectual property protections than consumer products. The company asked for an injunction to stop its competitors from making copycat sandals and order them to recall and destroy those already on the market.

Before Germany's highest court for civil trials weighed in Thursday, the case had been heard at two lower courts, which disagreed on the issue.

The appeals court said it was unable to establish any artistic achievement in the wide-strapped, big-buckled sandals.

The Federal Court of Justice sided with the appeals court and dismissed the case. In its ruling, it wrote that a product can't be copyrighted if "technical requirements, rules or other constraints determine the design."

"For the copyright protection of a work of applied art – as for all other types of work – the level of design must not be too low," the court wrote. "For copyright protection, a level of design must be achieved that reveals individuality."

# In Russia, political dissenters are targeted with psychiatric detention

The practice carries echoes of a method of control used widely in the Soviet Union and known as 'punitive psychiatry'; rights group Memorial has identified 48 people it says are currently undergoing treatment in politically motivated cases; the most common charges are related to war criticism

**Reuters**  
LONDON

**D**ozens of Russians are being subjected to compulsory psychiatric treatment because of their political views, according to lawyers and human rights groups – a trend they say has gathered pace since the start of the war in Ukraine.

The practice carries echoes of a method of control used widely in the Soviet Union and known as "punitive psychiatry", even if the current scale falls far short of that seen from the late 1960s until the early 1980s.

Yekaterina Fatyanova, 37, was interned on April 28 last year at the KKPND No.1 psychiatric hospital in Krasnoyarsk after being accused of discrediting the Russian armed forces by publishing an article in a small opposition newspaper she ran in her spare time. She was not the author of the piece, which argued the war in Ukraine was driven by imperialist motives. While in hospital she was subjected to painful, degrading and unnecessary procedures including a gynaecological examination, she wrote in letters of complaint to authorities.

**'Moral suppression'**  
Ms. Fatyanova was discharged from the hospital on May 27 after doctors determined that she had no



A view shows the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, Russia. One person who wrote an article in an opposition newspaper about the Ukraine war was interned last year at a psychiatric facility in the city. REUTERS

mental disorders or diseases.

"I believe that the real purpose of placing me there was moral suppression and isolation from society, possibly as a punishment for my active civic position," she said.

Robert van Voren, a Dutch professor and human rights campaigner who has spent decades studying what he describes as the political abuse of psychiatry in Russia, said he had documented around 23 such cases a year since 2022, when the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, up from an annual average of around 5 between 2015 and 2021.

Russia's Justice Ministry, human rights commissioner and the Kremlin did not reply to requests for comment about the alleged use

of psychiatry for political purposes.

The Kremlin says it does not discuss individual cases that pass through the criminal justice system, as these are a matter for the courts.

In the Soviet era, thousands of dissenters were hospitalised for political reasons, based on the premise that only someone mentally ill would oppose the Communist state. Among the best known cases were those of dissident Vladimir Bukovsky and Nobel prize-winning poet Joseph Brodsky. While far below that scale, the current trend is nonetheless "disturbing," Mr. van Voren said.

In many other parts of the world, the use of compulsory psychiatric treatment has been in decline

and generally confined to violent criminal cases, said Dainius Pūras, a Lithuanian psychiatrist who served as the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the right to health.

Mr. Pūras said an erosion of democratic reforms in Russia had a "detrimental impact on Russian psychiatry," cautioning that Russia's use of state-appointed psychiatrists in court cases likely leads to decisions that serve the interests of national authorities. In Russia, compulsory treatment "is now again used for political purposes, like it was in the time of the Soviet Union," he said.

Russian rights group Memorial has identified 48 people it says are currently undergoing such treatment in politically motivated cases. Of those, 46 are

psychiatric inpatients and two are receiving out-patient treatment while in prison.

The most common charges against them related to criticism of the war. Thirteen of the people had been prosecuted under censorship laws passed shortly after Russia's invasion, the rights group said.

According to Memorial, the youngest person subjected to compulsory psychiatric treatment for war protests turned 20 in hospital last week. He was investigated as a teenager in 2023 for seeking permission to organise an anti-war rally, and a court ordered his hospitalisation in February last year.

Anastasia Pilipenko, a lawyer who has represented people placed under compulsory psychiatric treatment, said she did not consider "risky behaviour in the form of public anti-war statements to be a sign of mental disorder."

### Dozens arrested

Hospitalisations represent a small fraction of overall arrests and jailings for political crimes, including speaking out against the war. Over 20,000 people have been arrested for expressing an anti-war position since the full-scale invasion began, according to Russian rights group OVD-Info. Some 1,155 people have been criminally charged.

For those admitted as psychiatric patients, addi-

tional trauma stems from the open-ended nature of their detention and the fact that their sanity is being called into question, Mr. van Voren said. "It challenges the value of what you think because it is dubbed mental illness. And that has a very debilitating effect."

Memorial said the person hospitalised the longest in a politically motivated case is Albert Gurdjian, interned since 2017 after allegedly posting online that justice officials were an organised crime group and that it would be good to "blast the yacht" of a businessman close to President Vladimir Putin.

Ms. Fatyanova, the Krasnoyarsk journalist, said that she was taken to the KKPND No.1 hospital and that she was pressured to sign admission forms authorising treatment and procedures without her informed.

She said she had been fired from a previous job at a transport company in December 2023 after the FSB started investigating her, she said in her complaints.

She added that patients were sometimes denied daily walks, given mouldy bread.

The Health Ministry wrote back, dismissing Ms. Fatyanova's complaints. However, the regional health inspectorate said in a letter dated October 1 that it had warned the hospital to obtain informed consent from patients.

## Winter labour



A man using heavy machinery to clear snow from a street in the ski resort town of Hakuba, Nagano prefecture. Residents of northern Japan were sheltering from deep snow up to the rooftops in some areas on Thursday after a two-week whiteout. AFP

# The quest to rescue nearly extinct northern white rhino through IVF

**Agence France-Presse**  
OL PEJETA

Two rhinos munch serenely on grass as the sun rises over Mount Kenya, oblivious to the massive global endeavour to prevent them from being the last of their kind.

Najin and her daughter Fatu are the only northern white rhinos left on Earth. The clock is ticking before they become the latest in a long line of animals that humans have poached to extinction. But a recent breakthrough means this could be the year the world celebrates a new northern white rhino foetus.

It would be an unprecedented comeback for the subspecies, declared functionally extinct after the death of the last male, Sudan, in 2018.



**Clock is ticking:** Ol Pejeta ranger and head care giver caresses one of the last two northern white rhinos in the world. AFP

Uterus problems mean neither Sudan's daughter Najin nor his granddaughter Fatu can carry a pregnancy to term. But Fatu still produces viable eggs, making her a candidate for in-vitro fertilisation (IVF).

For years, scientists have been collecting her eggs at the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya. The

eggs are sent to Europe where they are fertilised in a lab with sperm from dead male northern whites. There are now 36 fertilised eggs – or embryos – ready to be implanted, said Jan Stejskal, project coordinator for BioRescue, the most prominent of numerous such initiatives worldwide.

A year ago scientists announced a breakthrough: a surrogate was pregnant with a male southern white foetus, the first time IVF had worked for rhinos. But like so much about this long and difficult process, the joy was "mixed with sadness", Ol Pejeta head of research Samuel Mutisya said.

By the time the 6.4-centimetre, 70-day-old foetus was discovered, the surrogate had already died from an unrelated bacteria infection. Worse still, a sterilised male who had played the role of "teaser bull" – to help identify when the female is ready for impregnation – also died from the infection, and finding a replacement has proved tricky.

The team is determined to try again.

# Strong resistance to Trump's Gaza plan expected at mini-Arab summit today

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**  
RIYADH

President Donald Trump's plans for resolving the Israel-Palestine crisis by "relocating" the Palestinian population of Gaza to other Arab states are expected to face strong opposition as Saudi Arabia prepares to host a mini-Arab summit in Riyadh this weekend.

Apart from the summit, the region is also tense over the funeral, in Beirut, of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, who was assassinated in a missile attack in the Lebanese capital on September 27, 2024 by Is-

rael. The funeral is expected to be a show of strength for the Iran-Lebanon Shia crescent. The summit of the five Arab powers was earlier planned for Thursday but has now been pushed to Friday and expanded where all the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, the UAE, Oman, and Qatar) will be joined by Egypt and Jordan to brainstorm over the U.S.-Israel plans.

While the mainly Arab Muslim nations will display unity of purpose, the funeral of Nasrallah is expected to showcase the people power of the Iran-Lebanon Shia crescent that can heat up further in case Israel,

now armed by the U.S.-made 2000-pound bunker buster bombs, carries out an attack on Iran in the coming weeks.

Diplomats participating in the dialogues told *The Hindu* that the impact of President Trump's Gaza plans will play out in the region over a span of the next six months and the latest round of talks being held in Riyadh is an attempt to stop sudden escalation from breaking out.

Analysts pointed out that the solution that President Trump has been suggesting is inherently weak as it is part of the 'America First' policy which does not take into consideration the interests of other stake-



Displaced Palestinians wait along the Salah al-Din road in Nuseirat to cross to the northern part of the Gaza Strip. FILE PHOTO

holders such as the European powers, who are expected to face the blowback if the Arab bloc chooses to form a common front in support of the two-state solution for the Palestinians.

Najib Saab, Secretary General of Beirut-based Arab Forum for Environment and Development, said the just concluded meeting between U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign

Minister Sergei Lavrov has shown that the Trump administration is not giving importance to the opinion of the European Union. Mr. Saab did not rule out an Arab pushback as a U.S.-Israel-led attempt to relocate the Palestinian population from the Gaza Strip could destabilise Egypt and Jordan, triggering existential concerns across the major states of the region.

### Trump got no worries

On the sidelines of the Saudi Media Forum, a media conclave being held parallel to the peace talks on Ukraine and Gaza here, Mr. Saab told *The Hindu* that President Trump's Gaza plans are supported by the

fact that he does not have to worry about disruption of energy supplies to the U.S. as the country is now energy sufficient. "However, the same is not true for Europe which remains dependent on the Gulf for energy supplies and Europe will face energy disruption if President Trump's Gaza formula destabilises the region."

The Arab powers that will meet in Riyadh this weekend also have to contend with the fact that any display of weakness by them will give an opportunity to the Shia front that will carry out a show of strength on Sunday as people from Iran, Iraq, Syria and other places are flying

into Beirut to attend the funeral of Nasrallah.

To counter any such impression, the UAE's President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on Wednesday hosted U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Abu Dhabi and opposed proposals for displacing Palestinians from Gaza.

Mr. Saab pointed out that Abu Dhabi has followed the plan as laid down by Saudi Arabia, which had quickly opposed Mr. Trump's plans in the first week of February. "The Arab position is more or less clear that without an independent Palestine, Israel will not get to normalise relation with major Arab powers," he said.

## ON A HIGH

## Shami becomes the fastest Indian to reach 200 ODI wickets



Mohammed Shami became the fastest Indian bowler to reach 200 ODI wickets during the ICC Champions Trophy match against Bangladesh. The speedster's wicket of Jaker Ali helped him reach the milestone in his 104th match and better former pacer Ajit Agarkar's record of reaching the mark in 133 matches.

## IN ELITE COMPANY

## Rohit becomes second quickest to complete 11,000 runs in ODI cricket



Rohit Sharma on Thursday became the second fastest batter, after Virat Kohli, to complete 11,000 runs in ODIs, during the Champions Trophy clash against Bangladesh. Rohit is only the fourth Indian and 10th batter overall to reach the mark in the 50-over format. Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly are the other Indians in the list.

## OUTSTANDING

## Capitals' skipper Lanning all praise for Sutherland's display



Delhi Capitals captain Meg Lanning, who led from the front with a match-winning innings against UP Warriorz on Wednesday, praised Annabel Sutherland. "She was outstanding with the ball initially. She got early breakthroughs when we were really under pressure," the skipper said. "Later, she held her nerve while batting as well."

## KIRAN'S STRATEGY

## 'My plan was to hit hard and make the most out of the PowerPlay'



UP Warriorz opener Kiran Navgire, who scored a blistering 51 off 27 balls against Delhi Capitals, said the innings gave her confidence going into the next leg of the WPL, starting in Bengaluru on Friday. "My plan was to watch and hit the ball, and to make the most out of the PowerPlay. I wanted to hit hard and executed that plan."

## SA faces Afghanistan in a tricky opener

Shayan Acharya  
KARACHI

As Afghanistan captain Hashmatullah Shahidi started his presser on the eve of his team's Champions Trophy campaign-opener against South Africa, he was asked whether the team was under pressure.

Since 2019, the two teams have featured in five ODIs, with Afghanistan winning just twice. However, Shahidi underplayed the issue and said that the series win in Sharjah, in September last year, will boost the team's morale. And, it's this positive mindset that will be the key for the Afghans.

South Africa, which comes on the back of a string of defeats, looks under-cooked. With its quicks Gerald Coetzee and Anrich Nortje missing out, the team will be banking on Kagiso Rabada, Ngidi Lungi and Marco Jansen to put up a strong fight against the Afghanistan batters.

## The squads (from):

**South Africa:** Temba Bavuma (Capt.), Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs, Rassie van der Dussen, Corbin Bosch.

**Afghanistan:** Hashmatullah Shahidi (Capt.), Ibrahim Zadran, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Sediqqullah Atal, Rahmat Shah, Ikram Alikhil, Gulbadin Naib, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad Nabi, Rashid Khan, Nangyal Kharoti, Noor Ahmad, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Farid Malik, Naveed Zadrn. Match starts at 2:30 pm IST.

## Shami, Gill do the star turn as India trumps Bangladesh with ease

Ace pacer excels with a five-for before the vice-captain's century takes the Men in Blue home; Hridoy &amp; Jaker bat well for the loser

## CHAMPIONS TROPHY

S. Dipak Ragav  
DUBAI

Shubman Gill's previous three scores coming into the Champions Trophy read: 87, 60 and 112 (all against England). On Thursday, the 25-year-old continued his purple patch as he smashed his eighth ODI hundred (101 n.o., 129b, 9x4, 2x6) to help India kickstart its Champions Trophy campaign with a six-wicket win over Bangladesh at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

In pursuit of a modest target of 229, Gill showed why he is the top-ranked batter in the format as he expertly shepherded the team home.

He was aggressive in the PowerPlay and then hunkered down to navigate the tricky middle phase smartly when the spinners operated before ensuring the Men in Blue got their campaign off to a winning start.

The victory, though, was in no small measure set up by the bowlers led by Mohammed Shami (10-0-53-5), who scalped his sixth five-wicket haul to restrict Bangladesh to 228.

## Good rhythm

The pacer looked in good rhythm, moving the new ball both ways and setting the tone for the game by taking two wickets in the



No stopping him: The in-form Gill's stylish knock powered India's chase. PTI

PowerPlay before coming back strongly to clean up the tail.

On a pitch that was on the slower side, it was imperative to maximise the PowerPlay and openers Rohit Sharma and Gill got India off to a flyer, scoring 69 in the first 10 overs.

After starting tentatively against Mustafizur Rahman, Rohit took the left-arm pacer to the cleaners, smoking him for seven boundaries including some serene shots through the square on the off-side.

Gill was not to be left behind, pulling the fiery Tanzim Hasan for a six and then charging down to loft

him over covers.

But Bangladesh got back into the contest through its spinners Rishad Hossain and Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who squeezed the runs dry during the middle-overs.

Najmul Hossain Shanto's men had a small opening in the game when India lost three wickets for 22 runs and was in a spot of bother at 144 for four.

However, Gill and K.L. Rahul - who reaffirmed his status as the finisher by stroking a measured unbeaten 41 - stitched an unbroken 87-run stand for the fifth wicket to take their side home.

Earlier, it was an innings

of two halves for the Tigers, whose top-order just crumbled inside the PowerPlay before Towhid Hridoy (100) and Jaker Ali (68) repaired the damage by forging a masterful 154-run alliance.

Electing to bat, Bangladesh got off on the wrong foot, losing two wickets in the first two overs. Things went pear-shaped in the ninth over when Axar Patel struck off consecutive deliveries to remove Tanzim Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim to leave the Men in Green tottering at 35 for five.

It could have been even worse had Rohit not fum-

bled a straightforward chance off the very next delivery at first slip, which gave Jaker a reprieve and denied Axar a hat-trick.

Hridoy played patiently till he got to his half-century and seamlessly shifted gears after that, collecting 30 runs off the next 14 deliveries, raining sixes and fours. As he neared his landmark, the 24-year-old started cramping, limping across the pitch, but eventually got there in the penultimate over. Though his efforts gave something for his side to bowl at, it was never going to be enough against a strong Indian batting line-up.

## SCOREBOARD

**BANGLADESH**  
Tanzid Hasan c Rahul b Axar 25 (25b, 4x4), Soumya Sarkar c Rahul b Shami 0 (5b), Najmul Shanto c Kohli b Harshit 0 (2b), Mehidy Hasan Miraz c Gill b Shami 5 (10b, 1x4), Towhid Hridoy c Shami b Harshit 100 (118b, 6x4, 2x6), Mushfiqur Rahim c Rahul b Axar 0 (1b), Jaker Ali c Kohli b Shami 68 (114b, 4x4), Rishad Hossain c Hardik b Harshit 18 (12b, 1x4, 2x6), Tanzim Hasan b Shami 0 (4b), Taskin Ahmed c Shreyas b Shami 3 (6b), Mustafizur Rahman (not out) 0 (2b); Extras (lb-1, w-7, nb-1); 9; Total (in 49.4 overs): 228.

**FALL OF WICKETS**  
1-1 (Sarkar, 0.6 overs), 2-2 (Najmul, 1.4), 3-26 (Mehidy, 6.2), 4-35 (Tanzid, 8.2), 5-35 (Mushfiqur, 8.3), 6-189 (Jaker, 42.4), 7-214 (Rishad, 45.3), 8-215 (Tanzim, 46.2), 9-228 (Taskin, 48.4).

**INDIA BOWLING**  
Shami 10-0-53-5, Harshit 7.4-0-31-3, Axar 9-1-43-2, Hardik 4-0-20-0, Jadeja 9-0-37-0, Kuldeep 10-0-43-0.

**INDIA**  
Rohit Sharma c Rishad b Taskin 41 (36b, 7x4), Shubman Gill (not out) 101 (129b, 9x4, 2x6), Virat Kohli c Sarkar b Rishad 22 (38b, 1x4), Shreyas Iyer c Najmul b Mustafizur 15 (17b, 2x4), Axar Patel c & b Rishad 8 (12b, 1x4), K.L. Rahul (not out) 41 (47b, 1x4, 2x6); Extras (w-3); Total (for four wkts. in 46.3 overs): 231.

**FALL OF WICKETS**  
1-69 (Rohit, 9.5), 2-112 (Kohli, 22.4), 3-133 (Shreyas, 27.4), 4-144 (Axar, 30.1).

**BANGLADESH BOWLING**  
Taskin 9-0-36-1, Mustafizur 9-0-62-1, Tanzim 8.3-0-58-0, Mehidy 10-0-37-0, Rishad 10-0-38-2.

India won by six wickets with 21 balls to spare.  
Toss: Bangladesh.  
PoM: Gill.



Shami. AFP

## Rohit lauds Shami and Gill's performance

Sports Bureau  
DUBAI

India skipper Rohit Sharma was pleased with his team's performance following his side's convincing six-wicket win and heaped praise on Mohammed Shami and Shubman Gill.

"Very happy for Shami. It was a long waiting time. We know what he brings for us. The quality he has. Every time we throw the ball at him, he's got something up his sleeve, and we need guys like him to step up in big moments," said Rohit while speaking to the broadcaster after the game.

"Gill, we know the class he has. He's been batting brilliantly of late and what he showed us today shouldn't surprise anyone. What was good to see was that he was there till the end," he added.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto felt that losing five wickets in the PowerPlay put the team on the back foot.

## Exploring new pastures has paid off as Vadodara shows at the WPL

P.K. Ajith Kumar  
VADODARA

Over the last six days, close to midnight on the Vadodara Halol Highway, you could see scores of young men, and some women too, walking along for miles. Some of them would signal towards the speeding vehicles, hoping to hitch a ride, though not with apparent success.

The newly-built BCA Stadium is about 25 km away from the city, and getting public transportation late into the night could be extremely difficult. But that didn't stop the cricket fans of the cultural capital of Gujarat turning up in large numbers for every match of the third season of the WPL.

The decision to take women's cricket's most glamorous league to newer pastures has indeed been justified. Last year, the WPL travelled to Bengaluru and New Delhi.

And there is another



Tough challenge: Smriti, right, will have her task cut out as RCB gets ready to face an impressive MI. K. MURALI KUMAR

new stop this season: Lucknow, where UP Warriorz will become the last team to get an opportunity to

play in front of its fans. Gujarat Giants certainly loved its time before its supporters here.

The first match saw the Giants going past 200, but the defending champion RCB chased that total down with ease. It was for the first time in the WPL that a team batting second was scoring that many runs.

That match also set the template for the rest of the Vadodara leg: all the games were won by chasing. An excellent track and the dew factor made the decision after winning the toss a no-brainer.

RCB is looking impressive. That, mind you, is despite the absence of some of its stars, such as Sophie Devine, Sophie Molineux, Asha Sobhana and Shreyanka Patil.

Smriti Mandhana's women, however, may not find it easy to retain the title. Mumbai Indians, Delhi Capitals and Gujarat Giants have all looked good enough so far. UP Warriorz, the only team without a win so far, will have to up its game.

## Indian men look to address PC concerns; women hope to return to winning ways

## FIH PRO LEAGUE

Uthra Ganesan  
BHUBANESWAR

The last time Janneke Schopman was in India with a national team, she had to oversee the Indian women missing the bus for the Paris Olympics, going down in the qualifiers which Germany eventually won.

On Friday, she would be in the same German dugout, planning victory against her former wards who have not had a great time in the FIH Pro League so far with just one win in four games. The Germans haven't done any better and are yet to win in their six outings but have the advantage of experimenting as much as they want - as winners of the 2023-24 season, they are already assured of a World Cup spot.

The Indians, meanwhile, are in a rebuilding phase, testing new faces and combinations under a



Task ahead: The Indian men will seek to work on consistency. BISWARANJAN ROUT

coach who needs to balance experimentation with results.

The team has impressed in patches and some of the newcomers including debutants Rutuja Pisal and Sakshi Rana have performed well but the team has not been able to find its rhythm or match up to the opponents' pace and quick counters.

Coach Harendra Singh would be hoping his girls find consistency against a side they have beaten out-

right just once in the last 19 years.

The men will have it slightly easier, on paper, taking on lower-ranked Ireland in their next two games but aware that their opponents have the reputation of punching above their weight.

That coach Craig Fulton would have the inside information on many of those players will definitely be an advantage but the last time the two teams met, at Paris, India had to

work hard for its victory.

Ireland last beat India at the Azlan Shah Cup in 2018 and though the host holds a 7-1 advantage in their last nine outings with one draw, its penalty corner concerns are steadily growing. The team is yet to convert from the 14 it has earned so far.

Harmanpreet Singh sat out a couple of matches and Jugraj Singh, the top scorer in the HIL, has failed to replicate that form with the national team.

Also playing its first game here will be World No. 1 Netherlands, taking on England to get back on the winning track after an upset loss to Argentina in the previous leg in December. The Dutch women have come with a fairly young side that, incredibly, still has 11 from the gold-winning Olympic side.

## Friday's matches:

**Women:** England vs The Netherlands (3 pm), India vs Germany (5.15 pm).  
**Men:** India vs Ireland (7.30 pm).



# Indians are born clever but they should be ready to suffer

Indonesian coach Agus Dwi Santoso feels today's badminton is taxing both mentally and physically and only those who can master both aspects will survive



SUDHAKARA JAIN

## INTERVIEW

### AGUS DWI SANTOSO

N. Sudarshan

Agus Dwi Santoso has a ruthless streak in him. The noted Indonesian badminton coach, who otherwise has a baby-faced charming look, comes from a school of thought that believes that a player should be ready to die - not quite literally - on court in the pursuit of excellence. Playing through pain is non-negotiable for sustained success.

In the present-day environment, there will be many who will not be in agreement, but Santoso has results to back his methods and his nation's rich badminton history to make his voice heard. He has coached the elite in Thailand, Korea, Indonesia and India (including P.V. Sindhu and K. Srikanth) and also the likes of his countryman Hendrawan, whom he guided to the singles silver medal at Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and the World Championship title in Seville in 2001.

Santoso is also from a country that revolutionised badminton in the 1960s, first through Rudy Hartono who mesmerised the world with his power and speed and won seven straight All England titles from 1968 to 1974, and then via Liem Swie King, a three-time winner. To this day, Indonesia has elite players like Tokyo 2020 Olympic bronze medallist Anthony Ginting and reigning All England champion Jonatan Christie.

Now, Santoso is in India, heading the high-performance coaching program at Game Fit Academy in one of Bengaluru's south-east suburbs. In an interview with *The Hindu*, the 59-year-old speaks of about the talent pool in India, the badminton culture back home, the way the modern game is shaping up and what India needs to do to be consistently good at the world stage. Excerpts:

#### How do you assess the talent in India?

There is a lot of talent. But only a few can become world beaters. How? The culture has to change. Indians are born clever. But they are not able to manage pain, sorrow and suffering. In China, you start training from six

years old. But in the West, may be at 10 or 11, and if the player or the parent sees talent, then they become serious. No, it is too late. You have to start early.

#### How is the pool different in India from Indonesia?

Indonesia is a little bit like China. It's because China copied from Indonesia. Back in the day, three important people moved from Indonesia to China because of political reasons. Those three, including Hou Jiachang and Tong Sin Fu, built Chinese badminton. Tong Sin Fu was Lin Dan's coach. In terms of basic training, Indonesia and China are better. In India, it was not very good. But with better coaches, there is improvement now.

#### What makes Indonesian badminton so successful?

Badminton in Indonesia is like basketball in USA. So many people play the game and become champions. Kids see them and want to play. It's like a cycle and it's part of the culture. Football is still No. 1 and badminton No. 2. But badminton makes our country proud at the World level and at the Olympics. So, many parents and children want to play.

#### How is the training regimen in Indonesia? Is it centralised?

Normally, it is taken care of by clubs and there are so many of them. Players come into the junior program from there... U-12, 13, 15, 17 and so on. Then they come into the National Centre, of which there is only one. Players from all clubs ultimately come there. In India, it is a bit different, because multiple clubs and academies can become National centres. And players train separately too. But in Indonesia, you will stay in one building. China is also similar.

#### Do you feel the Indonesian set-up is better?

Yes. When you go to represent your country, you have become "pure Indian" or "pure Indonesian". It's the same in India too, no doubt. They all represent their country. But to me, it is not as strong a feeling like in Indonesia, Malaysia, Korea. The owner

of the academy may be like 'this is my player, even if he goes to an international tournament'. In Indonesia and China, it's not like that.

#### Is it challenging to coach youngsters in India compared to other countries?

Badminton is all about thinking... like chess, tennis. It is not like athletics or swimming where you have a good body, some thinking, good technique and that's enough. In badminton, even if you have everything, if your thinking is wrong or not straight, it is tough. You can become a champion. But may be just once. You won't be a legend. In India, if you become a one-time champion, you can become *somebody*. I am sorry to say that.

#### What does it take for that shift in mentality?

When I train kids here, there are some problems. Many players want the shortest route to success. They do not see it like a process. It is challenging. If you are at an academy, you should [aspire to] be the best professional there. Indians are clever. The body is like Europeans. But the thinking has to change. A young player should be ready to go through the suffering.

#### Badminton is becoming global and there are champions from many countries. How do you feel about this pattern?



It is good for the sport. But how has it become like this? Because of the Olympics. It all started from 1992. So every country tries to build for that. We see so many players from Indonesia, India, Korea, China etc., but Spain, Germany and France don't have that many. In our countries, the systems are better and we produce many players. However, they [Europe] have one or two special players, like Carolina Marin. With Olympics, their budgets have increased. Quality coaches can be hired.

#### How has the sport changed?

I feel that ever since we shifted to the 21-point format (from 2006), it is more tough. You cannot make a mistake. If you do, the opponent gets a point. In the 15-point format, if you make a mistake, it is only a service over. In the 21-point format, as you cannot make a mistake, you get mentally tired. Normally, one game is 20 minutes. But tough opponents can last 30 or 40 minutes. If there is a second game, then it is one hour for two games. So we do training for two and three hours. It's just like boxing. It was Muhammad Ali I think who said 'I train for 110-120 rounds for 10 rounds in the tournament'. The basics are the same. Training must be more. In tournaments, there will be strategising and thinking, and that can make you tired. If a match goes to the third game, just two things matter - either the player is better physically than you or more clever.

#### Where do you see world badminton going? Is it more attacking or more defensive?

Now it has become both. Attacking depends on the quality of the player. Defence is about how you can program a player. It is all about how you can transition from one to the other. It is also about who lasts longer, and about the mind. You may be a good attacking player, but if you are not strong in the mind, then... A good example is Poul-Erik Hoyer Larsen, the gold medallist at 1996 Atlanta. He was 32 [sic: nearly 31]. Back then, only those in their 20s were winning. But how did he win? He was mentally very strong. If he was focused, and felt okay on the court, it was very difficult to get even one point from him. There were so many good players. But he won. So how to beat such players? You have to attack their minds.

#### What about Viktor Axelsen?

Easy to say. He has a body like a European player, but his mind and agility are like an Asian player. So he is complete. In badminton, if you are clever and more efficient, you can play until you are 34-35 years old. A long time ago, in the Liem Swie King era, it was very physical. The coaches back then also trained more for the physical part. But after you turn 25, you cannot upgrade the physical aspect. You can just maintain. Axelsen does a lot of technical activity and not too much of the physical.

#### Finally, who is the best player you have trained?

Hendrawan! He won the Sydney [Olympics] silver (2000) and the 2001 World Championship. He was not a special player and didn't have strong fitness. He had tonsillitis, and in elementary school he had an operation. If he trained hard, the next day he would be sick. But how did he become a world-beating player? His mentality was different. He was from a rich family but when his father had a financial problem, he stopped badminton. He stopped badminton for a second time when his father fell sick. He wanted to make his father happy but was not physically up there. But he had the motivation and willpower which were different from others.