


A CLOSE LOOK

Why is India staring at an obesity challenge?

Data from the National Family Health Surveys reveals that obesity has been increasing across India over the years




FAQ » PAGE 13



Report links high levels of selenium in wheat to hair loss

SCIENCE » PAGE 12



Friedrich Merz: Germany's conservative centrist

PROFILES » PAGE 14



Karun puts Vidarbha on the cusp of Ranji glory

SPORT » PAGE 18

NEARBY



Four workers killed in Uttarakhand avalanche

Four still trapped as search continues amid heavy snowfall; at least eight of the rescued workers have suffered critical injuries; drones, radar, sniffer dogs are being deployed to assist operations

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

Four civilian workers were still missing, likely trapped under six feet of ice, as night fell on Saturday, two days after an avalanche hit a Border Roads Organisation building site at Mana village in Uttarakhand.



Mounting difficulties: Indo-Tibetan Border Police personnel carry out rescue operation on Saturday in Uttarakhand. ANI

On the second day of a rescue operation taking place amid heavy snowfall at 10,000 feet above sea level, 17 workers were brought out by the Indian Army and Indo-Tibetan Border Police, but four of them died of injuries.

Over 20 km of the road leading to the area is laden with about five feet of snow, and is cut off from the main highway, adding to the difficulty of the rescue operation. The India Meteorological Department has forecast more

snowfall and rainfall in the area over the next 24 hours.

Helicopters used

With snow making the roads impassable to vehicles, Army and Indian Air Force helicopters are being used for the rescue. The IAF plans to airlift a drone-

based intelligent buried object detection system to Mana on Sunday, while the Army plans to employ ground penetrating radar technology to trace three containers inside which the five missing workers are believed to be staying.

Army sniffer dogs have also been deployed to

search for the workers.

According to the Uttarakhand government, there were 57 workers employed at the BRO site, which is being dubbed as the last village before the Chinese border. Two workers had gone on leave but the rest are believed to have been sleeping in eight containers at the site when the avalanche crashed down on Friday.

"We learnt that 22 people possibly managed to escape the avalanche and ran towards Badrinath, and the remaining remained trapped under the ice," said Lt. Gen. Anindya Sen Gupta, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Army's Central Command, who arrived in Mana to review the rescue operations.

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Four 'located' in Telangana tunnel; hope slim: Minister

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The rescue operations to pull out the eight persons trapped 14 km inside the Srisailem Left Bank Canal tunnel in Telangana since February 22 saw a breakthrough on Saturday with the location of four of them likely identified.

A Telangana Minister, however, put the chances of their survival at "1%." State Excise Minister Juppally Krishna Rao, who attended a meeting with officials involved in the rescue operation along with Irrigation Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, said there was much progress during the past couple of days.

"In my view, the whereabouts of four persons have been located through radar," the Minister said, according to PTI. He expressed hope they would be extricated by Sunday evening.

Asked about the condition of the four, the Minister recalled he had said on



Tough task: Rescue operation under way to trace the workers trapped inside the partially collapsed SLBC tunnel on Saturday. PTI

the first day itself that the chances of survival of the trapped persons are remote.

The authorities supervising the rescue operation hoped that at least some of the victims buried beneath the muck in the area beside the tunnel boring machine (TBM) could be found by Saturday.

But the delay in muck removal and clearing the TBM debris has kept that hope at bay. Mr. Rao said there was still about 24 ft to 26 ft of mud in the tunnel on the sides of the TBM, which was damaged in the collapse.

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Naidu disburses pension under NTR Bharosa scheme

The Hindu Bureau
CHITTOOR

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday disbursed pensions to the beneficiaries under the NTR Bharosa scheme in the Gangadhara Nellore Assembly constituency.

Mr. Naidu, who was on a day's visit to the constituency, first visited the BC Colony near GD Nellore mandal headquarters and interacted with the beneficiaries.

Aid to elderly woman

During the interaction, an elderly woman, Selvi, requested the Chief Minister

to extend financial assistance for her two granddaughters' schooling and for procuring cows for the family's livelihood.

Mr. Naidu immediately directed District Collector Sumit Kumar to look into the matter. On instructions from the Collector, the officials concerned prepared the documents for providing financial support and housing schemes to the family.

The Collector also asked the officials to get the two children admitted in a social welfare school.

Earlier, the Chief Minister was accorded a grand welcome from the resi-

dents. Later, he proceeded to inspect the stalls set up by various government departments, displaying the welfare programmes under the 'Padi Sutralu' (10 principles) initiative.

Earlier, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu arrived at the Tirupati airport and reached GD Nellore by helicopter at noon.

Chittoor in-charge Minister M. Ramprasad Reddy, MLAs, Superintendent of Police V.N. Manikantha Chandolu, and senior officials were present.

YSRCP RULE RAVAGED ECONOMY, SAYS CM
» PAGE 6



Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu disbursing pension at the doorstep of a beneficiary, at BC Colony in GD Nellore in Chittoor district on Saturday. PTI

Take steps to ensure free movement on all Manipur roads: Shah

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday chaired a high-level review meeting in New Delhi with top security officials over the security situation in Manipur, during which he directed authorities to ensure free movement of people on all roads across the State from March 8.

He is also said to have directed early completion of fencing of Manipur's border with Myanmar and the dismantling of the drug network.

The review meeting comes a day after Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla extended the period for civilians to voluntarily surrender looted and illegal weapons without threat of action till March 6. Mr. Bhalla had on February 20 issued a call for people to surrender the weapons. Several weapon surrenders were arranged, including one in which the armed radical Meitei group Arambai Tenggol surrendered about 250 weapons.

At Saturday's review meeting chaired by Mr. Shah, Governor Bhalla, the Manipur Security Adviser, the Intelligence Bureau Director, the Deputy Chief of the Army Staff, the Army commander of the Eastern Command, and the Directors-General of the Border Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, and As-



Amit Shah

sam Rifles were in attendance.

In addition to directing officials to ensure free movement on roads, Mr. Shah called for the strictest of actions against anyone creating obstructions, according to a statement issued by the Union Home Ministry.

Mr. Shah directed that the fencing work on both sides of the designated entry points along Manipur's International Border to be finished at the earliest. "The entire network involved in the drug trade should be dismantled," he said, according to the government statement.

At the meeting, Mr. Shah added that the Centre remained "fully committed" to restoring peace in the State. Meanwhile, the Kuki Students' Organisation in Delhi and NCR and the Kuki-Zo Women's Forum in Delhi NCR on Saturday sent a memorandum to the Prime Minister, seeking a separate administration.

European leaders voice support for Zelensky after Oval Office fiasco

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

European leaders expressed their solidarity with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky following Friday's acrimonious interaction between the Ukrainian leader and U.S. President Donald Trump and Vice-President J.D. Vance. The Oval Office interaction led to Mr. Zelensky either choosing to leave – or being asked to leave – the White House without signing a deal on critical minerals.

"You are never alone, dear President Zelensky,"



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky departs after meeting U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House on Friday. AP

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who was in India on Friday, wrote on social media site X. "We will continue working with you for a

just and lasting peace," she said.

Most European leaders did not directly refer to Mr. Trump in their messages. They have been re-apprais-

ing the transatlantic relationship following the verbal attacks and tariff threats unleashed by Mr. Trump over the last few weeks as well as the fact that the U.S. did not invite Ukraine or other European countries to talks it had with Russia on February 18.

"...You are not alone," said Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, addressing his message to Ukrainians and Mr. Zelensky.

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'CAN MEND RELATIONSHIP'
» PAGE 15

Minister to visit U.S. tomorrow for talks on trade agreement

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will visit Washington on Monday as India and the U.S. are planning to negotiate a bilateral trade agreement, an official said.

The Minister is expected to be in the U.S. till Friday, the official added. During the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, India and the U.S. announced their commitment to more than double the two-way commerce

to \$500 billion by 2030 and negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025.

Tariff threat

The proposed agreement is an opportunity to boost bilateral trade and investments between the two countries amid threat of U.S. President Donald Trump to impose higher tariffs on Indian goods.

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Vijayawada/Region

IN BRIEF

Child marriage thwarted, girl sent to shelter home

The officials of Krishna District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) of Women Development and Child Welfare Department thwarted a child marriage on Friday and rescued a minor girl. The officials produced the 14-year-old girl before the Krishna district Child Welfare Committee (CWC), which referred her to a shelter home being run by an NGO. The case is under investigation, said CWC member Chandragiri Radha Kumari.

National Safety Week celebrations from March 4

The Factories Department will organise the 54th National Safety Week celebrations from March 4 to 11, Deputy Chief Inspector of Factories M. V. Siva Kumar Reddy has said. Awareness programmes on building and safety at the workplace will be conducted in all factories in NTR District, Mr. Siva Kumar Reddy said. Managements of the factories should display safety precautions, identify the 'hero of the workplace', invite their (heroes') families to the units and explain them about the safety measures being followed in factories. Prizes will be distributed to the 'heroes of the workplace' on the last day of the National Safety Week celebrations, Deputy Chief Inspector of Factories said in a release on Saturday.

YSRCP leaders are distorting Budget figures: TDP MLC

Government Chief Whip and TDP MLC Panchumarthi Anuradha has accused the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leaders of distorting the Budget figures to mislead the people. "The fact is that it was the YSRCP government which pushed the State to the brink of a disaster," she said while addressing the media here on Saturday. Describing the Budget as 'development-oriented', Mr. Anuradha alleged that the YSRCP leaders were 'spreading false propaganda as part of a political game'.

Over 4,300 litres of seized liquor destroyed

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Konaseema District police on Saturday destroyed 3,607 litres of liquor seized from various traders and 775 litres of ID liquor during a special drive under Mummudiwaram police station limits, according to SP B. Krishna Rao. The liquor was seized in 322 cases during the raids in the Amalapuram Division. Amalapuram DSP T.S.R.K. Prasad and Excise and Prohibition Department officials were present.

IMD predicts above normal temperatures

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

After experiencing a hot February, the State braces itself for a hotter summer this year, as both maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be above normal between March and May.

Except for a few isolated

places in Rayalaseema, where daytime temperature might not exceed the normal during the next three months, the remaining parts of the State would see higher maximum temperature, as per the summer outlook released by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on February 28.

Similarly, the minimum temperature, too, would be above normal throughout the season across the State.

The IMD also sounded a note of caution, as the number of heatwave days in March, and also during the summer season, was likely to be higher than the normal in Andhra Pradesh.

However, the IMD's forecast of above-normal rainfall in March might provide some respite from the searing heat.

February began on a hot note in the State, with most stations reporting an above-normal daytime temperature by a departure of 4-5 degree Celsius in the first two weeks.

20 roads will be laid at a cost of ₹223 crore in State: Union Minister

The Hindu Bureau
GUNTUR

The Central government has sanctioned ₹223.65 crore to Andhra Pradesh for the development of road network under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) in the last eight months, Union Minister of State for Rural Development and Communications Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar has said.

Addressing the media in Guntur district on Saturday, Mr. Chandra Sekhar, along with MLAs from the district, said that all these schemes would be undertaken with a cost-sharing ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and the State.

The Union Minister said that works worth ₹143.24 crore were sanctioned to Guntur district alone, while the rest of the State got ₹80.41 crore for road



Union Minister of State for Rural Development Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar addressing the media in Guntur on Saturday. T. VIJAY KUMAR

projects proposed. For laying 20 roads on a stretch of 139 km in the State, the government has sanctioned ₹123.46 crore. Of the total, the Central government sanctioned ₹74 crore while the State government contributes ₹49.3 crore.

There are four more bridges proposed in the State with an estimated cost of ₹100 crore. For the construction of these bridges, the Central go-

vernment sanctioned ₹29 crore, while the rest would be borne by the State government.

When it comes to Guntur district alone, the government is undertaking 12 road projects on a stretch of 78.51 km and sanctioned about ₹90 crore. Of it, the Central government's share was estimated as ₹53.5 crore, while the rest would be contributed by the State, he said.

Union Minister of State for Rural Development Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar addressing the media in Guntur on Saturday. T. VIJAY KUMAR

Union Minister of State for Rural Development Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar addressing the media in Guntur on Saturday. G.N. RAO

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96.41% Intermediate first-year students write exams on first day

Of the total 5,62,574 registered students, 5,42,368 appeared for the exam, while 20,204 students were absent; 1,535 exam centres set up across the State and a person from Health Department appointed at every exam centre with medical kits

P. Sujatha Varma
VIJAYAWADA

The 1,535 exam centres set up across Andhra Pradesh for Intermediate Public Examinations 2025 resonated with hushed whispers of Intermediate first-year students who huddled for a last-minute revision of the important points on Saturday. Students, most of them with their parents in tow, reached their respective centres well in advance as a precautionary measure. The exam was held from 9 am. to 12 noon.

Of the total 5,62,574 registered students (including general and vocational categories), 5,42,368 appeared for the exam, while 20,204 students were absent, registering an atten-



Intermediate students entering an examination centre in Vijayawada on Saturday. G.N. RAO

dance percentage of 96.41.

In the general category, of the 5,16,163 students registered, 5,00,595 showed up for the exam, registering 96.98% attendance. In vocational category, of the total 4,64,11 registered students, 4,17,73 appeared for the test, registering a

90.01% attendance.

A statement issued by the Board of Intermediate Education (BIE) said that two cases of malpractice were reported on the first day of the examination. The first-year students are writing their final exams from March 1 to March 19,

2025, while the second-year exams are scheduled from March 2 to March 20.

The examinations for Intermediate first and second-year students are being held alternately—one day for the first year and the next day for the second-year students.

Exams for the main subjects will be completed on March 13 for the first-year students and on March 15, for the second-year students.

For the last four days of the examinations (minor subjects), a few centres have been set up and the number of students appearing would be only around 1,000 across the State.

A person from the Health Department has been appointed at every exam centre with medical

kits and the Chief Superintendents of Examination centres have been told to allow the students into the examination halls 30 minutes before the exam time, to prevent last-minute crowding.

Display of the room-wise allotment of students has been made available in more places to avoid crowding at examination centres.

Toll-free number

A control room is functioning at the BIE office at Tadepalli to receive complaints and grievances regarding the examinations. It will function until the completion of the examinations. Grievances related to the examination can be registered by dialling the toll-free number 18004251531.

'No fly zone' status sought for Tirumala

The Hindu Bureau
TIRUMALA

In a bid to preserve the sanctity and security of the temple of Lord Venkateswara, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Chairman B.R. Naidu on Saturday wrote a letter to Union Minister of Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu to declare the sky overhead the sacred temple at Tirumala as a 'No Fly Zone'.

The letter highlighted the disruptions caused by the low-flying aircraft and helicopters, which he said not only violated the 'Agama Sastras', but also compromised the temple's purity and security, besides hurting the sentiments of devotees.

This is not the first time the TTD has sought a no fly zone status for Tirumala. A similar proposal was sent to the Centre way back in 2012, but it is yet to be considered despite several reminders.

Child-trafficking gang of five arrested; three infants rescued in Vijayawada

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

The NTR Commissionerate police in Andhra Pradesh busted a child-trafficking gang and rescued three children. The police arrested five women, identified as B. Sarojini, Sk. Fareena, Sk. Saida Bi, K. Karunasri and P. Sirisha, all hailing from Vijayawada, for their alleged involvement in the racket. "Sarojini, kingpin of the gang, would go around hospitals and diagnostic centres to identify childless couples. She would convince them and sell babies to them," Police



The police showing the infants rescued from the child trafficking gang, at a press conference in Vijayawada on Saturday. G.N. RAO

Commissioner S.V. Rajashakar Babu told the media in Vijayawada on Saturday. Sarojini, who was arrested in child-trafficking cases earlier in Delhi and other places, allegedly de-

veloped a network with Preethi Kiran and Anil for procuring children, Police Commissioner S.V. Rajashakar Babu told the media in Vijayawada on Saturday. "Sarojini, kingpin of the

gang, would go around hospitals and diagnostic centres to identify childless couples. She would convince them and sell babies to them," the Police Commissioner said.

"The accused were selling baby girls for ₹3 lakh and boys for ₹5 lakh each. However, the price would vary depending on the desperation of the childless couples," said Deputy Commissioner of Police Gowthami Sali, who probed the case.

The gang had allegedly sold away four babies to couples hailing from Eluru and Guntur districts in the

Brahmotsavams at Srisailam conclude

The Hindu Bureau
NANDYAL

The 11-day Maha Sivaratri Brahmotsavams at the Sri Bhramaramba Mallikarjuna Swamy temple in Srisailam concluded on Saturday.

On the last day of the

Brahmotsavams, the processional idols were taken on a ride on 'Aswa Vahanam' and at night, 'Pushpotsavam' was performed. As part of the Pushpotsavam, Lord Mallikarjuna and Goddess Bhramaramba were offered prayers with 21 varieties of flowers.

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MARKET INFO A Business Initiative

Krishna Milk Union's 60th Anniversary



On the occasion of 60th Anniversary of Krishna Milk Union the pylon was built as a symbol of the Vajrotsavam in the factory premises and unveiled by Krishna Milk Union Chairman Mr Chalasani Anjaneyulu in the presence of the Sangh presidents and samiti staff. The efforts of the great people who worked for the establishment of this union, dairy farmers, Sangh presidents, samiti employees and the consumers who contributed to this success were thanked. On the occasion of this general meeting, 28 Sangha Presidents who had completed 25 years of tenure were felicitated. In celebration of the Samiti's Vajrotsavam, 1 litre, 1/2 litre, 200 ML, 100 ML pet jar bottles of ghee (buffalo and cow) were unveiled.

CPR launches affordable 2BHK project



CPR Constructions has announced the launch of CPR Mangala, an affordable 2BHK project on Karakambadi Road in Tirupati. Managing Director Mr. Chalapathi Reddy said the affordable project with modern facilities is brought to the reach of every prospective customer. Directors Mr. Kasi Viswanath, Mr. Lokesh and Ms. Vinisha took part in the brochure release ceremony.

Timings VIJAYAWADA

SUNDAY, MAR. 02
RISE 06:24 SET 18:15
RISE 07:57 SET 20:38

MONDAY, MAR. 03
RISE 06:24 SET 18:15
RISE 08:39 SET 21:40

TUESDAY, MAR. 04
RISE 06:23 SET 18:15
RISE 09:25 SET 22:42

Vijayawada Weather max min
Machilipatnam 33 23
Guntur Town 34 21
Vijayawada City 34 24

Vijayawada City Today
33°C The weather will be dry. Morning will be pleasant with mist and haze. Day will be warm. Night will be pleasant.

Vijayawada City Tomorrow
34°C Morning will be pleasant. The weather will be dry. Day will be warm with uneasy afternoon. Night will be pleasant.

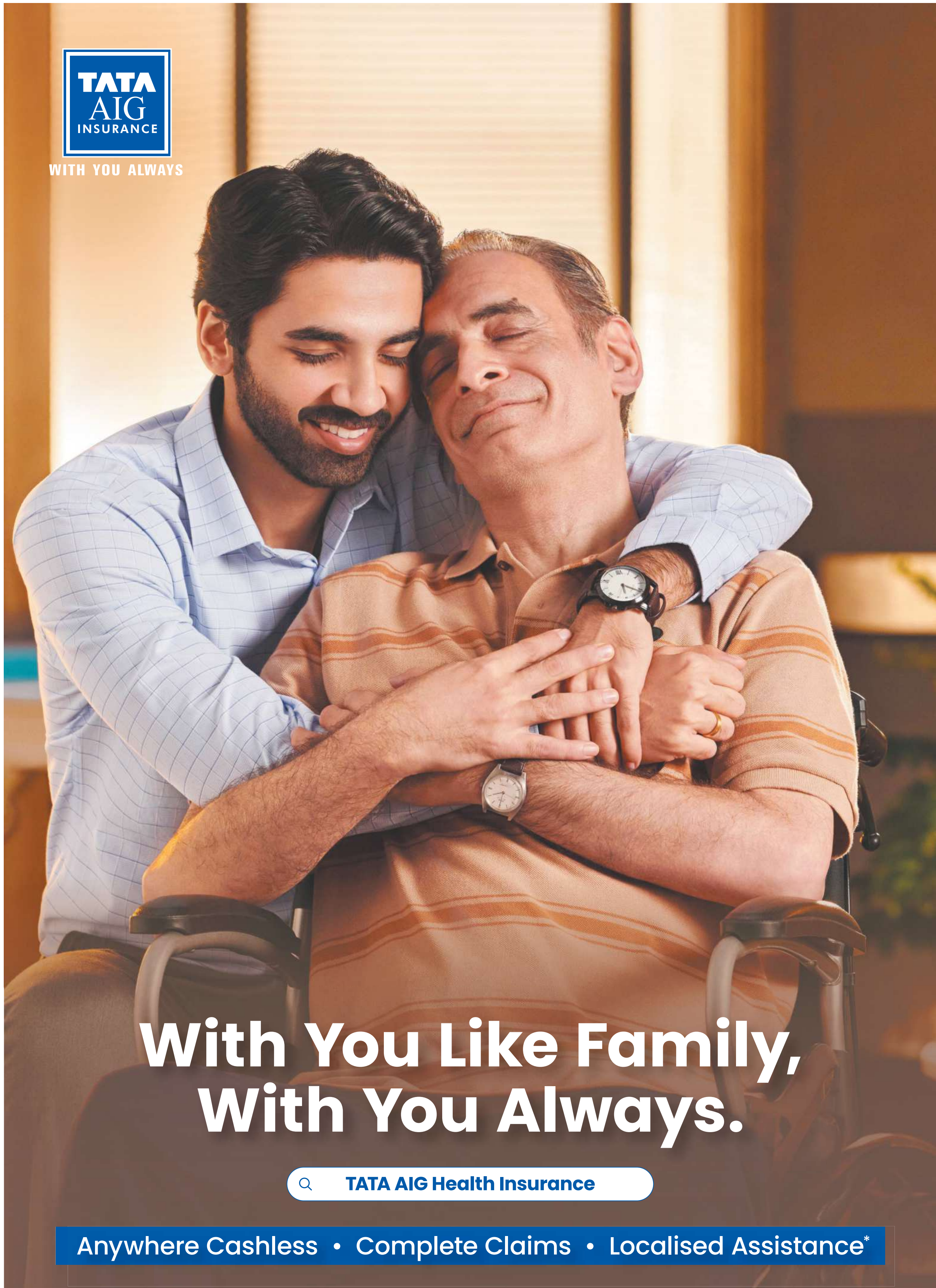
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THE HINDU

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COSMOPOLITAN

33/F, SC, Hindu, MBA, IT professional, 12 LPA. Looking for a suitable match. 9561343825.

WARM, ATTRACTIVE, 37, 155cm, well-educated professional, cultured family. Seeks compatible groom. Religion/caste no bar. Call/WA 9345634365.

US based, 26/167, Wheatish, BC, Tamil RC Girl Doctorate in OT. Seeks US based Professionals. Contact: 9952628665

DIVORCEE

HINDU TELUGU girl 29/154, issueless divorcee, short marriage B.Tech, MBA working in MNC at Mumbai seeks young 30-34yrs well settled professional issueless divorcee from India/abroad Caste language no bar. Contact 964035179 parents.

DOCTOR

DKV Govt. Dr. 28 Aswini Mesham Father Mother Govt. Dr. Seeks Dr. Groom Only. Ph: 9443151045.

Hindu (CNB) 25yrs Doctor Bride Doing (MSc) ENT Seeks Suitable Grooms. Contact: 9677199925

NAIDU, 25/160, MBBS Pursuing M.S. OBG (1st year in Pondicherry) Ket-tai, Upper Middle Class in Coimbatore seeking Doctor Groom. Sub Scts No Bar. Avoid IT & Abroad. 9842650751, 9865301820.

HINDU REDDY Doctor 34Y 165cms Well Settled Family. Seeks Suitable Groom from India / Dubai / Singapore, Caste No Bar 8925640111

Mudaliar Bride DM Cardiology 33/164 Kettai Seeks Any Mudaliar Doctor Groom With MD/MS. CT:8220677056

PRAJAPATI/KUMHAR MBBS Girl, 27/159 cm Govt. Medical Officer seeks Jharkhand settled MBBS/MS/MD Boy. Email-id: srmgrint@gmail.com

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Smart, Pretty, Cultured Homely Doctor Girl, MD, Anaesthesiology Specialist from Affluent Family of Doctors 35/165
Father Cardiac Surgeon from Kerala, based in Chennai, Mother Tamil.
Looking for doctor groom (or) Engineer from good families
98400 50381 / 98409 85383

ENGINEER

Mudaliar / Vanniar 30Y/165cm Doctor MBBS, fellowship in Diabetology seeks Engineer Grooms. Ph: 94444 54188.

IAS / ALLIED SERVICES

SC/Tamil/ BE/ Mar 93/ IRS-IT/ seeks MD/MS/SS or IAS Allied Services Contact: 9042261465

KANNADA

CHETTIAR-30Yrs, B.Tech-IT, Working as IT Professional in UAE. Looking for well Educated and with Reputed Job. Caste No Bar, BC Category. CT: 9786220821, 9003430922. Email: keertham10@gmail.com

MALAYALAM

MIENON GIRL, B.TECH (CSE), Senior Data Scientist. MNC, Bengaluru. 29Yrs/157cm/48kg. Ph. 9894940736

WANTED BRIDEGROOM

Veera Saivam, Keralaite, 27, Magam, Bcom PGDM, Tax Associate in MNC, 152 cms, slim, coming from an educated, upper middle class family of Palakkad origin, seeks well educated, settled Hindu Grooms (caste no bar), of Keralaite origin from India/abroad, 28-30, from similar family background.
Contact: WhatsApp: 7025300843.

NRI

Hindu Telugu never married 45yrs/168 MS USA very fair working bride seeks 45-48yrs never married working groom in USA, CNB 9866274192

TAMIL

GIRL, ENG Graduate 35 years working in MNC wanted working Eng graduate bride groom from a decent literate family - 9884831257

MUSLIM FAIR slim girl 38 B.E(CSC), seeks qualified, employed, Unmarried Tamil Muslim Groom. 944235779

RC CHRISTIAN 33 Yrs, 165cm, B.Tech, well Settled Working in Medical concern, Chennai Based, Needs Well educated groom. Ct:9789955775

TAMIL

HINDU, VANNIYAR, 24 yrs, MA, Studying at Chennai, upper middle class family. Contact 9048444840.

HINDU, CHETTIYAR, 24 yrs, B.Arch, IT professional at Madurai, Upper middle class family. Ct 8138900470.

HINDU, AGAMUDIYAR, 23yrs, M.Tech at Kanchipuram, Upper middle class family. Contact 8138900557.

HINDU NADAR 29yrs, BE, Govt staff, well educated family, Seeks Suitable Groom. Cont:9380791999/9841329471

AGAMUDIYAR/MUDALIAR, Dr.M.B.B.S 24yr Fair, 5'4, Non-Veg Preferably Dr.Bridegroom. 8754548810/9444333992

HINDU NADAR 2002 / 161cm Uthiradam Magara rasi, Raagu dhosam M. Tech, seeks suitable same caste groom earning above 50kpm. Ct: 9444970305

VANNIYAR, BDS, 31, Revathi, Employed, Middle class family, Groom from same community needed. 9840961251

Chettiar Bride 32yrs Sr Mgr top pvt bank seeks tall well educated and settled groom. CNB. Phone: 99406 57137

HINDU TAMIL, Yadava Revathi 28/165 B.Tech TCS Chennai 10 Lac PA seeks Software Groom from Same Community. Cont: 91760 52808 / 86103 21964

HINDU NADAR Bride, 48yrs, 162cms, M.C.A., M.Phil., Self Employed, Never Married, Good Looking, seeks Educated and well settled Chennai based Groom. Caste No Bar. Ct. 9840117920.

MUDALIAR 26/162, Fair Beautiful, BE, MS, AWS,USA, 60000,USD. PA, Affluent Family, CNB. 9043991629, 9043987029

MUDALIAR: 26/ V.Fair, B. Beautiful, MBBS, MD doing, Chennai, Elite Family, Seeks groom Doctor / Business Ct: 9962530015

MUDALIAR (CNB): 26/ V.Fair, B. Tech, MS (USA), Associate Developer, USA, Elite Family, Seeks groom Abroad / India. Ct: 8925019776

BEAUTIFUL, WARM 26, 160cm, polished, UK-raised doctor from affluent, Nadar family. Seeks active, Educated, compatible groom. Call/WA 9345634365

MBBS MD Pediatrician A-24 only Daughter/good looking well settled, Seeks Dr/Any PG/CA/Govt/Engg 9176737036

LOOKING FOR a Professionally Qualified well settled Groom with clean habits and from a status family for a Kerala Iyer Girl, aged 26.5. H. Hashtham Nakshatram, Sadamashana, Govthram, Master's Qualification (UK), willing to settle in India / Abroad. Please contact @ +919845231891

CASTE NO Bar, 31yrs, BE, Elite business family in Chennai, Seeks Suitable Groom. Contact: 9841329471/9380791999

GROOM WANTED Hindu Nadar, 24yrs, MBA, Elite Business Family in Chennai. Contact: 9380791999 / 9841329471

DKV/SC/IAS 1940/167cm Fair BE Parents Hindu/CNY, Seeks Groom Dr/Er. Govt Employee. 8056104103

HINDU SC Pr 38 fair M.Sc.M.Phil.B.Ed Govt PG Teacher 60000-pm divorcee no child seeks same caste groom below 41 with govt job Ct: 97900 49517.

HINDU CA Auditor 32/158 cm MBC Fair legally divorced CNB Chennai seeks suitable groom 9600055160

HINDU, KALLAR, 23 yrs, B.Sc, Business at Madurai.Income 1crore. Ct 8138901294.

HINDU, VANNIYAR, 31 yrs, MBBS, Doctor at Chennai , Income 9 Lakhs. Ct 8138901337.

HINDU, MUDALIYAR, 28 yrs, MA, Teacher at Chennai, upper middle class family. Ct 8138901189.

HINDU, NAIDU, 25 yrs, B.E, Business at Coimbatore, Income 20 Lakhs. Ct 8138900312

MUDALIAR (27/165), Beautiful, BE/IT Professional, Bangalore. Seeking fair groom from I.T. Background only. Sub-caste no bar. Contact: 9444979565 / 6369192021. Email: sivanesan1955@gmail.com

VISHWAKARMA MD final, 1996/168/70; TN govt MRB selected, posting awaited;seeks suitable groom WA 944211648

Adidravidar 28/160 Hashtham B.E, B.Ed seeks professionally qualified settled groom,same caste. 9789968845

GROOM WANTED, Caste No Bar, 30yrs, MBBS, MS, Elite business family in Chennai. Ct: 9710093999/9710091999

CHENNAI, BALIJA Naidu girl from upper middle class family, 26 yrs / 152cm / MCA working in Bangalore seeks well educated well settled groom. Contact:87542 29161.

CAVARA NAIDU Thiruvonam / Magalaru 28/165, B.Tech, IT, Bangalore, seeks groom. Cont: 9790548816

TELUGU

BALIJA NAIDU 24/162 cm CA, Wkg @ Bank 13.2 LPA Seeks Grooms CA / MBA / M.Tech /B.Tech SWE.Ct : 9941342140

WANTED NAIDU Groom, Settled in USA, for a Good Looking Girl, only Daughter, 22 years, 155cm Employee in Washington State Permanent Resident. Preferred Upper Middle Class Family. Contact: +1 650 933 7006, anjanbcb@gmail.com

REDDY 40/165 divorcee, employed in MNC, affluent family, veg seeks Chennai employed groom with age below 45, No child, CNB. Ct: 9884657084

GROOM WANTED Kamma Naidu, 30yrs, B.Tech, MBA, Elite business family in Chennai. Ct: 9710093999/9710091999

AGAMUDIYAR/MUDALIAR, Dr.M.B.B.S 24yr Fair, 5'4, Non-Veg Preferably Dr.Bridegroom. 8754548810/9444333992

HINDU NADAR 2002 / 161cm Uthiradam Magara rasi, Raagu dhosam M. Tech, seeks suitable same caste groom earning above 50kpm. Ct: 9444970305

VANNIYAR, BDS, 31, Revathi, Employed, Middle class family, Groom from same community needed. 9840961251

Chettiar Bride 32yrs Sr Mgr top pvt bank seeks tall well educated and settled groom. CNB. Phone: 99406 57137

HINDU TAMIL, Yadava Revathi 28/165 B.Tech TCS Chennai 10 Lac PA seeks Software Groom from Same Community. Cont: 91760 52808 / 86103 21964

HINDU NADAR Bride, 48yrs, 162cms, M.C.A., M.Phil., Self Employed, Never Married, Good Looking, seeks Educated and well settled Chennai based Groom. Caste No Bar. Ct. 9840117920.

MUDALIAR 26/162, Fair Beautiful, BE, MS, AWS,USA, 60000,USD. PA, Affluent Family, CNB. 9043991629, 9043987029

MUDALIAR: 26/ V.Fair, B. Beautiful, MBBS, MD doing, Chennai, Elite Family, Seeks groom Doctor / Business Ct: 9962530015

MUDALIAR (CNB): 26/ V.Fair, B. Tech, MS (USA), Associate Developer, USA, Elite Family, Seeks groom Abroad / India. Ct: 8925019776

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CAVARA NAIDU Thiruvonam / Magalaru 28/165, B.Tech, IT, Bangalore, seeks groom. Cont: 9790548816

BRIDES WANTED

DOCTOR

VEGETARIAN FAMILY, Pillai - Karkathar, 12th December 1994. Revathy/ Meenam, Asst-Professor MS (General Surgeon), having Own Clinic, Chennai, Smart well settled family, Expectation PG Doctor Vegetarian, Family Oriented Girl. Contact: 9841039515

HINDU THEVAR, 27 years boy, MBBS Doctor. Studying in P.G./ Seeks MBBS Lady Doctor. Cont: 9498681866

MDS (Prosthodontist) Age 27, Height 152 cm Uthirathi, Meenam, Implant specialist- consultant for various leading clinics in South India, running successfully his own dental clinic in Chennai, seeks same profession bride, Chettiyar community. Phone: 9840793361

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HINDU THEVAR, 27 years boy, MBBS Doctor. Studying in P.G./ Seeks MBBS Lady Doctor. Cont: 9498681866

TAMIL

HINDU, MUDALIYAR, 41 yrs, Divorced, MS , Management professional at Chennai, Income 1 Crore. Ct: 8138900498.

HINDU, CASTE No Bar, 34 Yrs, B.E, Engineer at Hyderabad, Income 20 Lakhs. Ct: 8138900652.

BRIDE WANTED Kongu vellala Gounder, 28yrs, BE, MS, Very Rich Family (Business) Ct: 9710093999/9710091999

Hindu, Brahmin, 29 yrs, B.Tech, Web developer at Bangalore, family running a business. Contact 8138900547.

Hindu, Pillai, 29 Yrs, M.Tech, IT Professional at Australia, Income 1Crore. Contact 8138901171

HINDU, PILLAI, 35 Yrs, MS, MBA, Managing Director at Ghera, Income 1Crore. Contact 8138900412.

HINDU SC AD 29/170cm, Fair, M.E. Visagam, Thulam, Well established business. Father Govt Sch HM, Mother village president. Require bride, 8610437752, 9442275242.

CASTE NO BAR/ Hindu Nadar 42 Yrs 177 cm M.Tech, MNC employed, Clean habits, well settled Chennai seeks suitable alliance. Ct.88382 40512.

HINDU NADAR 41/171 B.Tech MS, SWE, Canada, 1st Marriage. Seeks Suitable - Bride, Caste No Bar. 9790818852.

HINDU-BE/33/170/SWE/SC/AYILLAM-KATAGAM. FAMILY is financially well off, educated and Settled in Bangalore. Looking for a suitable bride from the same/other caste. Contact No 9845401461.

PERMANENT RESIDENT in Germany, 31 yrs, 168 cms, 63 Kg, fair and slim, employed, seeks good looking bride with professional qualification and employed in India or abroad. Contact 9841294930.

33yrs/183 cm, Tall and Handsome, Hindu, M.Arch from an affluent Business Background seeking for a Bride. Contact: 9840150217

ARC

Andhra Pradesh

IN BRIEF



Posani feels chest congestion, doctors say condition 'normal'

Actor and former chairman of the A.P. State Film, Television and Theatre Development Corporation Posani Krishna Murali, who is currently serving his 14-day judicial remand at the sub-jail in Rajampeta, was on Saturday shifted to the Government Medical College Hospital in Kadapa after he reportedly complained of congestion in the chest. The police arrested Mr. Krishna Murali in Hyderabad on February 26 for allegedly making derogatory comments against TDP national president N. Chandrababu Naidu and JSP chief K. Pawan Kalyan, and their family members, during the YSRCP government's term. The jail officials immediately rushed him to the government area hospital in Rajampeta and later shifted him to the Kadapa hospital. After medical tests, Mr. Krishna Murali was brought back to the sub-jail. The actor was shifted back to the sub-jail after doctors in the Rajampeta and Kadapa hospitals found his health condition normal, said Railway Kodur Circle Inspector Venkateswarlu.

'Gross injustice done to govt. staff, pensioners in Budget'

Alleging that gross injustice was done in the Budget to employees and pensioners, former government adviser (employees' welfare) and YSR Congress Party Employees & Pensioners' Wing State president N. Chandrasekhar Reddy has said there is no clarity on the demand to scrap the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS), implementing the Pay Revision Commission (PRC) recommendations. Addressing the media on Saturday, Mr. Chandrasekhar Reddy said benefits amounting to nearly ₹30,000 crore were due to be paid to the employees, but there were no budgetary allocations for them, and the government seemed to be backing off from its bounden duty to give the employees their benefits of ₹30,000 crore. He slammed the government for deceiving the contract and outsourcing staff, and leaving volunteers in the lurch. There was no Mega DSC notification in sight, and 21,000 posts in Village Secretariats and Rythu Bharosa Kendras were vacant. The NDA government borrowed ₹1.32 lakh crore in eight months, but nothing proves that the money was being properly used, he said.

Naidu announces sops to ASHAs, raises their retirement age to 62

Accredited Social Health Activists will be provided paid maternity leave of 180 days for the first two deliveries and given gratuity of ₹1.50 lakh on completion of 30 years of service

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

Acknowledging the key role being played by the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) in delivering health services to people, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has announced the decision to provide them paid maternity leave, gratuity, and increase their retirement age to 62 from the existing 60.

During the protests that had rocked the State during the previous YSRCP's term in 2023, these were some of their key demands.

While every working woman is entitled to maternity leave, ASHAs often have to work until a few days before delivery. The latest announcement comes as a relief to 42,752 ASHAs in the State.

An official release from the Health Department on Saturday said that the Chief Minister made the announcement after holding a discussion with Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav on February 27 in pursuance of the poll promises.

Each ASHA who has completed 30 years of service is entitled to receive ₹1.50 lakh as gratuity. They have also been granted 180 days of paid maternity leave for the first two deliveries. At present, they are being paid an honorarium of ₹10,000 per month.

Mr. Satya Kumar Yadav has thanked Mr. Naidu for fulfilling the promises made to the workers.



Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu sporting goggles at GD Nellore in Chittoor district on Saturday.

'YSRCP rule ravaged economy'

The Hindu Bureau
CHITTOOR

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday said the previous YSRCP government had unleashed a regime of distress that affected all sections of people and played havoc with the State's economy.

"I am unable to understand the previous government's five-year rule of destruction. Our government is committed to restoring development and streamlining all government services efficiently," Mr. Naidu said.

The Chief Minister was addressing a gathering at an SC Colony, near Gangadhara Nellore mandal headquarters, after distributing pensions to NTR Bharosa beneficiaries.

He listed the various welfare programmes launched by his government, including NTR Bharosa, which was benefiting over 64 lakh people.

Mr. Naidu said patients suffering from kidney-related diseases and thalassemia were being extended financial assistance. "The government has earmarked ₹33,000 crore towards disbursement of social pensions to stand by the poor and downtrodden sections," he said.

Growth rate

Stating that top priority was being accorded to economic growth, he said Andhra Pradesh registered 12.9% growth rate within nine months of the NDA coming to power.

Stating that focus was on creating infrastructure,

with priority to extend roads and establishment of industrial parks, he said steps were underway to create an industrial park in 2,000 acres in Chittoor district.

Super Six schemes

Mr. Naidu said the State government was expediting the process of launching 'Thalliki Vandanam' and financial assistance to the farmers. The two form a part of the 'Super Six' promises made in the run-up to the elections.

Under Thalliki Vandanam, mothers of every school-going student would be provided ₹15,000 annually from May. "Our motto is to usher in sustainable development, economic progress, and social welfare," Mr. Naidu said.

Budget: experts flag increasing public debt

G.V.R. Subba Rao
VIJAYAWADA

The State Budget presented on Friday showed an "alarming picture of the finances." Public debt is estimated to increase to ₹1.02 lakh crore in 2025-26, while the total outlay has been put at ₹3,22,359 lakh crore.

Andhra Pradesh will be witnessing a quantum jump of more than ₹25,000 crore in public debt in one year. Experts opine that it is largely due to "freebies, fewer tax revenues, and meagre capital expenditure," and advise the government to focus on physical and human infrastructure - health and education, and bring down fiscal deficit.

As per the Budget document, public debt is estimated to touch ₹1.03 lakh crore during 2025-26. It stood at ₹76,209 crore in 2023-24. The budget estimates for 2024-25, when the YSRCP demitted office, were ₹91,443 crore. However, the revised estimates for 2024-25 pointed out that public debt increased to ₹97,352 crore.

Institute for Economic and Social Justice Chairman K.S. Chalam opines that the State's finances are "alarming." The increasing public debt is a "serious issue," he says. The government will have to pay more than ₹44,000 crore as interest and principal payments per annum, if the fiscal deficit of ₹79,926 crore and revenue deficit of ₹33,185 crore are to be considered, he points out.

Expressing a similar view, V. Anji Reddy of Acharya Nagarjuna University says that tax revenues are not increasing to match the burgeoning expenditure on welfare schemes.

They blame freebies, fewer tax revenues, and meagre capital expenditure for the sorry state of affairs, and call for investment in infra to have a multiplier effect

To bridge the gap, public debt has become unavoidable, he says.

The Budget documents show that the government's internal debt was estimated to be ₹73,193 crore for the FY 2024-25, but it touched ₹81,108 crore as per the revised estimates. The government estimated that the internal debt would further go up to ₹81,956 crore during FY 2025-26.

The loans and advances from the Central government were ₹5,011 crore during FY 2023-24. It was estimated that the loans and advances would be ₹18,249 crore during FY 2024-25, but stood at ₹16,244 crore as per the revised estimates. The government estimated that the Central government loans and advances would be ₹21,700 crore during FY 2025-26.

Public debt as a percentage of GDP also points out a grim picture. It was ₹4.91 lakh crore during FY 2023-24, and it increased to ₹5.60 lakh crore in 2024-25. The budget estimate for the FY 2025-26 is ₹6.40 lakh crore. "The government receives 32 paise (32%) of every rupee from the open market loans and other liabilities. The tax revenue is a little above open market loans with 34 paise of a rupee. The non-tax revenue is 6%, and the grant-in-aid is 10%. The share of central taxes is 18%.

Govt. plans to set up special clusters to promote 11 horticulture crops in State

Sambasiva Rao M.
VIJAYAWADA



Andhra Pradesh government, in its Agriculture Budget 2025-26 presented in the Assembly on Friday, proposed cluster-based promotion of horticulture crops, depending on local climatic conditions, market demands and other relevant factors.

The government aims to boost the economy through these clusters by creating favourable export conditions. As part of this initiative, the government is committed to providing subsidies to farmers to increase crop size and encourage quality produce for the best prices.

Horticultural crops such as banana, mango, cashew, chilli and others would be encouraged and the inter-

national market would be developed for these farmers. The government also plans to use product tracking technology for benefit of consumers.

While tabling the Agriculture Budget, Agriculture Minister K. Atchannaaidu said, "As part of the Swarna Andhra 2047 Vision, an action plan has been prepared to promote 11 horticultural crops with the highest Gross Value Added (GVA) in cluster mode.

Clusters have been selected depending on climatic conditions and market demands to achieve an annual growth rate of more than 15%

K. ATCHANNAIDU
Agriculture Minister

Cropwise clusters are selected to achieve an annual growth rate of more than 15%. Special funds will be allocated from the National Horticulture Board for setting up these clusters."

The government sanctioned a banana cluster for Anantapur district and accorded permission to float a Request For Proposal (RFP) to identify implementing agencies, he said.

"Similarly, cluster proposals are being prepared

for other crops and will be submitted to the Central government. Proposals are being prepared for mango clusters in Chittoor, Annamayya and Tirupati districts; cashew clusters in Srikakulam and ASR and Parvathipuram-Manyam districts; coconut clusters in Srikakulam, East Godavari, Konaseema districts; oil palm and cocoa clusters in Eluru and East Godavari districts; and chilly cluster in Prakasam and Guntur districts," Mr. Atchannaaidu said.

These new initiatives will help increase farmers' income and generate revenue for the State government, the Minister said and suggested the farmers to make use of various schemes available for the development of horticulture sector.

Tourism potential of A.P. Buddhist sites to be explored in Berlin meet

The Hindu Bureau
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM

Minister for Tourism and Culture Kandula Durgesh said that the tourism potential of Buddhist sites in Andhra Pradesh will be explored at the International Tourism-Borse (ITB), an international conclave to be hosted by Germany in Berlin from March 4. Mr. Durgesh and Andhra Pradesh Tourism Department Corporation (APTDC) Managing Director K. Amrapali will participate in the event.

Speaking at a press conference here on Saturday, Mr. Durgesh said, "A.P. has a huge potential which remains unexplored for Buddhist tourism. We will showcase the Buddhist cultural heritage of the State at the ITB."

"The talks on tourism



Minister for Tourism and Culture Kandula Durgesh, at a press conference in Rajamahendravaram on Saturday.

potential and investment opportunities in A.P. will be held with various global players in the travel and tourism sectors during the convention," said Mr. Durgesh.

The tourist destinations of the Krishna-Godavari and Penna regions would also be revealed to the international stakeholders to draw their attention for the investment under the Pu-

blic, Private and People Partnership model, the Minister added.

The Tourism Department is also preparing to conduct tourism summits in Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai, said Mr. Durgesh. On exploring the tourism potential of the coastline, Mr. Durgesh said that efforts are on to get the Blue Flag tag for the Kakinada and Bapatla beaches.



A.P. Chambers president P. Bhaskara Rao.

'Budget has sown seeds for Swarna Andhra'

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce & Industry Federation (AP Chambers) has welcomed the State Budget on Friday, saying that it is growth-oriented and has decent allocations for welfare.

A.P. Chambers president P. Bhaskara Rao said in a release that the Budget provided for developmental activities, implementation of the 'Super Six' schemes and other promises. The Budget had sown the seeds for realisation of the Swarna Andhra Vision-2047. The allocation of ₹42,635 crore for capital expenditure is commendable, he said.

"Besides, priority has been given to the construction of the capital city Amaravati and Polavaram project. The government has announced sufficient allocations to support the industrial policies," he said.

"The Budget is pragmatic and progressive. The government has taken steps to improve the State's income," Mr. Rao added.

Jagan inaugurated incomplete Veligonda project: Minister

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

Water Resources Minister Nimmala Rama Naidu alleged that former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy dedicated the Poola Subbaiah Veligonda project to the nation before it was completed, for which he owed an apology to the people.

He stated in a release that Yerragondapalem MLA T. Chandrasekhar's demand for the allocation of ₹3,000 crore for the Veligonda project was proof that it was incomplete.

The YSRCP leaders were making misleading statements on the irrigation projects despite high priority accorded to them by the NDA government.

The government was focused on executing the pending Veligonda project works, the Minister said.

The government was in the process of allocating ₹1,000 crore for the project's R&R component.

The Nallamala Sagar reservoir will be filled with water from river Krishna by July 2026, the Minister added.

Surbana-Jurong and Knight Frank roped in to monitor construction works in Amaravati

V. Raghavendra
VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (APCRDA) has roped in Surbana-Jurong and Knight Frank to assist in monitoring the capital city construction works undertaken by various contractors.

Surbana Jurong and

Knight Frank will constitute the CRDA's Programme Management Consultant (PgMC) Team, which will also support the implementation of the standards and regulations set by the World Bank (WB) for the construction of Amaravati, which is being partly funded by the WB and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

CRDA Additional Commissioner Naveen Mallarapu and Surbana Jurong (India) Private Limited CEO (South Asia) Avinash Mishra signed an MoU to this effect on Friday (February 28).

CRDA Director N. Satish Babu, Surbana Jurong India Private Limited Executive Director Abhishek Malhotra and Knight Frank

(India) Private Limited National Director Vishwa Bandhu Mehra were present.

The Singapore-headquartered Surbana Jurong was associated with the CRDA in the preparation of the Amaravati master plans in 2014-19 along with the Singapore Government's Centre for Liveable Cities.

IN BRIEF



Babli gates opened to let 0.6 tmcft water to Telangana

Maharashtra lifted gates of Babli Barrage constructed across the river Godavari near Dharmabad in Nanded district to allow flow of 0.6 tmcft water downstream to Telangana on Saturday. As per the Supreme Court judgment of February 2013, gates of the barrage are lifted by Maharashtra on March 1 every year to let down 0.6 tmcft water to Telangana for drinking needs. Accordingly, the gates are lifted at forenoon and closed in the evening after releasing the water.

Skit row: Karnataka HC quashes criminal proceedings

The Karnataka High Court has quashed criminal proceedings initiated against two faculty members and seven students of Centre for Management Studies of Jain (Deemed-to-be) University on the allegation that they insulted B.R. Ambedkar and Dalits in a skit enacted during an inter-college youth festival in 2023.

Man booked for conning lady doctor of ₹11 lakh

A man was booked by the police for duping a 32-year-old female doctor of nearly ₹11 lakh in a matrimonial scam in Hyderabad. The accused, who introduced himself as Harsha Cherukuri, got connected with the doctor via a matrimonial platform. He expressed interest in marrying her and after she accepted, both continued their communication via WhatsApp. The man sought ₹10.94 lakh, citing that his bank accounts froze due to PAN card issues. The woman transferred the money. When she confronted him, he threatened to share her morphed images on social media, demanding ₹10 lakh more.

Kerala Class 10 student dies after clash in tuition centre

The fight was reportedly over stopping music at a farewell party; five accused students have been produced before the Juvenile Justice Board, which has sent them to an observation home

The Hindu Bureau
KOZHIKODE

A 15-year-old boy died on Saturday of injuries sustained in a clash between two groups of Class 10 students near a tuition centre here on Thursday. Five students have been charged with murder in the case.

The boy suffered severe head injuries during the clash over an argument over stopping music at a farewell party at the tuition centre on February 23. Though the victim did not study at the centre, he was reportedly persuaded by others to join the fight. Nearly 15 students were reportedly present during the clash. The students dis-



Final journey: The body of the boy being shifted from Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode on Saturday. K.RAJESH

persed after a few teachers arrived.

The police said though the victim sustained grave injuries, he was initially taken home by a few students. His family members took him to hospital after

he vomited and collapsed. By the time he was admitted to the Government Medical College Hospital here, he slipped into a coma. The post-mortem report says his skull was broken above his right ear and

a heavy weapon had been used for the attack. Voice clips went viral on social media groups in which some are heard talking about "finishing" the boy and others saying the police would not register any case if "someone is killed in a clash".

The police have filed cases against the accused under Sections 103(1), 118(2), 126(2), 189(2), 191(2), 191(3), and 190 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Samhita. The Juvenile Justice Board sent them to an observation home at Vellimadukunnu here. Their bail application was rejected. However, they were allowed to write the Class 10 exam, which will begin on March 3, accompanied by the police.

Govt. working towards making A.P. free of drugs and ganja, says Home Minister

The Hindu Bureau
ANANTAPUR

Home Minister V. Anitha said that the government is working towards making Andhra Pradesh a drug and ganja-free State and asked the police to strive for the same. She also wanted the police to use technology effectively to curb cybercrimes.

The Minister participated as the chief guest at the

passing out parade of 394 Sub-Inspectors (SIs) of police, including 97 women from the Police Training College, Anantapur, on Saturday, along with Director General of Police (DGP) Harish Kumar Gupta. Ms. Anitha asked the newly-inducted SIs to perform their duties with dedication and serve the people.

Ms. Anitha said that crime against women and children were on the rise in

the State and it was the responsibility of the police to prevent them.

"The nation is developing fast. The nature of crime is also changing. The State police should adopt new technology and prevent crimes effectively," she said.

The Minister said the State police has made strides in prevention of crime and enforcement of law and has earned a spe-

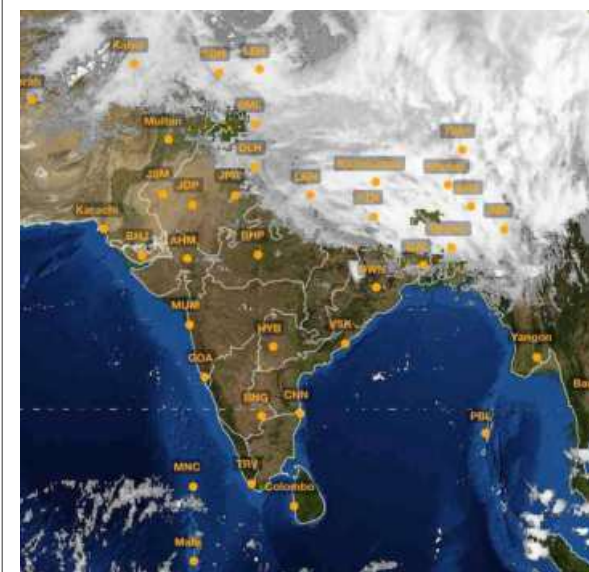
cial place for itself in the entire country.

"Our government is working to protect law and order in the State and for a crime-free society, and we won't compromise on this," she said.

DGP Harish Kumar Gupta said that the Police Department has enhanced its investigation skills and the personnel are using scientific aids to render justice to the victim.

WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Sunday: Heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Lakshadweep. Thunderstorm with gusty wind/lightning likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Kerala, Mahe and Lakshadweep. Heat wave condition likely at isolated places over coastal Karnataka

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	31.6	19.2	Kozhikode	.....	37.0	26.5
Ahmedabad	34.7	21.6	Kurnool	.....	37.0	20.0
Aizawl	31.4	13.1	Lucknow	.....	29.1	19.4
Allahabad	33.0	18.6	Madurai	.....	34.6	23.5
Bengaluru	32.1	19.4	Mangaluru	.....	36.3	23.8
Bhopal	32.8	17.9	Mumbai	.....	34.8	22.7
Bhubaneswar	34.2	21.4	Mysuru	.....	33.0	20.7
Chandigarh	25.1	14.5	New Delhi	.....	2.28	16.6
Chennai	32.2	26.7	Patna	.....	29.8	19.4
Coimbatore	33.7	24.4	Port Blair	.....	31.8	25.6
Dehradun	34.9	11.8	Puducherry	.....	31.2	24.5
Gangtok	16.7	8.5	Pune	.....	38.1	21.7
Goa	37.0	24.0	Raipur	.....	36.2	20.6
Guwahati	31.1	17.5	Ranchi	.....	33.3	18.2
Hubballi	35.0	19.0	Shillong	.....	21.0	8.9
Hyderabad	33.4	21.6	Shimla	.....	25.6	14.0
Imphal	26.3	18.0	Srinagar	.....	12.0	3.6
Jaipur	30.1	16.6	Thiruvananthapuram	.....	34.7	25.6
Kochi	33.6	28.0	Tiruchi	.....	33.5	24.6
Kohima	20.6	9.4	Vijayawada	.....	34.8	22.0
Kolkata	34.8	22.5	Visakhapatnam	.....	33.0	23.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE	Yesterday
Ahmedabad	68	76	12	201	.....	170
Bengaluru	8	6	48	77	.....	88
Chennai	14	33	73	38	.....	54
Delhi	20	49	59	237	.....	131
Hyderabad	5	120	8	110	.....	134
Kolkata	12	33	29	125	.....	122
Lucknow	8	81	61	210	.....	180
Mumbai	37	59	34	181	.....	178
Pune	20	142	38	241	.....	166
Visakhapatnam	8	65	28	134	.....	160

Air Quality Code: Poor Moderate Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.
NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.
CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.
PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease



Asaduddin Owaisi

MP recalls Urdu's role in freedom struggle

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Criticising Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath over his controversial remarks about Urdu, Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi said that the language is Constitutionally protected, and played a key role in India's freedom struggle.

Mr. Owaisi was speaking at the 67th Foundation Day of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen at Darussalaam on Saturday.

"The Chief Minister said that studying Urdu makes one a maulana like *kath-mullahs*. They don't become scientists. It is clear that the U.P. CM doesn't know Urdu, but can only answer why he did not become a scientist," Mr. Owaisi said.

The AIMIM president invoked Hindu poets and authors like Brij Narain Chakbast and freedom fighters such as Ram Prasad Bismil, who penned influential Urdu lines – '*sar-faroshi ki tamanna ab humare dil mey hai*'.

"The U.P. CM and PM Modi do not know that not all Muslims speak Urdu. In fact, it isn't even the language of Muslims. It is the language of independence of this country," he said.

Sun & shade



Bright stroke: A worker painting a wall, while holding an umbrella, on MG Road in Vijayawada on a hot afternoon on Saturday. G.N. RAO

Substance abuse among Kerala teenagers serious cause for concern: Cong.

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Leader of the Opposition in Kerala Legislative Assembly V.D. Satheesan on Saturday blamed the Left Democratic Front government for its "failure to crack down on the drug mafia that has spread rapidly across the State".

"The government and its agencies, including the excise and the police, have not yet been able to identify the source of highly dangerous narcotic substances being dumped into the State," he told media-persons in Ernakulam. He alleged that Kerala had turned into a State where you can "source drugs within minutes".

"It is available everywhere. Students appearing for



V.D. Satheesan

SSLC examinations are holding drug parties in five-star hotels, vacant houses, and open places," he alleged, calling for a mass campaign to identify and seal the source of drugs.

Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee president K. Sudhakaran, in a Facebook post on the death of a student following a violent

clash between two groups in Kozhikode, said most accused in violent crimes were addicted to contraband drugs. He blamed the State government and civil servants for the drug mafia gaining ground in Kerala.

The Students Federation of India also issued a press note expressing concern about violence and drug abuse in teenagers in the context of the Kozhikode incident.

In the release issued by State president M. Sivaprasad, and secretary P.S. Sanjeev, they said that a ban on campus politics and the absence of creative arts, sports, cultural and voluntary organisations in institutions played a role in anarchic and anti-social practices spreading their tentacles.

Helicopter ride over historical city flagged off at Hampi Utsav

The Hindu Bureau
KALABURAGI

Hampi-by-Sky, a seven-minute helicopter ride over historical Hampi in Vijayanagara district of Karnataka, was inaugurated on Saturday, the second day of Hampi Utsav 2025.

H.R. Gaviyappa, MLA for Hosapete, flagged off the helicopter ride from Mayura Bhuvaneshwari after offering puja to goddess Bhuvaneshwari. He later took the ride to see the view of the ruins of the Vijayanagara Empire, the Tungabhadra, and the green landscape surrounding the historical site.



H.R. Gaviyappa and Vijayanagara Deputy Commissioner M.S. Diwakar flagging off the Hampi-by-Sky. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"We have organised Hampi-by-Sky, as we do every year during Hampi Utsav, to facilitate tourists to have a view of the historical monuments of Hampi from the sky. I appeal to the people to make use of the opportunity to have a wonderful experience," he said.

Post-pandemic, Kerala still lagging behind in foreign tourist arrivals

Dhinesh Kallungal
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The growth trajectory of foreign tourist visits to Kerala is taking longer than expected when compared to the national-level average, considering the pattern of foreign tourist arrivals and visits across the country during the pre and post-pandemic period.

As per the latest foreign tourist arrivals and visits released by the Union Ministry of Tourism, 95.2 lakh foreigners arrived in India in 2023 compared to 1.09 crore in 2019. This



Traveller's haven: Kerala used to get a share of around 5% of the total foreign tourist visits in the country. K. RAGESH

shows that foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) have recovered to 87.1% of the pre-

pandemic levels, closely aligning with the global recovery rate of 88.8% and

surpassing the Asia-Pacific region's recovery rate of 65.4%.

Out of the total 1.92 crore foreign tourist visits (FTVs) recorded at various destinations inside the country in 2023, Kerala accounted for only 6.49 lakh FTVs, just 3.37% of the total FTVs.

Kerala used to get a share of around 5% of the total FTVs in the country.

According to Tourism department officials, the State has been hoping that by next year, Kerala will cross the pre-pandemic period FTVs.

From Page One

Four workers killed in Uttarakhand avalanche

The Uttarakhand government said the whereabouts of one worker who escaped the ice slide was traced on Friday evening, while another worker who fled the site had also reached his village without reporting to the authorities at Mana till he was traced on Saturday.

Ten workers were rescued on Friday, while another 13 were brought out alive on Saturday. Four other workers who were brought out on Saturday were later declared dead, the Army said. At least eight of the rescued workers have suffered critical injuries. The Army is yet to locate three of the eight containers in which the workers had been sleeping, and it is feared that the four missing workers are trapped within these containers.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Dhama also reached Mana on Saturday and conducted an aerial survey of the affected area.

4 'located'; hope for survival slim: Minister

With the hope that at least some of the trapped persons could be extracted from the debris, the authorities have made arrangements at the tunnel site, including lining up ambulances at the nearby Domalapatna village.

A team of forensic experts from Hyderabad has been directed to reach the tunnel site. Mr. Reddy also asked for oxygen cylinders to be kept ready for use, if required, at the site.

The TBM parts were being cut into small pieces for loading them into small loco-trolleys for shifting them out of the tunnel. Mr. Rao stated that they were hopeful of finding at least half of the trapped persons by Sunday evening or night and the remaining after the removal of TBM parts, under which they were presumed to be buried.

Meanwhile, official sources stated that the conveyor belt which was damaged after the tunnel collapse was yet to be restored. It would have helped speedy shifting of muck and other debris from the tunnel.

(With PTI inputs)

European leaders voice support for Zelenskyy

"We must never confuse aggressor and victim in this terrible war," said Friedrich Merz, who is likely to be Germany's next Chancellor. Mr. Merz expressed his support for Ukraine in good and in "testing" times.

"There is an aggressor: Russia. There is a victim: Ukraine," French President Emmanuel Macron said, adding that it was right for Europe and the U.S. and others to have aided Ukraine and sanctioned Russia following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine just over three years ago.

Mr. Macron and U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer had individual discussions with Mr. Trump at the Oval Office earlier this week. Both leaders interjected and fact-checked Mr. Trump's comments during their respective Oval Office press segments. However, there was bonhomie between the leaders and the overall mood from the bilateral discussion and the ensuing press conference (which was cancelled in Mr. Zelenskyy's case) was positive in both cases.

Following the Oval Office incident, Mr. Starmer had spoken to both Mr. Trump and Mr. Zelenskyy on Friday, Downing Street said. He is also hosting a meeting of European leaders, including Mr. Zelenskyy, in London on Sunday.

Separately, Mr. Starmer had conveyed the U.K.'s "commitment to supporting Ukraine for as long as necessary to deter Russian aggression" during a call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday.

"In partnership with our allies, we must intensify our preparations for the European element of security guarantees, alongside continued discussions with the United States," Mr. Starmer said on Saturday.

Not all European leaders sided with Mr. Zelenskyy though. "Strong men make peace, weak men make war. Today President Donald Trump stood bravely for peace. Even if it was difficult for many to digest," said Hungary's President Viktor Orban on X. Mr. Orban has been at odds with most of his European Union (EU), counterparts, given his pro-Russia position and close relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Mr. Zelenskyy arrived in London on Saturday ahead of Sunday's summit.

Piyush Goyal to visit U.S. for trade talks

Mr. Goyal is likely to hold talks with U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer and U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick during the visit.

The Commerce Ministry has already started engagements with different departments on the India-U.S. trade aspects and related developments. The Ministry takes views of all ministries concerned on proposed trade agreements. The nature of the agreement would be decided by both sides. Mr. Goyal has earlier stated that the two countries can offer concessions and duty reductions, as their economies complement each other.

Hope and despair at the homes of BRO workers trapped in avalanche

Most workers hail from families in Bihar living on a daily wage; some families worried about whereabouts as details of rescued persons are not available with them; Uttarakhand govt. issues list of 47 workers who were rescued from the site

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

Vijay Kumar from Prataptand village of Vaishali district in Bihar is one of the 55 workers who were present at the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) project site at Mana in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district when an avalanche hit the site on Friday morning.

Mr. Vijay, a 20-year-old and the youngest of five siblings, left home last year in search of work so that he could share the burden of his father, a farmer facing agricultural crisis.

The family spoke to Mr. Vijay the last time on Thursday night when he told them about the approval for leave he had obtained.

"He got the train reservation done for March 2. His leave for Holi was approved only a day before. He was happy about returning home for the festival but now we have no idea whether we will ever be able to see his face or not," said Sanjay Kumar, the elder brother of Mr. Vijay.

Back home, his mother



In better health: injured labourers receive treatment at a military hospital following an avalanche at Joshimathi in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand, on Saturday. PTI

is inconsolable and has not eaten anything since news broke out about the avalanche.

Funds for travel

The family, comprising mostly daily wagers, are collecting money to get a taxi to travel to Chamoli as they are not able to get any information about his survival.

The family of Naresh Rajat, another worker at the BRO site, lives just a few metres from Mr. Kumar's place in Prataptand village. A father of three, Mr. Rajat is the sole earning member of a family of six.

His wife Pinky Kumari has faith that her husband is alive and will soon come back home. "I am told that he is at the camp," she told

The Hindu over phone.

"I called up at least 15 times on the helpline issued by the Uttarakhand government since Friday evening and the only response I received is that the details of the rescued persons is not available," said Rajeev Paswan, brother of Dheeraj Paswan, 36, of Sarai Damodarpur in Bihar who is also missing.

Russian, Ukrainian Ministers may attend Raisina Dialogue in Delhi

Subhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The showdown between U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the White House on Friday and events that follow may not directly impact India but they could set the stage for fiery encounters in New Delhi later this month, as the Ministry of External Affairs presents the next edition of the annual Raisina Dialogue.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov are both invited to the dialogue, organised by the think-tank Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in Delhi. Sources said they were expected to participate, along with senior U.S. officials.

The chief guest at the event from March 17 to 19 will be New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, and a number of European Ministers and senior officials, including from Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Lithuania and Estonia.

"New Zealand remains steadfast in its support for Ukraine as it defends itself in a war that Russia started. It's mounting the defence of a proud, demo-



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, a regular speaker at the Raisina Dialogue. FILE PHOTO

cratic and sovereign nation, but also the defence of international law," Mr. Luxon posted on social media on Saturday.

Indian experts, however, reacted to the developments differently, with two former senior Ambassadors criticising Mr. Zelenskyy for "inviting" the harsh public treatment by the U.S. President. "Zelenskyy invited it by being argumentative instead of tactfully steering the exchange in a more positive direction," said former Indian Ambassador to Russia and Chancellor of Jawahar Lal Nehru University (JNU) Kanwal Sibal on social media platform X. "Zelenskyy literally asked for it," wrote former Indian Ambassador to the U.S. Nirupama Me-

non Rao on X, adding that "there was no need for him to vent his views on Russia and President Putin" in public.

"At the moment, Ukraine has very few options," said Happymon Jacob, founder and director of the Delhi-based Council for Strategic and Defence Research. "The Russian battlefield victories, rapidly declining support from the U.S., and pressure from the Trump administration to negotiate a deal with Russia have put Ukraine on the defensive, and Kyiv may have to agree to terms it may not like, including a ceasefire without future security guarantees," he told The Hindu. He said the open rift between Washington and Kyiv will also re-

move all pressure on India to "condemn Russia and stand with the West", as well as to join sanctions.

The developments will likely dominate discussions at the Raisina Dialogue as well.

As many as 1,800 speakers and delegates from more than 120 countries have confirmed their attendance thus far. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha is expected, sources said, subject to events following the showdown in Washington. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met with Mr. Sybiha in Munich earlier this month as well, and said he discussed efforts towards resolving the conflict with Russia, as well as furthering bilateral cooperation.

Mr. Lavrov has been a regular speaker at the Raisina dialogue, which is seen as New Delhi's attempt to rival the Munich Security Conference and the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore each year.

However, after a particularly heated exchange in the March 2023 session, where he berated the hosts of the event for "not doing their homework" over Russia's stance on talks with Ukraine, the Russian Foreign Minister and other senior officials were absent from the event in 2024.

Extent of calamity and number of dead would have been higher had this not been in February, say villagers

In respite to the families of the trapped workers, the Uttarakhand government late on Saturday issued the list of 47 workers who were rescued from the avalanche site.

The extent of the calamity and the number of those dead would have been higher had this not been in February, the time of the year when villagers of Mana move to Gopeshwar as part of winter migration, said Pitambar Molpha, the village headman.

"The villagers live in Mana from April to November during the Char Dham Yatra. After that, we move to Gopeshwar, in our winter homes. The avalanche hit the mouth of the village. Had we been there, the disaster would have been much bigger and many more lives would have been lost," he added.

Two Maoists killed in latest encounter in Chhattisgarh

The Hindu Bureau
RAIPUR

At least two Maoists, one of them a woman, were killed in an encounter with security forces in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh on Saturday, the police said.

The latest encounter takes the number of Maoists killed in the conflict-hit Bastar region to 67 in the first 60 days of the year, translating to an average of more than one casualty per day. Sukma is one of the seven districts of the Bastar region.

Additionally, at least 17 Maoists were killed in encounters in Gariaband district outside the Bastar region, bringing the number of Maoists killed in Chhattisgarh in 2025 to 84.

Saturday's encounter took place in Gundrajgudem forests, where earlier this week the police found a surveillance drone allegedly used by the Maoists.

Inspector-General of Police (Bastar Range) P. Sundarraj said intermittent exchange of fire began around 9 a.m. on Saturday. After the encounter ended, bodies of the two un-informed Maoists and arms and ammunition were recovered.

Overage vehicles in Delhi will be denied fuel from March 31

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Overage vehicles will not be allowed to refuel in the Capital from March 31, Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa said on Saturday. It was one of the several measures Mr. Sirsa announced following a three-and-a-half-hour meeting with various stakeholders on curbing air pollution in the city.

The measures include replacing CNG buses with e-buses, mandating the use of anti-smog guns on high rises, and using cloud seeding technology to create artificial rain. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has banned "end of life" or overage vehicles, defined as petrol vehicles older than 15 years and diesel vehicles over 10 years of age, in the National Capital Region.

Speaking to reporters, the Environment Minister said: "Instructions will be issued via the Petroleum Ministry to fuel station owners to not provide fuel to vehicles over 15 years old. Around 80% of the fuel stations in Delhi are already equipped with gadgets that will identify such vehicles. By March 31, this technology will be extended to all filling stations."



Manjinder Singh Sirsa

He added that arrangements will be made to ensure that such vehicles from other States are prevented from entering the national capital.

On October 1, 2022, Gopal Rai, the Environment Minister in the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) regime, had announced that filling stations in the city would not sell fuel to motorists without valid pollution under control certificates. However, the plan was never notified.

'Wasted opportunity'

Mr. Sirsa also lashed out at the AAP for not taking measures to improve air quality. "Thousands of crores worth of funds given by the Centre were not used by them," he alleged, adding that only 31.8% of the funds under the Union government's National Clean Air Programme were used by the Arvind Kejriwal-led dispensation.

Use of ballot paper not in panel's ambit: Law Ministry

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The question of reverting to ballot papers does not fall within the ambit of the mandate of a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) examining the two Bills on simultaneous polls, the Union Law Ministry has stated.

Going back to the ballot paper system was a "suggestion" made by some of the members of the committee, and the Ministry was to respond to it in writing.

While the Ministry's Le-

gislative Department gave elaborate responses to a variety of questions posed to it by the committee, it did not give a direct reply on the suggestion on the ballot paper system.

The Ministry is learnt to have said it was "out of scope" of the parliamentary panel to make a suggestion on the use of the ballot paper system, according to sources.

Whether to use Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) or ballot papers for casting votes is not the subject the panel is examining, they underlined.

Going back to ballot paper system was a 'suggestion' made by some members of the joint parliamentary committee

The committee is mandated to examine the Bills on simultaneous polls – the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill – and give its report on whether they are sound enough for the purpose or need changes, the sources said.

While the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill lays down a legal framework to hold the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls together, the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill seeks to align the terms of Assemblies of Delhi, Puducherry and Jammu and Kashmir for the purpose of holding joint elections. Delhi, Puducherry, and Jammu and Kashmir are the three UTs with Assemblies.

Centre not keen

The government has on multiple occasions told

Parliament that it does not favour returning to the ballot paper system and the Supreme Court too has weighed in favour of using EVMs.

The top court recently rejected pleas for reviving paper ballots, holding that suspicions regarding tampering of voting machines were "unfounded".

The sources said that while the Ministry answered some of the questions, some others were sent to the Election Commission for a calibrated response.

The Ministry has also

told the committee that holding simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies is not undemocratic and does not hurt the federal structure.

It is learnt to have asserted that elections were held simultaneously in the past before the cycle was broken for various reasons, including the imposition of President's Rule in some States.

Following the adoption of the Constitution, elections to the Lok Sabha and all Assemblies were conducted simultaneously from 1951 to 1967, it noted.

CPI(ML)
Liberation
questions
CPI(M) note

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Disapproving of the CPI(M) note clarifying that it does not consider the Narendra Modi government or the Indian state as "neo-fascist", Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya said on Saturday that any "downplaying of the fascist danger" at this juncture can only erode the electoral strength and moral authority of the communists.

His remarks came days after the CPI(M) issued the note to its State units on the draft political resolution for the upcoming party congress. He stressed that the stand is different from that of the CPI and CPI(ML). Mr. Bhattacharya questioned if the CPI(M)'s stand is due to the immediate electoral circumstances faced by the party.

The draft political resolution of the CPI(M) had said that "the push to impose a reactionary Hindutva agenda and the authoritarian drive to suppress the Opposition and democracy display neo-fascist characteristics". However, the CPI(M) then clarified in a note that it was not calling the Modi government fascist or neo-fascist.

Bengal Minister's vehicle attacked on campus; he blames SFI for violence

Bratya Basu's car was attacked by protesting Jadavpur University students after he refused to discuss the delayed union elections; protesters sustain injuries; Minister remains on campus for hours, taken to hospital for a medical examination

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

West Bengal Education Minister Bratya Basu's vehicle was attacked inside Jadavpur University here on Saturday by students while he was attending a meeting of the teachers' association.

The incident triggered protests with students alleging they had been targeted by Trinamool Congress goons. Protesting students were seen ransacking the venue of the teachers' association meeting, and blocking traffic outside the university.

Mr. Basu was visiting the university for a convention of the West Bengal College and University Professors' Association (WBCUPA), a body affiliated to the Trinamool Congress and having over 3,000 members. Shoes were thrown at his car, the windshield broken, and slogans raised. Videos showed the tyre of the Minister's car punctured.

The Trinamool Congress's office inside the university was vandalised.

Students demanded a meeting with Mr. Basu over union elections, which



Tension erupts: Protesting students gather around West Bengal Education Minister Bratya Basu's car on the Jadavpur University campus in Kolkata on Saturday. PTI

have been withheld for five years. When Mr. Basu refused to engage with the students, the protests turned violent. The protests continued for hours as Mr. Basu sat inside the car, waiting for the students to disperse. However, the protest continued.

After the Minister's car was removed from the university, he was taken to the State-run SSKM Medical College and Hospital for a medical examination.

While the Minister alleged the attack was led by the Students Federation of India (SFI), the student wing of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), SFI members said the Minister's vehicle had driven over them.

"How can such protests and attacks be democratic? We will again hold our convention there. The students tried to provoke us; they want anarchism," Mr. Basu said.

Senior Trinamool Con-

gress leader Kunal Ghosh, who visited the Minister at the hospital, said Mr. Basu was physically targeted despite agreeing to talk to the students. "Mr. Basu showed restraint, but our restraint should not be mistaken for weakness," he said.

WBCUPA members have reportedly filed a complaint about the incident at the Jadavpur police station. The students are also planning to call for a university-wide strike on Monday to condemn the violence.

Teachers attacked

Mr. Ghosh and Mr. Basu have alleged that several of the association's Professors had been attacked and physically harmed during the protests.

Jadavpur University Professor Om Prakash Mishra, present at the WBCUPA meeting, said he was heckled after Mr. Basu left. "They attacked my car, tried to physically attack me. I had to leave my car and walk out," Professor Mishra said.

Students attacked

The protesting students alleged outsiders triggered the violence when they blocked the Minister's car. Videos and photographs of the protests showed one student had sustained a head injury.

"We had made several requests to Mr. Basu for a meeting on the union elections, but he did not agree. We protested and the Trinamool Congress goons used this opportunity to attack university students," JU SFI member Kaushiki Bhattacharya told *The Hindu*.

Mob attacks police in Kalikapur; accused in weapon case escapes

Movurie Som
KOLKATA

Police personnel were allegedly attacked by residents while the former were detaining an accused in a police vehicle in Kalikapur in the Chopra police station's jurisdiction in Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal on Saturday.

The accused, Mujibur Rahman, fled along with the attackers. Mr. Rahman was an accused in a weapons case, police sources said.

A larger police force then reached the spot to rescue their colleagues, and to begin a search for the main accused and the miscreants who had attacked the police. Eleven people were arrested in connection with the attack, but Mr. Rahman is still on the run.

'No search warrant'

Meanwhile, the Trinamool Congress MLA from Chopra, Hamidul Rahman, said the accused was a former member of the gram panchayat, adding that he was innocent and had no criminal cases against him.

"The police came to his house and started creating a ruckus without having a search warrant. The locals clashed with the police ov-

Eleven people have been arrested in connection with the attack, but key accused is on the run

er this. However, I reprimanded the locals for attacking the police, and said they could have instead got Mujibur out after the police had taken him to the police station," the MLA told a local television channel.

"The police attacked houses and shops belonging to the villagers. This is what the locals have told me," he added.

The West Bengal police have not made any official statement on the incident.

Series of attacks

In January, there was a series of attacks against police personnel in the State, including in Uttar Dinajpur district. One accused was killed in a police encounter a few days later.

"It is our duty to ensure peace and security for the public. But if a criminal shoots at us, we will retaliate four times. If anyone fires at us, we are trained to deal with it very strongly," Director-General of Police Rajeev Kumar had said, following the consecutive attacks on the police.

People's govt. to run J&K affairs now, not a shadow Cabinet, says CM Omar

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday said the people's government, and not a shadow Cabinet, will run affairs of the Union Territory.

Replying to a question on whether the BJP was attempting to run a "shadow Cabinet" in the Assembly, Mr. Abdullah said, "There is no need for a shadow Cabinet as the elected government in Jammu and Kashmir will fulfil its promises. Shadow Cabinets do not exist anywhere. There is no such precedence. The BJP ran affairs of Jammu



The Budget Session of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly will commence on March 3.

and Kashmir and now it is the people's government that will run the affairs," Mr. Abdullah said.

'Do not disrupt'

National Conference leader Salman Sagar said there

was no relevance of the BJP's "shadow Cabinet". "They [BJP] are in the Opposition and should focus on constructive opposition," Mr. Sagar said.

With the Budget Session starting from March 3 in Jammu, National Conference legislator Tanvir Sadiq asked the Opposition "to hold the government accountable, but not disrupt the House under that pretext".

Mr. Abdullah called on Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha on Saturday. An official said they discussed issues "related to the forthcoming Budget Session of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly".

Trinamool Congress leaders begin campaign to check electoral rolls

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Doubling down on their allegations of inclusion of fake voters on the electoral rolls in West Bengal, several Trinamool Congress leaders began a door-to-door campaign on Saturday to scrutinise the rolls across the State.

Urban Development and Municipal Affairs Minister Firhad Hakim and North Bengal Development Minister Udayan Guha scrutinised the rolls in many areas in their respective constituencies. Mr. Hakim, who is also the Mayor of Kolkata, went around ward 82 of the civic body. The ward comes under the Bhawanipore Assembly constituency represented



Urban Development and Municipal Affairs Minister Firhad Hakim checks a voter's name in the Chetla Agrani area on Saturday. ANI

by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

"We have to list the number of fake voters and

the number of dead voters separately. After scrutinising the list, we will specify in each booth the Assem-

ly number, part number, and booth number of those who were found and those who were not found. Accordingly, if the party finds an unreasonably high number of fake voters, it will be reported to the Election Commission," Mr. Hakim said.

At a meeting on Thursday, the Chief Minister directed the party leadership to ensure that there are no fake voters on the electoral rolls.

Ms. Banerjee alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leadership with the blessings of Election Commission included fake voters on the electoral rolls. She summoned councillors from Bhawanipore and directed them to look for fake voters.

Sena (UBT) stakes claim to LoP post in Assembly

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The Shiv Sena (UBT) staked claim to the position of Leader of the Opposition in the Maharashtra Assembly on Saturday, ahead of the State Budget set to begin on March 3. Though the largest in the Opposition, the party holds only 20 seats in the 288-member Assembly.

In the past decade, other parties that had less than 10% of the seat share in the Assembly have been given the Leader of the Opposition position, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said, expressing his confidence that the Speaker would accept the party's claim.

Atmosphere of repression not reduced in J&K: Karra

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

J&K State Congress president Tariq Hameed Karra on Saturday said the "atmosphere of repression on the people, which was there earlier, has not reduced" in the Union Territory (U.T.).

"We would say that the atmosphere of repression on the people which was there earlier has not reduced, the reason for this is that Statehood has not been restored yet," Mr. Karra, who is also an MLA, said. He said the non-restoration of Statehood means the police department was under the Home Ministry. "People understand that until the Statehood is restored, the police department comes under the government here, the atmosphere of repression will not improve," he added.

Entire Congress leadership in Punjab unanimous about ousting AAP govt.: Baghel

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

Congress general secretary in charge for Punjab Bhupesh Baghel on Saturday said following the electoral defeat in Delhi, a power struggle has started in the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

He asserted the entire Congress leadership in Punjab was united and unanimous about ousting the AAP government from the State.

"A power struggle had already started in AAP with the defeated Delhi leaders having started taking charge and control of various government departments in Punjab," he said.

Replying to a question on the Ludhiana West byelection, for which the AAP has already announced a candidate, Mr. Baghel said the purpose of announcing the candidate by the AAP



Bhupesh Baghel

stay and carry on the good work they have been doing."

During the Congress meeting, the party had chalked out a road map for the year-long programmes planned by the AICC at its Belgavi Session under 'Nav Satyagraha' mission, he said. On the organisational front, within this year the Punjab Congress Committee will form the committees from the State to the booth level and involve the entire rank and file in the party's programmes.

About the Punjab government's declaration of finishing the drug menace within three months, Mr. Baghel said, "The government had completely failed on all fronts and was now trying to cover up its failures with grandiose announcements, which were high on rhetoric and low on delivery."

was to create a Rajya Sabha vacancy for its leader Arvind Kejriwal after his defeat in Delhi.

Dismissing that there was any factionalism in the Punjab Congress, he said there was complete unity and unanimity among the leadership to strengthen the party in the State. To the question on PCC leadership, Mr. Baghel said "both the president (Amarinder Singh Raja Warring) and the CLP leader Partap Singh Bajwa are here to



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IN BRIEF



‘Kingpin’ of digital arrest racket held from Delhi

The cybercrime branch of the Kolkata Police on Friday said they had arrested one of the primary ‘kingpins’ of a fraudulent network of digital arrests and other cybercrimes. According to the police, the accused Yogesh Dua was arrested in Delhi and brought to Kolkata on transit remand, as granted by the Delhi High Court. “The accused is involved in nearly 930 cyberfraud cases reported across India,” the police said, adding that he and his brother Aditya Dua were on the cybercrime branch’s radar for a long time. The police seized mobile phones and hard disks from the accused, aside from ₹2 lakh in cash and foreign currencies.

Believers rally in Arunachal for anti-conversion law

Almost a fortnight after Christians in Arunachal Pradesh staged a hunger strike opposing the State government’s move to enforce an anti-conversion Act of 1978 vintage, the State’s indigenous faith believers took out a rally on Saturday, demanding early implementation of the law. The Sadbhavna Pad Yatra, organised by the Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh at Doimukh, followed a meeting of the leaders of the organisation with RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat in Itanagar. “This Act was introduced in 1978 within four months of the State Assembly’s maiden session for the welfare of the indigenous tribal society,” he said.

ED arrests cloud particles scam ‘mastermind’, his wife

The Enforcement Directorate has arrested Vuenow Group chief executive officer Sukhvinder Singh Kharour and his wife, Dimple Kharour, who are allegedly involved in cheating people on the pretext of selling them “cloud particles (servers)” and leasing them back on the assurance of providing monthly rental income to the investors. Funds to the tune of ₹3,558-crore were raised through the “scam”. The agency has alleged that Mr. Kharour is the brain behind the scam. On Friday, they were allegedly on their way to board a flight to Nepal when they were detained by immigration officials at Delhi’s Indira Gandhi International Airport.

Report on Assam-Bhutan railway line submitted

A railway project connecting Assam’s Kokrajhar and Bhutan’s Gelephu has been fast-tracked, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) said on Saturday. Less than a week after Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced the new Assam-Bhutan railway line to improve cross-border connectivity and strengthen ties, the NFR said the final locational survey has been completed, and the detailed project report has been submitted to the government for approval and further action. The proposed 69.04 km railway line, expected to help Assam capitalise on Bhutan’s Gelephu Mindfulness City project, is estimated to cost ₹3,500 crore.

SUDOKU

	9	6			5	8	7	
						5		
2			7			6	1	9
1				5			8	
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	8			2				6
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

UGC’s new draft rules seek to redefine ‘discrimination’

The regulations define ‘caste-based discrimination’ as bias ‘only against members of Scheduled communities; they propose to form ‘equity committee’, impose punishments for false complaints

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission has issued draft regulations that redefine “discrimination” and introduce the specific terminology of “caste-based discrimination” on campuses. While the regulations propose an “equity committee” and punishments for false complaints, the definition of what counts as discrimination on campuses may lead to concern over clarity.

The UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2025 define “caste-based discrimination” as “discrimination on the basis of caste or tribe only against the members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes”. It then defines “discrimination” as “any unfair, differential, or biased treatment or any such act” against “any stakeholder” on solely the grounds of “religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, or any of them”.

This is a deviation from the 2012 Regulations on Promotion of Equity, which define “discrimination” as “any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference” that impairs equality of treatment. The



The draft has been submitted before the Bench hearing pleas filed by the mothers of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi. NAGARA GOPAL

grounds of discrimination included caste, creed, language, religion, ethnicity, gender, and disabilities.

And while the 2012 regulations define discrimination in terms of what students or groups of students may face inside an institute, the new draft regulations have broadened its scope to “any stakeholder” within the institute.

The new regulations have been drafted by an expert committee of the UGC and submitted before the Supreme Court Bench hearing petitions filed by the mothers of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi, who had appealed for action against the “rampant” caste discrimination in un-

iversities that claimed their children’s lives. The UGC had formed this committee headed by Shailesh N. Zala to revisit the 2012 Regulations on directives of the top court.

The draft Regulations were put out in the public domain this week on February 27, and the UGC has given 30 days for the public to send in their suggestions and objections.

‘More teeth’

In the Supreme Court, the Union government submitted on Friday that the new regulations would give the UGC “teeth and power” to de-recognise institutions that fail to comply with them.

In addition, the new reg-

ulations propose to set up an equity committee under the equal opportunity centres, as the first authority to examine complaints of discrimination. The equity committee has been mandated to have at least two representatives from civil society having relevant experience; and two student representatives as special invitees; four faculty members; and the head of institution as ex-officio chief.

The regulations have introduced a section on “false complaints”, proposing fines and possible disciplinary action for those found making such complaints. However, the draft does not define what constitutes a “false complaint”.

Former students, activists, Ambedkarite student associations, and student unions across the country have consistently maintained that caste-based discrimination on university campuses manifests in the form of an anti-reservation sentiment, which is observable as discrimination based on entrance exam ranks or reservation status.

The new draft regulations do not have any language that specifically accounts for discrimination based on exam ranks or reservation status.

‘Migration for jobs in developed countries will turn short-term’

Varghese K. George
ABU DHABI

Global demographic trends make both movement of people across national borders and political blowback against it inevitable but India can have a calibrated approach that turns this into an opportunity, according to M.R. Rangaswami, founder of Indiaspora, a global platform of people of Indian origin.

Mr. Rangaswami was speaking to *The Hindu* on the sidelines of a convention of Indian diaspora members from various fields and from 35 countries. “There is rhetoric against immigration in many countries but the reality is that these countries need skilled people,” he said.

Training needs

Mr. Rangaswami said the Government of India and Indian institutions should facilitate “proper training, proper socialising and proper certification” for millions of workers who will be required in the developed world in the coming years. Going forward, countries might look for short-term foreign workers and India should prepare for them to return to the country.

“India should expect and work for a new framework where, maybe, there is a special visa that allows



M.R. Rangaswami

Indian people to get jobs in other countries, but it’s for a short term, let’s say three to five years, with an opportunity to extend those visas depending on the economic situation in those countries... When you look at the Western world, all of Europe, Japan... these countries, they’re aging rapidly. They’re going to need doctors, nurses, practitioners in that field to be available in those countries. Where are they going to come from? Local population is going down. So they’re going to have to rely on a country like India, which can train quality doctors, nurses, medical practitioners etc. to go to these countries and actually deliver services,” Mr. Rangaswami said.

To make the optimal use of this opportunity, India should pay attention to skilling, certification and diplomatic efforts to smoothen the export of human resources, he said.

One to one



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi meeting porters at the New Delhi Railway Station to thank them for saving lives during the recent stampede at the station that claimed the lives of 18 Kumbh pilgrims. PTI

Himachal govt. planning to dismantle drug network in a mission mode in six months

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

To curb the drug menace in Himachal Pradesh, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Saturday directed the Police Department to initiate a crackdown to dismantle the drug network, even as he announced that the services of government employees would be terminated if they were to be found involved in the drug trade.

He was presiding over a high-level meeting of senior officers of the police and other departments in Shimla. Emphasising that the drug network in the State would be dismantled in a mission mode over the next six months, Mr. Sukhu instructed officials to take stringent action against drug peddlers, adding that no one involved in illegal drug trade should be spared. “Government employees against whom concrete evidence of drug smuggling has been found will be terminated from their service,” he said.



Government employees against whom concrete evidence of drug smuggling has been found will be terminated

SUKHVINDER SINGH SUKHU
Himachal Pradesh CM

Stating that the Congress government had adopted a zero tolerance policy against the drug menace, he said the properties of drug peddlers and their associates would be attached. The Chief Minister directed the police to investigate the bank accounts of suspects. He said the Anti-Narcotics Task Force would be strengthened and a Special Task Force headed by a senior police officer notified.

The Chief Minister said he would personally monitor the anti-drug campaign regularly, and directed the police to map drug peddlers and victims up to the panchayat level, and submit a report by March 15.

Mr. Sukhu issued directions to enhance vigilance on pharmaceutical companies. “Licences of companies found to be involved in the illegal sale of psychotropic drugs will be cancelled. FIRs would be registered against such companies, and renewal of their licences will not be allowed,” he said. The government, he said, will introduce the Himachal Pradesh Anti-Drug Act in the upcoming Budget Session of the Assembly, which will differentiate between victims and drug peddlers.

In Punjab, talking to reporters, Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said the Aam Aadmi Party government had launched a war against drugs in Punjab, which aimed to break the supply line of drugs.

Rajasthan’s BJP govt. turns focus on Dang region by doubling budgetary allocation

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

The Bharatiya Janata Party government in Rajasthan has accorded priority to the development of the Dang region, comprising eight districts bordering Madhya Pradesh, with plans to include more villages in the programme for the area.

Mines falling in the region will also be covered after a no-objection certificate (NOC) is secured from

the Forest Department.

Minister of State for Rural Development Otaram Dewasi said in the Assembly on Friday that the budgetary allocation for the Dang area development programme in 2025-26 had been increased from ₹50 crore to ₹100 crore.

“Proposals have been sought from the Collectors concerned for adding more villages to the programme,” he said.

Mr. Dewasi said during Question Hour that the

Dang Area Development Board had taken a decision in this regard at its meeting held on January 8 this year.

Basic infrastructure

The State government would approve all proposals for improving the basic infrastructure of the Dang region without delay, he added.

The Minister said the location of some villages along with the mining areas in the forest region had created difficulty in

the implementation of development plans.

The Forest Department would provide an NOC for resolving the issue, he said.

The Dang region is known for its ravines and gorges.

Its development programme, introduced in December 2005, aims to provide basic facilities, including drinking water and road connectivity, and create skilling and employment opportunities for the youth.

Special leave petition was supposed to be narrow-slit: Dhankhar

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday said the provision of special leave petition was supposed to be a “narrow-slit” but is now hurting the arbitral process due to its wide use. He stressed the need to have domain experts in arbitration cases, saying experts in varied areas can be utilised in handling

complex matters involving commercial disputes.

Addressing a conference on arbitration here, Mr. Dhankhar drew the attention towards the use of Article 136 and its impact on the arbitral process.

Article 136 of the Constitution allows the top court to grant “special leave” to appeal from any judgment or order. It is called as a special leave petition (SLP).

IN BRIEF



NMDC's iron ore output rose 18% in February on flat sales

State-owned iron ore miner NMDC reported an almost 18% increase in production to 4.62 million tonne (MT) for February from the 3.92 MT a year earlier. Sales was flat at 3.98 MT (3.99 MT). It was the highest output thus far in February. The 18% boost is reflective of a strong operational momentum. "Consistent growth like this is an outcome of an efficient mining ecosystem driven by an innovative and ingenious spirit... our team is relentless in its pursuit of crossing new milestones in FY25," CMD (additional charge) Amitava Mukherjee said. The upcoming financial year is lined up with determined expansion and new opportunities, he said in a release.

Cotton Productivity Mission may take off in 4-5 months

The Mission for Cotton Productivity, announced in the Union Budget last month, is expected to take off in another four to five months. At a post-Budget webinar on agriculture and rural prosperity, one of the discussions was on the mission where stakeholders presented their views. The Mission, to be implemented at a cost of ₹2,500 crore over five years, would have three mini missions. First mini mission will focus on improving cotton yield and productivity for farmers. The second, anchored by the Cotton Corporation of India, will look at modernising 1,000 ginning and pressing units. The third will focus on promoting sustainable natural fibres such as banana, milkweed and bamboo.

City Union Bank, CSK tie up for co-branded credit card

City Union Bank (CUB) announced a partnership with Chennai Super Kings (CSK) to introduce a co-branded credit card. This collaboration offers fans of the franchise a chance to enhance their financial journey while enjoying exclusive perks related to cricket. Those who use the City Union Bank - Chennai Super Kings Co-Branded Credit Card will get multiple benefits. Cardholders will earn exciting rewards on every purchase, with bonus points for CSK-related merchandise, match tickets, and experiences, CUB said in a release.

Maruti holds fort in February auto sales, Tata, Hyundai skid

Mahindra & Mahindra, Toyota Kirloskar Motor and Kia put up an impressive performance with a growth of 15%, 13% and 24% respectively even as Suzuki Motorcycles reported 9% drop in offtake

Lalendu Mishra
MUMBAI

Tata Motors and Hyundai Motor India in February reported a 8% and a 3% year on year (YoY) decline in total vehicle wholesale numbers respectively while market leader Maruti Suzuki reported a marginal growth of less than 1%.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Toyota Kirloskar Motor and Kia put up a strong show with a growth of 15%, 13% and 24% respectively, data by individual companies on Saturday show as a slowdown in the market continued with demand remaining muted.

Maruti Suzuki reported wholesales of 1,99,400 units, up 0.97%. This includes domestic passenger vehicles (PV) wholesales of

Tepid ride

Major automobile companies reported weak growth in sales while M&M, Toyota and Kia bucked the trend and posted a double-digit growth in offtake in the month of February

Company	Feb. 2024	Feb. 2025	% increase
Maruti	1,97,471	1,99,400	1
Hyundai	60,501	58,727	-3
Tata Motors	86,406	79,344	-8
M&M	72,923	83,702	15
Toyota	25,220	28,414	13
Kia	20,200	25,026	24

Source: company data



1,60,791 units. Hyundai reported PV wholesales of 58,727 units, down 2.93%. This includes domestic PV sales of 47,727 units.

Tata Motors wholesales stood at 79,344 units, down 8.17%.

Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M) reported total wholesales of 83,702 units, up

14.78%. Toyota Kirloskar Motors (TKM) announced wholesales of 28,414 units in February, up 13%.

Kia India registered total wholesales of 25,026 units, up 23.8% while Honda Cars India Ltd. logged total PV sales of 10,323 units. This is a 21% fall from 13,078 sold in February 2024.

In the two-wheeler and three-wheeler segments, Suzuki Motorcycles and Scooters reported 9% drop in sales to 90,206 units, Royal Enfield witnessed 19% growth in unit sales at 90,670 units while TVS Motor Company's total volume increased by 10% to 4,03,976 units.

Pandey takes charge as SEBI Chairman

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Tuhin Kanta Pandey took charge as Chairperson of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on Saturday at the market regulators' headquarters here.

Mr. Pandey will lead the institution for three years.

Speaking to the media, he said, "SEBI is a very robust market institution. It has been built over the years with successive leadership and will continue with it." SEBI holds the trust of people, industry, Parliament, investors and the government, he added.

He emphasised on four objectives for his tenure - technology, trust, transparency and teamwork.

"We have built such a good institution and we will continue to put our own contributions to its growth" he added.

Mr. Pandey replaces Madhabi Puri Buch whose three-year tenure ended



Tuhin Kanta Pandey

on Friday. Ms. Buch, who is reportedly unwell, was not present when Mr. Pandey arrived.

Dressed in a dark blue blazer and a striped shirt, Mr. Pandey arrived at the SEBI headquarters at the Bandra Kurla Complex business district on Saturday afternoon.

All four SEBI whole-time members viz. Ashwani Bhatia, Amarjeet Singh, Ananth Narayan and Kamlesh Varshney welcomed Mr. Pandey at the SEBI headquarters.

(With agency inputs)

Coffee plantations face mounting costs

The Hindu Bureau
COIMBATORE

The United Planters' Association of Southern India (UPASI) has expressed concern over declining productivity and mounting costs faced by coffee growers in India due to the impact of climate change.

Erratic weather patterns leading to prolonged dry spells, unseasonal rains and increased pest infestations continued to pose a serious challenge to coffee production in India, the Association said in a note.

India's average coffee productivity declined from

947 kg per hectare in 2000 to 814 kg per hectare in 2023 with Arabica productivity seeing a drop from 815 kg per hectare to 464 kg per hectare.

Further, coffee plantations were highly labour-intensive, making wage costs a crucial component of production. Lack of sufficient reinvestment in estate infrastructure due to poor profitability exacerbated productivity dip.

UPASI president K. Mathew Abraham said coffee prices were subdued for a long period and during this phase, costs increased manifold.

Minister Piyush Goyal urges caution over skyrocketing stock valuations

T. Ashokamithran
MUMBAI

Stock valuations have soared to over 100 times company earnings, raising concerns over artificial and unsustainable growth, Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said here on Saturday.

Speaking at the annual summit of the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI), Mr. Goyal cautioned that such excessive run-ups should not be allowed in the future as they distort market stability and investor confidence.



Piyush Goyal

"We need to think through how we will ensure that such run ups don't happen in the future because they are clearly artificial. They are not sustainable. And, we are facing some of the brunt of

that," said Mr. Goyal. As per experts, a stock price is usually not more than about 20 times the earnings of the company.

He said too much inflow into the markets and a sense of "fear of missing out" is setting in among middle class retail investors, which was a reason for this trend. There is a lot of misinformation among small investors about the unending ability of the markets, he added.

Domestic investors should make sure they do not let foreign portfolio investors dominate the mar-

ket forever. Mr. Goyal said this assumes significance as Indian markets saw a flight of about ₹34,500 crore foreign money from equities, as per the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy.

"Systematic Investment Plans (SIP) which are a large part of domestic investors have seen higher discontinuation/end of tenure of 26%," he added.

New SIP accounts declined by 0.5% for the first time in this financial year, according to AMFI. This trend has been slowing for past three months.

APPOINTMENT

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT & PANCHAYATI RAJ
(An Organisation of the Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India)
Rajendranagar, Hyderabad-500030

Chair Professor on 'Rural Labour' in honour of Late Shri S.R.Sankaran

NIRDPR invites applications for Chair Professor constituted in honour of Late Shri S.R. Sankaran, an eminent civil servant and acclaimed rural development administrator. The Chair Professor should be a person of National/International Eminence either from India or abroad who can guide and inspire research, consultations and also networks with academicians, administrators, political parties and civil society groups. He/she should possess qualifications normally required for a Senior Professor in a Central University.

For Job profile, online submission of application and other details please visit: <http://career.nirdpr.in/>

Last date for submission of online application is **23/03/2025**.

Advt.No.07/2024
File No: SRSC/16/1
Comp.no. 5100

Sd/-
Assistant Director
Administration (Section-I)

कार्यालय अतिरिक्त मुख्य अभियंता, जन स्वास्थ्य अभियांत्रिकी विभाग, हैदराबाद-500030
E-Mail : acephedpal@rajasthan.gov.in

क्रमांक- अमुप्र/जनस्वा./क्षेत्र पाली/त.स./24-25/ दिनांक- /02/2025

निध संशोधन सूचना (NIB) संख्या 02/2024-25

इस कार्यालय के तंत्रक अमुप्र/जनस्वा./क्षेत्र पाली/त.स./24-25/राजकाज रेक. नं. 12471697 दिनांक 17.12.2024 द्वारा जारी निविदा संख्या 01-04/2024-25 में से निविदा संख्या 02/2024-25 (UBIN No. PHE2425WLO807275) में आवेदन संशोधन जारी किया जाकर <https://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in> एवं <https://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in> पर अपलोड किया गया।

(अधीनस्थ मूक अश्रित) अतिरिक्त मुख्य अभियंता जन स्वास्थ्य अभियांत्रिकी विभाग, हैदराबाद

DIPR/C/2347/2025

Karnataka Road Development Corporation Limited
(A Government of Karnataka Enterprise)
"Samparka Soudha" No.8, Dr. Rajkumar Road, Rajajinagar 1st Block, Bengaluru-560 010.
Telephone: 080-22024000, email : cekrdcl@gmail.com

No. KRDC/IFB/2024-25/29 Date: 28-02-2025

TENDER NOTIFICATION ON TURNKEY BASIS

Karnataka Road Development Corporation Limited [KRDC] proposes to take up the work of "Construction of Bridge Across Arkavathi River Near Chikkamaskal Village of Bhachenahatti Panchayat, Kasaba Hobli in Magadi Taluk Ramanagara District, on Turnkey Basis based Tenderer's own Design" on two cover system. Interested bidders can participate through Karnataka Public Procurement Portal (KPPP) of GoK and documents can be downloaded from website <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in>. Pre-Bid meeting will be held on **12-03-2025 at 15.30 Hrs** at KRDC Head Office. The last date of receipt of tender is on **21-03-2025 upto 17.30 hours** & Technical bids will be opened on **24-03-2025 at 11.30 hours**.

Note: Please note henceforth, any changes in the schedule will not be published through Newspapers and further changes will be updated only on KPP Portal / KRDC website www.krdcl.in

Sd/- Chief Engineer,
KRDC, Bengaluru

DIPR/CP/R05378/AAPL/2024-25

GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
KARNATAKA STATE HIGHWAYS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Project Implementation Unit, Karnataka State Highways Improvement Project
K R Circle, Bengaluru - 560 001 Tele: 2212 6758/59/61e-mail: piukship@gmail.com

No. PIU/KSHIP/IFB/2024-25/04 Dated: 01.03.2025

INVITATION FOR TENDER (Through KPP Portal)

Request for Proposal (RFP)

The Government of Karnataka (GoK) entrusted to the Authority for the development, maintenance and management of following Roads in the state of Karnataka ("Project"), on PPP-DBFOMT - Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM). The Authority had resolved to construct following roads on Design, build, finance, operate, maintain and transfer (the "DBFOMTAnnuity" or "Hybrid Annuity") basis and has decided to carry out the Bidding Process for the selection of a private entity as the bidder(s) to whom the Projects may be awarded.

Brief particulars of the Projects are as follows:

Sl. No.	Project Name	Length in Km	Concession Period	Estimated Project Cost (Excluding GST) (Rs. in Crore)*
1	Package 01 - Development of Road from Vemagal to TN Border for length of 36.586 km in the state of Karnataka on PPP-DBFOMT-Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM).	36.586	15 years (including 2 Years of construction period and 13 years of Operation & Maintenance)	571.23
2	Package 02 - Development of Road from Hoskote to Malur and Elevated Corridor upto Malur Industrial Area for a length of 25.615 km in the state of Karnataka on PPP-DBFOMT-Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM).	25.615	15 years (including 3 Years of construction period and 12 years of Operation & Maintenance)	828.46

* The Estimated Project Cost includes EPC cost, Interest during construction, Financing cost, Physical & Price Contingency and other elements

The complete bid documents can be viewed/downloaded from Karnataka Public Procurement Portal (KPPP) <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in> of GoK. Bids must be submitted online only at Karnataka Public Procurement Portal (KPPP) of GoK on or before **16-04-2025 upto 17:30 hours (IST)**. Technical submissions of the bids received online shall be opened on **19-04-2025 at 15:00 hours (IST)**.

Bid submitted through any other mode shall not be entertained. However, Bid Security, Power of Attorney for signing of Bid, Power of Attorney for lead member of Consortium, if any, Joint Bidding Agreement for Consortium, if any, and experience certificates, and other documents required as per RFP shall be submitted physically in original as detailed in the RFP. Please note that the Authority reserves the right to accept or reject all or any of the bids without assigning any reason whatsoever.

Please note that henceforth, any changes in the schedule will not be published through Newspapers and further changes will be updated only in the Karnataka Public Procurement Portal (KPPP) of GoK/KSHIP Website www.kship.in

Sd/-
Project Director
PIU, KSHIP, Bengaluru.

DIPR/CP/5383/AKAR/2024-25

APPOINTMENT

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT & PANCHAYATI RAJ
(An Organisation of the Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India)
Rajendranagar, Hyderabad-500030

Extension of Last Date

Refer to Advt. No.38/2024 issued on 09.02.2025 in The Hindu, The New Indian Express, Indian Express, Dainik Bhaskar and in Employment News on 22.02.2025 notifying recruitment of Practitioners (Professor, Associate Professor and Assistant Professor) on deputation basis. The last date for the submission of online application has been **extended by 15 more days** with regard to the deputation posts of Professor, Associate Professor and Assistant Professor notified against the advt. No.38/2024. Now, the last date for submission of online application is **18.03.2025**.

For submission of online application and other details please visit: <http://career.nirdpr.in/>

Advt.No.11/2025
File No: NIRDPR/Admin/Sec-I/2024/54
Comp.no. 17314

Sd/-
Assistant Director
Administration (Section-I)

M O F P I
MINISTRY OF FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD TECHNOLOGY, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, THANJAVUR (NIFTEM-T)

An Institute of National Importance
Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Government of India,
Pudukkottai Road, Thanjavur - 613 005, Tamil Nadu, India
Ph:+91-04362-228155 Email:director@niftem-t.ac.in Website:www.niftem-t.ac.in

Short Course on
FOOD BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
(Industry 4.0 Perspectives: Strategies & Solutions)

Venue: NIFTEM-T, Campus Date: 19th- 21st March 2025

Key Topics to be Delivered

- Innovative Product Strategies for Niche Markets
- Quality Assurance, Certification and Accreditation for Global Trade
- Traceability Solutions, AI & Blockchain Management
- Automation Platforms and Predictive Maintenance in Food Industry
- Big Data and Predictive Business Analytics
- Digitalization, Scale-Up Plans, IoT and Retail Management
- Investments and Working Capital Management in Food Business
- Financial Regulatory Techniques, Applications and Solutions in Food Business
- Accomplishing Make in India: Policy and Support Schemes for Food Industry

Managerial Skill Workshops: * Leadership Development * Performance Management * Assertive Training

Registration Details Scan Here

- Registration is open for Food Business Operators, Budding Entrepreneurs, Academicians, Students or Any Aspiring Individual
- Fee : Rs.15,000/-** (includes course kit, working lunch & refreshments, double bed sharing accommodation & Local pickup-drop facility)
- Registration Closes on : **15th March 2025**

For queries, please contact :
+91- 9750968417, +91-9750968401, +91- 8098880888
Email: hodfbm@iifpt.edu.in

Director

Gene therapy for maple syrup urine disease shows promise

The Hindu Bureau

Scientists have created a new gene therapy for a debilitating genetic disorder called maple syrup urine disease (MSUD). The treatment can prevent recurrence of deadly symptoms in a cow-calf born with the disease. Their protocol could one day be translated into a much-needed

therapy for patients with two types of classic MSUD, who currently face limited treatment options. Results were published in *Science Translational Medicine*.

Classic MSUD arises from mutations in the three genes that encode the protein subunits of the branched chain alpha-keto acid dehydrogenase complex (BCKDH). The loss of

this complex prevents the body from properly breaking down several amino acids, eventually leading to neurological symptoms and life-threatening brain damage. To prevent complications, patients must either follow a very strict diet low in protein or receive a liver transplant.

Now, Dr. Jiaming Wang from the University of Mas-

sachusetts Chan Medical School, Worcester, Massachusetts and others present a new gene replacement therapy for two types of classic MSUD that uses an adeno-associated viral vector to deliver functional gene copies of BCKDHA and BCKDHB systemically. The therapy worked as intended in knockout cells and was safe in wild-type

mice, and also prevented death after birth in mice deficient in either BCKDHA or BCKDHB.

The scientists visited a farm where some newborn calves had perished from classic MSUD. They administered a single dose of their gene therapy, modified to carry bovine genes, to the animal. Over the next two years, the calf

grew normally and was eventually able to transition to a normal bovine diet high in protein.

The team plans on further work to characterize the long-term impact of the gene therapy on BCKDH levels in the brain, as well as to determine the treatment's benefits on cognition and behaviour over longer study periods.

SNAPSHOTS



Breast cancer cases predicted to rise over the next 25 years

People in low- and middle-income countries face higher death rates from breast cancer than those in wealthier nations, because of a lack of screening and treatment options. For example, people aged under 50 in low-income countries are four times more likely to die from breast cancer than those in high-income countries, on the basis of 2022 data. Due to increasing life expectancy and changing prevalence of risk, breast cancer cases and deaths are predicted to rise over the next 25 years.

ICMR report links high levels of selenium in wheat to hair loss

The ICMR interim report submitted to the Health Ministry on January 28 found consumption of wheat with high levels of selenium led to 31 times higher selenium in the body causing sudden hair loss

R. Prasad

Three Zika virus cases in Gujarat detected between November 2016 and February 2017 were kept under wraps till WHO announced the outbreak on May 26, 2017; the Health Ministry had informed WHO about the three cases on May 15, 2017. The case of high levels of selenium in wheat distributed by Public Distribution System (PDS) outlets causing increased selenium levels and sudden hair loss in over 300 people in Shegaon taluka in Buldhana district, Maharashtra, seems to be following the same pattern – reluctance of the Health Ministry to keep all the stakeholders informed and make the findings public, and then claim there is no conclusive evidence to link high selenium levels in wheat with sudden hair loss.

Between end-December 2024 and January this year, over 300 cases of sudden hair loss were reported in people living in 18 villages in Shegaon taluka. From January 14-17, a team of scientists from ICMR institutes and AIIMS Delhi visited three villages and collected samples from people affected and unaffected (control) by sudden hair loss. Samples of wheat and rice from affected and unaffected households and from ration shops were collected, as well as water and soil samples. Contrary to claims made by government sources, no other samples of food items were collected for testing by the ICMR-AIIMS team. The samples were sent for testing to ICMR-National Institute for Research in Envi-

Unwillingness to be transparent, a recurring tale

Over 300 people in Shegaon taluka in Buldhana district, Maharashtra, experienced sudden hair loss

1 Scientists from ICMR institutes and AIIMS Delhi visited villages from January 14-17 and collected wheat, rice, water, soil and various human samples

2 ICMR submitted an interim report to the Health Ministry on January 28, nearly a month before PTI published the results of an independent researcher

3 Selenium levels in the blood were about 31 times higher. Hair had high selenium content

4 Selenium in wheat samples collected from ration shops was two-eight times higher

5 Selenium levels in the affected people were three times more than the unaffected individuals from the same household



PHOTO CREDIT: CDC

Selenosis: Intake of excessive selenium leads to a condition called selenosis, which is characterised by sudden hair loss

6 Wheat collected from ration shops and affected households had high levels of selenium, establishing a link between high selenium in wheat and sudden hair loss

7 A 2016 report in an Indian journal found 15 individuals from two families with high to extreme selenium toxicity had high selenium levels. Selenium in wheat was 250 times higher

ronmental Health (NIREH) in Bhopal and AIIMS Delhi.

A PTI report published on February 25 said that very high levels of selenium found in wheat was the reason for the sudden hair loss, based on an independent investigation by Dr. Himmatrao Bawaskar of Bawaskar Hospital and Research Centre in Raigad. The ICMR-AIIMS team found high selenium in blood and hair samples of affected people, and the link between high selenium levels in wheat and hair loss nearly a month before Dr. Bawaskar's investigation revealed them. But the findings of the ICMR-AIIMS team have not been made public till date.

In an interim report submitted to the Health Ministry on January 28, ICMR clearly said that the amount of selenium detected in the blood of affected individuals was about 31 times higher than controls. The selenium content was also high in wheat samples collected

from two ration shops and a few households of affected people. Water samples were tested for nearly two-dozen heavy metals, and all were within permissible limits. Based on these findings, the interim report says that high selenium levels in wheat could have caused sudden hair loss. Intake of excessive selenium through food and/or water leads to a condition called selenosis, which is characterised by hair loss, which is what was seen in people in Shegaon taluka.

Blood samples tested by ICMR-NIREH found that people with sudden hair loss had selenium levels nearly 31 times higher than individuals without hair loss from households with no cases of hair loss in the family. Selenium levels in the affected people were three times more than the unaffected individuals from the same households as the affected people. Blood samples tested by AIIMS Delhi found that the

selenium levels were about 25 times more than the controls, and the selenium levels in hair samples from people with sudden hair loss were also high compared with the control group.

Testing by ICMR-NIREH of wheat samples supplied by two ration shops to the affected people living in two villages had selenium two-eight times higher than normal values. The selenium level in the wheat sample collected from a household where an affected person was living was high and comparable to the selenium levels in wheat available at the ration shop. Compared with households of unaffected individuals, people from affected households consumed wheat and rice supplied by PDS shops. The presence of wheat with high levels of selenium both in the ration shops and in the affected households clearly establishes that wheat distributed by the PDS outlets as the

source of selenium for the affected people.

As per a Letter published in 2016 in the *Indian Journal of Dermatology, Venereology, and Leprology*, a study by the SMS Medical College and Hospital in Jaipur found 15 individuals from two families with high to extreme selenium toxicity. Selenium in wheat samples was 250 times higher. As per a 2004 report in *Down to Earth*, large tracts of agriculture lands in Hoshiarpur and Nawanshahar districts in Punjab are impacted and people in many villages in these districts are affected by selenium toxicity.

Investigations needed

It must be noted that while every family receives PDS wheat, not everyone eats this wheat. Many families have wheat grown in their own field. As a result, the wheat samples collected from houses were not necessarily received from PDS shops. Curiously, people who had sudden hair loss in end-December 2024 had good hair regrowth even though they continued to consume wheat supplied by PDS shops. This suggests that the exposure to high selenium was only for a short time, probably because only a few sacks of wheat had high selenium levels. The cases were reported only from 12-15 villages, again supporting the hypothesis that only a few sacks would have had high selenium. It is therefore necessary to carry out further investigations by testing additional wheat samples from the entire supply chain of PDS to ensure that high selenium wheat is not present in the supply chain.

Study identifies sources of PM2.5 in northern India

The Hindu Bureau

A study published in the journal *Nature Communications* has investigated the sources and health impacts of PM2.5 in Northern India, particularly in the Indo-Gangetic Plain. The study has examined PM2.5 composition and oxidative potential, a key indicator of its health risks, using samples from five sites: urban and roadside locations in Delhi, rural and industrial peripheries, and a suburban site in Kanpur. Addressing local inefficient combustion processes can effectively mitigate particulate matter health exposure in northern India, the study finds.

The study found that although uniformly high particulate matter concentrations were recorded across the entire region, local emission sources and atmospheric processes

dominate particulate matter pollution. "In Delhi, PM2.5 is dominated by ammonium chloride and organic aerosols from vehicular emissions, residential heating, and fossil fuel oxidation," says Dr. Sachchida N. Tripathi, Professor at the Department of Civil Engineering & Department of Sustainable Energy Engineering, IIT Kanpur, and one of the corresponding authors. "Outside Delhi, ammonium sulfate, ammonium nitrate, and biomass-burning-derived organic aerosols are more prominent." The study highlights that PM2.5 oxidative potential is primarily influenced by organic aerosols from incomplete combustion of biomass and fossil fuels, particularly from traffic and residential sources. This trend is observed across all locations, emphasising that inefficient local combustion



Major contributor: Traffic can contribute up to 40% of total organic aerosols at urban roadside. GETTY IMAGES

is a major contributor to PM2.5-related health risks.

Hydrocarbon-like organic aerosols originate from fresh vehicular tail-pipe emissions. The study found that the highest average hydrocarbon-like organic aerosols concentrations (8 micrograms per metre cube) were recorded at the urban roadside site

in Delhi. The hydrocarbon-like organic aerosol concentrations do not show great variations across seasons.

Consistent with previous studies, the current study found that hydrocarbon-like organic aerosols are primarily from traffic and contribute up to 20% of total organic aerosols

mass with higher relative contributions in the warm season. From 20%, the contribution from traffic can increase to 40% at an urban roadside. "In all, hydrocarbon-like organic aerosols constitute 50% of the total fossil (coal, petrol, diesel) organic aerosols," says Dr. Tripathi.

Cow dung combustion during winter for heating and cooking contributes to cold-season primary organic aerosols. The cold-season primary organic aerosols are highly elevated during the night and exhibit spatially homogeneous contribution. Also, concentration of cold-season primary organic aerosols during cold weather is up to 10 times higher than during warmer weather. This is because of increased residential heating or cooking emissions and shallower boundary layer conditions.

Urban oxygenated organic aerosols are affected by both fossil emissions from vehicle exhausts and non-fossil emissions from cooking, and have similar concentration levels across seasons. While hydrocarbon-like organic aerosols and urban oxygenated organic aerosols are especially important inside Delhi, cold-season oxygenated organic aerosol forms outside Delhi, the authors write.

Comparative analysis shows that the oxidative potential of PM2.5 in Indian cities is among the highest globally, exceeding levels in Chinese and European cities by up to five times. "The study provides crucial insights for policymakers to design effective air quality control strategies focused on reducing primary emissions from incomplete combustion," says Dr. Tripathi.



Immunity against H1N1 flu reduces flu severity in ferrets

Pre-existing immunity against seasonal H1N1 flu might help explain why most reported human cases of H5N1 bird flu in the U.S. have not resulted in lethal outcomes, suggests a new study. Pre-existing immunity appeared to influence infection severity in ferrets. Compared to immunologically naïve animals, ferrets with previous infection were protected against severe disease and death caused by H5N1 bird flu strain currently circulating in the U.S. Ferrets without prior immunity had more fatal outcomes.



Extreme heat may speed up aging in older adults: study

A study has revealed a correlation between neighbourhoods with more days of extreme heat and individuals experiencing greater increases in biological age. Researchers examined how biological age changed in more than 3,600 participants aged 56 and older from throughout the U.S. Blood samples taken during the study period were analysed for changes in the way individual genes are turned "off" or "on" by a process called DNA methylation.



Question Corner

Symbiosis

Does anemonefish actively feed its hosts in the wild?

Living symbiotically with sea anemones that shelter them from predators, anemonefish (*Amphiprion clarkii*) drive away organisms that nibble at their hosts. Anemonefish have also shown they will provide their hosts with the food given to them by humans. A new study shows such feeding behaviour does happen in the wild by investigating food provisioning by anemonefish and its effects on the symbiotic relationships. When anemonefish are provided with foods of various sizes and types in the field, they

selectively consume small animal food (krill, clams, squid, and fish) and green macroalgae of small size, while providing larger pieces of animal food to their hosts. Food provisioning positively influences the growth of host anemones as growth of anemones directly benefits anemonefish – the number of eggs laid increases when the hosts are larger, and since anemonefish cannot leave their sea anemone, feeding their hosts is extremely important.

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

Has Trump put up entry into the U.S. for sale?

What is the 'gold card' proposal? Will it replace the existing EB-5 visa programme?

Narayan Lakshman

The story so far:
U.S. President Donald Trump recently unveiled plans to sell \$5 million "gold card" resident permits to non-Americans worldwide, a long-term visa policy that might eventually offer a pathway to citizenship for the global economic elite. This new visa will replace the existing EB-5 immigrant investor visa for foreigners who can create jobs in the U.S., the latter an option that Mr. Trump's Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has attacked as "full of nonsense, make-believe and fraud."

Why replace the EB-5 visa?

The EB-5 visa was introduced in 1990 with the explicit aim of attracting foreign investors to the U.S. via the residency route, only requiring that they create and support jobs on U.S. soil via direct investment of capital. The investment levels are set at \$8,00,000 in a "Targeted Employment Area", one that faces a certain level of economic distress, and \$10,50,000 outside of such areas. Critics of the EB-5 programme, primarily in the Trump administration, highlight the scope for abuse and fraud within this scheme. While aggregate figures on the scale and frequency of EB-5 fraud and abuse are not available, there is a significant number of documented cases involving misuse of investor funds, for example developers diverting millions

The U.K. and Australia have experimented with similar 'golden visa' initiatives; in both countries it was scrapped 'after interest peaked at a few hundred applications per year'

of dollars intended for projects towards personal use. In terms of governance, the U.S. Congress is responsible for determining citizenship qualifications. In this regard Mr. Trump has reportedly said that Congressional approval may be unnecessary for the "gold card" visa, an approach that might cause consternation on Capitol Hill.

How much revenue will the card raise?

Mr. Trump, while announcing the scheme, expressed hope that "If we sell a million, that's \$5 trillion dollars... I think we will sell a lot because I think there's really a thirst." He also noted that future recipients of the gold visa will be "wealthy and successful and they'll be spending a lot of money and paying a lot of taxes and employing a lot of people." However, close to 75% of billionaires polled by a survey that asked if they would consider this visa indicated that they would not opt for it, primarily because at that level of wealth, they anyway could set up businesses in the U.S. at a lower cost, have options to reside on U.S. soil, and could avoid the U.S. tax net on global income.

Yet there appears to be a lack of clarity on the tax front. While Mr. Trump has said gold card-holders would not be subject to taxes on their overseas income, this would imply that gold card residents will be able to purchase a tax benefit not available to U.S. citizens, effectively creating "dual classes of taxpayers among the American wealthy." That might contravene certain regulations or potentially cause political blowback for the White House if passed into law.

What about other countries?

If we were to compare the experience of other advanced economies, both the U.K. and Australia have experimented with similar "golden visa" initiatives, yet in both countries it was scrapped "after interest peaked at a few hundred applications per year", according to London School of Economics Professor Kristin Surak. Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal had similar experiences. Ms. Surak's 2023 book, *The Golden Passport*, examines the global market for citizenship and the wealthy elites who buy their way through it.

The U.K.'s trial of a "gold card" type programme raised another concern – former Home Secretary Suella Braverman said once to the U.K. Parliament that a closer examination of visa grantees indicated that some "were potentially at high risk of having obtained wealth through corruption or other illicit financial activity, and/or being engaged in serious and organised crime." When he was recently asked by media whether Russian oligarchs would be eligible for the card, Mr. Trump said, "Yeah, possibly... I know some Russian oligarchs that are very nice people."

How does this tie in with Trump's immigration paradigm?

The Trump administration is currently in the process of carrying out mass deportations of undocumented migrants in the U.S. Even so, his White House has strongly supported legal migration. Add to this the MAGA focus on gaining transactional advantage through dealmaking with other nations, and the gold visa scheme makes perfect sense as a means to monetise entry into the U.S., while spurring job creation. The test of the success of the programme will depend upon the numbers of those who take up the gold visa offer.

What were the objections to new Advocates Bill?

Why has the Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025 been retracted for now? Why is the Bar Council of India peeved with some of the proposed changes? Why are some of the amendments being seen as an effort to undermine judicial independence?

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:
On February 22, the Centre withdrew the contentious Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025, stating that a revised version incorporating public feedback will be introduced. The Bill sought to amend the Advocates Act, 1961. However, its introduction faced strong opposition from sections of the bar. The government's decision to retract the Bill followed a letter from the Bar Council of India (BCI) to Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, pointing out that the proposed amendments threatened the "autonomy and independence of the bar."

What is the objective of the Bill?

The Law Ministry underscored the need to amend the 1961 Act to address "contemporary challenges" and align the legal profession with global best practices. It pointed out that seismic shifts in the legal landscape necessitate reforms to better equip lawyers for a rapidly evolving world. The draft Bill comes over a year after the introduction of the Advocates Bill, 2023, which was passed to eliminate "touts" and curb "superfluous enactments" in existing statutes.

Are lawyers allowed to go on strike?

A key point of contention in the Bill is its proposed ban on strikes and boycotts by lawyers, citing their disruptive impact on judicial proceedings. It introduces Section 35-A, explicitly prohibiting advocates and bar associations from abstaining from court work. Violations would constitute "misconduct," subjecting offenders to disciplinary action under the 1961 Act and the Bar Council of India Rules,



In rage: Lawyers stage a protest against the Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025, in Ajmer on February 21. ANI

A key point of contention in the Bill is its proposed ban on strikes and boycotts by lawyers

1975. However, the Bill clarifies that the restriction does not apply to strikes that do not "impede the administration of justice" and are intended to address "legitimate concerns about professional conduct," such as working conditions or administrative issues.

Senior advocate Chander Lall underscored that strikes are a legitimate means for lawyers to voice grievances. "The Bill's withdrawal was a direct consequence of protests led by various bar associations. However, court boycotts and strikes inevitably disrupt judicial proceedings, ultimately harming litigants. That said, I believe the bar exercises restraint and resorts to strikes only in cases of extreme exigency," he told *The Hindu*. Echoing similar sentiments, advocate Nipun Saxena pointed out that strikes have historically served as a powerful tool for the legal fraternity to oppose state excesses. "Barrister Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew was among the earliest vocal opponents of the Rowlatt Act, 1919, which granted the British government sweeping powers to arrest and detain individuals without trial in colonial India. He organised widespread boycotts of British courts by Indian lawyers... Lawyers have long stood as the first line of defence in safeguarding the rule of law and preserving constitutional values," he said.

Is there executive control?

The proposed law allows the Centre to nominate up to three members to the BCI, alongside its existing members – the Attorney General, Solicitor General, and representatives from State Bar Councils. The BCI has strongly opposed this provision, calling it "draconian" and "arbitrarily inserted." The Bill also introduces Section 49B, empowering the Centre to issue binding directions to the BCI, set bar council eligibility criteria, and regulate the BCI's oversight of State bar councils. "Since the government is the largest litigant, it should have no role in an autonomous body like the BCI. Such influence would undermine judicial independence, as advocates serve as officers of the court," Mr. Lal told *The Hindu*.

The amendments significantly expand the BCI's authority, potentially rendering State bar councils redundant. Traditionally, misconduct complaints against advocates are handled by the disciplinary committees of State bar councils. However, Section 45B now allows the BCI to hear complaints nationwide and suspend advocates at its discretion. Additionally, Section 48B empowers the BCI to dissolve a State bar council and replace it with a committee if it deems the council ineffective. Mr. Saxena argued that these changes undermine the federal structure of the 1961 Act. "The BCI and

State bar councils were created under distinct provisions. Stripping State councils of their core functions reduces them to mere administrative bodies with no real authority," he said.

How will it impact corporate lawyers?

The Bill expands the definition of "legal practitioner" under Section 2(i) to include lawyers associated with foreign law firms, corporate entities, and practising advocates. It grants statutory recognition to corporate lawyers working in law firms and as in-house counsel – a long-standing demand that has gained momentum in recent years. Additionally, the Bill empowers the Centre to formulate rules governing the entry of foreign law firms and lawyers into India. "This has faced strong opposition from the BCI.

The Bar Council of India Rules for Registration and Regulation of Foreign Lawyers and Foreign Law Firms in India, 2022, allows foreign lawyers and firms to practise law in India on a reciprocal basis. However, these rules were later challenged before the Delhi High Court, with petitioners arguing that the BCI lacked the statutory mandate to permit such practice. "This proposed change would have had little impact on corporate lawyers in law firms, as most are already licensed advocates. However, its implications are far more significant for in-house counsel. A crucial question is whether this move intends to gradually blur the distinction between 'advocates' and 'legal practitioners'. For instance, would in-house counsel be granted rights of audience before courts, arbitral tribunals, and other judicial fora? Moreover, it could have definitively settled the long-standing debate on whether legal privilege extends to advice provided by in-house counsel to their employers", Mrinal Ojha, partner at Solaris Legal told *The Hindu*. He further pointed out that while the structured entry of foreign law firms into India is a welcome development, the proposed framework remains ambiguous.

"Jurisdictions like Singapore serve as valuable precedents, having successfully balanced the interests of international law firms and the domestic legal fraternity. However, for any regulations introduced by the Centre to be effective, they must be formulated in consultation with all key stakeholders – the BCI, bar associations, and the legal community at large," Mr. Ojha added.

What is the way forward?

"The Bill's withdrawal is a welcome step, and one hopes that inclusive dialogue will lead to meaningful reforms. Any changes must safeguard judicial independence and the autonomy of regulatory bodies," Mr. Lal stated.

Mr. Saxena further underscored the need to consult High Courts before implementing any reforms, noting that Section 34 of the 1961 Act empowers them to regulate the practice of advocates before them and subordinate courts.

Why is India staring at an obesity challenge?

Is there an urban-rural divide? How are prices affecting the right food intake? Why does the rise in obesity have a bearing on non-communicable diseases like diabetes? Why is childhood obesity an area of concern? What is likely to happen in adolescence and adulthood?

Zubeda Hamid

The story so far:
Earlier this week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his 'Mann Ki Baat' radio programme, highlighted the alarming increase in obesity in the country, particularly among children, and noted that obesity affected one in eight Indians. Mr. Modi urged people to reduce oil consumption by 10% each month and stressed that to build a healthy nation, obesity needed to be addressed.

What is the scale of the problem?

Overweight and obesity are defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health. Data from the National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) reveals that obesity has been increasing across India over the years. The percentage of women who were overweight/obese grew from 20.6% during NFHS-4 (2015-16) to 24% during NFHS-5 (2019-21). The percentage of overweight/obese men increased from 18.9% to 22.9% during this period. Urban numbers were significantly higher than rural numbers. A 2023 research paper in *The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia* that analysed the NFHS-5 data, found the prevalence

While obesity is still primarily an urban, middle class phenomenon in India, it is already rising among the rural poor

of abdominal obesity (assessed through waist circumference) in the country was 40% in women and 12% in men.

Childhood obesity is also an area of concern: the percentage of children under five who were overweight rose from 2.1% to 3.4% from 2015-16 to 2019-21, as per NFHS data. With older children the figures are higher – the World Obesity Atlas 2022 estimates that India will have a child obesity prevalence of 10.81% among 5 to 9-year-olds and 6.23% among 10 to 19-year-olds by 2030.

What are the health risks?

According to the WHO, obesity in adulthood is a major risk factor for the world's leading causes of poor health and early death. These include cardiovascular disease, several common cancers, diabetes and osteoarthritis. India leads the world in the number of people with diabetes at an estimated 101 million. The burden of cancer is on the rise; from 14.6 lakh cancer cases in 2022, the number is projected to go up to 15.7 lakh in 2025, as per the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Cancer Registry Programme. Moreover, cardiovascular disease remains one of the leading causes of death and disability, reportedly affecting Indians at least 10 years earlier than in other countries. In fact, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) now account for about 60% of all deaths in India.

Being overweight in childhood and adolescence, the WHO says, affects children's and adolescents' immediate health and is associated with greater risk and earlier onset of various NCDs. It can also have adverse psychosocial consequences affecting school performance and quality of life, compounded by stigma, discrimination and bullying. Children with obesity are likely to be adults with obesity.

Why is obesity on the rise?

"Rising levels of obesity in urban India are due to a combination of multiple factors: unhealthy diets loaded with ultra-processed foods, lowered levels of physical activity and even air pollution which provokes inflammation that predisposes the body to cardio-metabolic diseases and visceral adiposity in the body," says K. Srinath

Reddy, distinguished professor of public health, Public Health Foundation of India.

Cost is another factor. Low-income households, especially those that depend on the public distribution system, eat more carbohydrates through rice and wheat, says public health professional Vandana Prasad. "You can instruct people to eat better, but it is not possible if these foods are unaffordable. Indian diets, especially among poor families, are deficient in iron and proteins. Foods like fruits, vegetables, pulses, dairy and animal-based foods are all expensive. While at present obesity is still primarily an urban, middle class phenomenon in India, it is already rising among the rural poor, which may soon overtake other segments," she adds.

A study in *The Lancet Global Health* last year said almost half of all Indians are not sufficiently physically active. "Even as indoor sedentariness is increasing due to the seated nature of office work and use of digital devices, outdoor conditions are not conducive to safe and pleasurable physical activity," points out Dr. Reddy. The absence of safe cycling lanes and pedestrian paths are compounded by dimly-lit lanes; green spaces available for recreational physical activity are shrinking while traffic density and rising street crime deter walkers in many urban zones.

Is obesity being measured correctly?

While the usual metric to measure obesity is the Body Mass Index (BMI), there has been a growing debate about its limitations. BMI does not indicate how much of the weight is fat and where the fat is distributed in the body. Fat in the abdomen particularly – something that Indians are genetically predisposed to accumulating – contributes to metabolic syndrome, a group of risk factors that increases the chances of developing type 2 diabetes, stroke and heart disease.

This January, experts in India issued updated guidelines for obesity treatment and diagnosis that placed special emphasis on abdominal fat distribution. The classification introduces two stages in obesity – the first stage where there is increased adiposity without discernible effects on organ functions or daily activities, and the second, where both physical and organ functions are impacted. It recommends the use of waist circumference or waist-to-height ratio and body fat measurements, alongside BMI, to diagnose obesity.



ISTOCKPHOTO

PROFILES

Twisting in the whirlwind

Volodymyr Zelenskyy

The Ukrainian President, who in recent past emerged as the face of his country's resistance against Russia's war, has been left in the cold as the U.S., Kyiv's main backer, has reached out to the Kremlin to bring the war to an end

ILLUSTRATION: SOUMYADIP SINHA



Stanly Johny

“Our two nations are allies in this battle,” Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his address to the U.S. Congress in December 2022. “We have to defeat the Kremlin... This struggle will define in what world our children and grandchildren will live...,” he said. The Ukrainian President was accorded a hero's welcome in Washington DC, and both Biden administration officials and lawmakers declared their support for Kyiv. Earlier in the year, while addressing the House of Commons in London, Mr. Zelenskyy compared himself to Winston Churchill, the British wartime Prime Minister, without directly mentioning his name. “We will not give up, and we will not lose,” Mr. Zelenskyy said. Many hailed him as a “modern Churchill”. He was the ‘brave face’ of Ukraine's dogged resistance against Russia's “unprovoked” invasion. The U.S. and its European allies said they would support Ukraine “as long as it takes”. Mr. Zelenskyy believed them. Cut to the present. Mr. Zelenskyy went to the White House on February 28 to sign a minerals deal between Ukraine and the U.S. He was welcomed by his American counterpart, Donald Trump, at the Oval Office, before the leaders, along with Vice President J.D. Vance, sat down for a meeting. What followed was an extraordinary public spat between the two Presidents that was telecast across the world. “You right now are not in a very good position. You are not winning this... You don't have the cards right now,” Mr. Trump told the visiting Ukrainian President. It was a remarkable turnaround of events for both Ukraine and its leader. How did it happen?

Rise to the top

Born to Jewish parents in 1978, Volodymyr Zelenskyy grew up as a native Russian speaker in Kryvyi Rih, in central Ukraine. Joining politics was not even close to young Zelenskyy's imagination. He obtained a law degree from the Kryvyi Rih Institute of Economics, but never took law as a profession. His interests were elsewhere – the world of

entertainment. Mr. Trump recently called Mr. Zelenskyy “a moderately successful comedian”. But Mr. Zelenskyy was actually quite successful as an actor and comedian. In 1997, at age 19, he won popularity as his team appeared in the finals of *KVN (Club of the Funny and Inventive People)*, a comedy show that was broadcast across former Soviet republics. He later co-founded a studio, *Kvartal 95*, and joined hands with Ihor Kolomoisky, one of the wealthiest Ukrainians who owned the popular 1+1 network. Mr. Zelenskyy won national acclaim for his role as the fictional president of Ukraine, who fights the corrupt establishment, in the TV show, *Servant of the People*. It was this popularity that catapulted him to the centre of Ukrainian politics.

Mr. Zelenskyy promised to fight corruption, reform the system and make peace with Russia during the campaign, and won the second round of the 2019 presidential election with 73.23% vote, against incumbent Petro Poroshenko. But victory also put Mr. Zelenskyy in an unenviable position. Five years prior to his election, Russia had annexed Crimea. Ever since, a separatist civil war had been brewing in Ukraine's east.

After assuming office, Mr. Zelenskyy held a telephone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and later announced a preliminary deal with the separatists, who were backed by Russia. In 2020, he declared a formal ceasefire. But none of these efforts brought the fighting in Donbas to an end – the hard-right nationalists on the Ukrainian side, including the Azov Brigade with neo-Nazi links, rejected the deal with separatists, while Russia continued to back the latter. In September 2020, in the midst of the crisis in Donbas, Mr. Zelenskyy unveiled a new national security strategy that called Russia an ‘aggressor’ and identified NATO membership as Ukraine's key defence and foreign policy objective. Within two years, Mr. Putin would annex the Donbas Oblasts (Donetsk and Luhansk) and launch his invasion of Ukraine.

Mr. Putin may have wanted to wrap up his “special military operation” within days. But Ukrainian resistance

denied a quick victory to the Russians. Mr. Zelenskyy, who refused to leave the country, took shelter in a bunker in the early days of war. The then Israeli Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, later recalled a conversation he had with Mr. Putin about Mr. Zelenskyy's fate. When he met Mr. Putin in Moscow in March 2022, Mr. Bennett asked him if he intended to kill Mr. Zelenskyy, to which the Russian leader said ‘No’.

“Are you giving me your word that you won't kill Zelenskyy?” Mr. Bennett asked again.

“I won't kill Zelenskyy,” said Mr. Putin.

Immediately after the three-hour meeting with Mr. Putin, Mr. Bennett called the Ukrainian leader and said: “I've just come out of a meeting –

[Putin] is not going to kill you.”

Mr. Zelenskyy asked Mr. Bennett, ‘Are you sure?’ He said, “100%.”

Two hours after their conversation, Mr. Zelenskyy took a selfie in his office and posted it with the caption “I'm not afraid,” Mr. Bennett recalled in a YouTube interview, published after he left the Prime Minister's office.

Fall from grace

The war turned Mr. Zelenskyy into a hero of sorts in the West: the man who stood up to “the evil dictator of Russia”. In March 2022, the Russians and Ukrainians were close to signing an agreement after talks in Istanbul to bring the war to an end, but Ukraine, egged on by the U.K. and the U.S., walked out of it at the last minute and

preferred to fight on (according to various accounts by people who were privy to the Istanbul talks). When the Russian troops were forced to withdraw from Kharkiv and later Kherson, Mr. Zelenskyy hailed it as a victory, and vowed to liberate all territories captured by Russia, including Crimea.

Ukraine got weapons worth billions of dollars from the West, mainly the U.S. But Mr. Putin, after the initial setback, announced a partial mobilisation, aimed at fighting a long war. In the following months, Ukraine started losing territories in the east. In 2023, Kyiv launched a much talked-about counteroffensive, with advanced weaponry supplied by the West, aimed at recapturing the territories seized by Russia. But it turned out to be a damp squib. Ukraine's fate was sealed in the months the counteroffensive failed.

But Mr. Zelenskyy continued to put up a brave face. His narrative was that if Ukraine falls, the Russians will march further towards the east, endangering Europe's security. But that was his Plan A and B. It worked as long as Joe Biden was there in the White House. But Donald Trump returned to power with an entirely different agenda and worldview. Mr. Zelenskyy, who was almost entirely dependent on defence supplies from the U.S., was hardly prepared for that.

Now, the Trump administration seems determined to bring the war to an end through a direct deal with the Russians, leaving Mr. Zelenskyy in the cold. He lost more than 20% of his country's territory. His troops are pushed back by the Russians on the battlefield. His country will not become a member of NATO. He is not going to get any security guarantees from the U.S. And, America wants a share of Ukraine's natural resources to recoup the aid it gave to the war-torn country. On top of it all, President Trump now thinks Mr. Zelenskyy is an impediment to peace. “He [Zelenskyy] disrespected the United States of America in its cherished Oval Office,” Mr. Trump posted on Truth Social immediately after Friday's meeting was over. “He can come back when he is ready for peace,” he said.

THE GIST

Zelenskyy, who presented himself as an alternative to the corrupt establishment and promised to make peace with Russia during the campaign, won the 2019 presidential election with 73.23% vote

After assuming office, Zelenskyy held a telephone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin and declared a ceasefire in the east, but those efforts failed to bring peace

In September 2020, Zelenskyy unveiled a new national security strategy that called Russia an ‘aggressor’ and identified NATO membership as Ukraine's key defence and foreign policy objective. Within two years, Russia invaded Ukraine

The outsider within

Shashi Tharoor

The four-time MP for Thiruvananthapuram has landed in back-to-back controversies after his comments on Kerala's industrial growth and Congress leadership

S.R. Praveen

Literature has often been Shashi Tharoor's calling card, at times even more than his politics, but words have also been his Achilles heel in politics, right from the “cattle class” and “holy cows” comments in 2009. Misinterpreted or otherwise, the four-time Lok Sabha MP's utterances and writings have frequently landed him in trouble, inviting the displeasure of the higher-ups in the Congress as well as fellow leaders in its Kerala unit.

The latest instance came last week when, in a newspaper interview, he purportedly underscored the absence of a leader in Kerala's Congress unit and also spoke about other “options”, including speaking tours and books, if the Congress did not require his services. Though Mr. Tharoor later accused the newspaper of putting a fake spin on the Malayalam podcast to make it seem as if he was exploring political options, the damage was already done, partly due to the history of his run-ins with the State leadership of the party. The impression that he was making a pitch for a leadership role ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections did not help matters either.

The controversy came close on the heels of another



one. Earlier in February, he said U.S. President Donald Trump's invitation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi was a “significant development” for the country. The next day, in an article, he praised the transformation of Kerala's industrial ecosystem driven by the “staggering growth” in the start-up sector. He also praised the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government's Year of Enterprises initiative, the State's “success” in establishing close to 3 lakh MSMEs since 2022 as well as its topping of the Ease of Doing Business rankings.

Mr. Tharoor's article, published right ahead of the State government's Invest Kerala Global Summit, came in handy for the ruling LDF, which used it to counter the Congress's dim view of the State's investment climate.

The State Congress leaders, who were not obviously happy at the comments, scrambled to counter his views, with the Congress's

Kerala mouthpiece *Veekshanam* also levelling some oblique criticism in an editorial. The issue died down only after Mr. Tharoor had a one-to-one meeting with Rahul Gandhi.

Entry into politics

Mr. Tharoor waded into politics in 2009, carrying with him the glory of a flourishing literary career and a long stint with the UN, which ended in an unsuccessful bid to the UN Secretary-General post. But, right from his early days, he had an “outsider” tag stuck to him, used openly by the opposing parties and more privately by his fellow party members.

Yet, he made up for the challenges he faced, including the not-so-friendly local party leadership, with his personal charisma. For four consecutive terms, he has held on to the Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha seat, which before his arrival used to alternate between the Congress and the Left. But,

since 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been giving him a close fight, with the 2024 win by a slender margin of 16,077 votes. The outsider tag still follows him, as even local Congress members are not so happy about his prolonged absence from the constituency.

Of late, Mr. Tharoor has begun priming himself for alternative and more ambitious roles. With opinions often at variance with the leadership, he has in recent years consistently played the role of the disruptor within the party, first as one of the 23 Congress leaders (G-23) who sought reforms within the party, which culminated in his making an unsuccessful bid to the party leadership post in 2022.

His current manoeuvres in Kerala closely resemble his actions at the national level in recent years. Coming a year ahead of a crucial Assembly election, in which the Congress is attempting a comeback after being kept away from power for an unprecedented two terms, his purported comments on the leadership attain added significance.

Though Mr. Tharoor's intentions are barely concealed, it is not going to be an easy ride to the top for someone who has ruffled so many feathers within his own party.

The conservative turn

Friedrich Merz

The man who could become Germany's next Chancellor has promised to impose border controls, revive the country's economy and keep supporting Ukraine and Israel

Joan Sony Cherian

While addressing the media after the results of Germany's Feb. 23 election were out, the leader of the leading conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, Christian Social Union, Friedrich Merz, opined that the staggering rise of the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD), with its vote share of almost 20%, is a “real warning bell, a real alarm bell for the political parties”. However, for someone who has strongly ruled out any coalition with the AfD, effectively breaking the ‘Brandmauer’ or firewall that political parties have kept with the right-wing post the Second World War, for the motions he raised in the Bundestag in January on restricting immigration and asylum.

Mr. Merz's tougher stance on immigration has been seen as an attempt to gain some section of right-wing voters, especially in east Germany. In light of a knife attack carried out by an Afghan immigrant in the city of Aschaffenburg on January 22, Mr. Merz had promised that if he became Chancellor, he would “impose permanent border controls with all our



neighbours and refuse all attempts at illegal entry”. He stated that the knife attack was evidence of a “failed” immigration system. Mr. Merz was born into an affluent family, with his father also being a member of the CDU. Mr. Merz joined the CDU as a young boy, and was briefly engaged in the military before becoming a lawyer. Keen to make his entry in politics, he was elected to be a member of the CDU's wing in the European Parliament in 1989. After being elected to the German parliament in 1994, Mr. Merz established himself in the CDU as a leading economic policy expert, and was a favourite of the more conservative faction within the CDU.

However, after the rise to power of CDU stalwart Angela Merkel, Mr. Merz resigned from politics in 2009 and went back to practising corporate law full-time. In the interim, before his return to the CDU in 2018, Mr. Merz

ILLUSTRATIONS: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

served on the board of many multinational companies and trusts. Always staunchly pro-business, Mr. Merz was until recently a strong supporter of the U.S. and trans-Atlantic trade. Under President Donald Trump however, Mr. Merz has stated that the U.S. seems indifferent to Europe's fate, and that the continent needs to build its own defences without relying on the U.S.

Rivalry with Merkel

Before his exit from politics in 2009, Mr. Merz was considered an up and coming leader of the CDU, and even became the parliamentary leader of the party in 2000. However, his rise to the very top was blocked by the increasing dominance of Ms. Merkel, who was the chairwoman of the CDU at the time. To Ms. Merkel, Mr. Merz was a tad too conservative to be a centrist as she was, and after the party's electoral defeat in 2002, she removed Mr. Merz from his post as

the parliamentary leader. Therefore, it is unsurprising that his return to the party was after Ms. Merkel resigned from the CDU leadership.

After being sidelined by Ms. Merkel, Mr. Merz's bid for leadership of the CDU was thwarted twice – once in 2018 and the other in January 2021. He was finally elected party leader in December 2021, and has shown himself to be quite a different leader compared to Ms. Merkel – central to this being his vastly different stance on immigration in contrast to Ms. Merkel's open borders policy.

Apart from a divided polity and an unpredictable U.S. government, Germany's economic woes are aplenty. The economy, suffering from the phasing out of cheap energy from Russia and the strict ‘debt brake’, needs a major boost, which Mr. Merz has promised to deliver by cutting down expenses on bureaucracy. Additionally, Mr. Merz, who is critical of the Russian regime, has offered all support to Ukraine. Mr. Merz is also an avid supporter of Israel, and has said that he will invite the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, to Germany after he becomes Chancellor in open defiance of the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for Mr. Netanyahu.

TOKYO
Japan battles its biggest wildfire in more than three decades



REUTERS

Japan was battling its largest wildfire in more than three decades on Saturday, one of several blazes that have killed one person and forced the evacuation of more than a thousand. The fire is spread over about 3,000 acres in the forest of Ofunato in the northern region of Iwate since it broke out on Wednesday. AFP

WASHINGTON
U.S. federal workers receive second email asking to justify their jobs



AFP

A second email asking U.S. federal workers to justify their jobs was sent on Friday, as part of President Donald Trump's initiative to slash spending. It came a week after Elon Musk engineered a first mass email to the federal government's two million employees, ordering them to justify their work or risk being fired. AFP

COLOMBO
Sri Lanka gets fourth tranche of bailout package from IMF



AFP

The IMF has agreed to release the fourth tranche of \$334 million from its \$2.9 billion bailout package to Sri Lanka to strengthen the island nation's recovery from its 2022 bankruptcy. The move came after the IMF completed the third review under the 48-month Extended Fund Facility (EFF) Arrangement to Sri Lanka. PTI

GENEVA
Swiss to host conference on occupied Palestinian territories



AFP

Switzerland said it will host an international conference on March 7 on the protection of Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories, as called for in a United Nations vote. The 196 signatories to the Geneva Convention will be invited to the meeting, which will be attended by Ambassadors, the Swiss foreign ministry said. AFP

Russia seizes two more villages in Ukraine's east

Agence France-Presse
MOSCOW

Moscow on Saturday said it had seized two more villages in eastern Ukraine as Kyiv officials said Russian strikes had killed one person and wounded 19.

The Russian Defence Ministry said its forces had captured Sudne and Bur-latske in the south of the eastern Donetsk region. They lie near the town of Velyka Novosilka which was seized by the Russia at the end of January.

The Ukrainian air force said Russia had launched 154 drones overnight, of which 103 were downed and 51 disappeared from the radar without causing casualties. Ukraine however reported one death and several injuries.

Trump relationship can still be repaired, says Zelenskyy

U.S.-Ukrainian ties are about 'more than two Presidents', he says, adding that Kyiv badly needs Washington's help in the fight against Russia's far bigger and better-armed military forces

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Friday that his relations with the United States can still be repaired after U.S. President Donald Trump shouted at him in an angry White House meltdown accusing the Ukrainian leader of refusing to make peace with Russia.

"Of course," Mr. Zelenskyy said when asked in a Fox News interview if the relationship with Mr. Trump could be salvaged.

U.S.-Ukrainian ties are about "more than two Presidents," he said, adding that Ukraine badly needs Washington's help in the



Managing fissures: U.S. President Donald Trump had accused Volodymyr Zelenskyy of refusing to make peace with Russia. AFP

fight against Russia's far bigger and better-armed military.

"It will be difficult without your support," Mr. Zelenskyy said on Fox - Mr.

Trump's favourite news channel.

Mr. Zelenskyy's olive branch came hours after the extraordinary Oval Office scene where the years-

long U.S. policy of massive support for Ukraine's fight against the Russian invasion collapsed in a shouting match.

The row saw European leaders scramble to voice support for Ukraine after Mr. Zelenskyy was made to leave the White House early and without signing a minerals-sharing deal seen as vital to an eventual U.S.-brokered truce.

During the clash, played out in front of U.S. and international media, Mr. Trump and Vice-President J.D. Vance shouted at Mr. Zelenskyy, accusing him of not being "thankful" and refusing to accept the two leaders' proposed truce terms.

Uncertainty looms as first phase of truce due to expire

Agence France-Presse
GAZA CITY

The first phase of the Israel-Hamas truce is drawing to a close on Saturday, but negotiations on the next stage, which should secure a permanent ceasefire, have so far been inconclusive.

The ceasefire took effect on January 19 after more than 15 months of war sparked by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

Over the initial six-week phase, Gaza militants freed 25 living hostages and returned the bodies of eight others to Israel, in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

A second phase of the truce was supposed to secure the release of dozens of hostages in Gaza and pave the way for a more permanent end to the war.



Dire straits: Muslim worshippers pray in Gaza City on the first day of the holy fasting month of Ramadan on March 1. AFP

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had sent a delegation to Cairo, and mediator Egypt said "intensive talks" on the second phase had begun with the presence of delegations from Israel as well as fellow mediators Qatar and the U.S. But by early Saturday, there was no sign

of consensus, and Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said the group rejected "the extension of the first phase in the formulation proposed by the occupation (Israel)".

He called on mediators "to oblige the occupation to abide by the agreement in its various stages".

PKK declares truce with Turkiye after 40 years of conflict

Agence France-Presse
ISTANBUL

Outlawed Kurdish militants on Saturday declared a ceasefire with Turkiye following a landmark call by jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan asking the group to disband and end more than four decades of armed struggle. It was the first reaction from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) after Mr. Ocalan this week called for the dissolution of the group and asked it to lay down arms.

"In order to pave the way for the implementation of leader Apo's call for peace and democratic society, we are declaring a ceasefire effective from today," the PKK executive committee said referring to



Abdullah Ocalan

Mr. Ocalan.

The PKK, designated a terrorist group by Turkiye, the U.S. and the European Union, has waged an insurgency since 1984 with the aim of carving out a homeland for Kurds, who account for around 20% of Turkiye's 85 million people.

23 Ahmadis arrested for offering Friday prayers in Pakistan

Press Trust of India
LAHORE

As many as 23 members of minority Ahmadi community were arrested in Punjab province of Pakistan for offering 'Friday prayers,' prohibited for them under law.

The police received a call that 27 Ahmadis were offering juma (Friday) prayers at their place of worship at Daska, Sialkot, some 100 km from Lahore.

'Ahmadis' prayer leader Arshad Sahi was giving Friday sermon and was reading Islamic verses and other Ahmadis were listening to him, a police officer said on Saturday.

"As local Muslims' sentiments were hurt, police registered an FIR against

Pakistan's Parliament in 1974 had declared the minority Ahmadi community as non-Muslims

those 27 Ahmadis under section 298 C of Pakistan Penal Code," the official said and added that 23 of them were arrested.

Section 298 C criminalises Ahmadis who refer to themselves as Muslim.

Although Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims, Pakistan's Parliament in 1974 declared the community as non-Muslims. A decade later, they were not just banned from calling themselves Muslims but were also barred from practising aspects of Islam.

Trump likely to sign order designating English as the official language of U.S.

Associated Press
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump is expected to sign an executive order designating English as the official language of the country, according to the White House.

The order will allow government agencies and organisations that receive federal funding to choose whether to continue to offer documents and services in language other than English, according to a fact sheet about the impending order.

Mr. Trump had been expected to sign the order on Friday.



The order will allow government agencies to choose whether to continue to offer documents in languages other than English. AP

But by Friday night, the White House had not announced the order had been signed and did not immediately respond to a

message seeking comment.

The executive order will rescind a mandate from former President Bill Clin-

ton that required the government and organisations that received federal funding to provide language assistance to non-English speakers.

'Promoting unity' Designating English as the national language "promotes unity, establishes efficiency in government operations, and creates a pathway for civic engagement," according to the White House.

Within hours of Mr. Trump's inauguration last month, the new administration took down the Spanish language version of the official White House website.

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EFFUSIVE IN PRAISE

Words can't express how good a player Kohli has been: Rahul



Virat Kohli, if he takes the field on Sunday, will feature in his 300th ODI. K.L. Rahul feels the batter still has a lot left in the tank. "That (300) is a lot of ODIs. Words can't express how good a player he has been and what a great servant of Indian cricket he has been. Hopefully, there are many more hundreds left for him," said Rahul.

ALL IS WELL

Mitchell recovers from illness and is available for the India match



New Zealand all-rounder Daryl Mitchell, who had a long session in the nets on Friday, has recovered from his illness and is available for Sunday's final league game against India. Mitchell's replacement Rachin Ravindra had scored a hundred against Bangladesh and it remains to be seen who he will replace if he plays.

OUT OF ACTION

Opener Short likely to miss Champions Trophy semifinal



Australian opener Matthew Short will likely miss the Champions Trophy semifinal against either India or New Zealand after the in-form batter suffered a quad injury in the washed out match against Afghanistan in Lahore. Short had scored a 15-ball 20 on Friday but had looked in visible pain before he was dismissed.

EXTRA TRAVEL

Uncertainty over semifinal venue sees Australia and SA fly to Dubai



The Australian and South African teams will fly into Dubai ahead of the Champions Trophy semifinals, even though it remains uncertain whether their match will be held in Dubai or Lahore. The venue decision hinges on the outcome of the last Group-A match between India and New Zealand on Sunday.

Who will emerge first among equals?

India and New Zealand's final league encounter is inconsequential with both teams already sealing their semifinal spot; the victor, though, will claim the Group-A top spot and some brownie points ahead of the knockouts; the Men in Blue's top-order will need to fire against the Kiwi bowling attack

CHAMPIONS TROPHY

S. Dipak Ragav
DUBAI

The Champions Trophy format is designed to ensure that every game is important, and even a single loss in a three-match league stage can potentially mean a first-round exit.

By having only the top eight nations, the expectation is that teams will be evenly matched. While this is the ideal scenario, it seldom happens, and the story of the 2025 edition has been no different.

India and New Zealand, having already booked their semifinal berths after clinical wins over Bangladesh and Pakistan, will play in the final league encounter (Group-A) on Sunday at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium in what is essentially a dead rubber.

Spin it to win it

The Men in Blue's success has been built around their three-pronged spin attack, which has restricted the opposition to modest totals that have been easily chased down.

It did not help that Bangladesh and Pakistan had only one front-line spinner, who the Indian batters were happy to see off and



Suspense continues: It remains to be seen if Shami and Rohit, coming off an injury scare, sit out the final group game. AFP

score off the others.

The think-tank will be happy that key batters like Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli, who could play his 300th ODI, have scored centuries in the first two outings respectively. Shreyas Iyer and K.L. Rahul, too, got going in crucial situations.

However, Rohit Sharma's men will face a much more formidable challenge next considering the Black

Caps' squad depth in all departments.

The 0-3 Test series loss last year will be fresh in India's minds, and the New Zealand batting lineup is largely similar to the one that was part of the historic triumph. The Kiwi batters have shown they can play on tweaker-friendly surfaces and have a good mix of left- and right-handed options in the top-eight.

Besides having a solid

pace battery, New Zealand also has a penetrative spin attack led by skipper Mitchell Santner and off-spinners Michael Bracewell and Glenn Phillips.

India's batters struggled on the turning pitches during the three-match ODI series in Sri Lanka, and will face their first stern test of the competition.

The big talking point in the build-up to this tie is whether the teams will

look to rest a few players with the short turnaround before the semifinals scheduled on Tuesday (for India) and Wednesday (for New Zealand).

Against Pakistan, pace spearhead Mohammed Shami, clutching his shin, walked off the field for a few overs before returning to bowl again. The team could be tempted to bring left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh for the former if it

wants to take a cautious approach ahead of the semifinal. Similarly, Rohit had a hamstring issue in the previous game, though the skipper appeared fine and batted for nearly an hour in the nets on Friday.

Rishabh Pant could be his likely replacement if the captain opts to rest. Off-spinner Washington Sundar could also be in the mix considering the number of left-handers in the Black Caps line-up.

Though the stakes are not high for this match, the two standout teams will want to keep the momentum going and top the group.

The teams (from):

India: Rohit Sharma (Capt.), Shubman Gill (Vice-capt.), Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, K.L. Rahul (wk), Rishabh Pant (wk), Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Mohammed Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Ravindra Jadeja and Varun Chakaravarty.

New Zealand: Mitchell Santner (Capt.), Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Matt Henry, Tom Latham (wk), Daryl Mitchell, Will O'Rourke, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Ben Sears, Nathan Smith, Kane Williamson, Will Young and Kyle Jamieson.

Match officials: On-field umpires: Michael Gough and Richard Illingworth; TV umpire: Adrian Holdstock; Fourth umpire: Paul Reiffel; Referee: David Boon.

Match starts at 2.30 p.m. IST.

India-New Zealand H2H in ODIs

	M	India	New Zealand	T	NR
Overall	118	60	50	1	7
In Champions Trophy	1	0	1	0	0

New Zealand won by four wickets (final, Nairobi, 2000)

We have all bases covered, says Kiwi all-rounder Phillips

S. Dipak Ragav
DUBAI

New Zealand all-rounder Glenn Phillips believes his side has all bases covered ahead of his team's final league match in the Champions Trophy against India here on Sunday.

"In terms of scouting and things going on, we have our game plans coming up against India. We do have a lot of bases covered, regardless of the situation that we are going to be facing," said Phillips.

On meeting India at a venue where run-scoring has not been easy and their opponent having already played two games, the 28-year-old was confident about his team's plans.

"(It will be about) how can we rotate strike and take the game deep and give ourselves a chance to launch an attack at the death to put a competitive score on the board. If we are chasing, it becomes crucial to limit those dot balls in the middle overs with how good their spinners are," explained Phillips on the way to tackle Indian tweekers.



We are fortunate we have a lot fewer players than India has to choose from. It means we can afford to give guys slightly longer run and that does give a lot of confidence. At the same time, if you aren't performing, there is always someone waiting

The Black Caps have been in Pakistan for three weeks playing a tri-series and the first two games of this tournament. Coming to the UAE, Phillips was confident of adapting to the new conditions.

Adaptable

"I think we pride ourselves on being as adaptable as possible. That doesn't necessarily mean everything is foolproof and that we are always going to come out on top. To be able to come to a new situation in a new environment, we rise to the challenge and always fight no matter what," said Phillips.

SA crushes England, seals semifinal spot as group topper

Press Trust of India
KARACHI

South Africa secured its place in the Champions Trophy semifinals after hammering a struggling England by seven wickets in the last Group B match here on Saturday.

South Africa dismissed England for just 179 before chasing down the target with 20.5 overs to spare.

The Proteas topped the group with five points from three matches ahead of Australia (four points).

South Africa bundled out its opponent for the lowest total of the tournament this edition in just 38.2 overs.

Marco Jansen (3/39) shone with the new ball, while Wiaan Mulder (3/25) and Keshav Maharaj (2/35) applied pressure throughout the middle overs, ensuring that South Africa's knockout berth was secured even before the run chase began.

South Africa completed the chase with ease, reaching 181/3 in 29.1 overs, thanks to Rassie van der Dussen (72 not out) and Heinrich Klaasen (64). The



Jansen's triple strike pushed England on the back foot. AFP

two added 127 runs for the third wicket.

The scores: England 179 in 38.3 overs (Joe Root 37; Marco Jansen 3/39, Wiaan Mulder 3/25, Keshav Maharaj 2/35) lost to South Africa 181/3 in 29.1 overs (Rassie van der Dussen 72 n.o., Heinrich Klaasen 64).

Toss: England; **PoM:** Jansen.

Shafali, Jonassen on the rampage as DC routs RCB, marches into playoffs

WPL

Ashwin Achal
BENGALURU

After three straight defeats at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) was desperate to end the home leg on a high. It was not to be, as Smriti Mandhana's side crashed to yet another loss on Saturday, this time to Delhi Capitals (DC).

RCB (four points) tumbled to a nine-wicket loss to the table topper DC (10 points), which became the first side to qualify for the playoffs.

RCB had no answers to the might of Shafali Verma (80 n.o., 43b, 8x4, 4x6) and Jess Jonassen (61 n.o., 38b, 9x4, 1x6), who made light work of the 148-run target.

The duo put on a match-winning 146-run unbroken second-wicket partnership. As the batters began to grow in confidence, the packed house fell silent. A few clean hits later, the home faithful afforded gracious applause.

With a DC win around the corner, Kim Garth misjudged a regulation catch



No stopping 'em: Shafali and Jonassen helped Capitals run away with the game. K. MURALI KUMAR

in the deep and conceded a six - aptly summing up the Royal Challengers' disastrous run. After being asked to bat, RCB stumbled to a par score on the back of a fighting knock from Ellyse Perry (60 n.o., 47b, 3x4, 3x6). The Australian came in to bat early, as Smriti was dismissed cheaply for a fourth time.

Placing prime value on her wicket, Perry went

about her business efficiently. She found good company in Danielle Wyatt (21, 18b, 2x4, 1x6) and Raghvi Bist (33, 32b, 2x6). Raghvi's stumping in the 17th over stopped RCB from making a big score.

Along the way, Perry and RCB pacer Renuka Singh became the highest run-scorer and wicket-taker of the tournament respectively. These individual

accolades, however, count for little with the team in a deep hole.

The tournament now moves to Lucknow, for the last stage of round-robin games.

The scores: RCB 147/5 in 20 overs (Perry 60 n.o., Raghvi 33, Shikha 2/24, Shree Charani 2/28) lost to Delhi Capitals 151/1 in 15.3 overs (Shafali 80 n.o., Jonassen 61 n.o.).

Toss: Capitals; **PoM:** Shafali.



Resilient show: Yuki and Popyrin emerged victorious after going down in the first set. GETTY IMAGES

Yuki and Popyrin win doubles title in Dubai

Sports Bureau

Yuki Bhambri and Alexei Popyrin of Australia beat second seeds Harri Heliovaara of Finland and Henry Patten of Britain 3-6, 7-6 (12), [10-8] in the doubles final of the \$3,415,700 ATP tennis tournament in Dubai on Saturday.

It was the first title of the season and 23rd doubles crown of his career for Yuki. It was the maiden doubles title for the 25-year-old Popyrin, ranked 27th in singles.

The Indo-Aussie team had beaten the top seeds in similar fashion after losing the first set in the first round, and had been pulling through every match in the super tie-break. The

champion team won 500 ATP points and \$198,880. The runner-up team collected 300 points and \$106,060.

In the \$710,735 ATP event in Santiago, Chile, Rithvik Bollipalli and Nicolas Barrientos set up a title clash against top seeds Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni of Argentina.

Other results: \$2,763,440 ATP, Acapulco, Mexico: Doubles (semifinals): Sadio Doumbia & Fabien Reboul (Fra) bt Sriram Balaji & Miguel Reyes-Varela (Mex) 7-6(4), 6-3.

\$710,735 ATP, Santiago, Chile: Doubles (semifinals): Nicolas Barrientos (Col) & Rithvik Bollipalli bt Guido Andreozzi (Arg) & Theo Arribage (Fra) 4-6, 7-6(7), [10-5].

Sport

Time And Tide showcases his class in the Sprinters Cup again

Ramiel takes the honours with consummate ease in the Stayers Cup to give jockey Sandesh a delightful double

RACING
Cyrus I. Madan
H. Kamal Khan
CHENNAI

Time waits for no one and you just can't stem the tide. The aptly-named Time And Tide, a dark bay son of Dali out of Starlet, proved that age-old saying beyond any doubt when he strolled away with the Zavaray S. Poonawalla Sprinters Cup for his second successive victory in this premier Grade 1 event.



Champion outfit: The breeders of Time And Tide Angad Singh and Guralp Singh, jockey A. Sandesh, owners Delha Poonawalla, Rishad Pandole, Vikram Bachhawatt, and Simone Poonawalla Pandole with the Madras Race Club chairman Muthiah Ramaswamy after receiving the reward for the success in the Zavaray S. Poonawalla Sprinters Cup. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM



Rewarding a winner: Arun Alagappan presenting the Coromandel Gromor Stayers Cup to trainer Bharat Singh in the presence of the owners Joydeep Datta Gupta, Achuthan Siddharth, jockey A. Sandesh, the Madras Race Club chairman Muthiah Ramaswamy, and others. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

THE RESULTS: 1. DELHI RACE CLUB MILLION (1,200M): WIN WIN (David Allan) 1, Dhantaras (Suraj Narredu) 2, Verrazano (Yash Narredu) 3 and Bomber Jet (D.S. Deora) 4. 2-3/4 and hd. Im, 11.92s. ₹47 (w), 12, 15 and 33 (p), SHP: 36, THP: 127, FP: 257, Q: 57, Tla: 2,105. Owner: M/s. Sarainaga Racing. Trainer: J.E. Mckeown.
2. MYSORE RACE CLUB MILLION (1,600M): KING KE (G. Vivek) 1, Luca (A. Sandesh) 2, Star Honour (Suraj Narredu) 3 and Vafadar (P. Trevor) 4. Not run: Desert Kingdom. Nose, 4-1/2 and 4-3/4. Im, 38.93s. ₹13 (w), 12 and 13 (p), SHP: 69, THP: 46, FP: 45, Q: 46, Tla: 103. Owners: Mr. Vijay B. Shrike, Mrs. Vijay B. Shrike, Mr. Jay V. Shirke, Mrs. Daisy K.D.B. Mehta and Dara K. Mehta rep. Darashaw Bloodstock & Mr. D.R. Thacker rep. DT Racing & Breeders. Trainer: P. Shroff.
3. JUSTICE KULDIP SINGH MEMORIAL MILLION (4,000M): THESALIAN (G. Vivek) 1, Victoria Maker (David Allan) 2, Lightning Blitz (Suraj Narredu) 3 and Cosette (N.S. Parmar) 4. 5, nk. and 2-1/2. Im, 25.34s. ₹28 (w), 19 and 14 (p), SHP: 24, THP: 22, FP: 101, Q: 21, Tla: 104. Owners: M/s.

Rapar's Galloping Stars rep. by Mr. Rajendran & Mr. S.P. Thiruvavukkarasu. Trainer: Prasanna.
4. BANGALORE TURF CLUB MILLION (1,800M): SWEET FRAGRANCE (D.S. Deora) 1, Kings Wali (Hindu Singh) 2 and Wolf Creek (C. Umesh) 4. Shd, Ink and Ink. Im, 51.89s. ₹1,351 (w), 429, 58 and 114 (p), SHP: 157, THP: 131, FP: 12,471 (c/o), Q: 10,132 (c/o), Tla: 49,710 (c/o). Owner: Mr. Champakal Zaveri. Trainer: P. Krishna.
5. ZAVARAY S. POONAWALLA SPRINTERS CUP (GR. I) (1,200M): TIME AND TIDE (DALI-STARLET) (A. SANDESH), MEROP (Western Aristocrat-Panamera) (Yash Narredu) 2, MASATO (Dali-Elusive

Legend) (Akshay Kumar) 3 and MISS AMERICAN PIE (Gleneagles-Reine Australe) N.S. Parmar 4. 1 and nose. Im, 9.44s. ₹19 (w), 19 and 28 (p) SHP: 94, THP: 98, FP: 83, Q: 66, Tla: 912. Owners: M/s. Bachhawatt Farms rep. by Mr. Vikram Bachhawatt. Trainer: A.S. Jodha.
6. SANS CRAINTES STUB MILLION (4,000M): BHARAT (Akshay Kumar) 1, Royal Defender (K. Mukesh Kumar) 2, Andorra (R. Gochhi) 3 and Swaga (Hindu Singh) 4. Not run: Excellent Lass. 7, Ink and hd. Im, 23.73s. ₹16 (w), 12, 27 and 32 (p), SHP: 50, THP: 65, FP: 74, Q: 61, Tla: 902. Owners: M/s. Rapar's Galloping Stars rep. by Mr. Rajendran, Mr. Ronak

J. Kimmane & Mr. Ananth lyenger. Trainer: Prasanna.
7. COROMANDEL GROMOR STAYERS CUP (GR. I), (3,000M): RAMIEL (WIN LEGEND-ANGELIQUE) (A. SANDESH), TRUTH (Pinson-Lady Be Good) (P. Trevor) 1, MESCALITO (Win Legend-Adoring Bay) (Akshay Kumar) 3 and GOLDEN THUNDER (Crystal Ocean-High Above) (Antony Raj) 4. Not run: Monteverdi. 5-1/2, 2-3/4 and 2.3m, 11.36s. ₹226 (w), 14, 11 and 45 (p), SHP: 49, THP: 46, FP: 413, Q: 60, Tla: 2,964. Owners: Mr. Joydeep Datta Gupta, Poddar's Thandai Ltd., Mr. Achuthan Siddharth, Mr. Sanjay Datta Gupta, Ms. Mona Grewal Jatai, Mr. Pratik Chitlangia, Mr. In-

drajrit Roy, Mr. Jeet Banerjee & Mr. Sumit Muzumder. Trainer: Bharath Singh.
8. ROYAL CALCUTTA TURF CLUB MILLION (1,400M): PERFECT LEGEND (Suraj Narredu) 1, Elfin Knight (A. Sandesh) 2, Grey Beauty (David Allan) 3 and Stradordinario (K. Mukesh Kumar) 4. 4-1/2, 3-1/4 and 2. Im, 23.39s. ₹23 (w), 15, 18 and 24 (p), SHP: 52, THP: 70, FP: 39, Q: 23, Tla: 779. Owner: Mr. B.E. Vasanth Kumar. Trainer: Warren Singh.
Jkt: ₹5,25,653 (2 tkts.), Runner-up: 2,25,280 (2 tkts.), Mini Jkt: 1,446 (211 tkts.), Tr (i): 11,254 (5 tkts.), (ii): 388 (309 tkts.).

Dyf primed to deliver in Invitation Cup

Cyrus I. Madan

"If there are two greys in a race, one of them will invariably win," goes an old saying in racing. It's a superstition with a fair number of followers, as it is backed up to an extent by results.

But what can one expect when five greys – Dyf, Touch Of Grey, Shubankar, Pyrite and Galahad – line up to face the starter in the field of 13 for the HPSL Royal Arion Invitation Cup on Sunday? From 2021 to 2024, the Invitation Cup

has been won by a grey – Alluring Silver in 2021 and then Juliette's hat-trick.

For me, this year's race boils down to a battle of the ages and a battle of colour. It's between the six-year-old Dyf and the 4-year-old bays Ranquelino and Redefined.

Dyf won the Gr.1 Indian Champion Cup in Kolkata and was the winner of the Stayers Cup last year. He was also triumphant in the South India Derby before that. Ranquelino is a champion in his own right and a gutsy one too. With two

Derby wins in a span of seven days, it makes him the Rocky Balboa of the equine breed. He beat Redefined convincingly the last time they met, but that was Redefined's first run after a three month lay-off. It could be a lot closer this time.

All three have a lot going for them but, if I had to put my neck on the line, I would go for Dyf and give him the edge over Ranquelino. He has oodles of class and experience and seems to be in his prime. Though Ranquelino has not put a

foot wrong, he might find himself a little out of his comfort zone taking on opposition beyond his own age group. So to end, for me it looks as though a grey just could make it five in a row!

The Major P.K. Mehra Super Mile looks a carbon copy of the Invitation with the 4-year-olds Santissimo and African Gold taking on the 6-year-old Once You Go Black. Though tactics and the run of the race will play a major role, I would stay with Santissimo to prevail over the other two.

WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS SAY

MAJOR P.K. MEHRA
SUPER MILE CUP

James McKeown: Once You Go Black is in great form after his last Gr.3 win in Mumbai. He's got the class and will be right there.
Satish Narredu: Shamrock has always run top races in Chennai and am sure he will give a good account of himself.

Parvati Byramji: African Gold is fit and has travelled well. Will run a big race.

Pesi Shroff: Santissimo is back to his best trip and I think he has a great chance although he is meeting classier older horses for the first time.

HPSL ROYAL ARION INDIAN TURF INVITATION CUP

Satish Narredu: I have **Champions Way** and **Touch Of Grey** in the line-up and look forward to them giving a good account of themselves.

Adhiraj Singh Jodha: Dyf has done everything right and he is always been consistent and genuine. His last win in the Gr.1 Indian Champion Cup in Kolkata was a good lead up and I think he will be right there.

Warren Singh: Shubankar is going from strength to strength. This is the first time I have targeted over 2400 metres, and if he gets the extra 400 he could beat them all.

Pesi Shroff: Duke Of Tuscan only came to me a few months ago but proved that he is top class when winning the Golconda Derby and finishing less than four lengths behind in the Indian Derby. He comes in with a great chance.

Sulaiman Attaollahi: Positano was unlucky in both the Bangalore 2000 Guineas and the Indian Derby. He is very well and I hope the number plates on the board will be different this time.
Darius Byramji: Ranquelino is a gutsy horse who has shown his class when winning two Gr.1 Derbies in seven days. He has had a rest and is well, but is meeting older horses for the first time. All said and done, he will run a great race.
Prasanna Kumar: Redefined finished behind Ranquelino in the Bangalore Derby, but came into that race after a lay-off of almost three months. He's going to be right there at the busy end in the Invitation.

In-form Ranquelino for the Invitation Cup

CHENNAI: The HPSL Royal Arion Indian Turf Invitation Cup (Gr. I) (2,400m) to be run on Sunday afternoon has a field of 13. Among them the Bengaluru challenger Ranquelino, who is in rousing form, has an edge over his rivals. A sum of ₹5,00,000 will be added to the combined jackpot pool, while ₹1,00,000 each will be added to the Mini Jackpot, first and second treble respectively.

JAPAN CUP (2,000M), rated 20 to 45, 1:30 pm. 1. Royal Nobility (1) Farid Ansari 61.5, 2. Gold Fame (4) P. Vikram 60.5, 3. Beyond Stars (5) K. Mukesh Kumar 60, 4. Kallania (3) N. Darshan 59.5, 5. Edmund (2) M.S. Deora 58.5 and 6. Flourish (6) Vinod Shinde 50.
ROYAL NOBILITY: An impressive winner over 2,000m in her last start; retains form. **BEYOND STARS:** His last run over 1,400m at Mumbai is best ignored; moving well in the morning trials here. **KALLANIA:** Won a 1,600m comfortably in the lower class; continues to shine in the morning trials.

1. ROYAL NOBILITY, 2. BEYOND STARS, 3. KALLANIA
2. OLYMPIA TECH PARK MILLION (1,600M), rated 60 to 85, 2:00: 1. Mayne Magic (4) Antony Raj 60, 2. Startkova (6) R. Gochhi 57, 3. Golden Warrior (2) Yash Narredu 56.5, 4. Loch Lomond (8) David Allan 56.5, 5. Divine Art (5) Suraj Narredu 54, 6. Desert Hero (1) Gaurav Singh 53.5, 7. Key To The Mint (9) N.S. Parmar 53.5, 8. Zuri (3) P. Trevor 53.5, 9. Emphatic (10) G. Vivek 53 and 10. Pharazon (7) Neeraj 52.5.
MAYNE MAGIC: Won three of his four starts at Bengaluru; continues to be in good form. **GOLDEN WARRIOR:** After winning a 1,800m in the lower class, finished a neck second to stablemate Schnell over 1,600m; in fine trim. **DESERT**

HERO: Deserves following on his consistency. **ZURI:** Justified favouritism by winning a 1,400m in the lower class; retains form. **EMPHATIC:** Third to Mayne Magic over 1,600m; well tuned.
1. EMPHATIC, 2. MAYNE MAGIC, 3. ZURI

3. AVT CENTENARY MILLION (2,000M), 3-y-o only, 2:30: 1. Echoes Of Time (6) Hindu Singh 56, 2. Vibrant Bliss (1) P. Trevor 56, 3. Joondalup (4) A. Sandesh 54.5, 4. Lena (2) Akshay Kumar 54.5, 5. Merlet (5) K. Mukesh Kumar 54.5 and 6. Sweet Redemption (3) Suraj Narredu 54.5.
ECHOES OF TIME: A facile winner over 1,200m on his debut; maintains form. **VIBRANT BLISS:** Poised for a hat-trick. **JOONDALUP:** Left the maiden status in a resolute manner; may repeat. **SWEET REDEMPTION:** A close third to Magentar (1,200m) on her debut; in fine trim.

1. ECHOES OF TIME, 2. SWEET REDEMPTION, 3. JOONDALUP
4. SURESH MAHINDRA MULTI MILLION TROPHY (GR. II) (1,400M), 4-y-o & over (Terms), 3:00: 1. Knotty Charmer (7) Antony Raj 60, 2. Siege Courageous (1) David Allan 58, 3. Prana (5) Suraj Narredu 57, 4. Confident Game (2) C. Brisson 56, 5. El Greco (6) P. Trevor 56, 6. Glorious King (8) Yash Narredu 56, 7. Imperial Blue (12) L.A. Rozario 56, 8. Kalamatis (10) Srinath 56, 9. Mystic Bond (3) R. Vaibhav 56, 10. The Protector (–) (–) 56, 11. Yukan (11) Akshay Kumar 56, 12. Snowfall (9) G. Vivek 54.5 and 13. Dubai Princess (4) K. Nazil 53.
SIEGE COURAGEOUS: A consistent runner; may raise a winning gallop. **PRANA:** Ran Shamrock to 3/4 length over 1,600m; in fine condition. **EL GRECO:** After winning two races, finished a close second to Once You Go Black (1,600m); well

tuned. **GLORIOUS KING:** A rousing performer; in great heart.
1. EL GRECO, 2. SIEGE COURAGEOUS, 3. PRANA

5. MAJ. P.K. MEHRA MEMORIAL SUPER MILE (GR. I), (1,600M), 4-y-o & over (Terms), 3:30: 1. Iron Clad (1) Srinath 59, 2. Once You Go Black (3) David Allan 59, 3. Sea The Sun (5) Vinod Shinde 59, 4. Shamrock (7) Suraj Narredu 59, 5. African Gold (4) P. Trevor 57.5, 6. Santissimo (2) Oisín Murphy 57.5 and 7. Tehani (6) Akshay Kumar 57.5.
IRON CLAD: A consistent runner; in good condition. **ONCE YOU GO BLACK:** An impressive winner of his last start over 1,600m at Mumbai; retains form. **AFRICAN GOLD:** Well prepared. **SANTISSIMO:** His nowhere in Ranquelino's Indian Derby is best ignored.
1. SANTISSIMO, 2. ONCE YOU GO BLACK, 3. AFRICAN GOLD

6. ROYAL WESTERN INDIA TURF CLUB MILLION (1,200M), rated 80 & above, 4:15: 1. Czar (9) Antony Raj 60, 2. New Dimension (4) Yash Narredu 60, 3. Star Clary (1) Suraj Narredu 57, 4. Dedicate (8) Hindu Singh 53.5, 5. Soft Whisper (6) K. Mukesh Kumar 53.5, 6. The Flying Feet (2) P. Sai Kumar 52.5, 7. Perfect Blend (5) Neeraj 52, 8. Never Give In (3) G. Vivek 51.5 and 9. Ricardo (7) C. Umesh 50.5.
CZAR: His last run is best ignored. **NEW DIMENSION:** Won two of her four starts; working well. **STAR GLORY:** Runs with an upsetting chance. **NEVER GIVE IN:** Won his last two starts impressively; may make it three-in-a-row. **RECARDO:** Appeals on weight.
1. NEVER GIVE IN, 2. NEW DIMENSION, 3. RECARDO

7. HPSL ROYAL ARION INDIAN TURF INVITATION CUP (GR. I), (2,400M), 4-y-o & over (Terms), 4:45: 1. Champions Way (6) Vinod

Shinde 59, 2. Dyf (4) P. Trevor 59, 3. Galahad (2) Antony Raj 59, 4. Shubankar (11) C. Umesh 59, 5. Touch Of Grey (3) Suraj Narredu 59, 6. Duke Of Tuscan (8) Oisín Murphy 57, 7. Mandarino (5) Neeraj 57, 8. Positano (13) Akshay Kumar 57, 9. Ranquelino (7) A. Sandesh 57, 10. Redefined (12) David Allan 57, 11. Rodney (9) L.A. Rozario 57, 12. Pyrite (1) K. Mukesh Kumar 55.5 and 13. Queen Of Kings (10) Yash Narredu 55.5.
DYF: A game galloper; may spring a surprise. **DUKE OF TUSCANY:** After leading in the straight, finished fifth to Ranquelino (2,400m); working well. **POSITANO:** An impressive third to Ranquelino in the Indian Derby; may turn the tables. **RANQUELINO:** Winner of the Indian Derby at Mumbai; in great heart.
1. RANQUELINO, 2. POSITANO, 3. DYF

8. HYDERABAD RACE CLUB MILLION (1,200M), rated 40 to 65, 5:30: 1. Flight On (8) P. Trevor 60.5, 2. Del Aviz (3) Akshay Kumar 60, 3. Gold Ride (4) David Allan 59.5, 4. Emperor Vikram (7) C. Brisson 59, 5. Tesorino (10) K. Mukesh Kumar 58, 6. Phoenomenon (9) L.A. Rozario 57, 7. Groovin (6) R.N. Darshan 55.5, 8. Dazzling Princess (5) D.S. Deora 52, 9. Cache (1) Neeraj 51 and 10. Divine Star (2) G. Vivek 51.
FLIGHT ON: An impressive winner of his last start over 1,200m at Bengaluru; may repeat. **DEL AVIZ:** A consistent runner; in good nick. **GOLD RIDE:** Finished second in his last three starts; may raise a winning gallop. **EMPEROR VIKRAM:** Winner of his last two starts; may complete hat-trick. **DIVINE STAR:** Appeals on weights.
1. FLIGHT ON, 2. DIVINE STAR, 3. DEL AVIZ
Jkt.: 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8; Mini Jkt.: 5, 6, 7 & 8; Tr (i): 2, 3 & 4; (ii): 6, 7 & 8.

TAI awards given away



Recognising excellence: Madras Race Club chairman Muthiah Ramaswamy, third from right, presenting the 'Legend of Indian Horse Racing' award to R. Surender Reddy, fourth from left, at the Indian Turf Invitation Cup Awards nite on Saturday. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

The following awards were given away at the Indian Turf Invitation Cup awards nite at Madras Race Club on Saturday:

Champion owner: Dr. M.A.M. Ramaswamy Chettiar Of Chettinad Charitable Trust represented by A.C. Muthiah.
Champion trainer: Pesi Shroff.
Champion jockey: Yash Narredu. **Champion stud farm:** Poonawalla Group Of Farms represented Zavaray S. Poonawalla. **Champion horse:** Dyf (Cougar Mountain-Soak). **Hall Of Fame award:** Dr. P.C. Reddy. **Legend Of Indian Racing award:** R. Surender Reddy.



Coveted honour: Dr. P.C. Reddy receiving 'Hall of Fame' award from the MRC chairman Muthiah Ramaswamy. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Mochizuki meets Holt; Anirudh-Ho duo wins

BENGALURU OPEN

N. Sudarshan
BENGALURU

Japan's Shintaro Mochizuki entered his third ATP Challenger singles final with a 6-1, 3-6, 6-4 victory over Australia's James McCabe in the Bengaluru Open at the KSLTA courts here on Saturday.

In a contest that ebbed and flowed for two hours and 23 minutes, Mochizuki, dressed in dark and staid grey, impressed with his meticulous game even as McCabe, in fluorescent green shorts and white sleeveless tee, couldn't get over the line despite his flamboyant shot-making.

In Sunday evening's final, the World No. 167 will take on American World No. 144 Brandon Holt, who got past Brit Billy Harris 6-2, 7-6(4).

The Mochizuki-McCabe fixture began under hot conditions, with the usual breeze that blows across the leafy environs of the Cubbon Park surprisingly non-existent.

It seemed to affect McCabe more, and Mochizuki, the 2019 junior Wimbledon champion, was up a double break in no time and soon took the set 6-1.

In the second, as temperatures cooled, McCabe managed to marry his ag-



Super Saturday! Ho and Anirudh defeated the second-seeded Australian pair of Bayldon and Romios in the final. SUDHAKARA JAIN

gression with precision and threatened the Mochizuki serve nearly every single time.

The first break came in the seventh game and the second in the ninth as the World No. 207 took the set 6-3 to level matters. The third set was see-saw.

Though not blessed with penetrative power, Mochizuki worked the angles, changed direction repeatedly and hit with a lot of top-spin.

That forced McCabe to dig deep and scamper all over, which, to his credit, he did rather well.

The two traded breaks once in the first six games but at 30-30 in the seventh, Mochizuki came up with a terrific down-the-line pass to bring up a break-point

and won the game by finishing on the right side of a long, capricious rally.

The hold to 5-3 was gutsy as Mochizuki erased two break-point opportunities, survived multiple deuces and closed with a fine one-two punch that left his opponent awestruck.

The end was swift as the Japanese player, on his second match-point, drilled a shot at McCabe's shoelaces, to which the latter had no answer.

In the doubles final, top seeds Anirudh Chandrasekar and Taipei's Ray Ho beat the second-seeded Australian duo Blake Bayldon and Matthew Christopher Romios 6-2, 6-4. This was Anirudh's sixth Challenger title overall, and first with Ho.

10-man Mumbai City hits back, denies Mohun Bagan

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Mumbai City FC played the final half-hour with 10 men but fought back from 0-2 down to secure a dramatic 2-2 draw against Mohun Bagan Super Giant in the Indian Super League here on Saturday.

The Islanders, now on 33 points from 22 games, are just one point away from securing a playoffs berth. Jamie Maclaren scored in the 32nd minute before Dimitri Petratos doubled the lead nine minutes later, curling a precise finish into



Rodrigues. ISL

the 57th minute led to Jon Total tapping in from close range to cut the deficit.

The Islanders' Vikram Pratap Singh was sent off after receiving a second yellow card in the 58th minute.

The 19-year-old Nathan Rodrigues headed home the equaliser, denying the Shield winner all three points.

The results:
At Mumbai: MCFC 2 (Torál 57, Rodrigues 89) drew with MBSG 2 (Maclaren 32, Petratos 41).
At Kochi: Kerala Blasters 1 (Korou Singh 34) drew with Jamsheer FC 1 (Milos Drinic 86-og).

IN BRIEF



Duplantis breaks his own pole vault world record

Swedish Olympic champion Armand Duplantis improved his own world record on Friday at the All Star Pole Vault in Clermont-Ferrand (France). After securing victory in the competition by clearing 6.02m, 'Mondo' Duplantis then took aim at the world record and raised the bar to 6.27m. He cleared it comfortably in his first attempt. It is the 11th time he has broken the record by 1cm since first claiming it with 6.16m in February 2020.

Tanisha & Dhruv lose in semis as Indian challenge ends

The Indian challenge at the German Open Super 300 badminton tournament at Mulheim an der Ruhr came to an end after the mixed doubles pair of Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila lost to Indonesia's Gloria Emanuelle Widjaja and Rehan Naufal Khusarjanto in the semifinals on Saturday. Tanisha and Dhruv went down 23-25, 21-10, 15-21.

The results: Mixed doubles: Semifinals: Gloria Emanuelle Widjaja & Rehan Naufal Khusarjanto bt Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila 25-23, 10-21, 21-15. **Quarterfinals:** Tanisha & Dhruv bt Wu Meng Ying & Gao Jia Xuan 21-14, 21-17. **Women: Quarterfinals:** Mia Blichfeldt bt Rakshitha Sree Santosh Ramaraj 21-12, 21-12; Riko Gunji bt Unnati Hooda 15-21, 25-23, 24-22. **Men: Quarterfinals:** Toma Junior Popov bt Tharun Manneppalli 16-21, 21-17, 21-8.

LIVE TELECAST

Ranji Trophy: (final), day 5, JioHotstar, 9.30 a.m.
Champions Trophy: India vs New Zealand, Star Sports 2 (SD & HD) & JioHotstar, 2.30 p.m.
Serie A: gxr.world, 5, 7.30, 10.30 p.m. & 1.15 a.m. (Monday)
LaLiga: gxr.world, 6.30, 8.45, 11 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Monday)
ISL: Sports 18-3 & JioHotstar, 7.30 p.m.
Bundesliga: Sony Sports Ten 2 (SD & HD) & LIV, 8 & 10 p.m.

Karun's ton puts Vidarbha on the verge of third title

The prolific batter adds 182 for the third wicket with Malewar after the side loses two quick wickets on the fourth morning: Kerala pays the price for dropping the batting mainstay on 31

RANJI TROPHY FINAL

P.K. Ajith Kumar
NAGPUR

Karun Nair loves to bat on and on. He loves it more if the stage is grander. Like a Ranji Trophy final, for instance. Back in 2014-15, he had made 328 to help Karnataka score a massive victory over Tamil Nadu.

A decade later, he has stamped his authority in another Ranji Trophy final. His unbeaten 132 (280b, 373m, 10x4, 2x6) has virtually ensured Vidarbha its third title in India's most prestigious domestic tournament.

Riding on Karun's classy knock, the host ended the fourth day at 249 for four at the VCA Stadium. It has an overall lead of 286 runs going into Sunday's final day.

This is Karun's ninth hundred across formats this season. It could easily have been 10th, if he hadn't been run out for 86 in the first innings.

The main reason behind what now looks like Vidarbha's match-winning first innings total was his fourth-wicket stand of 215 with Danish Malewar.

The two batters, who clearly love each other's company, frustrated Kerala on Saturday too, adding 182 for the third wicket.

And Vidarbha badly needed that partnership



On a roll: Karun brought up his ninth hundred of the domestic season. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

after the openers were back in the dressing room inside three overs.

Jalaj Saxena, the veteran off-spinner who came into the attack in just the second over, had Parth Rekha lunging forward only

to hear the unpleasant sound from behind, as the ball kept low and sneaked through the gate to disturb the stumps.

In the following over, Dhruv Shorey played well away from his body and

was caught by wicketkeeper Mohammed Azharuddeen, diving in front of slip.

At seven for two, Vidarbha was in trouble. It momentarily became nine for three, but Malewar, who was adjudged lbw to Jalaj, had a successful review. The 21-year-old, who had hit a sparkling hundred in the first innings, and his senior partner soon went about doing what they had been doing all season: accumulating runs with minimum risk.

Malewar (73, 162b, 5x4) was eventually caught at slip off Akshay Chandran. But Karun continued to bat serenely. He drove sweetly and when opportunities came, he also went aerial, like he did against Aditya Sarwate, lofting him for successive sixes.

Before that he had given a chance when he was on 31, but was dropped at slip by Akshay off Eden Apple Tom. Karun made Kerala pay dearly.

The scores:
Vidarbha — 1st Innings: 379.
Kerala — 1st Innings: 342.
Vidarbha — 2nd Innings: Parth Rekha b Jalaj 1, Dhruv Shorey c Azharuddeen b Nidheesh 5, Danish Malewar c Baby b Akshay 73, Karun Nair (batting) 132, Yash Rathod lbw b Sarwate 24, Akshay Wadkar (batting) 4; Extras (b-5, lb-3, nb-2): 10; Total (for four wickets, in 90 overs): 249.
Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-7, 3-189, 4-238.
Kerala bowling: Nidheesh 10-2-37-1, Jalaj 32-7-76-1, Eden 10-0-38-0, Sarwate 25-8-55-1, Basil 4-1-6-0, Akshay 9-1-29-1.

I was determined to make it count in the second innings: Karun

P.K. Ajith Kumar
NAGPUR

'Nine', said Karun Nair through his hands.

No prize for guessing what he meant. That was his ninth hundred of the season across formats. So after taking the single to complete his century for Vidarbha in the Ranji Trophy final, he took off his helmet, looked towards his dressing room, and made that signal.

"I had been talking to one of our throwers and said that I would show him 'nine' if I scored a hundred in this match," Karun explained shortly after remaining unbeaten on 132 at the end of the fourth day.

When asked if it was only meant for the dressing room, as the national selectors were also present at the stadium, he said with a mischievous smile, "But you can take it however you like."

Karun certainly must have made the selectors take note.

The man who scored a triple hundred in only his third Test is making his bat talk loudly.

He now has 860 runs, with four hundreds, in the Ranji Trophy this season, to add to the 779 runs in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, with five hundreds.

He is hoping to add to the Ranji Trophy tally. "It has been an important knock for me as we were seven for two when I went in," he said.

"It was important for me to stay there and hold



Standout performer: Karun has let his bat do the talking. NIRMAL HARINDRAN



It has been an important knock for me as we were seven for two when I went in

one end. I wanted to play the whole day. We want to come back for the final day and bat as long as we can." He admitted he was very disappointed after getting run out for 86 in the first innings.

Determined

"I knew the hundred was there for me to take," he said. "So I was determined to make it count in the second innings. But batting on the fourth day is never easy, but I wanted to go out there and give my best."

Gukesh attains career-best ranking; climbs to No. 3

CHESS

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India's reigning World champion D. Gukesh climbed to a career-high No. 3 ranking, while compatriot R. Praggnanandhaa broke back into the top-10 in the latest FIDE classical ratings released on Saturday.

The 18-year-old Gukesh, who has been in sublime form ever since he beat China's Ding Liren to clinch the world title in Singapore in December, has gained 10 points and now has a rating of 2787.

Gukesh, who lost the Tata Steel Masters title in Wijk aan Zee to Praggnanand-



Gukesh. FILE PHOTO

haa on a tiebreak, is behind second-placed Hikaru Nakamura (2802) while and Norway's Magnus Carlsen (2833) continues to be the top-ranked chess player in the world.

The Indian Grandmaster has overtaken compatriot Arjun Erigiasi and USA's Fabiano Caruana. Erigiasi, who was the

highest-ranked Indian for a long time, has moved down to fifth with a rating of 2777.

Praggnanandhaa, who is currently competing in the Prague Masters, is back in the top 10 for the first time since July last year thanks to his win at the Tata Steel Masters.

He has moved up to the eighth spot after gaining 17 pointing. He has a 2758 rating.

Koneru Humpy remains the sole Indian in the top 10 in the women's list at number six with a rating of 2528, while R.Vaishali (2484) and Harika Dronavalli (2483) are 14th and 16th respectively.

The FIDE rating are different from the live Elo ratings.

Rodri back in training as Man City eyes return ahead of schedule

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

Rodri was back in training as the Manchester City midfielder looked to return ahead of schedule after suffering a serious knee injury. Rodri was expected to miss the rest of the season after rupturing an anterior cruciate ligament in September.

The 28-year-old's absence has been a key factor in Pep Guardiola's side's dismal form this term. The 2024 Ballon d'Or winner could be back quicker than expected after he was seen taking part in an individual session on Friday.

Prague Masters: Praggnanandhaa scores first win, Aravindh jumps into lead

Press Trust of India
PRAGUE

Indian Grandmaster R. Praggnanandhaa cruised to a smooth victory against Nguyen Thai Dai Van of Czechia, while Aravindh Chithambaram emerged as the sole leader, defeating top seed Wei Yi of China in the third round of the Prague Masters here.

It was a swift and commanding victory for Praggnanandhaa, widely regarded as the biggest favourite to win this tournament.

It was a Nimzo-Indian defence and in Praggnanandhaa's words it was "just a position to play". The middle game surfaced with Dai Van being on the defensive despite his extra

pawn, a typical feature of the structure and the Indian navigated the complexities with ease. The decisive moment came on the 14th move itself when Praggnanandhaa got an undeniable advantage and after that though the game took a few twists but the result was never in doubt.

Having played two draws in the first two rounds, it was a much-needed victory for Praggnanandhaa and he achieved the final result in style. The Indian won a rook for a minor piece and when it comes to technicalities, no one can doubt acumen of Praggnanandhaa.

While Praggnanandhaa scored his first win, compatriot Aravindh Chitha-

mabaram announced his arrival in the elite circles by entering the world top 20 in live ratings for first time.

He showed deeper opening understanding in the Ragozin where the Chinese played as black. The middle game approached with a dynamic balance but Aravindh out-calculated Yi and launched a king side attack, sacrificing two pawns on the other flank. The game lasted 44 moves.

The victory took Aravindh to 2.5 points out of a possible 3 on a day when American Sam Shankland lost to Vincent Keymer of Germany. The second place is now shared by Praggnanandhaa and Keymer on two points.

In the challengers' se-

tion being played simultaneously, Divya Deshmukh succumbed to her second defeat in three days, losing to Nodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan.

The results: Round 3: Sam Shankland (USA, 1.5) lost to Vincent Keymer (Ger, 2) Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind, 2.5) beat Wei Yi (Chn, 0.5); Anish Giri (Ned, 1.5) drew with David Navara (Cze, 1.5); Praggnanandhaa (2) beat Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 1); Quang Leim Le (Vie, 1.5) drew with Gurel Ediz (Tur, 1). **Challengers:** Stamatios Kourkoulous-Arditis (Ger, 1) drew with Vaclav Finek (Cze, 1.5); Ma Qun (Chn, 1.5) drew with Marc Andria Maurizzi (Fra, 1); Nodirbek Yakubboev (Uzb, 2.5) beat Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 1); Richard Stalmach (Cze, 0.5) lost to Jonas Buhl Bjerre (Den, 2.5); Jachym Nemeec (Cze, 1.5) beat Ivan Salgado Lopez (Esp, 1.5).

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Perfect balance: A child walks the tightrope among the crowd at the Sangam. R.V. MOORTHY



Strong shoulders: A woman carries an elderly relative on their return trip. R.V. MOORTHY



Fiery devotion: Pilgrims offer prayers after taking the holy dip. R.V. MOORTHY



Confluence point: Devotees take a holy dip at the Sangam on the occasion of Maha Sivaratri, marking the culmination of the Maha Kumbh at Prayagraj. R.V. MOORTHY

Where culture converges

Crossing many hurdles to reach the Sangam in Prayagraj, pilgrims at the Maha Kumbh embraced spirituality and faith as they took the holy dip

To the teeming hundreds of thousands, the Maha Kumbh is not just about taking a dip in the Triveni Sangam – the confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati – but also an emotional roller coaster. The unimaginable hurdles and difficulties the pilgrims face to reach the Sangam in Prayagraj of Uttar Pradesh is not visible on their faces. On the contrary, they look completely engrossed in the spirituality of it all. Their eyes brimming with faith, they wait for the moment when the waters would wash over them in the belief that they are one step closer to salvation. Total strangers come to each other's aid, without so much as even a gesture for help. This is where the emotions reach a crescendo, with almost everyone who was there wanting the same for themselves and for their fellow human beings.

While the mornings were calm, the evenings remained vibrant. And while a variety of colours displayed life, the tiny sheds which housed Naga sadhus, smeared in ash, celebrated death, and the journey beyond.

At the Maha Kumbh, where food was abundantly available for everyone, so too was room for rest, at almost no cost.

The journey to get to the Sangam had its moments. While travel to Prayagraj itself may

have been by air, rail or road, getting to the Sangam was another story. Once one enters the town, only two transport options were available to the general public and they did not come cheap. Cycle rickshaw drivers offered to accommodate a maximum of six people and motorbike drivers offered to take two passengers. The charges ranged anywhere between ₹200 and ₹300 per person, and the drop point was still two kilometres from the river.

A majority of the devotees decided to walk if they could not offered the rides. Children and elderly people sitting on the shoulders of their relatives was a common sight during the journey of about 10 km from Prayagraj town to the Sangam.

Pilgrims thronged the Triveni Sangam as Maha Sivaratri drew closer. Many people arrived in groups, and they wore distinctive gear, carried flags, and held on to a rope to stay together.

For the few moments when they took a dip, everyone was equal. In the collective faith that had brought the crores of people to the Sangam, the waters were a great leveller: no one knew if the person taking a dip in the water alongside was a big shot or just another man under the sun.

(Text: R.V. Moorthy)



Mark of blessing: An elder member of a family applies sindoor on the forehead of a younger woman. R.V. MOORTHY

