



**'PEACE ALONG LOC'**  
Army asks Pakistan to honour 2021 pact

NEWS » PAGE 4



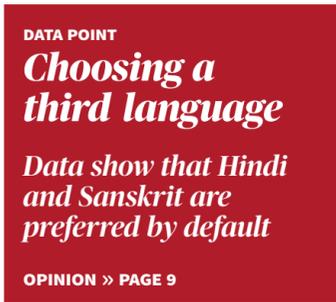
**STAR BIDS ADIEU**  
**Val Kilmer, known for Top Gun, Batman, dies aged 65**

WORLD » PAGE 14



**'GREAT OPPORTUNITY'**  
Sri Lankan Minister speaks on India ties

WORLD » PAGE 14



**DATA POINT**  
**Choosing a third language**

Data show that Hindi and Sanskrit are preferred by default

OPINION » PAGE 9



**RULING THE DAY**  
Siraj and Buttler star in GT's win over RCB

SPORT » PAGE 16

## INSIDE



**Stop work near UoH campus, HC tells Telangana**

**HYDERABAD**  
Telangana High Court on Wednesday instructed the State government to stop the ground levelling works and cutting of trees until Thursday on the 400 acres of land abutting University of Hyderabad allotted to Telangana Industrial Infrastructure Corporation at Kancha Gachibowli. » PAGE 3

**Doubts persist over Modi-Yunus meet in Bangkok**

**NEW DELHI**  
Ahead of the 6th summit of the BIMSTEC in Bangkok, all eyes are on whether PM Narendra Modi and Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Prof. Mohammed Yunus will meet in Bangkok on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC summit. Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin said on Wednesday that a meeting has been slotted. » PAGE 4

**Navy seizes 2,500 kg of narcotics in Indian Ocean**

**NEW DELHI**  
The Indian Navy frigate *INS Tarkash*, deployed in the western Indian Ocean for maritime security, has seized over 2,500 kg of narcotics, the Navy said on Wednesday. On March 31, it received inputs from the Navy's P8I aircraft regarding suspicious vessels, the Navy said. » PAGE 4

**Ensure hygiene, education in rural areas: SC**

**NEW DELHI**  
The SC remarked on Wednesday that ensuring education, hygiene, and healthcare was the most important path towards a robust rural India. A Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant made the observation while hearing a petition to set up at least one public library in every village. » PAGE 6

**'Indian steel to be prioritised for govt. contracts'**

**NEW DELHI**  
India has revamped its procurement policy to curb surging steel imports that threaten domestic market stability. The new policy's rules prioritise indigenously produced steel for government contracts. » PAGE 12

# LS passes Waqf Bill after a long debate

The Bill was passed after several amendments moved by the Opposition were negated through division of votes; Home Minister accuses Opposition of 'fear-mongering' for vote bank politics; Rijju asserts that the Bill was about 'property' and not 'religion'; Opposition calls the Bill 'unconstitutional', with AIMIM chief symbolically 'tearing' a copy

**Sandeep Phukan**  
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha passed the Waqf (Amendment) Bill well past midnight on Wednesday after a marathon debate, with Home Minister Amit Shah categorically assuring the Muslim community that the new Bill does not interfere with their religious practices. The Home Minister also accused the Opposition of "fear-mongering" for the sake of "vote bank" politics.

The debate, which started on Wednesday afternoon, went past midnight. The first clause of the Bill was passed with 288 MPs voting in favour and 232 against. The Bill was

passed after several key amendments moved by the Opposition were negated through division of votes.

Making an intervention during the debate, Mr. Shah made it clear that a *mutawalli* or the manager/administrator of a Waqf and the *waqif* (donor) can only be from the Muslim community. Non-Muslims have been included in a Waqf Board or Council for administrative purposes and that too to ensure that any donation is being used for the purpose it is meant for, he added.

"There is an attempt to spread confusion that this law will interfere with [Muslim] religious practices and the nature of donation. Such fear-mongering



Drawn out: Union Minister for Minority Affairs Kiren Rijju speaks in Lok Sabha during the debate on the UMEED Bill on Wednesday. ANI

is being done to create a vote bank," he said, adding, "Waqf or charitable endowment is religious, not the Waqf Board or Councils."

"The Narendra Modi government runs on a very clear principle that we will

not bring any law for vote bank," Mr. Shah said.

The stage for a fierce exchange in the House was set after Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju moved the revised version of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, the Unified Waqf Man-

agement Empowerment, Efficiency and Development Bill (UMEED).

Asserting that the Bill was about "property and not religion," Mr. Rijju said, "I am from a minority myself and I can say there is no country which is safer for minorities than India".

Opposition members, however, called the Bill "unconstitutional," with All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief Asaduddin Owaisi symbolically "tearing" a copy of the Bill in the House.

During his speech, the Home Minister said the word 'donation' has special importance because donation can be done only of that thing which is one's own property and none can donate government

property. He further added that a designated official has been authorised to ascertain the genuineness of waqf property in case of disputes.

In a change from the 2013 Waqf law, the new law states that only a person, who has been practising Islam for over five years, is allowed to donate to Waqf.

**'This is Parliament law'**  
Responding to Opposition arguments that Muslims won't accept the new law, he said, "This is Parliament's law, it is binding on everyone".

Taking on the Opposition, Mr. Shah claimed that they had resorted to similar fear-mongering during the passage of other laws such as CAA, abrogation of

special status for J&K under Article 370 and abolition of triple talaq. "Has even one Muslim person lost his citizenship because of CAA?" he asked.

Asserting that even Rashtriya Janata Dal patriarch Lalu Prasad Yadav wanted reform in the Waqf law, the Home Minister said the Modi government is fulfilling Mr. Yadav's wish.

Stating that the Narendra Modi government believes in the "politics of performance," Mr. Shah said, "People blessed Modi ji with three terms as Prime Minister and the BJP will get another three more terms".

**RELATED REPORTS**  
» PAGE 2 & 5

## Colourful journey



A jacaranda tree in full bloom on the roadside near Coonoor in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu on Wednesday. M. SATHYAMOORTHY

**India braces for tariffs on 'liberation day in America'**

**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of an expected announcement on "reciprocal tariffs" by U.S. President Donald Trump, the government braced for harsh tariffs against India. However, it also hoped for some leniency down the road due to the concessions on import duties.

"It's liberation day in America!" Mr. Trump wrote on the Truth Social platform on Wednesday, referring to implementation of tariffs against countries that he claims have treated the U.S. "unfairly".

**FULL REPORT**  
» PAGE 4

## Speaker cannot be 'indecisive' on pleas over defection: SC

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it was not "powerless" if a Speaker chose to remain "indecisive" on petitions seeking disqualification of legislators who defect.

Hearing petitions filed by Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) leaders seeking timely action by the Telangana Speaker on disqualification proceedings pending against 10 MLAs who shifted allegiance to the ruling Congress party in the State, the Bench headed by Justice B.R. Gavai said a Speaker could not use his indecision to defeat the worthy objective of the Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law) of the Constitution. The courts cannot certainly tell a Speaker to decide in a particular manner, but can it not tell a Speaker to decide within a specified and reasonable period, Justice Gavai asked.

The main question in the case is whether constitutional courts cannot direct Speakers, who act as quasi-judicial tribunals under the anti-defection law, to decide petitions filed with them under the Tenth Schedule within a specified period.

"Your argument is that if a Speaker does not act, courts, would be powerless? So, out of the five-year term of the House, if defection happened in the first year and Speaker does not do anything for the next four years, courts cannot do anything but sit with their hands tied?" Justice Gavai asked senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi and advocate Sravan Kumar, who appeared for the respondents.

The respondent side, also represented by senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, include the Telangana government, State Assembly

Courts cannot tell a Speaker how to decide, but can it not tell a Speaker to decide within a reasonable period?



Speaker, Secretary of the Assembly, and the Election Commission, among others.

**'Have no power'**

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, who appeared for the respondents, argued extensively that Constitutional courts could request a Speaker, from one Constitutional body to another, to decide disqualification petitions expeditiously, but not bind the Speaker to a deadline of four or six weeks. The senior advocate said courts have no power of Superintendent over a Speaker.

But Justice Gavai said that although the message from the court to the Speaker to not delay was worded as a 'request', it was not really one.

"How can a Constitutional authority be directed to decide disqualification petitions in six or eight weeks? Instead, the court can say the Speaker may decide within a reasonable period," Mr. Rohatgi asked.

Justice Gavai said disqualification petitions were filed before the Telangana Assembly Speaker in March-April 2024. The notice was issued only in January this year. "Do you call this a 'reasonable period'?" Justice Gavai asked the senior lawyer.

The Supreme Court had intervened in the past in egging on Speakers to decide long-pending petitions filed before them under the Tenth Schedule.

## 'Only Left can counter Hindutva neo-fascism'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MADURAI

Only the Left has the wherewithal and conviction to fight and counter Hindutva neo-fascism, senior Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader and convener Prakash Karat said on Wednesday.

"It is only Left which can lead the fight against imperialist designs on the country," Mr. Karat said in his inaugural address to the 24th congress of the party that is under way in Madurai, Tamil Nadu.

Mr. Karat said the U.S. imperialism, under President Donald Trump, would launch new attacks through economic and trade wars and military interventions on countries around the world.

"This is the time for the CPI(M) and the Left to actively develop anti-imperialist struggles and expose



pro-imperialist policies of the Modi government," Mr. Karat said.

He made it clear that while the party strived for the broadest mobilisation of all secular forces against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), it must be borne in mind that that the Left alone was the consistent force that could firmly and uncompromisingly could fight all manifestations of Hindutva and majoritarian communalism because of its uncompromising stand on neo-liberal policies.

## Manufacturing activity at an 8-month high in March

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MUMBAI

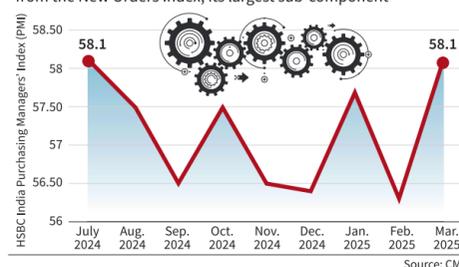
Manufacturing activity, as measured by the seasonally adjusted Purchasing Managers Index (PMI), climbed to an eight-month high of 58.1 in March 2025, according to an S&P Global statement. This figure stood at 56.3 in February 2025.

A PMI value above 50 is considered an expansion and the metric has been showing expansion for 45 months straight. The improvement in PMI in March was attributed to an increase in new orders.

"Although international orders slightly slowed, overall demand momentum remained robust, and the new orders index recorded an eight-month high of 61.5. Business expectations remained fairly optimistic, with around 30% of survey

## On a recovery

Recovery in manufacturing was largely driven by contribution from the New Orders Index, its largest sub-component



participants foreseeing greater output volumes in the year ahead, compared to less than 2% that anticipate a contraction," said Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

Sales numbers expanded at a robust rate and companies had "positive customer interest, favourable demand conditions,

and successful marketing initiatives", according to a statement from HSBC India, which collaborates with S&P Global to compile the data. Production volume also increased at the end of 2024-25. New export orders increased, but their growth was the slowest in three months, the statement said.

## INBRIEF



## Drug peddlers' assets being razed in Punjab: Kejriwal

Former Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said the Punjab government has a 'zero tolerance' policy against drugs. He said the properties of drug peddlers are being demolished in the State to ensure that people involved in this heinous crime get exemplary punishment. He was addressing the gathering in Punjab's Ludhiana before flagging off an awareness march against drugs. Mr. Kejriwal said the Punjab government has done "exemplary work" for eradication of drugs, and huge palaces built from drug money are being destroyed.

## Six acquitted of murder of three British nationals

The Gujarat High Court has upheld a sessions court's order acquitting six men of the killing of three British nationals during the 2002 riots that broke out after the Godhra train burning incident. A Division Bench of Justices A.Y. Kogje and Samir J. Dave passed the order on March 6 and it was made available recently. The HC considered the testimonies of witnesses and the investigating officer, and observed that it did not find any reason to interfere with the judgment and order of acquittal passed by the Principal District and Sessions Judge at Sabarkantha, Himmatnagar, on February 27, 2015. PH

## Gujarat factory blast: kin say bodies taken away without consent

Abhinav Lakshman  
Mehul Malpani  
BANASKANTHA/BHOPAL

Family members of more than half-a-dozen victims of Tuesday's firecracker factory blast in Gujarat's Banaskantha district sat in protest outside the Deesa Civil Hospital on Wednesday, alleging that the bodies of their loved ones had been handed over to the authorities of the Madhya Pradesh government without their consent.

The explosion at the firecracker factory killed at least 21 people, most of them hailing from Madhya Pradesh.

Most family members *The Hindu* spoke to outside the hospital said they started arriving from Madhya Pradesh around Tuesday midnight to early morning on Wednesday, but were not allowed to see the bodies.

Chander Singh Nayak, father of 23-year-old victim Sunita, wrote a petition to the Chief Minister of Gujarat, saying that he and family members of many other victims, were not given a chance to see the remains of their loved ones despite informing the district authorities that they were on their way from Madhya Pradesh to identify them. He added that they had not been given copies of the post-mortem reports either.

Congress MLA Jignesh Mevani joined the family members at the Deesa Civil Hospital, calling the incident "bigger than Hathras" [2020 gang-rape in U.P.], alleging that there was a conspiracy to "hide the bodies" so that a fair probe could be skirted.

**Kin came late: Minister** However, Madhya Pradesh Cabinet Minister Nagar Singh Chouhan, who is coordinating the return of the bodies, denied claims that the families were not allowed to identify the body, adding that some peo-



Gujarat MLA Jignesh Mevani with victims' family members in Banaskantha. VIJAY SONEJI

ple were "politicising" the issue. He said families of some victims had arrived late so they could not see the bodies.

Mr. Nagar told *The Hindu* that the bodies of victims from Dewas district were dispatched around 10 a.m. on Wednesday, and those from Harda district were sent around 12.30 p.m. He said the bodies should reach their destinations in Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday night.

**Factory owner, son held** In a statement on Wednesday, the local Crime Branch of the Gujarat Police said it had registered an FIR against the owner of the factory and had arrested him along with his son. They have been identified as Khubchandbhai Renmul Mohanani and Deepakbhai Khubchandbhai Mohanani respectively. The factory was being run in a building inside the premises of the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation.

The police held a press conference and said the FIR was registered under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Explosives Substances Act, on a complaint from the local revenue officer. They added that an SIT had been formed. Several teams of experts had been roped in for the probe, and they were looking for the other accused in places such as Tamil Nadu, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Rajasthan, the police said.

## Security up in U.P. amid tabling of Waqf Bill; flag march held in 50 districts

Drones monitor sensitive districts; police cancel all leave applications of staff; Opposition criticises BJP govt. for 'new form of communal politics'; Samajwadi Party says Bill will dent secular image

The Hindu Bureau  
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Police conducted flag marches in over 50 districts (of the total 75) as authorities ramped up security across the State as a precautionary measure amid the tabling of the Waqf Bill in Parliament on Wednesday.

Union Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju tabled the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, as proposed by a Joint Parliamentary Committee, in the Lok Sabha for consideration and passage. The Bill seeks to improve the administration of Waqf properties, introduce technology-driven management, address complexities and ensure transparency.

A flag march led by Senior Superintendent of Police Abhishek Singh and District Magistrate Umesh Mishra was conducted in the sensitive areas of Muzaffarnagar.

In many other districts,



Taking no chances: Police personnel patrolling a sensitive area in Meerut on Wednesday. PTI

including Meerut, Aligarh, Kanpur, Agra, Varanasi, Moradabad, and Prayagraj, district authorities conducted flag marches in sensitive localities.

Drone surveillance was also carried out in some of these districts. Police personnel from local stations carried out the flag marches. The police department has cancelled all leave applications in view of the security situation.

Hitting out at the Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP) government, the Opposition parties alleged that it was the party's new form of communal politics.

## 'Bid to hide failures'

"The BJP government brought the Bill to cover up its failures. Neither the BJP's policies nor the intention behind the Waqf (Amendment) Bill is right. The secular image of the country will be greatly affected by the Bill," said Sa-

majwadi Party (SP) spokesperson Ameerque Jamei.

Mr. Jamei said the BJP wanted to appease those supporters who feel alienated owing to the poor economic policy, rising inflation, unemployment, joblessness, and ruined economy.

"The target is the Waqf land. By taking control of the land, the BJP wants to give to its friendly people through backdoor," the SP spokesperson said.

## Fadnavis, Shinde back Bill; Sena (UBT) has strayed from Balasaheb's ideology: Sena

Press Trust of India  
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday hailed the introduction of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill in the Lok Sabha, calling it a progressive step that reflects the word "secular" mentioned in the Preamble. Deputy Chief Minister and Shiv Sena chief Eknath Shinde stressed it was in the "best interest of the Muslim community".

Addressing reporters, Mr. Fadnavis expressed confidence that the Bill will eventually get Parliament's nod. "The Bill doesn't hurt religious faith or sentiment of any community. It only corrects the wrongdoings of the past. Women will get representation on the Waqf Board. Any wrongdoing in the board couldn't be challenged in courts.

He said the Bill would be "politicising" the issue. He said families of some victims had arrived late so they could not see the bodies.

Mr. Nagar told *The Hindu* that the bodies of victims from Dewas district were dispatched around 10 a.m. on Wednesday, and those from Harda district were sent around 12.30 p.m. He said the bodies should reach their destinations in Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday night.

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Devendra Fadnavis

This provision has been removed," he said.

The BJP leader maintained that under the existing Waqf Act, lands were taken over by the board and then by Congress leaders. The Bill aims to stop this "loot", he said.

The Chief Minister said it is foolish to say industrialists will benefit from the proposed law and dismissed its critics as "sycophants" who want to play appeasement politics. "Those whose conscience is alive will support the Bill. If the Shiv Sena (UBT) still

follows Balasaheb Thackeray's ideals, they will support the Bill," he said.

## 'True faces exposed'

Mr. Shinde also attacked the Uddhav Thackeray-led party over the Bill, accusing it of "engaging in vote bank politics". "The Sena (UBT) has strayed from Balasaheb's ideology and is operating under [Congress leader] Rahul Gandhi's influence," he said. "The true faces of those engaging in vote bank politics for Muslim votes have been exposed through their stance on the Bill," he added.

Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Shinde said Mr. Uddhav's party has "ditched" its founder's ideology and bulldozed it. He said Bal Thackeray would have been upset had he learnt about the stand taken by the Sena (UBT) on the Waqf Bill and Aurangzeb.

## Trinamool Cong. members are fighting to protect Waqf properties: West Bengal CM

Shiv Sahay Singh  
KOLKATA

Urging all political parties to abide by the Constitution, West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee said her party members are fighting for Waqf properties.

"The 'jumla party' has a one-point programme to divide the country. They believe only in the 'divide and rule' policy, which we do not. First respect the Constitution, then think about snatching the rights of someone," Ms. Banerjee said, alluding to the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Trinamool Congress MP from Serampore Kalyan Banerjee opposed the Waqf (Amendment) Bill while participating in the debate in Parliament.

Speaking about the Bill, Ms. Banerjee said, "We

## J&amp;K parties see bid to grab assets; Waqf chief welcomes Bill

Peerzada Ashiq  
SRINAGAR

Several regional party heads in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday expressed displeasure over the tabling of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill in the Lok Sabha even as BJP leader and J&K Waqf chairperson Darakshan Andrabi hailed the Centre's move as a "pro-poor Muslim" step.

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti opposed the Bill in strong words. "India, which was once known for its unity and cultural harmony, is now witnessing a systematic attack on minority rights. The BJP wants to take control of our properties. The BJP rule is not permanent but the country will be in ruins by the time it leaves," she said.

Former MP and National Conference (NC) MLA Justice (ret.) Hasnain Masoodi said the Bill was an act against the rights of Muslims. He said the Centre was singling out a section of the population and violating their rights.

J&K Peoples Conference chief Sajad Lone described the Bill as yet another "right-wing trespass".

**J&K Peoples Conference chief Sajad Lone described it as yet another 'right-wing trespass'**

"The proposed amendment by Parliament is a blatant interference in our faith aimed at divesting rightful custodians of their authority," he said.

**'Very unfortunate'** Kashmir's chief cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, who attended the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Bill, said the move was "very unfortunate and disturbing".

J&K Apni Party president Altaf Bukhari warned that if the Bill was passed, it would deprive the Muslim community of control over Waqf assets and their administration.

J&K Peoples Democratic Front (JKPDF) president Hakeem Muhammad Yaseen described the Bill as "a direct assault" on the religious rights of Muslims and an "infringement upon their faith".

Ms. Andrabi, however, said the Bill "would contribute to the progress of the Muslim community".



Mamata Banerjee

should all respect the Constitution first. Always remember, religion is for everyone, festivals are for everyone. I listen to the sermons of Shri Krishna. I read the sermons and writings of Swami Vivekananda, [Subhas Chandra Bose] Netaji, [Mahatma] Gandhiji, [Dr. B.R.] Ambedkar, Abul Kalam Azad, and Ramakrishna [Paramahansa]. If someone's actions are inhuman, then they cannot respect any religion. I respect all religions."

The Chief Minister also touched on the issue of the proposed Ram Navami celebrations in the State and urged all communities to maintain peace. She urged people not to pay heed to any rumours.

Ms. Banerjee on Monday had participated in the annual Id-ul-Fitr prayers at Kolkata's Red Road and claimed that the Opposition parties, "Ram and Baam", are trying to incite riots.

Ms. Banerjee on Monday had participated in the annual Id-ul-Fitr prayers at Kolkata's Red Road and claimed that the Opposition parties, "Ram and Baam", are trying to incite riots.

## Suvendu's call

Leader of the Opposition and BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari again raised the pitch for Ram Navami celebrations and urged Hindus to "show their strength" by participating in the processions. Kolkata Police Commissioner Manoj Verma visited areas in Sealdah, Entally, and Tangra and took stock of preparations for the celebrations.

## Relatives grief-stricken after eight die in explosion in Bengal

Moyurie Som  
DHOLAHAT (WEST BENGAL)

Relatives of the Banik family are inconsolable after eight members, including four children, died in a blaze and explosion in a house at Dholahat in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district on March 31.

"The rice ceremony of the six-month-old was supposed to take place on Monday (April 7). The five-year-old girl was supposed to celebrate her birthday in a month. Preparations for celebrations were in full swing when this tragedy unfolded," said Tinku Mondal, a relative.

According to the police, an "accidental fire and explosion" occurred at the one-storey house of Arabinda Banik, 65, on the evening of March 31. Firecrackers had been stored there. The blast claimed



Gutted: Charred remains of the Banik house after the blast on March 31 at Dholahat in South 24 Parganas. DEBASISH BHADURI

the lives of Arabinda, his mother Prabhavati Banik, 80; his daughters-in-law Sutapa, 30 and Swantana, 28; their two children aged nine and five; and two infants aged under one. Arabinda's wife and his two sons, Chandrakanta Banik and Tushar Banik, escaped unhurt.

Supratim Sarkar, Additional Director-General of Police (South Bengal), confirmed that firecrackers

were stored in the house, and that a manufacturing unit was situated metres away. Mr. Chandrakanta is said to be the owner of the unit.

The West Bengal police filed a case against Mr. Chandrakanta and Mr. Tushar on Tuesday under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the West Bengal Fire Service Act, 1950. Mr. Chandrakanta was arrested

on Wednesday.

According to locals, the family, which traded in vegetables, is among the wealthiest in the area, owning multiple acres of agricultural land. Arabinda was also known in the village as a traditional healer.

## Grim reminder

A burnt smell still engulfs the area. The house, with its walls coated in black and the roof blown away, has been sealed. A fruit-laden mango tree in front of the house is partly charred.

Arabinda's younger brother, Pradip Banik, who lives next door, is shattered by the turn of events. "I had worked the whole day and returned around 8.40 p.m. when we saw the house suddenly go up in flames. The explosion came a few mo-

ments later. We rushed to their house, but could not do anything," Mr. Pradip told *The Hindu*.

He declined to talk about the scale of the firecracker business of Mr. Chandrakanta and his brother, and insisted that the family's main source of income was from selling vegetables.

Pramila Banik, another family member, said: "We knew they sold firecrackers here and there. We did not know it was a full-fledged operation or that they kept explosives in the house. The four children did not deserve such a horrific death. We are heartbroken."

A resident of the same village, who did not wish to be named, said their firecracker manufacturing business was an open secret in the area. "The villagers had alerted the police last year. Had the police acted then, these people would not have died," she said.

ice last year. Had the police acted then, these people would not have died," she said.

"Chandrakanta was in the firecracker godown near their house when the house went up in flames. He was about to rush into the house to save them, but the villagers held him back," she said.

## Exercise caution: CM

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday urged people to exercise caution to prevent such incidents. "The incident at Pathar Pratima is very tragic. But the businessman was a licence holder. Should firecrackers and cooking gas be stored together? If flammable substances are kept in one place, a fire can break out at any time. Be careful. A single life shouldn't be lost in an accident," she said.

# Stop work near UoH campus: HC

Telangana High Court adjourns the matter to Thursday for continued hearing; Ministry of Environment seeks 'factual' report on 'illegal' felling of vegetation in 400 acres of land abutting the University of Hyderabad in Kancha Gachibowli

**The Hindu Bureau**  
HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court on Wednesday instructed the State government to stop until Thursday the ground levelling works and cutting of trees on the 400 acres of land abutting the University of Hyderabad (UoH) allotted to the Telangana Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (TGIC) at Kancha Gachibowli here.

A Bench of Acting Chief Justice Sujoy Paul and Justice Renuka Yara passed the interim direction after hearing contentions of counsel of two PIL petitioners challenging the land allotment to TGIC



**Demonstrating dissent:** Students of the University of Hyderabad staging protests over ground-levelling works and cutting of trees. PTI

and Advocate-General A. Sudarshan Reddy. "No destruction, no cutting trees," said the Acting CJ, adjourning the matter to Thursday for continued hearing.

Some student groups of the university have been intensely opposing the land allotment and the ground-levelling works undertaken three days ago.

## 20 students injured in police lathi charge

**HYDERABAD** Tensions escalated in University of Hyderabad campus as police resorted to a lathi charge to prevent students from entering land in Kancha Gachibowli. At least 20 students sustained injuries. The students were heading toward the site where clearance work was under way.

Meanwhile, the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests has sought a 'factual' and an 'action taken' report on the "illegal" felling, on Wednesday.

In a communication to the Additional Secretary (Forests) here, Assistant Inspector General of Forests S. Sundar said there have been reports in print and social media alleging damage to wildlife in the said land, its lakes and unique rock formations.

The Union Minister concerned too had received representations from MPs and other public representatives on the matter, hence the official concerned has been asked to take legal action under the Indian Forest Act, Wildlife Protection Act and others.

He was also asked to see that there is no violation of any other Acts or orders of the courts and tribunals.



T.N. CM M.K. Stalin moves the resolution urging the Centre to take steps to retrieve Katchatheevu island. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## T.N. adopts resolution on the retrieval of Katchatheevu

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Sri Lanka, scheduled for Friday, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly on Wednesday unanimously adopted a resolution urging the Union government to take steps to retrieve Katchatheevu from the island nation.

The resolution, moved by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, said: "Retrieval of Katchatheevu island is the only permanent solution to protect the traditional fishing rights of the Tamil Nadu fishermen and mitigate the sufferings they face due to the Sri Lankan Navy."

The resolution urged the Union government to review the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of 1974.

Mr. Stalin said that the continued attack on fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy had become an ongoing and unending tragedy despite Sri Lanka witnessing a political change.

"In 2024 alone, 530 fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy. These

fishermen were given maximum prison sentences or [levied upon] hefty fines on the charge that they crossed the maritime boundary," he added.

He further said that it had become a norm for some political parties to spread misinformation, claiming that the then Tamil Nadu government supported the ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka. "However, it is regrettable that the Union government is also repeating the same for political gain. Former Chief Minister Kalaignar [M. Karunanidhi] strongly opposed the giving away of Katchatheevu. He argued that the people of Tamil Nadu would not accept it, and that the island should not be given to Sri Lanka."

Though all parties supported the government resolution in the Assembly, Leader of the Opposition Edappadi K. Palaniswami, during the discussion, alleged that despite being a coalition partner of governments at the Centre on various occasions for nearly 16 years, the DMK failed to find an amicable solution to the Katchatheevu issue.

## Rapido, Ola and Uber told to stop bike taxi services in six weeks

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

In a major setback for transport technology aggregators, the High Court of Karnataka on Wednesday directed Rapido, Ola, and Uber to stop operating their bike taxi services within six weeks.

The court clarified that unless the State government notifies the relevant guidelines under Section 93 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, and the relevant rules framed under this provision, Rapido, Ola, and Uber cannot function as bike taxi aggregators.

### 'Govt. can take action'

The court also said it cannot direct the State government or the Transport Department to register motorcycles as "transport vehicles" and issue them contract carriage permits so that Rapido, Ola, and Uber can operate bike taxi services.

Justice B.M. Shyam Prasad passed the order while disposing of petitions filed by Uber India Systems Pvt. Ltd., Roppen Transportation Services Pvt. Ltd., which operates Rapido services, and ANI Technology Pvt. Ltd., which operates Ola services.

While giving six weeks to the petitioners to withdraw the bike taxi services, the court said the government can take action to ensure that no bike taxi services are offered on the online platform after six weeks.

## Empuraan row shakes up Rajya Sabha proceedings

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Minister of State for Minority Affairs George Kurien and CPI(M) MP John Brittas sparred in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday over the Malayalam film *L2: Empuraan*, starring Mohanlal and Prithviraj Sukumaran.

Mr. Brittas raised the issue of post-release cuts made to the film, reportedly due to threats, and alleged that these actions constitute an assault on freedom of speech and expression.

In response, Mr. Kurien



John Brittas

countered that the film is offensive to Christian beliefs and alleged that communists want to "insult every religion" in India.

Bringing up the issue during Zero Hour, Mr. Brittas said, "Unfortunate inci-

dents are happening in this country. There is an assault on freedom of speech which is enshrined in the Indian Constitution."

He said that it was unfortunate that a film cleared by the censor board had to undergo 24 additional cuts after its theatrical release due to threats from right-wing groups. One of the lead characters of the film is portrayed as a survivor of the 2002 Gujarat riots.

"If this is the situation in this country, I fear that the freedom of speech and expression would be in peril," Mr. Brittas said.

## 'Inmate orchestrates murder from prison using WhatsApp'

**Shreyas H.S.**  
BENGALURU

In a major security lapse at the Bengaluru Central Jail, an inmate who is a rowdy shetter allegedly orchestrated a murder by coordinating with the killers using WhatsApp and Instagram on a smuggled cellphone.

This was revealed in a letter written on March 26 to the Director-General (DG) of Prisons and Correctional Services Malini Krishnamurthy by Deputy

Inspector-General (DIG) of Prisons (Northern Range) T.P. Shesha.

Though the letter does not mention the identity of the deceased, sources told *The Hindu* that the victim is Jayaram K., a history-shetter, who was hacked to death on March 4. The police have arrested five persons in connection with the murder.

The inmate could place calls despite prison authorities installing 19 jammers and tower-harmonics call blocking system.

## INBRIEF



### Karnataka BJP begins dharna over price rise on Wednesday

The Opposition BJP began its day-and-night protest in Bengaluru against the hike in prices of essential commodities and services by releasing a "chargesheet" accusing the Congress government in Karnataka of increasing the financial burden on common people. It cited hike in the prices of about 50 items and services in the last two years. BJP legislators, former legislators, and prominent leaders, including party veteran B.S. Yediyurappa, are participating in the protest being held at Freedom Park from Wednesday 12 p.m. to Thursday 12 p.m.

### Coach of Nagavali Express derails; no casualty reported

The last coach of Nagavali Express from Nanded to Sambalpur derailed shortly after leaving the Vizianagaram railway station in Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday. No casualty was reported as the train was travelling slowly. The incident occurred at 11.40 am. Railway officials rushed to the spot, detached the affected coach, and cleared the track in an hour. At 12.40 p.m., the train departed. Railway officials said, "The downline [Visakhapatnam-Palasa] will be restored soon. The Up main line and the RV lines [both Up and Down] remain clear for train movements."

### Probe ordered into custodial death of tribal youth in Kerala

The Kerala government has ordered a Crime Branch (CB) investigation into the death of a tribal youth who was taken into custody by the police in Wayanad on Monday. The youth was found dead inside the police station's toilet on Tuesday. He was taken into custody in connection with the missing of a minor tribal girl. The CB probe was ordered even as his family members produced documents suggesting the deceased was a minor, according to the PTI. Some tribal welfare organisations also have sought a high-level probe into the incident.

## Strings of summer



**Vacation notes:** A violin class for children in progress as part of a summer camp, *Kalimuttam*, at the Kerala State Jawahar Bala Bhavan in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

## A.P. reports its first human death owing to bird flu infection

**Nellore Sravani**  
VIJAYAWADA

Samples of a two-year-old girl from Andhra Pradesh's Narasaraopeta in Palnadu district, who died of multi-organ failure at AIIMS-Mangalagiri on March 16, tested positive for H5N1 virus. The confirmation from National Institute of Virology (NIV-Pune) came on March 31.

This is the second human death in the country due to the H5N1 virus, which causes bird flu, and the first in Andhra Pradesh, according to officials.

Palnadu District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) B. Ravi said on Wednesday that the girl had fever, cough, running nose, diarrhoea, nasal discharge, seizures and breathlessness when she was admitted. "She was also diagnosed with leptospirosis, a disease spread by rats and developed multi-organ failure," Dr. Ravi said. He added that the district did not have a history of any bird-flu outbreak or large-scale bird mortality.

Health staff have been deployed for fever survey in and around the locality.

## New damselfly species found in Kerala

**Sarath Babu George**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A group of researchers has discovered a new species of damselfly in the Wayanad landscape of the Western Ghats, Kerala.

Named *Euphaea wayanadensis*, this species marks Kerala's 191st recorded odonate species (including dragonflies and damselflies), and the 223rd one to be documented from the Ghats. The findings were recently published in the peer-reviewed journal *ENTOMON*.

### Research team

The research team comprised S.S. Anooj of Kerala Agricultural University; C. Susanth and Kalesh Sadasiva-



*Euphaea wayanadensis* prefers streams with aquatic vegetation, along with trees on banks, say researchers. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

van, representing conservation groups Warblers and Waders, and Travancore Nature History Society respectively; Vinayan P. Nair of Alphonso College, Pala; and Dattaprasad Sawant and Milind Bhakare from Maharashtra.

The new species belongs to the family Euphaeidae and was identified using integrated taxonomy methods. The discovery is the result of several years of field surveys. The team first observed the distinct mor-

## Centre wants Kerala's cost-sharing consent for Sabari rail project

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Putting the future of the Sabari rail project off the track once again, the Union Railway Ministry has asked the Kerala government to submit its unconditional consent for sharing the cost of the project.

The Railways' insistence on a cost-sharing agreement has left the project in limbo for a long time. However, the project received momentum recently with the Centre asking Kerala to ink a tripartite agreement involving the State government, Ministry of Railways, and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to take the project forward.

The agreement will ensure that the RBI will pay Kerala's share to the Minis-

try if the State fails to pay its share of the cost on time and deduct that amount from the Central share of assistance to Kerala for various schemes.

Though the State initially toyed with the idea of signing the agreement, it later insisted that the State will shoulder 50% of the revised estimate for the Sabari rail project only if the debt incurred by the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board by financing the project will be fully exempted from the State's borrowing limit.

In Parliament, Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw made it clear that Kerala has been requested by the Railways to submit unconditional consent for sharing the cost to take the project forward.

prototype of *Euphaea wayanadensis* at the Kalindi River, Thirunelli, in Wayanad district in 2013.

The research found the species preferred fast-flowing streams with rocks and aquatic vegetation, with evergreen and semi-evergreen tree growth on the banks. They are observed throughout the year, except during the dry seasons of March and April.

Dr. Sadasivan, a member of the IUCN Dragonfly Specialist Group, emphasised the highly restricted distribution and habitat requirement of the new species calls for targeted surveys and steps to conserve aquatic invertebrates of ecologically vulnerable landscapes like Wayanad.

## All eyes on Centre's reaction to Trump's tariff announcement

Subhasini Haidar  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of an expected announcement on "reciprocal tariffs" by United States President Donald Trump, the government braced for harsh tariffs against India. However, it also hoped for some leniency down the road due to the concessions on import duties that Indian trade negotiators have proposed to the U.S. Trade Representative over the past few weeks.

"It's liberation day in America!" Mr. Trump wrote on the Truth Social platform on Wednesday, referring to implementation of tariffs against countries that he claims have treated the U.S. "unfairly".

### 'Waiting game'

All eyes will be on how the markets will respond when they open on Thursday, and whether India will join other countries that have already warned of or implemented counter-tariffs against the U.S., or not. "It is a waiting game now," said an official, declining to



Donald Trump

comment on what the Modi government's reaction might be.

India has been identified as the country with the "highest average Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) applied tariff rate" (17% of any major world economy by the USTR's report on Foreign Trade Barriers released this week.

It is also one of U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's "Dirty 15" countries with the highest bilateral trade deficit (\$45.7 billion) in their favour. In addition, the USTR has singled out Indian surcharges, market access in many areas, and mandatory price caps on items like medical equipment for penalties.

## Army asks Pakistani forces to abide by 2021 ceasefire

Troops of the two countries exchanged fire along the Line of Control in the Krishna Ghati sector of Poonch on Tuesday; military and intelligence officials remain on high alert in the region

Peerzada Ashiq  
SRINAGAR

The Indian Army on Wednesday asked the Pakistan Army to uphold the ceasefire agreement reached in 2021 to maintain peace along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Indian Army's call came a day after Pakistani and Indian troops exchanged fire along the LoC in the Krishna Ghati sector of Poonch. "Indian Army reiterates the importance of upholding the tenets of DGMO [Directors General of Military Operation] understanding of 2021 to maintain peace along the LoC," a Jammu-based Army spokesperson said in a statement.

The agreement, aimed at fostering stability in the region, underscores the necessity for both sides to uphold the ceasefire understanding and avoid escalation. An Army spokes-



Sharp spike: Six skirmishes were witnessed on the LoC in Jammu, Rajouri, and Poonch districts in January and February. ANI

person said a mine blast had occurred on Tuesday in the Krishna Ghati sector "due to Pakistan Army intrusion across LoC". "This was followed by unprovoked firing and ceasefire violation by the Pakistan Army. Own troops responded effectively in a controlled and calibrated manner. Situation is under control and being closely monitored," he said.

The Army has not confirmed any casualty. Military and intelligence officials remain on high alert in the region. "All necessary measures are being taken to ensure security while also engaging diplomatically to prevent further deterioration of the situation," an official source said.

Since the 2021 agreement, when the two Ar-

mies agreed to abide by the 2003 ceasefire agreement in J&K, there have been very few violations. However, this year, the frequency of violations is showing an upward trend.

### Upward trend

On February 16, an exchange of fire took place in the Gulpur sector, as the Indian Army accused the Pakistan Army of "unprovoked firing". According to the Pakistan newspaper *Dawn*, two Pakistani soldiers were injured in "an unprovoked ceasefire violation by Indian troops in the Deva and Bagsar sectors" on February 12.

Six skirmishes were witnessed on the LoC in Jammu, Rajouri, and Poonch districts in January and February. Two soldiers, including a Captain, were killed as an improvised explosive device went off. Two other soldiers were hit by snipers from across the LoC.

## U.S. man arrested for entering restricted North Sentinel Island

Press Trust of India  
PORT BLAIR

A 24-year-old U.S. national, Mykhailo Viktorovych Polyakov, was arrested on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for allegedly entering the prohibited tribal reserve area of the North Sentinel Island, the police said on Wednesday.

He arrived in Port Blair on March 26 and launched his inflatable boat from the Kurma Dera beach early on March 29, they said. He reached North Sentinel Island, left a coconut and a can of cola as "offerings for the Sentinelese", and collected sand samples, but did not encounter any inhabitants. He returned by evening, where he was spotted by local fishermen and subsequently arrested.

Director-General of Police H.S. Dhaliwal said, "We are getting more details about him and his intention to visit the reserved tribal area. We are also trying to find where else he had visited during his stay in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. We are ques-

**He left a coconut and a can of cola for the Sentinelese, and collected sand samples on island**

tioning the hotel staff where he was staying in Port Blair." Among the items seized from him were the boat and an outboard motor.

The police said he had planned his journey meticulously and used GPS navigation. Mr. Polyakov, whose father is of Ukrainian origin, was found in possession of a GoPro camera, and its footage showed him landing on North Sentinel Island, the police said.

He is at present in police custody. The police said he visited Port Blair last October and attempted reconnaissance of North Sentinel Island, but was stopped by hotel staff. He came in January and attempted to procure a motor for his boat. He went to Baratang Islands and allegedly videographed the Jarawa tribe, the police said.

## Maoists offer conditional talks; Chhattisgarh says ready for dialogue but with no conditions

Shubhomoy Sikdar  
RAIPUR

As the government intensifies operations against left-wing extremism in Chhattisgarh, the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) has reportedly offered conditional peace talks. The State government said that any talks must be unconditional.

In a press release attributed to the group and released in Telangana on March 28, its central committee said it was ready for peace talks on the condition that the government halted its anti-Maoist operations in the region and stopped the establishment of new camps of the armed forces in various States such as Chhattisgarh.

"We are always ready

for peace talks in the interest of the public. Therefore, on this occasion, we are proposing to create a positive atmosphere for peace talks in front of the Central and State governments," said the purported Maoist statement.

Explaining its new stance, it said that its peace talks committee had held a round table meeting in Hyderabad on March 24 on the theme "The ongoing war in Central India must be stopped immediately, Government of India-CPI (Maoist) must declare unconditional ceasefire and hold peace talks".

### 'No conditions'

State Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma said that the government was ready for talks and for the



The Maoist letter has surfaced two days ahead of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's expected arrival in Chhattisgarh. FILE PHOTO

Maoists to return to the mainstream, but it could not be subject to conditions laid down by them. He added that the government was not going to form any committees for peace talks and reiterated that the Maoists could initiate it through any channel of their choice.

"They have written that the last time they had said that they would discuss if [security forces] should not leave their camps for six months, there should be a reduction in the number of troops. Talks will be without any conditions and we are still ready for that. But the government

will not form any committee. They should make one if they want or use the channel they like, we are ready," he added.

The Maoist letter surfaced two days ahead of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's expected arrival in Chhattisgarh. Mr. Shah will be on a two-day visit to the State where he is scheduled to attend the closing ceremony of Bastar Pandum, a cultural event, in Dantewada district of Bastar region.

Meanwhile, the Opposition Congress has called the latest development a propaganda effort by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with State Congress chief Deepak Bajaj saying that the government was preparing a "script" for Mr. Shah's visit.

## Two women Maoists killed in encounter in Kanha National Park

The Hindu Bureau  
BHOPAL

Two women Maoist operatives, each carrying a reward of ₹14 lakh on her head, were shot dead by the anti-Naxal Hawk Force of the Madhya Pradesh Police on Wednesday in an encounter during a search operation in the Kanha National Park in Mandla district, officers said.

"One self-loading rifle, one rifle, wireless set and other items of daily use were recovered from their possession. Search is ongoing," M.P. Director-General of Police (DGP) Kailash Makwana said on X.

Shiyaz K.M., Hawk Force Commandant, told *The Hindu* that the deceased were identified as

Mamta, 30, a resident of Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district; and Pramila, 35, who hailed from Chhattisgarh's Sukma district. He said the two operatives were part of the Bhoramdev Area Committee in the Kanha-Bhoramdev Division of the Madhya Pradesh-Maharashtra-Chhattisgarh zone of Naxals.

"We have been tracking the routes of this group for the past six months. A search operation was launched early morning based on inputs of movement of some 18-20 Maoists. During the search, they started to fire and the police team retaliated," Mr. Shiyaz said. Multiple teams are combing the area for the remaining members who escaped.

## Assam to have two-phase panchayat polls in May

The Hindu Bureau  
GUWAHATI

The Assam State Election Commission on Wednesday announced the dates of the panchayat polls, billed as a test of the popularity of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies ahead of the Assembly elections in 2026.

"The panchayat election will be held in two phases - on May 2 and May 7. The first phase of the election will be held in Upper Assam [eastern half of the State] and the Barak Valley, while the second phase will be across Lower Assam [western half]," Election Commissioner Alok Kumar said.

The results will be announced on May 11.

## COTU sets preconditions before talks with MHA

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of a meeting with officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) scheduled on Saturday, representatives of the Kuki-Zo Council, civil society organisations and leaders of the Kuki community have set forth three preconditions for the cessation of hostilities in Manipur, which include no cross-movement [between Kuki and Meitei areas], initiation of meaningful dialogue, and a six-month ceasefire.

Representatives of the Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) and the Zomi Council have been called for a meeting with Ministry officials on April 5 in Delhi in a bid to start talks between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. On April 1, the Kangpokpi-based Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU) held a "consultation meeting", where these preconditions were arrived at.

The April 5 meeting comes after "free movement" attempt last month led to protests and clashes.

## Territorial battles flare up in Manipur, Nagaland villages

The Hindu Bureau  
GUWAHATI

Territorial battles between villages in Manipur and Nagaland have flared up over the past few days.

Four people were injured in a conflict between the residents of two villages bordering Nagaland's Kiphire and Meluri districts on March 28 over the construction of an approach road.

Three days later, an apex body of the Liangmai community flagged "repeated acts of aggression by people falsely claiming the ownership" of Maremei village in Manipur's Senapati district.

The conflicts in the two adjoining States, about 260 km apart, were reported six months after four people died in a violent boundary dispute between the residents of Hunphun and Hungpung villages in Manipur's Ukhrul district.

**Four people were injured in a conflict on March 28 over the construction of an approach road**

harm the bonds that hold our communities together," he said, and advised villagers to settle disputes through dialogue.

"We are looking into the matter to ensure peace in the area," a Senapati district police officer said. Meanwhile, officials in Assam's Jorhat said security has been heightened along the State's border with Nagaland, particularly in the Mariani area, after reports of attacks on residents by people from across the border.

Assam and Nagaland have a decades-old boundary dispute. On the night of March 31, miscreants from Nagaland took four people from Assam's Rajbari village at gunpoint and allegedly made them sign blank papers before letting them go. It was the third such incident in March.

## Ahead of BIMSTEC summit in Bangkok, doubts persist over Modi-Yunus meeting

Kallol Bhattacharjee  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the 6th summit of the BIMSTEC in Bangkok, all eyes are on whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Prof. Mohammed Yunus will meet in Bangkok on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC summit. Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin told reporters in Dhaka on Wednesday that a meeting has been slotted, though the Ministry of External Affairs refused to confirm it.

BIMSTEC, or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, is holding its sixth summit in a physical format, for the first time since the end of the pandemic; the last such in-person summit was held in Kathmandu in 2018. The fifth BIMSTEC summit was held virtually in 2022, under the leadership of Sri Lanka.

This year's theme is a "prosperous, resilient, and open BIMSTEC". The summit will lead to the adop-



The 6th BIMSTEC summit will be held in Thailand on April 4.

tion of the Declaration of 5th BIMSTEC, a press note from the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka has announced. The Secretariat also said member states are expected to sign an agreement on maritime transport cooperation at the summit.

### On the sidelines

Plans are under way for the Prime Minister to hold bilateral meeting with several dignitaries, and Bangladesh's High Representative for the Rohingya refugee crisis, Khalilur Rahman, informed reporters in Dhaka that there is "sufficient possibility" of a meeting between Mr. Modi and Professor Yunus on the sidelines of the summit.

Upon arriving in Bangkok's Don Mueang Airport on Friday, the PM will meet his Thai counterpart, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, which will be followed by a dinner hosted in honour of the visiting Heads of government and Heads of State. Mr. Modi will also meet Thai King Maha Vajiralongkorn before leaving for a state visit to Colombo from April 4 to 6.

The BIMSTEC summit has gained attention in recent weeks as it is being held against the backdrop of the devastating earthquake that hit Myanmar last Thursday.

After years of wrangling, BIMSTEC finally framed a common charter in 2022, but bilateral relations among the member countries remain a matter of concern. While Bangladesh-Myanmar ties have been marred by the Rohingya crisis, the relationship between India and Bangladesh has remained uncertain since the removal of Bangladesh's ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

## Navy seizes 2,500 kg of narcotics in Indian Ocean operation



Maritime security: INS Tarkash during an operation to intercept narcotics in the western Indian Ocean. PTI

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy frigate *INS Tarkash*, which has been deployed in the western Indian Ocean for maritime security operations since January, has seized over 2,500 kg of narcotics, the Navy said on Wednesday.

On March 31, while on patrol, *INS Tarkash* received multiple inputs from the Navy's P8I aircraft regarding suspicious vessels operating in the area and believed to be involved in illicit activities, including narcotics trafficking, the Navy said. "In response, the ship altered its course to intercept the suspicious vessels. After system-

atically interrogating all suspicious vessels in the vicinity, *INS Tarkash* intercepted and [a team] boarded a suspect dhow, owing to the coordinated efforts with the P8I and the Maritime Operations Centre in Mumbai," it stated.

A specialist boarding team, including marine commandos, boarded the vessel and conducted a thorough search, leading to the discovery of sealed packets, the statement said. Further search and interrogation revealed over 2,500 kg of narcotic substances, including 2,386 kg of hashish and 121 kg of heroin, stored in different cargo holds and compartments onboard the vessel.

# Waqf Bill a direct attack on the Constitution, says Opposition

Congress MP Gogoi says the Centre seeks 'to dilute the Constitution, defame minorities, divide the Indian society and disenfranchise the minority communities'; Akhilesh alleges that it had been brought to hide the failures of BJP government

**Sreeparna Chakrabarty**  
NEW DELHI

The Opposition INDIA bloc on Wednesday said the Waqf Bill was an attack on the Basic Structure of the Constitution and was aimed at "polarising" and dividing the country on the basis of religion.

During a discussion on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025, and the Mussalman Wakf (Repeal) Bill, 2024 in the Lok Sabha, the Opposition said the Centre was trying to hide its failures through the Bill. It questioned the provision in the Bill that only a practising Muslim of five years could create a Waqf property.

Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi said the government's aim was to "defame" and "disenfranchise" the minorities in the country, while Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said this Bill would be the BJP's "waterloo". Though the National Democratic Alliance allies were supporting the Bill, they were actually very unhappy.

A. Raja of the DMK challenged the government's assertion that the Bill incorporated all recommendations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee.

Mr. Gogoi, who opened the debate from the Opposition benches, said, "This Bill is an attack on the Basic Structure of the Constitu-



**Strong protest:** Congress MP Imran Pratapgadhi protesting against the Waqf Bill on the Parliament premises on Wednesday. ANI

tion," and Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju's entire speech was an attack on the Constitution.

He said the government had four goals - "to dilute the Constitution, defame minorities in India, divide the Indian society, and disenfranchise the minority communities".

He said that it was misleading to say the Bill was discussed threadbare. "There were four meetings of the Minority Affairs Ministry in 2023 and not even once Waqf was discussed. Till November 2023, the Ministry did not think there was a new Bill need-

ed... so I would like to ask whether some other department made the Bill," he added.

He said the Centre's political objective was to spoil the existing "brotherhood" in the country.

### 'Not accepted'

They had not accepted even one amendment proposed by the Opposition in the Joint Parliamentary Committee, he said, adding that there was no clause-by-clause discussion in the JPC. On the clause that only those who are practising Muslims for five years will be able to

create Waqf properties, he said, "Minorities will have to give certificates of their religion now."

Congress MP K.C. Venugopal said: "Are you going to start a separate department for finding out who is a five-year Muslim?" He said the Bill was a direct attack on the Constitution.

"Your agenda is to destroy the minorities and attack the freedom of religion in this country. You are trying to divide the country for political benefits," he said.

Mr. Akhilesh said the Bill had been brought to hide the government's failures.

"Bringing Waqf Bill is the BJP's political game, it is a new form of their communal politics. The BJP wants to appease those supporters who are now distancing themselves from the party because of its policies. As there has been a drop in the vote share, especially in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP has been trying to manage votes and this Bill is being introduced for managing votes," Mr. Yadav said.

He alleged that the BJP wants the Muslim community to feel that their rights are being attacked so that they react and the party gets to indulge in politics of polarisation because that was their agenda.

Mr. Raja attacked the government for claiming that the revised Bill incorporates most of the recommendations of the JPC and dared Mr. Rijju to compare the text of the JPC report and the Bill. "If they are the same, I will resign from the House".

He also said that the Minister, while introducing the Bill for the first time last year, had claimed large tracts of land in a village in Tiruchi had been claimed as Waqf land. "The JPC went there and the claims were demolished by the District Collector". He also took a swipe at the BJP, saying it is talking about reform of Waqf boards but doesn't have "a single Muslim MP to pilot the Bill".

# NDA partners show different shades of support for Bill

**Sobhana K. Nair**  
NEW DELHI

The parties of the National Democratic Alliance showed varied shades of support for the Waqf (amendment) Bill, 2025 in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. While the Bill received unqualified support from the Janata Dal(U) and Shiv Sena, the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) was circumspect in its endorsement. The Telugu Desam Party urged the government for more flexibility for the State governments in determining composition of the Waqf Boards.

The allies also underlined the work they had done in the past for Muslims.

TDP MP Krishna Prasad Tenneti said the Centre, while framing Rules to the Act, should consider providing flexibility to the States in deciding the composition of Waqf Boards in the interest of the Muslim women, youth and downtrodden. He spoke at length on the TDP's contribution in making important amendments to the Bill, from prospective application of the "Waqf by User" clause to ensure that existing Waqf properties were not endangered, to appointing a designated officer for conducting the survey of Waqf properties instead of the District Collector, clauses the Opposition had objected to.

In sharp contrast, the JD (U) extended unqualified support with Union Minis-

### TDP calls for more flexibility for the States in determining composition of the Waqf Boards

ter Rajiv Ranjan, aka Lalan Singh, attacking the Opposition for running a misleading narrative to brand the legislation as "anti-Muslim" in an attempt to vitiate the country's atmosphere.

The Shiv Sena's Shrikant Shinde too lauded the legislation and used the opportunity to attack the Shiv Sena (UBT) for straying away from Bal Thackeray's ideology. Flagging a dissent note by the Sena (UBT) protesting inclusion of non-Muslims on the Waqf Board, Mr. Shinde said, "We thought they were allergic to Hindutva, turns out they are allergic to Hindus."

LJP (Ram Vilas) MP Arun Bharti hailed the legislation for bringing in "transparency and accountability" and promised support for the law. But unlike the JD(U), he did not praise the government or Mr. Modi for framing the legislation.

Instead, he credited his party president Chirag Paswan as the first leader to call for an extensive debate on the proposed law when it was introduced in Parliament in August last year. Heeding to Mr. Paswan's suggestion, he said, the government sent the Bill to the Joint Parliamentary Committee.

# Muslim body calls for protest against Bill

**Ziya Us Salam**  
NEW DELHI

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board on Wednesday "categorically rejected" the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025, calling it "discriminatory, communally motivated, and a blatant infringement on the Constitutional rights of Muslim citizens".

It gave a call for nationwide protests, asking citizens "to hit the streets and democratically protest" if the contentious Bill becomes a law. It is likely to explore legal options.

The Bill is "likely to be more devastating than the demolition of Babri Masjid. That was one mosque. This Bill endangers many more mosques, madrasas, dargahs and cemeteries", S.Q.R. Ilyas, AIMPLB spokesperson, said.

### 'Eroding autonomy'

"The Bill undermines the fundamental principles of religious freedom, equality, and justice, enshrined in Articles 14, 25, and 26 of the Indian Constitution. The AIMPLB strongly objects to the Bill's provisions, which erode Waqf Board autonomy," Mohammed Ali Mohsin Taqvi, vice-president of the Board, told presspersons even as the Bill was being debated in Parliament.

Strong criticism came from Mahmood Madani, president, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, the oldest Muslim body in the country, who called it a reflection of "majoritarian mindset".

# CPI(M) to introspect why it is losing appeal among the masses: M.A. Baby

**S. Anandan**  
MADURAI

A critical question that the Communist Party of India (Marxist) is grappling with at its 24th party congress that got under way here on Wednesday is the party's inability to retain or increase its influence among the working class people, peasants, agricultural labourers, and the rural and urban poor who form a vast majority of the Indian population, says M.A. Baby, member of the CPI(M) Polit Bureau.

In an interview with *The Hindu*, Mr. Baby said the party would introspect why it had not been able to convince these sections that the CPI(M) was their uncompromising advocate. He attributed this to the failure in effective communication. The party, he said, is also concerned about its inability to attract



M.A. Baby

the youth. "We have assessed [in the reports presented at the party congress] how different State units have fared in attracting the youth to the party, recruiting them, and giving them important responsibilities within the party and the class and mass organisations," he said.

While the broad political arrangement of Opposition parties called the INDIA bloc was able to stop the BJP in its tracks by de-

nying it absolute majority in the previous Lok Sabha election, the CPI(M) or the Left parties could not leverage the situation to increase their political strength and make substantial gains either in Parliament or among the masses, he said. The electoral understanding helped the CPI(M) win a seat in Rajasthan, while the CPI(ML) secured two seats in Bihar. "But these gains in the Hindi heartland are inconsequential."

### 'Major task'

"One major political task that is [being] discussed at this party congress is how to take this political arrangement forward to defeat the RSS-controlled BJP and remove it from the Centre. The second is the question of enhancing the CPI(M)'s independent strength which is a prerequisite for an effective alternative at

the Centre. There are no ready-made answers. Many of these points are flagged in the organisational report in which the state of the party organisation, its strengths, weaknesses, mass organisations, etc. will be discussed," he said.

Mr. Baby said the party congress will discuss granting exemptions to competent and active leaders who have crossed the age bar for holding party positions (if the age criterion is strictly implemented, there will be eight vacancies in the 18-member Polit Bureau).

It will deliberate on the ways to utilise the services of those stepping down.

"There's this mistaken notion that the CPI(M) is against religious faith. Right now, various forces are conveniently exploiting religiosity in society to advance their reactionary political projects," he said.

# Muslim MPs flay provisions of Bill, say it will affect rights of community

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

A majority of Muslim MPs on Wednesday objected to the clause allowing non-Muslims to be part of Waqf Boards in the Waqf (amendment) Bill.

Participating in the debate on the Bill in the Lok Sabha, AIMIM MP Asaduddin Owaisi said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had declared a war on his community. He said the Bill violated Constitutional provisions. "You are saying that Hindu and Jain Boards will have only their community members but not the Waqf Board."

He said the aim of the Bill was to make Muslims second-grade citizens of India.

Giving the example of the Kashi Vishwanath temple at Varanasi, Congress MP from Uttar Pradesh Imran Masood said: "The



**Sharp words:** AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi said that PM Narendra Modi had declared a war on the Muslim community. PTI

temple is managed by a committee that is headed by the District Collector. However, there is a provision that if the Collector is a non-Hindu, an official below or above takes charge".

Terming the Bill as unconstitutional, Mr. Masood questioned how the government would register Waqf properties within six months when the same

could not be done in the last 10 years.

Another Congress MP, Mohammad Jawed, said the government was trying to snatch Waqf properties from Muslims and it was unfortunate that BJP allies, the Janata Dal (United) and Telugu Desam Party, were supporting this.

"They are changing some clauses which will lead to continuous conflict.

So, wherever they want, they will create trouble".

He said that the Joint Parliamentary Committee did not discuss the Bill clause by clause. "This government is targeting Muslims since it has come [to power]... Whether it is the CAA [Citizenship (Amendment) Act] or Places of Worship Act or triple talaq... They want to take away the rights of the Muslims and scare them".

Samajwadi Party MP Iqra Chaudhary said the Bill was not for the welfare of Muslims but aimed at destroying their heritage and existence. "By removing the 'Waqf by User' clause, lakhs of properties would lose their status and poor people will be on streets".

E.T.M. Basheer of the Indian Union Muslim League termed the Bill "regressive". "They are planning to do further injustice to Muslims," he said.

# UGC studying feedback on draft faculty appointment norms: govt.

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has received feedback on its controversial draft guidelines on faculty appointments. Suggestions have been made on improvements to the provisions relating to the role of Chancellors, and the constitution of the selection committee for appointing Vice-Chancellors. The feedback is at different stages of analyses and deliberations, the Education Ministry told the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

### The feedback is at different stages of analyses and deliberations, the Ministry says

Answering a question by DMK MP Tiruchi Siva, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said in the Upper House that the aim of the guidelines was to create an inclusive and multidisciplinary system. Opposition-ruled States had collectively opposed the draft guidelines. The Ministry said that as

part of the consultation process, Vice-Chancellors of Central universities from all States had been consulted. Mr. Pradhan said the regulations were designed to ensure academic excellence, while respecting the diverse educational frameworks of different States.

He added that the regulations aimed to create a more inclusive and multidisciplinary higher education ecosystem, in line with the National Education Policy, by allowing professionals with diverse expertise into academia.

# 'Thousands granted citizenship under CAA'

**Vijaita Singh**  
NEW DELHI

Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday that "thousands were granted citizenship" under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

His remarks come after Trinamool Congress MP Sushmita Dev said merely 350 people had received citizenship under the Act. Mr. Rai did not specify the number.

The Act was passed in 2019 but the Rules were notified on March 11, 2024. The Centre has not shared data on CAA citizenships so far.



**Answering queries:** Union Minister Nityanand Rai speaking in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday. PTI

The Minister was replying to a debate on the Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025 which was passed by the Lok Sabha last week. The Bill was passed by a voice vote in

the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday even as several Opposition members demanded that it be sent to a select committee for scrutiny as it did not face any appeal process.

Mr. Rai said the government had deported 36,000 "infiltrators" so far. He added the Bill was not against foreigners and only sought to track their movement and create a database on their entry, exit and stay.

### 'Ulterior motives'

Congress's Abhishek Manu Singhvi said the Bill was "designed for ulterior motives by a control-freak government, bent on sending out a message of fear through the architecture of omniscient, Orwellian surveillance for foreigners".

Mr. Singhvi said though the Bill was aimed at foreigners and targeted them as "suspicious," similar

laws could be brought in for Indians in the future, turning them into accused without any crime being committed.

According to the Bill, anyone found to be using a forged passport or visa for entering India or staying in or exiting from the country will be punishable with a jail term of up to seven years and a fine to the extent of ₹10 lakh.

The proposed legislation also provides for mandatory reporting of information about foreigners by hotels, universities, other educational institutions, hospitals and nursing homes to enable tracking of overstaying foreigners.

## IN BRIEF



## IAF pilot killed as fighter jet crashes near Jamnagar

An Indian Air Force pilot was killed when a Jaguar fighter jet of the IAF on a routine sortie crashed near Jamnagar city in Gujarat late on Wednesday, official sources confirmed. The Jaguar was a trainer aircraft and the other pilot safely ejected from the jet, officials in the know said. IAF operates six squadrons of the Jaguar deep penetration fighter jet. Last month, a Jaguar fighter on a routine training mission crashed at Ambala in Haryana after encountering a system malfunction but the pilot managed to manoeuvre the aircraft away from any habitation on ground, before ejecting safely, the IAF had stated.

## Govt.-owned aircraft repair company staffers on protest

A section of employees at the government-owned and the country's largest aircraft maintenance company, Air India Engineering Services Limited (AIESL), started a symbolic protest on Wednesday by wearing a black ribbon to work over issues of promotion and alleged discrimination against contractual staff. The protest comes amidst an uncertain future for the employees as the government has plans for privatising AIESL, which was among the companies hived off from erstwhile national carrier Air India at the time of its disinvestment. Those on protest are from the All India Aircraft Maintenance Engineering Union (AIAMEU), the union of AIESL employees.

## HC fines Anil Ambani ₹25,000 for seeking urgent hearing

The Bombay High Court has imposed a cost of ₹25,000 on industrialist Anil Ambani for seeking an urgent hearing in a petition challenging a tax notice issued to him on April 12, 2022. Mr. Ambani had moved the High Court seeking an urgent hearing on March 27, challenging the show-cause notice issued to him by the Income Tax Department. A Division Bench of Justice M.S. Sonak and Justice Jitendra Jain expressed their displeasure over the urgency and called it an "artificial urgency". The copy of the March 27 order was made available on Wednesday.

## Navy, Kirloskar sign deal for 6 MW marine diesel engine

A sanction order for the design and development of a 6-megawatt (MW) medium speed marine diesel engine was signed between the Indian Navy and Kirloskar Oil Engines Limited (KOEL) under Make-I category of the procurement procedure. "The prototype diesel engine with indigenous content of over 50% will be developed at a cost of ₹270 crore with 70% funding from the Government of India. The order also includes development of detailed design for 3-10 MW diesel engine," a Defence Ministry statement said. The developed engines will be used for main propulsion and power generation on ships of the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard.

## Ensure education, hygiene, healthcare in rural areas: SC

Top court dismisses plea to direct States to set up at least one public library in every village; Bench says 10% to 15% of budgetary allocations must go towards improving basic rural infrastructure

Krishnadas Rajagopal  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday remarked that ensuring hygiene, education and healthcare was the most important path towards a robust rural India.

A Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant made the oral observation while hearing a petition filed by the Mundona Rural Development Foundation to direct the States to set up at least one public library in every village in the country.

But Justice Kant said libraries, though laudable, may not be what rural areas need the most. "If you want to improve rural India, hygiene, education and health have to be ensured... A person who is starving, does he go to a library," Justice Kant asked the petitioner.

The judge said the States usually quote "financial constraints" as a reason for not spending more to improve hygiene, education and healthcare in rural

Direct States to set up at least one public library in every village in the country.

PETITION BY MUNDONA RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

A person who is starving, does he go to a library?... Have you looked at the availability of schools, teachers and mid-day meals for children, the water supply to villages... Has anybody done these surveys?

JUSTICE SURYA KANT  
Supreme Court Judge



areas. The court said at least 10% to 15% of the States' budgetary allocations must go towards improving basic rural infrastructure to realise the ambition of a fully developed country.

## 'Priorities differ'

Justice Kant said priorities differed: while the petitioner believed public libraries were essential in villages, others might want money to be spent on healthcare.

hygiene and education," Justice Kant noted.

Justice Kant asked the petitioner NGO whether it had done a survey on the health conditions in villages or the condition of drinking water in them. "Have you looked at the availability of schools, teachers and mid-day meals for children, the water supply to villages... Has anybody done these surveys?" the Bench asked counsel for the petitioner.

**Policymakers to decide**  
The court said it would be left to the wisdom of the policymakers in the government as to which best to prioritise, public libraries or basic infrastructure, in rural areas.

Disposing of the petition, the Bench urged the States to look into the issue and take steps within the limit of their resources. It expressed the hope that the States would consider taking effective measures, including the promotion of e-libraries, even through corporate social responsibility funds.

"But equally important is the means to provide them adequate healthcare,

## Kamra apologises as stand-up attendees get police notices

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

Stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra has apologised to fans after the police issued notices to attendees of his recent show, which has sparked a controversy over alleged remarks against Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

Mr. Kamra, known for his sharp political satire, is facing multiple FIRs over his show *Naya Bharat*, during which he allegedly referred to Mr. Shinde as a "traitor" — a remark that has drawn backlash from ruling party leaders.

Supporters of the Deputy Chief Minister have accused the comedian of "defamation" and "inciting hatred."

## Show attendee quizzed

A Navi Mumbai-based banker who attended the show was reportedly summoned by the police to record his statement as a witness, forcing him to cut

short a trip.

Reacting to the situation, the comedian posted on X: "I am deeply sorry for the inconvenience that attending my show has caused you. Please email me so that I can schedule your next vacation anywhere you'd like in India."

However, the Mumbai Police denied reports of widespread audience summons, clarifying that only specific witnesses were contacted.

## Third summons

The Khar police station in Mumbai has issued a third summons to Mr. Kamra, directing him to appear on April 5 for questioning. The comedian had previously skipped two summons, citing prior commitments.

Currently residing in Tamil Nadu, the 36-year-old comedian has refused to apologise for his 45-minute viral video, which has amassed over 12 million views on YouTube.

## On the draw

MNS against release of Pakistani film *Abir Gulaal*

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

The Raj Thackeray led-Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) on Wednesday strongly opposed the release of Pakistani film *Abir Gulaal* starring Fawad Khan in Maharashtra. "Despite several warnings, a Pakistani film is still being released," MNS spokesperson Amey Khopkar said.

The row intensified after the teaser for *Abir Gulaal*, also featuring Indian actress Vaani Kapoor, was unveiled on April 1.

## Mamata calls for rollback of drug price hike

The Hindu Bureau  
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday raised concerns over the hike in prices of essential medicines and

asked for a complete rollback of the Union government's order to ensure poor people have better access to healthcare. She called for protests across the State to condemn the hike.

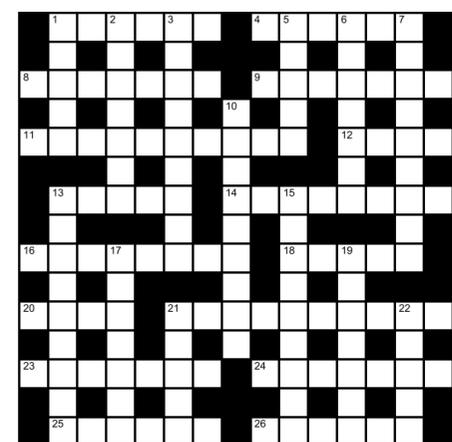
This came as a response to the rise in prices of over 900 essential drugs, by up to 1.74%, from April 1, announced by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority. This includes essential medicines for heart

diseases, infections, diabetes, and more. The CM called for protests across the State on April 4 and 5 at block and ward levels to condemn the hike. She said there would be protest meetings and marches.

TH CROSSWORD+ 14449 (set by Bruno)

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

SCAN TO PLAY



- 13 Quietly struggling... dear 4ac (5)  
14 Man's desire to get group to return knives (8)  
16 European with gold, escaped (8)  
18 Metal support systems' frame (5)  
20 4ac informally explodes! (4)  
21 4acs from rich parts while travelling around America (10)  
23 Odd business... really? In Delhi? (7)  
24 Fictional character - a boy with no papers from the East (7)  
25 Team seen in hotel, eventually (6)  
26 Heavy-set boy doggy often chased away (6)
- Down**
- 1 Fear of 4ac's mostly good (5)  
2 Right direction to go close to death? Back! (4-3)  
3 Thing about fatigue - it helps us sleep better (9)  
5 A leisurely walk - bet clears head (5)  
6 Man took care to fence town's large area (7)  
7 RRR movie's ending needs to be shot with professional artists (9)  
10 Hate to relax? Take up chant at home... (9)  
13 4ac's on time - rushed to catch my first play (9)  
15 One way to travel from California to South American city over heart of Caribbean and the French Territory (9)  
17 Unaccompanied man enthralled by person acting? (7)  
19 Article woven without interest became worn down (7)  
21 4ac often crushed with process (5)  
22 Chewbacca-like magical being starting to howl for touch of 4ac (5)

- Across**
- 1 Plain old man turned out to be architect (6)  
4 Rich girl's 1ac (6)  
8 General desperate to blow up (7)  
9 Son, ABCD's complex - run away! (7)  
11 Fine account on record counter (10)  
12 Son of Adam and Eve's a girl three-fifths (4)

## SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

**Solution to previous puzzle**

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

**Solution to yesterday's Sudoku**

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

## FAITH

## Unsurpassed servitor

In Sri Vaishnava terminology, the word *sesha* is used for devotees of Lord Narayana, and the Lord is called *seshi*. The *seshas* must serve the Lord. The Lord is easily pleased. Visiting temples, offering Him flowers, participating in *utsavas* — all of these please Him. However, there is one devotee of the Lord, who is unsurpassed in the services he offers to the Lord. That devotee is the serpent *Adi Sesha*, elaborated V.S. Karunakarachariar in a discourse. As a servitor of the Lord, he has no match. *Poigai Azhvar*, in one of his verses, describes the various ways in which the serpent serves Lord Narayana. If the Lord decides to stand, the serpent spreads its hood over His head and serves as an umbrella. If He wants to sit, the serpent becomes a throne for Him to sit on. If He decides to recline in the milky ocean, the serpent becomes a comfortable bed. The serpent also serves as His garment at times. If it is dark and the path needs to be lighted, the serpent shows the way, using the brightness of the gem in its hood. So in such cases, the serpent becomes a lamp too.

This pasuram of *Poigai Azhvar* is significant because it not only sheds light on the multifarious duties of the serpent *Adi Sesha*, all of which he performs with enthusiasm, but it also shows us the importance of devotion to the Lord. It shows us that our *bhakti* should be selfless. We must not expect any quid pro quo from the Lord. Compared to what *Adi Sesha* does for the Lord, what can we do? And yet, we are ready with a list of demands from the Lord, expecting a reward for every little offering of ours to Him. A visit to a temple must be to take in the beauty of the form of the Lord, to concentrate on Him.

# India's critical efforts to tackle air pollution could worsen warming

Regions that cleaned their air in the late 20th century have experienced a greater increase in warming trends over time while more populated urban areas with low human development indices have experienced lower levels of warming – due to the masking effect of pollution

Neelima Vallangi

Rapidly reducing aerosol emissions, which are part of air pollution, without concurrently reducing greenhouse gas emissions could expose a large fraction of the world's most vulnerable people to a sudden acceleration of warming and extreme heat in highly polluted regions like India. Researchers warned as much in a study published in November 2024 in *Geophysical Research Letters*.

The analysis found regions that cleaned their air in the late 20th century have experienced a greater increase in warming trends over time, while more populated urban areas with low human development indices have experienced lower levels of warming – due to the masking effect of pollution.

According to Aditya Sengupta, a graduate researcher at the University of Melbourne and first author of the study, abruptly halting the emission of aerosols can also increase the rate of warming on shorter time scales.

The study is particularly relevant for India, which is currently struggling to improve air quality on one hand while trying to stave off the worst of climate change on the other.

## Greenhouse gases vs. aerosols

Global warming is caused by the build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and has been known to intensify temperature and rainfall extremes. Aerosols can counteract the impact of greenhouse gases to some extent.

This is because, while greenhouse gases trap heat and warm the earth's surface, aerosols such as sulphates and nitrates scatter solar radiation, preventing it from reaching the ground and rendering a cooling effect. Aerosols also affect the water cycle.

Greenhouse gases are also well mixed in the atmosphere. As a result, their effects, including knock-on ones on the climate, can be felt around the planet. On the other hand, the concentration of aerosols in the atmosphere varies by location and time. Greenhouse gases are also more long-lived – carbon dioxide can persist in the atmosphere without breaking down for centuries – whereas aerosols live for a few days to weeks at a time.

The consequences of changes in the atmosphere's aerosol load can thus be felt almost immediately.

## Thermal power

According to Govindasamy Bala, professor at the Centre for Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, growing economies and industrialisation go hand in hand with aerosol and fossil-fuel emissions.

In India, thermal power plants generate roughly 70% of the country's electricity by burning coal, which contains some sulphur. "So before the flue gas [exhaust gas from the combustion process] is released to the atmosphere, you have to take out sulphur dioxide at the source to reduce air pollution," Mr. Bala explained.

Sulphate aerosols, which form through the oxidation of sulphur dioxide, are



Thermal power plants generate 70% of India's electricity by burning coal, which also releases sulphur that can go on to form reflective sulphate aerosols. AP

highly reflective and make up 50-60% of the overall aerosol composition in India, in addition to black carbon, dust, and other pollutants, according to Mr. Bala.

## Invisible offset

"[O]ur numbers show, if it were not for aerosols, we would experience much greater warming over India," Krishna AchutaRao, dean and professor at the Centre for Atmospheric Sciences, IIT-Delhi, said.

According to him, India warmed by about 0.54° C between 1906 and 2005, with the estimated warming due to greenhouse gases being about 2° C and the cooling offset from other anthropogenic factors about 1.5° C. While most of the cooling is likely from aerosols released by human industrial activity, some cooling is also likely from irrigation, Mr. AchutaRao added.

According to the first-ever assessment of climate change over India published by the Ministry of Earth Sciences in 2020, the country's average temperature rose by around 0.7° C between 1901 and 2018, largely due to greenhouse gas-induced warming, but was partially offset by anthropogenic aerosols and changes in land use. To compare, overall long-term global warming is currently about 1.3° C above pre-industrial times.

## Aerosols and rain

Aerosols' effects on rainfall are another matter. "In general, the temperature effect is fairly straightforward: remove aerosols, and it gets warmer," Mr. AchutaRao said. "With precipitation, things are further complicated."

According to Mr. Bala, the global mean cooling is about 0.6° C in the industrial period due to aerosols. But he said, citing a recent Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) report, that "this



Achieving net-zero carbon emissions is not the end of the story, policymakers should focus on adaptation policies for vulnerable areas, particularly the Indo-Gangetic plains, where the highest aerosol loading is found

cooling is unevenly distributed – in the northern hemisphere, it is 0.9° and in the southern hemisphere it is about 0.3° C. Because of this larger cooling in the northern hemisphere, the actual aerosol effect is a slight reduction in Indian monsoon rainfall."

Many people would like to understand what aerosols emitted by India are doing to India, but the remote effects of aerosols are also important to consider, he added. For example, a May 2024 study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* reported that when China cut its aerosol emissions, extreme heat wave events in the Pacific Ocean, along the west coast of North America, got worse.

Likewise, according to Mr. Bala's ongoing research, any substantial increase in aerosols over India could negatively affect the hydrological cycle and reduce the amount of monsoon rainfall. Understanding this process is an active area of study worldwide.

## Net-zero not the end

Both aerosol pollution and greenhouse gas-related climate pollution are mainly due to large-scale industrial activity. Greenhouse gas-induced warming increases the risk of extreme heat, aerosols cause respiratory ailments, creating a compounding effect on vulnerable populations, Mr. Sengupta said.

The study has found that cutting both

will also require policies to support already at-risk populations that will be affected by the sudden rise in warming in the short term.

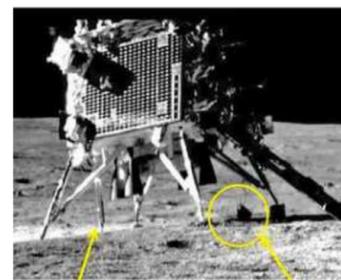
"Achieving net-zero carbon emissions would not be the end of the story, and policymakers should focus on long-term adaptation policies for the vulnerable parts of India, particularly people residing in the Indo-Gangetic plains, where the highest aerosol loading is found," Mr. Sengupta added. But because aerosol distribution is highly regional, it is difficult to exactly predict how specific places in India will be affected when (and if) we clean up aerosols, Mr. AchutaRao said.

Experts suggested the surest step would be to develop better heat action plans. Delhi-based research organisation Sustainable Futures Collaborative recently reported that few of the heat action plans of nine cities – Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Faridabad, Gwalior, Kota, Ludhiana, Meerut, and Surat – included long-term action and that even those were poorly targeted. If and when aerosols are removed from the atmosphere, the heat stress in these cities could worsen.

"While cleaning the air might accelerate ongoing warming by unmasking the greenhouse gas-induced warming, it could be beneficial in terms of increased rainfall over India. These trade-offs should be considered when assessing the effects of aerosols on our complex climate system," Mr. Bala added.

That said, all the experts agreed the immediate benefits to human health from reducing air pollution far outweighed any adverse consequences due to higher heat or disrupted rainfall.

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ChaSTE

ILSA

This image shows the ChaSTE instrument. ISRO

## Chandrayaan's ChaSTE takes the moon's temperature

Unnati Ashar

As the Vikram lander of Chandrayaan-3 touched down on the moon on August 23, 2023, a thermal probe tucked snugly in its panels slowly worked itself free and stretched its arms. Its motors started to whirl, sending the little probe into the soil. Once the probe reached its intended depth, it clicked in place with a latch.

This is Chandra's Surface Thermophysical Experiment (ChaSTE) – the first instrument *in situ* near the moon's south pole. Scientists used this data to report that water ice is more prevalent on the moon than expected.

ChaSTE also became the first mission to successfully penetrate the soil of a celestial body to deploy a thermal probe after two previous missions had fallen short. The ChaSTE probe features 10 temperature sensors spaced about 1 cm apart along its length, near the nose-tip. It uses a rotation-based deployment mechanism.

When its motor rotates, ChaSTE's probe needle pushes down until its tip touches the moon's surface. By monitoring the temperature from the sensor at the end of the probe, scientists can identify if it has touched the surface. As the probe continues to pierce, the soil offers more and more resistance. This requires the motor to exert greater force. That is how scientists confirm how far the probe has descended.

ChaSTE tunneled into the soil to a final depth of 10 cm, then collected measurements throughout the Chandrayaan-3 mission until September 2, 2023.

## ChaSTE became the first mission to successfully penetrate the soil of a celestial body to deploy a thermal probe after two previous missions had fallen short

On November 12, 2014, the European Space Agency's Philae lander, hitchhiking on the Rosetta spacecraft, landed on comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko. But it bounced – twice. Its Multi-Purpose Sensors for Surface and Subsurface Science (MUPUS) instrument onboard was designed to measure temperature by digging into the terrain. However, scientists couldn't deploy it due to the awkward landing. Philae found itself in a desolate icy rock, 500 million km away.

The German-Polish team behind MUPUS got another chance when NASA's InSight robotic spacecraft landed on Mars on November 26, 2018. It carried a temperature-sensing instrument called the Heat Flow and Physical Properties Package (HP<sup>3</sup>). It consisted of a self-hammering nail, nicknamed "The Mole," designed to penetrate 5 m below Mars's surface.

But the friction between the probe and the sand was too low for the mole to hammer itself down more than a few centimetres. After more than a year's action-packed struggle, the 35-cm Mole had finally descended fully into the Martian sand. But scientists couldn't get any temperature data. This was because HP<sup>3</sup>'s temperature sensors were not on the mole. They were attached to a tether that was supposed to trail The Mole as it burrowed through the sand.

"While both the instruments [MUPUS and HP<sup>3</sup>] used a hammering device, the ChaSTE probe was pushed into the soil by a rotating device," Durga Prasad K., principal investigator of ChaSTE from the Physical Research Laboratory, Ahmedabad, said. It was the secret sauce that made all the difference.

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## THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Please send in your answers to [science@thehindu.co.in](mailto:science@thehindu.co.in)

## A reference point where water meets earth

Vasudevan Mukunth

### QUESTION 1

The first step to scientifically understanding the earth's sea level is to determine the \_\_\_\_\_ the shape that the surface of the ocean would take under the influence of gravity and the planet's rotation and minus the effects of tides and winds. Fill in the blank.

### QUESTION 2

In 1948, geophysicists discovered an anomaly in the \_\_\_\_\_ in the form of a 3 million sq. km patch – roughly the size of India – where the sea level is about 106 m lower than the global mean. Fill in the blank.

### QUESTION 3

The world's mean sea level can be calculated as the average value of the X level over time. X in turn refers to the value of the sea level that includes the average height of waves on the surface due to winds. Name X.

### QUESTION 4

Name the space mission built by the US and French space agencies and launched in August 1992. Among other contributions, it revolutionised oceanography by measuring the mean sea level with an accuracy of 3.3 cm.

### QUESTION 5

As the earth's most recent glacial cycle ended around 11,700 years ago and landmasses lost ice, they became lighter and started to rise a little more above the water. In these places, the local sea level is dropping. What is this

geological phenomenon called?

### Answers to April 1 quiz:

1. Mathematical way to describe the state of a quantum system – **Ans: Wavefunction**

2. Rule that restricts fermions' quantum states – **Ans: Pauli's exclusion principle**

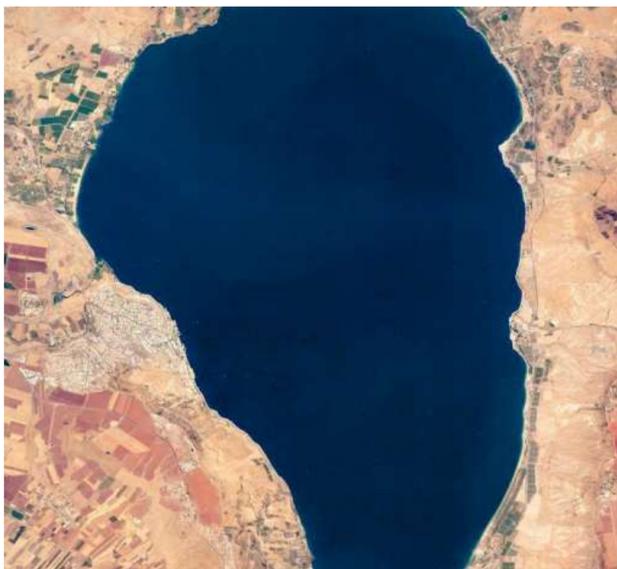
3. Idea about pairs of properties espoused by Niels Bohr – **Ans: Complementarity**

4. Quantum concept whose reality Einstein sought to refute – **Ans: Entanglement**

5. Quantum phenomenon rendering quantum computing possible – **Ans: Superposition**

Visual: **Hendrik Casimir**

First contact: Tamal Biswas | K.N. Viswanathan | Anmol Agrawal | Ashutosh Gupta | Settem Anjaneyulu



Visual: The Dead Sea is the lowest-lying lake in the world. Which is the second lowest (shown above as seen from space)? It lies just north of the Dead Sea. NASA

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



## Timing and location

Yunus chose the wrong time and place to push for regional connectivity

Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's remarks, made during his China visit to attend the Boao Forum for Asia conference, have sparked sharp responses in India, amid questions about their underlying intent. Speaking at a round table, Mr. Yunus highlighted the lack of connectivity and trade in the region, referring to the north-eastern Indian States – the “Seven Sisters” – as a “land-locked” area. Ignoring India's vast coastline, he went on to claim that Bangladesh was the “guardian of ocean access” and called on China to view the Indian States, along with Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh, as an “extension of the Chinese economy”, presenting them as a market and a production base. There were other undertones to his remarks, which were shared on his social media accounts. This was his first visit to China since taking office following the ouster of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last August. Tensions with India have persisted over attacks on minorities in Bangladesh and the Yunus government's demands for the repatriation of Ms. Hasina from India.

With no invitation forthcoming from New Delhi, Mr. Yunus's decision to visit China has been perceived as a diplomatic snub – and possibly a sign that Bangladesh may be shifting its foreign policy orientation. While the Ministry of External Affairs has declined to comment, political leaders have weighed in. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma called the comments “offensive and strongly condemnable”, suggesting that the remarks were aimed at highlighting India's strategic vulnerability via the “Chicken's Neck”. Other regional leaders and members of the Opposition have urged the central government to convey its displeasure to Dhaka. Mr. Yunus could not have been unaware that the timing and the location of his speech would provoke controversy. His remarks reflected a lack of sensitivity toward how the countries mentioned might interpret statements that appear to support China's economic hegemony in the region. While these comments may have been intended to appeal to his hosts or may have stemmed from his advocacy for regional connectivity, their substance could have been more carefully considered. A more suitable platform for such discussions might have been the upcoming BIMSTEC summit in Thailand, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi and leaders from South Asia to Southeast Asia will be present. Equally significant is that Mr. Yunus received two letters from India this week: one from President Droupadi Murmu extending *Eid-ul-Fitr* greetings, and another from Mr. Modi on the anniversary of Bangladesh's Independence Day. Although there has been no formal announcement of a Modi-Yunus meet in Bangkok, it is hoped that both sides will engage on the sidelines to mend the strain in ties and explore a more constructive path.

## Season of bluster

Donald Trump is finding it difficult to negotiate with Putin on Ukraine

After more than two months of caustic words for Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and approbation for Russian President Vladimir Putin, U.S. President Donald Trump appeared to strike a different note in his approach towards bringing the two leaders to the negotiating table. Following a call with Mr. Putin, Mr. Trump said that he was “very angry” with the former when, following weeks of attempted negotiations, Mr. Putin reportedly attacked Mr. Zelenskyy's credibility instead of discussing steps towards finding peace. Further, Mr. Trump, apparently irate that his campaign promise to end the conflict was losing steam and in danger of remaining unfulfilled, threatened to slap nations purchasing Russian oil with a 50% tariff, unless Mr. Putin agreed to a ceasefire in the near term. The choke point was Mr. Putin's insistence that Mr. Zelenskyy lacks the legitimate authority to sign a robust peace deal that would not be challenged by any nation; and that in this context the introduction of “temporary governance in Ukraine,” was required, perhaps achieved through “democratic elections, to bring to power a viable government that enjoys the trust of the people...”

In terms of his popularity back home, Mr. Zelenskyy had earlier corrected a broadside from Mr. Trump, a false claim that he only had an approval rating of 4%, when in fact Kiev had noted that 65% of Ukrainians trusted their President and his approval rating hovered around 57% in early 2025. Mr. Putin's claims in this regard, which range from the unfounded statements about Mr. Zelenskyy lacking popular legitimacy to accusing him, a leader of Jewish descent, of enabling Nazi forces in Ukraine, can be understood in the backdrop of Moscow's reluctance to enter into a peace treaty at a time when its troops have continued to keep up the military pressure on Ukrainian forces and have made substantial territorial gains there. The greater concern for Europe, and perhaps the U.S., might be that Mr. Putin could seek to undermine via influence operations any plan for free and fair elections in Ukraine and thus succeed in getting a pro-Russian candidate installed in Kiev. In turn, Mr. Trump, even if he is not particularly concerned with European security in a post-conflict scenario in Ukraine that might favour Russian interests, may worry that a lucrative U.S.-Ukraine mineral extraction deal might be in jeopardy if Mr. Putin is de facto calling the shots across the region. Regardless of the bluster on all sides, an early ceasefire would have the greatest impact on prospects for lasting peace after more than three years of bloodshed and dislocation.

On March 7, 2025, Donald Trump announced that he had sent a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, seeking to negotiate a deal on Tehran's nuclear programme. “We can't let them have a nuclear weapon,” the U.S. President told reporters in the Oval Office. A week later, on March 15, the U.S. launched waves of “pre-emptive” air strikes against Ansar Allah (commonly known as the Houthis) in Yemen. Within two days, Israel resumed its bombing of Gaza, killing over 400 Palestinians in overnight attacks and effectively ending the fragile ceasefire that had been in place since January 19. On March 22, Israel carried out its heaviest air strikes in Lebanon since the November ceasefire, targeting Hezbollah, a key Iranian non-state ally.

After a brief lull, West Asia is once again on fire. The common thread in these developments is unmistakably Iran. While Mr. Trump has reached out to Tehran for nuclear talks, the U.S. and Israel continue to escalate attacks on Iran's so-called axis of resistance, ratcheting up pressure on the Islamic Republic. “We are down to the final strokes with Iran,” Mr. Trump declared on March 7. In the subsequent days, the U.S. has deployed more fighter jets and its second aircraft carrier to West Asia.

### The deal that did not work

For America's elites, Iran's nuclear programme – and Iran in general – has remained an unresolved issue for decades. U.S. President Barack Obama sought to address it through diplomacy. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) curtailed Iran's path to a nuclear bomb, but Israel and the Israel lobby in the U.S. were not happy with the agreement. While the deal restricted Iran's nuclear programme, it left its nuclear processing capabilities, extensive ballistic missile programme and support for the axis untouched. The JCPOA, which promised to lift economic sanctions on Iran in return for scuttling its nuclear programme, allowed Iran to join the economic and diplomatic mainstream of West Asia, which would invariably leave Iran as a stronger conventional power – an outcome Israel found unacceptable. Mr. Trump, who first took office in 2017, shared the Israeli narrative that the JCPOA was a flawed deal. In May 2018, Mr. Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the agreement and reimposed sanctions on Iran, effectively sabotaging the agreement.

Mr. Trump's “maximum pressure” campaign, along with Israel's covert operations inside Iran, met with Tehran's “maximum resistance”. If Mr. Trump's plan was to force the Iranians back to the negotiating table, it failed. Instead, Iran stepped up its nuclear programme, enhanced support for the network, particularly the Houthis, and expanded its weapons capabilities. But then the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas in Israel happened.

Following the attack, Israel saw an opportunity



Stanly Johny

to weaken Iran's forward defence through a mini-regional war. Initially this approach faltered. Israel's war had two dimensions – one focused on Gaza, and the other targeting Iran. It was Israel that took the war to Iran, first by killing an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) general in Syria, and then bombing the Iranian embassy in Damascus. The Iranians retaliated, by directly attacking Israel twice. In Gaza, Israel has killed over 50,000 Palestinians and destroyed much of the enclave, yet, it remains far from achieving its stated goal of “destroying Hamas”. In Lebanon, Israel has degraded Hezbollah's militant infrastructure and decapitated its leadership, but the high casualties that it suffered and its failure to halt Hezbollah's rocket attacks, are what ultimately forced it to accept a ceasefire in November 2024. Meanwhile, Iran has significantly expanded its nuclear programme. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran now possesses enough stockpile of 60% enriched uranium to make six nuclear bombs if further enriched to weapons-grade purity (90%).

### Changing regional dynamics

But then two key developments happened in November, which Israel thinks have shifted the regional dynamics in its favour, strengthening its position in the war. First, the election of Mr. Trump, who unapologetically supports Israel's war policies, has given Tel Aviv the confidence to continue its mini-regional war without bothering about external pressure. Second, the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria has disrupted Iran's regional axis. Mr. Assad's Syria, Iran's only state ally in West Asia, had served as a crucial land bridge between Iran (through Iraq) and Hezbollah (in Lebanon). Hezbollah's ability to rebuild itself depends on supplies from Iran. With Mr. Assad gone and a regime of Sunni Islamists that is hostile to the Shia theocratic Iran taking over Damascus, the supply route has been severed. As a result, Hezbollah, Iran's most prized ally in the axis, will remain weak militarily, which would in turn weaken Iran's overall deterrence.

This shift is reshaping Israel's approach to the conflict. Under the November ceasefire with Hezbollah, Israel was expected to withdraw troops from southern Lebanon, but it refused to do so. Likewise, Israel entered into a ceasefire with Hamas in January only to get at least some hostages out, and not to end the war. It has since refused to withdraw troops from Gaza, and resumed bombing the enclave. Mr. Trump's decision to bomb the Houthis – one pro-Iranian group that remained relatively unscathed – signals that he is fully on board in Israel's mini-regional war. But for Israel, the fight against militias is not the ultimate goal. The real target is Iran itself. With the axis weakened and the Assad regime gone, Israel thinks that the Iranian regime is more vulnerable today than at any time since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

West Asia is on fire again, with Tehran dealing with diminishing strategic space, Israel growing more aggressive and the Trump administration turning more hostile

The Israelis are tightening the ring of fire around Iran. As Iran faces the heat, Mr. Trump has stepped in with his offer for dialogue.

### Shrinking strategic space

While the contents of Mr. Trump's letter remain undisclosed, his demands (and those of Israel) are no secret. The U.S. wants Iran to give up its nuclear programme, restrict its conventional military capabilities and sever ties with the axis. Iran, however, has only expressed willingness to engage in “indirect talks”, focusing only on the nuclear programme – essentially a return to the 2015 framework. But Mr. Trump wants more.

Iran, which sees itself being surrounded by hostile forces in a violent region, is unlikely to sign on its own surrender, by agreeing to restrictions on its defence industry or cutting ties with the axis. With Iran's shrinking strategic space, Israel's growing aggression and the near impossibility of diplomatic common ground between a hostile Trump administration and a wary Iranian regime, the risk of a large-scale military confrontation is today higher than ever.

Yet, war with Iran – even if the axis is decimated – would be catastrophic. Israel has two broad military options, both of which require American involvement. The first is a series of heavy air strikes aimed at crippling Iran's nuclear facilities and military infrastructure. However, given that most of Iran's nuclear facilities are buried underground – some of them beneath mountains – even a joint U.S.-Israeli operation may fail to eliminate them completely. Even if the facilities are damaged, Iran will still possess the technical know-how to rebuild the programme, and, post-attacks, it will have a greater incentive to develop a nuclear bomb.

The second option is a full-scale regime change war. But unlike in Syria, a country that has been internally destabilised by years of civil war and different armed opposition groups, Iran, despite the occasional mass protests, has no organised, militarised insurgency. So, if the U.S. and Israel want a regime change, they will have to launch an Iraq-style all-out invasion. But Iran, which is a country with centuries of statecraft, ring-fenced by mountains, and with a polarising but deeply entrenched, ideologically motivated regime whose navy has the Strait of Hormuz, a vital oil transit choke point, in its sight, is not Iraq. Israel might still want to push the envelope as it sees Iran's current vulnerabilities as a historic opportunity. But Israel needs its patron, the United States. So, the final question is whether Donald Trump, who came to power campaigning on ending America's “forever wars”, would commit to an all-out war against Iran if his diplomatic push collapses. If his statements and the regional developments are to be taken seriously, he seems inclined to back Israel's push to reshape West Asia by force.

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# Digital child abuse, the danger of AI-based exploitation

Recently, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology of the British Government, along with the AI Safety Institute (now called the AI Security Institute), released the first-ever International AI Safety Report 2025 (updated February 18, 2025). It flags the imminent risk of the generation, the possession, and the dissemination of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. Additionally, the United Kingdom is making the first legislative attempt to target the threats posed by AI tools that can generate CSAM. CSAM refers to material (audio, video, and images) that depicts a sexually explicit portrayal of a child. In a similar vein, the World Economic Forum, in a 2023 paper, highlighted how generative AI can create life-like images, especially of children. Moreover, the Internet Watch Foundation, in its report released in October 2024, underscored the proliferation of CSAM on the open web. The Government of India must amend existing laws to address the emerging threats and ensure long-term effectiveness.

### Recent developments

The upcoming U.K. legislation will make it illegal to possess, create, or distribute AI tools that can generate CSAM. Moreover, it will be illegal to possess paedophile manuals that may guide individuals in using AI tools to generate CSAM. This marks a progressive shift from an ‘accused-centric’ and ‘act-centric’ to a ‘tool-centric’ approach in dealing with these abhorrent crimes.

The existing laws focus entirely on ‘who’ has done ‘what’, placing less or no emphasis on the ‘tool/medium’ used to commit the said ‘act.’ For instance, the Protection of Children Act 1978 criminalises taking, distributing, and possessing an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of



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The Government of India must amend existing laws to address emerging threats

a child. Furthermore, the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 criminalises the possession of a prohibited image of a child, including non-photographic materials. In contrast, the proposed law outlaws even the possession and use of such AI tools, making it deterrent and holistic. Second, it will enable enforcement authorities to apprehend offenders at the preparation stage itself. Third, it can curb the initial rippling effect caused by the spread of CSAM on the mental health of children. Fourth, it addresses the legislative gap concerning CSAM generated as purely AI imagery, which was previously restricted to the images of an ‘actual child.’

### On whether India is future ready

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Report 2022, cybercrimes against children have substantially increased compared to the previous year's statistics. Moreover, the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP), under the aegis of the Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) scheme, recorded 1.94 lakh child pornography incidents as of April 2024. In 2019, the NCRB signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), USA to receive tip-line reports on CSAM. As of March 2024, 69.05 lakh cyber tip-line reports have been shared with the States and Union Territories concerned. The statistics underscore the gravity of CSAM as a serious threat to a child's right to life and dignity in India.

Presently, Section 67B of the IT Act 2000 punishes those who publish or transmit material in electronic form depicting children in sexually explicit acts. Furthermore, Sections 13, 14, and 15 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO) prohibit using children for pornographic purposes, storing child

pornography in any form, and using a child for sexual gratification. Additionally, Section 294 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita penalises the sale, distribution, or public exhibition of obscene materials, while Section 295 makes it illegal to sell, distribute, or exhibit such obscene objects to children. However, the existing legislative framework lacks adequate safeguards to deal with the AI-generated CSAM.

### A plan to follow

The existing legislative and policy framework in India needs to adapt to futuristic challenges, by making suitable changes. First, as proposed by the NHRC Advisory in October 2023, the definition of ‘child pornography’ under the POCSO Act must be replaced with the phrase ‘CSAM’ to make it expansive. Second, the term ‘sexually explicit’ under Section 67B of the IT Act must be defined to enable the real-time identification and blocking of CSAM. Third, the definition of ‘intermediary’ under the IT Act must expressly include Virtual Private Networks, Virtual Private Servers, and Cloud Services to impose statutory liability on them to comply with the CSAM-related provisions in Indian laws. Fourth, statutory amendments are needed to integrate the risks arising from emerging technological advancements. Fifth, the Government of India must pursue the adoption of the UN Draft Convention on ‘Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technology for Criminal Purposes’ by the UN General Assembly. Notably, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology proposed the Digital India Act 2023, currently in pipeline, to replace the two-decade-old IT Act. Therefore, and lastly, the proposed Digital India Act must draw inspiration from the U.K.'s upcoming legislation to include the provisions specifically targeting AI-generated CSAM.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Flouting directives

That certain governments in north India have devised their own system of instant justice is shocking. It is obvious that it has never struck these overzealous governments that such acts are arbitrary and thus extra-judicial. Detailed norms have been issued by the courts on such demolitions. It remains to

be seen whether such power-drunk governments will follow the directives and laws in force.

**C.V. Aravind,**  
Bangaluru

### ‘Elephant-dragon tango’

China's call to strengthen ties with India is welcome (Inside pages, “Xi Jinping calls for ‘elephant-dragon duet’ on 75th anniversary of

ties between India, China”, April 2). Yet, vigil is paramount. New Delhi must remain acquainted with various surveillance reports as the world is well aware of China's stand when it comes to respecting the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of neighbouring countries.

**Tushar Anand,**  
Patna, Bihar

If the signals are really what they mean then it could spell positive change. But India can extend the hand of cooperation only after satisfying itself that the ground developments are safe. Yes, if China makes a single, sincere and positive step, India can go two steps further.

**R. Sampath,**  
Chennai

### Minister's account

The Union Education Minister's lucid account of the salient features of the New Education Policy of 2020, should put to rest the misplaced fears of the leaders of the Opposition parties. His account of the edifice of the NEP being built on the five pillars of access, equity, quality, accountability and

accommodation, and the presentation of statistical data in support of his opinion that the focus is also on women as well as those who are marginalised must be appreciated (Editorial page, April 2).

**K. Chellappan,**  
Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

# The reciprocal tariff dilemma

Under the 'Fair and Reciprocal Plan,' the Donald Trump administration is countering "non-reciprocal trading arrangements with trading partners by determining the equivalent of a reciprocal tariff with respect to each foreign trading partner". The non-reciprocal trading relationship is assessed based on tariffs, discriminatory taxes, non-tariff barriers (including subsidies and restrictive regulations), exchange rate manipulations, and any other practice deemed to limit U.S. market access or impede American firms from competing.

In 2010, countries across the world sent 12% of their total merchandise exports to American shores. By 2019, one year before the pandemic, the U.S. share of world exports had only risen to 13%. The share stood at 13.4% in 2022, the latest year for which internationally comparable data on merchandise exports are available for the largest sample of the world's trading economies. Thus, roughly 87% of global merchandise exports are currently traded among countries that do not include the U.S.

Of course, there are variations around this average. For instance, the Cayman Islands and Bermuda in the Caribbean export almost 85% of their goods to America. The U.S. also accounts for over 75% of Canadian and Mexican merchandise exports. At the opposite end of the spectrum, 81 out of 160 countries, for which data were available from UN Comtrade for 2022, exported less than 5% of their total goods to the U.S. For 26 of these 81 countries (many from Africa), the U.S. share was less than 1%. The average U.S. share across the 160 countries was 11.4%, while the median was much lower at 4.7%. Less than a fifth of Indian, Chinese, and EU merchandise exports (18%, 16%, and 19%, respectively, in 2022) were destined for the U.S.

Now, let us look at the tariff



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picture and compare U.S. tariffs on partner exports vis-à-vis partner tariffs on U.S. exports. The latest tariff data available for this comparison are from UNCTAD TRAINS for 157 trading partners of the U.S., mostly for the year 2022. The European Union is considered a single partner given its common external tariff.

The average import-weighted tariffs on U.S. exports in 27 partner countries are lower than the corresponding U.S. tariffs. Technically, the concept of reciprocal tariffs works as a threat and a bargaining tool only when U.S. tariffs are lower than those in the partner country.

Considering only tariffs, this simple analysis thus rules out almost a fifth of all countries for which comparable tariff data are available from the 'Fair and Reciprocal Plan.' These countries include Canada, the EU, Japan, and the U.K. — among America's largest trading partners, which together accounted for half of total U.S. merchandise exports in 2022. In fact, U.S. commercial interests could be harmed if these countries imposed reciprocal tariffs on American merchandise exports instead.

Of the remaining 130 countries where the Trump administration perceives a tariff disadvantage, the magnitude of the tariff increase needed to nullify the disadvantage is less than 5% in 57 countries, including China and India. Moreover, in 15 of these 57 countries, the U.S. needs to increase its import-weighted tariffs by less than 1% to restore parity with partner tariffs. Thus, the threat of reciprocal tariffs may be more credible in the remaining 73 countries worldwide, where U.S. bilateral tariffs need to be raised by more than 5%.

Interestingly, however, the magnitude of the tariff hikes in these cases is positively correlated with the U.S. export shares in the partner countries. Put simply, pursuing the policy of reciprocal tariffs against partners where there is a significant tariff

differential results in raising average import duties on exports from countries for whom the U.S. is an important destination market. There is extensive commentary on how tariffs are a self-defeating policy. The correlation above only compounds the self-inflicted harm that a policy of reciprocal tariffs brings to the U.S.

This simple analysis is at the aggregate level, and more detailed product-level bilateral tariff and U.S. export share comparisons might be more revealing. However, based on this simple analysis, could partner countries be tempted to divert their exports to other countries in response to large reciprocal tariffs? After all, even today, 87% of global merchandise exports do not involve the U.S. While there are obvious costs to finding new export markets and trading partners, the experience during the pandemic has shown that firms adapt to external shocks quicker than governments.

### Removing barriers

The best policy response to reciprocal tariffs is for impacted countries to remove barriers to doing business, both internally and with their non-U.S. trading partners. This is also the time to enhance regulatory cooperation and reduce regulatory bottlenecks to cross-border trade with the rest of the world, not just in goods but also in services.

The World Bank and World Trade Organization reports show that exports of digitally delivered services have grown faster than those of all other services and goods during the last decade. My own research also shows that preferential trade agreements, which include provisions on regulatory behind-the-border issues, have the most positive effect on digital services trade. Instead of wasting scarce resources on retaliatory tariffs, countries will be much better served if policymakers focus on issues that matter.

The best policy response to reciprocal tariffs would be for impacted countries to remove barriers to doing business, both internally and with their non-U.S. trading partners

# Gains, losses, and politics in A.P.

CM supports the delimitation move, unlike his southern counterparts

### STATE OF PLAY

**Sumit Bhattacharjee**  
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Ever since the Union government began discussing the delimitation exercise, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has made it clear that he supports the process, unlike his southern counterparts, led by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin.

Supporting the NDA government's move, Mr. Naidu — who had earlier promoted family planning and spoken about population explosion — said that he has changed his view on population and is now promoting population growth, arguing that India's biggest advantage over developed nations is its demographic dividend.

He further stated that even South Indian States, including Andhra Pradesh, were also facing the ageing issue, compared to northern States. And that is why he is now promoting population growth.

In the recently concluded Assembly Budget session, Mr. Naidu made it clear that once the delimitation process is completed after the 2026 Census, the share of women in the Assembly would increase to 75 seats as per women's reservation norms.

After securing a landslide victory in the 2024 General and Assembly elections and forming the NDA coalition government in Andhra Pradesh, Mr. Naidu overturned a three-decade-old rule that disqualified candidates with more than two children from contesting local body polls.

Now the question is whether his support for delimitation will isolate him from the other Southern States. Notably, he

did not attend the meeting convened by Mr. Stalin. Mr. Naidu's absence from the meeting was expected, as his party, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), is part of the NDA, along with Pawan Kalyan's Jana Sena Party.

Interestingly, Mr. Naidu is aware that if the delimitation process is done after the 2026 Census, Andhra Pradesh's representation in the Lok Sabha will not increase substantially, unlike States such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. However, he has no other choice.

### Not repeating the past

As the leader of the TDP, Mr. Naidu is unlikely to repeat his past mistake of differing or opposing the BJP, as he had done before the 2019 elections. He not only lost the election by walking out of the NDA over the issue of Special Category Status for Andhra Pradesh, but also invited the wrath of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. The coalition deal was inked only days before the 2024 elections, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Kalyan.

It is also worth noting that Mr. Naidu first formed the government in 2014, after Andhra Pradesh's bifurcation, with the support of the NDA. Now, in 2024, he has become the Chief Minister for the fourth time, again with the same coalition.

On the other hand, former Chief Minister and YSR Con-

gress Party president Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy also did not attend Mr. Stalin's meeting, despite being invited. However, he had sent a letter to the Prime Minister, emphasising the need to amend the Constitution to give effect to a proportionate increase in the number of Lok Sabha seats for each State. Going by the records, Mr. Jagan had never strongly opposed the NDA on any issue. In fact, he has supported the passage of several contentious Bills.

Currently, Andhra Pradesh has 25 Lok Sabha seats, and under the proposed delimitation formula, this number is expected to increase to just 28. In contrast, Uttar Pradesh's representation is set to rise from 80 to 128, and Bihar's from 40 to 70.

Mr. Naidu has clearly stated that delimitation should not be linked to population management. He has also expressed that the delimitation process should not reduce the number of Lok Sabha seats but instead ensure justifiable distribution.

He also added that Andhra Pradesh followed family planning programmes, which is why there is no significant rise in population compared to northern States such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

While Mr. Shah has stated that no seats will be reduced in the southern States, he has not specified the numbers.

Now, whether delimitation will become a major issue for the Andhra Pradesh government and whether it will find itself in a delicate debate with the Centre in the coming days remains to be seen.

The total increase in seats from the five southern States is expected to be around 16, when compared to about 190 seats from the other States in the Lower House.

# Third language choice: Hindi in non-Hindi States, Sanskrit in Hindi-belt

Data hint that Sanskrit and Hindi are preferred by default due to a lack of supply and demand, even if they are not imposed

### DATA POINT

**Maitri Porecha**  
**Sambavi Parthasarathy**  
**Vignesh Radhakrishnan**

With the debate over Tamil Nadu's refusal to adopt the three-language policy still ongoing, the latest data needed to address key questions on the issue is lacking. Vital data that could help bring clarity is the list of languages currently being taught in schools across the States. Notably, DMK MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi raised this question in the Lok Sabha (LS) last month. However, the reply only provided the share of schools that taught three-languages, without mentioning the specific languages.

The last survey with this detail was the 2009 All India School Education Survey, which is not publicly available. *The Hindu* accessed a copy of the report through sources in the Education Ministry. Notably, even in the 2009 survey, school-wise data on languages taught is limited to the primary stage. However, the insights remain relevant, as the LS reply from 1995 states that 27 States/U.T.s had implemented the three-language formula (Table 1).

An analysis of the 2009 survey (Table 2) shows that in Bihar, 99.1% of schools taught Hindi, 64% taught English, and 56% taught Sanskrit in the primary stage, with only 8% teaching other languages. Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, 94% taught Hindi, 75.3% taught English, and 65.2% taught Sanskrit in the primary, with just 7% offering other languages. For Uttarakhand, the numbers were 99.5% Hindi, 85.5% English, 79.4% Sanskrit, and 2.6% others.

Data from these three States show that in Hindi-speaking States, the third language offered is mostly limited to Sanskrit. This is notable as the 1968 National Education Policy (NEP) had pre-

ferred a modern southern language in Hindi-speaking States.

Officials in Himachal Pradesh's Department of Education told *The Hindu* that in the last 15 years, there was no enrolment for Telugu, Tamil, and French "due to unavailability of teachers". Also, in the State, 34% of the 100 sanctioned Punjabi teaching posts are vacant, 71% of the 100 Urdu teaching posts are vacant, while only 9.8% of the 5,078 Sanskrit teaching posts are vacant presently. The high number of teaching posts and low vacancy at present also hint at Sanskrit being the preferred third language even now.

A similar situation continues in Uttar Pradesh currently. Bhagwati Singh, Secretary, Madhyamik Shiksha Parishad, Uttar Pradesh, said, "We have one student of Malayalam, three students of Tamil, and five students of Kannada registered with us. These students appear as private candidates."

Data from the 2009 survey also show that in Gujarat, over 97% schools taught Gujarati and 20.9% taught English, and 64% taught Hindi in the primary stage, with only 2.2% teaching other languages. In Karnataka, 97.5% offered Kannada, 86.2% English, 30.4% Hindi, and just 15% others. In Punjab, 79.2% schools offered Hindi, with less than 1% offering languages other than English and Punjabi. This hints at another trend, that in non-Hindi speaking States, the third language is mostly limited to Hindi.

Moreover, the LS reply shows that in Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha — States that had agreed for the three-language formula — less than 50% schools had implemented it as of 2023-24 (Map 3). In Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Haryana, less than 60% schools had implemented, pointing to uneven execution among those States that agreed.

Detailed data for recent years is the need of the hour. (With inputs from Amit Bhelari and Mayank Kumar)

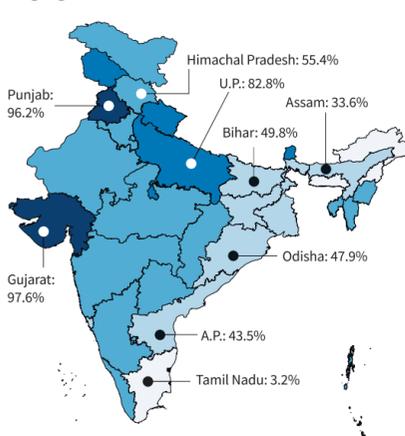
# Whither the three language formula

The data for the charts were sourced from All India School Education Survey (2009), Lok Sabha questions & answers and includes *The Hindu's* calculations

**Table 1:** The table shows the status of implementation of the three-language formula in States/UTs as per a reply in the Lok Sabha on December 13, 1995

Category	States/UTs
The State governments that adopted /implemented the three-language formula as of 1995	Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Orissa, Sikkim, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Daman & Diu, Goa, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra
Status not available in the report	Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Manipur
The State governments that had not implemented the three-language formula as of 1995	Jammu & Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry

**Map 3: State-wise share of schools teaching three languages as of 2023-24** In the map, the darker the colour, the higher the share of schools that teach three languages



**1** The share of schools teaching three languages is more than 90% in only five States/UTs

**2** The share is below 50% even in States such as Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, and Goa, which had agreed to implement the three language formula

**Table 2:** The table shows the share (in %) of schools that taught the regional language, English, Hindi, Sanskrit, and other languages in the primary stage, across select States, as of 2009

State	Regional	English	Hindi	Sanskrit	Others
Haryana	-	70.9	94.4	-	5.4
Himachal	-	68.3	97.3	-	1.5
Delhi	-	87.4	92.0	-	13.7
U.P.	-	75.3	94.0	65.2	7.0
Punjab	97.8	79.8	79.2	-	0.8
Uttarakhand	-	85.5	99.5	79.4	2.6
M.P.	-	52.5	99.1	1.2	10.9
Chhattisgarh	-	37.1	99.3	-	3.6
Gujarat	97.3	20.9	64.1	-	2.2
Rajasthan	-	52.5	98.7	-	5.8
Maharashtra	91.3	60.0	6.2	-	9.1
Arunachal	-	90.8	81.2	-	23.3
Assam	77.8	11.9	0.5	-	24.2
Manipur	86.3	86.5	35.2	-	27.6
Meghalaya	88.2	64.8	1.1	-	15.4
Mizoram	78.7	85.3	4.2	-	24.9
Nagaland	-	97.7	5.4	-	72.3
Sikkim	87.9	86.6	43.8	-	26.0
Tripura	98.5	79.7	0.5	1.8	18.3
Odisha	94.8	64.3	0.2	-	7.9
Bengal	94.2	86.5	2.0	-	3.5
Jharkhand	-	37.4	99	0.1	17.5
Bihar	-	64.0	99.1	55.9	8.4
Karnataka	97.5	86.2	30.4	-	15.0
Kerala	90.4	72.0	8.4	-	33.0
Undivided A.P.	94.3	83.1	6.3	-	7.2
Tamil Nadu	95.5	73.9	3.7	-	4.8

Others refer to languages other than English, Hindi, Sanskrit and the regional language in each State. The total in each row does not add up to 100 as one school can teach more than one language

The All India School Education Survey (2009) includes govt./govt. aided, private aided/unaided, recognised and unrecognised schools

### FROM THE ARCHIVES

*The Hindu*

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 3, 1975

## Stunning reverses for Saigon and Phnom Penh

Saigon, April 2: Virtually all northern and central areas of South Vietnam were in National Liberation Front hands to-day after the latest in a week of stunning Government reverses.

After military sources reported the loss of Nha Trang and Tuy Hoa and the apparent abandonment of Cam Ranh and Da Lat, the country's entire central coast to within 160 km of Saigon had passed into NLF control.

The picture was just as bleak for the administration in adjoining Cambodia following the reported capture of the ferry town of Neak Luong — which gave the Red Khmers full control of the Mekong river.

The formation of a new "war cabinet" seemed in the offing in Saigon after Premier Tran Thien Khiem submitted his resignation. He agreed to stay on until the new Cabinet came into being.

Nha Trang was command headquarters for one of the country's four military regions. Its loss meant that four of the country's five biggest cities had fallen to the NLF in little more than a week. The others were the former U.S. fortress Da Nang, the sacred former imperial capital of Hue and the key coastal city of Qui Nhon.

Nha Trang and Tuy Hoa, further north, which also fell to-day, were crammed with legions of refugees. Reported abandoned and probably lost to-day were Cam Ranh, once the Americans' major harbour in the Vietnam war, and Da Lat, the last provincial capital held by the Government in the Central Highlands.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 3, 1925

## Govt. and Indian Art.

Bombay, April 2: A largely attended meeting was held at Marwari Vidyalaya Hall. Mr. S. R. Bomarji, presided. The principal speaker was Mr. M. R. Jayakar, local Swarajist leader. Speeches were made strongly condemning the Government's lack of sympathy in fostering Indian artistic talent and art treasures.

Sir Edwin Lutyens, Consulting Architect for new Delhi was strongly criticised for having submitted the so-called rival scheme for encouraging Indian art. The Government of Bombay was strongly urged to take prompt measures for the scheme proposed at the Conference on Indian art, organised by the society at Wembley.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**Norway's emergency funding to help NGOs hit by U.S. aid freeze**

**28.7** In \$ million. Norway is to provide 300 million kroner (\$28.7 million) in emergency funding to help NGOs hit by the U.S. aid freeze. "The funds will go to Norwegian organisations which have been hard hit by the loss of U.S. funding," a statement read. AFP

**Amount to be spent by Greece as part of its defence plan**

**25** In billion euros. Greece aims to spend 25 billion euros as part of a multi-year defence plan, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis told parliament. The move is part of Greece's bid to modernise its armed forces as it emerges from the 2009-2018 debt crisis that led to years of austerity. REUTERS

**People who died due to electrocution in Odisha in last 5 years**

**391** Odisha's Deputy Chief Minister informed the Assembly that 391 people and 27 elephants died due to electrocution in the State during the last five years. Maximum numbers of such cases were reported in the area around Tata Power Western Odisha Distribution Limited. PTI

**Number of days given as special casual leave for organ donation**

**42** Central government employees are entitled to get a maximum of 42 days of special casual leave for organ donation, the Lok Sabha was informed. Irrespective of the type of surgery for removal of a donor's organ, the duration of special leave will be a maximum of 42 days. PTI

**The gap in funds of the WHO even after slashing budget**

**2.5** In \$ billion. The World Health Organization (WHO) is facing a gaping deficit this year and through 2027, following the U.S. decision to withdraw. The UN agency has shrunk its two-year budget for 2026-2027 from \$5.3 billion to \$4.2 billion. AFP  
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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# How did the Myanmar earthquake occur?

Has there been a history of earthquakes along the Sagaing fault? Has the earthquake caused damage in Bangkok as well? How did neighbouring eastern parts of India avoid any damage from the earthquake? Why is the plate boundary in Southeast Asia an active tectonic feature?

## EXPLAINER

C. P. Rajendran

### The story so far:

The powerful earthquake in Myanmar on March 28 had its source in central Myanmar, about 20 km from Mandalay, the country's second-largest city. Mandalay, located on the east bank of the Irrawaddy river, is close to one of the most seismically active faults in the region, called the Sagaing fault, named after a town not far from Mandalay on the river's opposite side. The earthquake of magnitude 7.7 struck around 12:50 pm local time, followed by several strong aftershocks, including one of magnitude 6.4, which occurred 11 minutes after the major event.

### What effect did the quakes have?

The quakes were very devastating; they affected the entire region, left thousands of people dead, and destroyed many homes. The damage zone extended to Bangkok, the capital of neighbouring Thailand, which is about 1,000 km from the earthquake's epicentre.

However, the damage in Bangkok was minimal, confined to the complete collapse of a 33-storey high-rise under construction, and causing water from a swimming pool on the top of another high-rise building to overflow. However, these incidents were given much hype because of the city's place on the global tourism circuit. The outpouring of water from the rooftop pool was due to seismic seiches – oscillations in the water triggered by the passage of seismic waves through the area. Even though the building was located far from the earthquake's source, slower, long-period seismic waves can cause the top floors to sway more and amplify the seiches, as observed in this case.

The damage prediction models of the U.S. Geological Survey estimated that the total death toll in the region could reach well over 10,000. Mandalay itself is home to over 1.5 million people and was hit the hardest, with many buildings, including pagodas, mosques, and bridges, either partially damaged or completely collapsed. A review of the damage pattern reveals that much of the devastation was concentrated in the southern areas of the Sagaing fault because this region is sitting on a thicker pile of alluvium, deposited by the Irrawaddy, which amplifies the seismic energy, as compared to the northern parts of the fault. This also explains why China's southwest Yunnan Province, which is north of the fault, escaped earthquake-induced damage. The depth to the source of the 2025 earthquake on the Sagaing fault was only 10 km, which is another contributing factor for the heavy damage and a large felt area (area where the earthquake's shaking is felt).

The neighbouring eastern parts of India also escaped damage because the energy released by the earthquake dispersed in a north-south direction, following the trend of the fault.

### Are quakes common in South Asia?

South Asia, including Myanmar, is highly prone to earthquakes due to its proximity to the complex assemblage of some of the largest tectonic features on earth, including the Himalayas, the Shillong Plateau, the Southern Indo-Burman Range, and the Andaman-Nicobar subduction zone. Originating from the collision of the Indian and the Eurasian Plates some 40 million years ago, the



**Mass destruction:** A damaged pagoda in the aftermath of the earthquake in Amarapura township, Mandalay, Myanmar, on April 2. AP

plate boundary in Southeast Asia is an active tectonic feature that generated one of the largest earthquakes in history, of magnitude 9.2, and a transcontinental tsunami in 2004.

The tectonic stress accumulating on these plate boundaries is the cause of frequent seismic activity in the region. The earthquake of 1792 was also a great 'megathrust' earthquake of magnitude 8.5, with its epicentre located somewhere along the Arakan coast of Myanmar. This seismic event generated a tsunami in the northern Bay of Bengal and caused widespread soil liquefaction in the Chittagong areas of Bangladesh. The large thrust fault extends further north onto the Chittagong-Tripura fold belt, where several moderate earthquakes continue to occur. It is still not clear whether this part of the deformation front can generate future great earthquakes.

Southeast Asia is a tectonic museum that exhibits structures that host earthquakes of varying faulting mechanisms, occurring at depths ranging from as shallow as 5 km to 200-400 km. The deeper ones occur in the southern regions closer to Indonesia or the Indo-Burmese regions in the north, bordering the subduction front along the Indo-Eurasian plates. The 2025 Mandalay earthquake in Central Myanmar was sourced from within the continental part of the mountain range. In the tectonics of mountain building, such features develop when sediment piles up and rocks are scraped off from the subducting Indian plate, which get plastered onto the overriding Asian plate.

### What is the geodynamic context of the Sagaing fault?

Because of the complex interplay of plate motions and the resulting geodynamics in the eastern margin of the Indian Ocean, the northeast-directed convergence of the India and Eurasia plates takes place in a slanted fashion rather than happening head-on. This oblique convergence of the plates causes the overall strain to become partitioned, with part of the deformation

being perpendicular to the plate boundary and the other part occurring parallel within the interiors. The north-south running Sagaing fault forms the tectonic boundary between the Central Myanmar Lowlands and the Indo-Burman Range. An elongated micro-tectonic block that exists between the Indian plate and the Sagaing fault is commonly called the Burma plate or the Burma sliver. It owes its origin to the strain partitioning occurring at the subduction front.

Studies have revealed that this fault, with its subsidiary parallel structures, accommodates much of the strike-slip part of the oblique convergence, with a slip rate of 15-25 mm a year and an accumulated slippage of 100-700 km. The Sagaing fault accommodates about 50-55% of the overall plate motion in the region. Unlike the vertical motions of fault blocks along the frontal part of the convergence zone, where one tectonic block is pushed up on the other, the movement is horizontal on the Sagaing fault, with the blocks sliding past each other. The San Andreas fault in the western U.S. is another such example. Unlike thrust faults, where earthquakes originate at either shallow or deeper sources, earthquakes on strike-slip faults are almost always shallower (10-15 km).

Classified as a typical ridge-trench transform fault, the Sagaing fault system runs 1,400 km between the spreading centre under the Andaman Sea in the south to the eastern Himalayan bend in the north. It has a long history of earthquakes. Moderate and occasional strong earthquakes of magnitudes 7 and above are common in central Myanmar, where six strong quakes of 7.0 magnitude or more struck between 1930 and 1956 along the Sagaing fault or on adjacent structures. Analyses of historical earthquakes have revealed that about half of the Sagaing fault has ruptured in the last few decades. Thus, the 2025 earthquake is not a surprise event but a part of the earthquakes occurring sequentially on this structure to release

the accumulating stresses from the ongoing active plate interactions.

### What does the Mandalay earthquake portend?

Historical records support the occurrence of an earthquake in 1839, called the Ava earthquake, that killed more than 500 people in central Myanmar. This event may have originated on one of the segments of the Sagaing fault with a hypothesised magnitude of 7.8. Equally interesting is the earthquake of 1927, reportedly felt strongly north of Yangon, Myanmar's largest city with a current population of more than four million people. Records also indicate that an earthquake occurred in 1946, possibly on the Sagaing fault north of Mandalay and with a magnitude of 7.7, like that of the 2025 temblor.

The historic city of Bagan in Central Myanmar, densely packed with religious monuments, has also been subjected to several damaging earthquakes. The latest one to hit this town was in 2016.

Science helps us understand the processes behind earthquakes and provides approximate locations of future earthquakes and their possible magnitudes. The Sagaing fault is not merely a scientific curiosity; it has a tragic impact on the millions who live with the restless fault beneath their feet. Myanmar is struggling to cope with the aftermath of the latest earthquake, with a rising death toll and extensive damage to infrastructure, both complicated by the ongoing civil war.

The 2025 Mandalay earthquake should serve as a warning to India. As the country most prone to earthquakes in South Asia, India should introduce scientifically tested safety measures and procedures to mitigate the impact of earthquakes.

C.P. Rajendran is an adjunct professor at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru. This article benefited from the paper by Yu Wang et al., published in *JGR Solid Earth* on March 15, 2014.

## THE GIST

The Myanmar quakes were very devastating; they affected the entire region, left thousands of people dead, and destroyed many homes. The damage zone extended to Bangkok, the capital of neighbouring Thailand, which is about 1,000 km from the earthquake's epicentre.

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The historic city of Bagan in Central Myanmar, densely packed with religious monuments, has also been subjected to several damaging earthquakes. The latest one to hit this town was in 2016.

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**Glory of old:** Children dressed up in Maharashtrian traditional attire during celebrations on the birth anniversary of Chhatrapati Shivaji, in Hyderabad, on February 19. PTI

# The Svarājya of Chhatrapati Shivaji: the wise king's just rule

The Maratha king's liberal and progressive attitude with regards to the various religions under his rule, particularly when contrasted with Aurangzeb's, is a legacy which needs to be cherished in contemporary India. Shivaji stood up to both Hindu orthodoxy and Islamic fundamentalism

**Prathmesh Kher**

Shivaji was religious, and from all accounts seems to have been proud of being a Hindu. He awarded large gifts to temples as well as priests. However, his pride in his religion does not seem to have been grounded in hatred for other religions. Even in those medieval times, his faith seems pragmatic, if not outrightly rational.

Khafi Khan's *Muntakhab-i Lubab* notes, "Shivaji had made a strict rule that wherever his soldiers went they were not to harm mosques, the Quran or women. If he found a volume of the Quran, he would show respect to it and hand it over to a Muslim servant. If any helpless Hindu or Muslim were found, Shivaji would personally look after them until their relatives came to take them." Likewise, Shivaji's chief justice, Raghunath Pandit Rao, in a letter of November 2, 1669, writes, "Shrimant Maharaj has ordained that everybody is free to follow his religion and nobody is allowed to disturb it."

In contrast, Aurangzeb had imposed the 'jizya', a mandatory tax intended for non-Muslims living under Islamic rule, in 1679. As the contemporaneous *fatwa* declares, this amount was to be paid "regardless of whether they agree or disagree, consent to it or not".

Shivaji's response to this was bold and clear. Contending that Hinduism and Islam, while different from each other, are equal creations of God, he wrote in a letter to Aurangzeb: "They are different hues used by the true Divine Painter for blending the colours and filling in the outlines of His [God's] picture of the entire human race."

"If it be a mosque, the call to prayer is chanted in remembrance of Him. If it be a temple, the bell is rung in yearning for Him only. To show bigotry for any man's own creed and practices is equivalent to

altering the words of the Holy Book. To draw new lines on a picture is equivalent to finding fault with the painter," he contended.

**A ruler's responsibility**

Reminding Aurangzeb of a ruler's duty towards his subjects, Shivaji writes, "Your peasants are downtrodden; the yield of every village has declined, in the place of a lakh only a thousand, and in the place of a thousand only ten are collected." He reminds the Mughal autocrat that under his rule "the army is in a ferment, the merchants complain, the Muslims cry, the Hindus are grilled, most men lack bread at night and in the day inflame their own cheeks by slapping them in anguish."

Not one to back off from a righteous battle even when beseeching for fair play, Shivaji reminded Aurangzeb that many of the forts and provinces "have gone out of your possession, and the rest will soon do so too, because there will be no slackness on my part in ruining and devastating them".

In his *Travels in the Mogul Empire: AD 1656-1668*, French traveller Francois Bernier testifies to Shivaji's conciliatory attitude towards Catholic clergymen he encountered. "I forgot to mention that during pillage of Sourate [Surat], the Holy Seva-ji, respected the habitation of the reverend father Ambrose, the Capuchin missionary. 'The Frankish Padres are good men', he said, 'and shall not be attacked'. He spared also the house of a deceased Delale or Gentile broker, of the Dutch, because he was assured that he had been very charitable while alive. The incident is corroborated by De Thévenot in his *Voyages*. 'All the rest of the town [Surat] was plundered except the monastery of the Capuchins.'"

Shivaji's liberal and progressive attitude with regards to the various religions under his rule, particularly when contrasted with Aurangzeb's attitudes in this regard, is something that

contemporary India can learn from.

**The once and future king**

Shivaji died on April 3, 1680. That, however, did not stop the project he had set afoot. Despite many setbacks, the discipline and zeal of those who followed managed to rout out the numerically powerful yet otherwise hollow Mughal empire. In less than a century after his death, the empire that Shivaji had brought into existence had taken over much of the erstwhile Mughal territory.

Over two decades after Shivaji had shuffled off his mortal coil, an aged Aurangzeb wrote in a deathbed letter: "The escape of the wretch Shiva took place through [my] carelessness, and I have had to labour hard [against the Marathas] to the end of my life, [as the result of it]."

Shivaji continues to fascinate the politics both of Maharashtra and India at large. During the struggle for independence, revolutionaries from across political stripes drew inspiration from him.

Mahatma Phule's ballad *Chhatrapati Shivaji Raje Bhosale Yancha Powada* reflects on Shivaji's opposition both to the orthodoxy of *savarna* Hindus in his age as well as Islamic fundamentalism.

The term 'Svarājya' was employed by the likes of Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahatma Gandhi et al to champion their causes. "Svarājya is my birth right," was a popular maxim by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The anti-caste agitation of the Mahad Satyagraha, which took place in Shivaji's erstwhile capital Raigad, witnessed protestors chanting 'Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj ki Jai!'. Dr. Ambedkar had extensively covered the coronation controversy in his *Who are the Shudras?* explaining in detail how the contrivance of the caste Hindus almost stopped Shivaji's project from becoming a reality. The subject was recounted in Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam founder and former

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C.N. Annadurai's play *Shivaji Kanda Hindu Rajyam*, which got its lead actor the nom de guerre Shivaji Ganesan. Subramanya Bharati extolled Shivaji in his 190-line poem of the same name exhorting Indians to rise against British tyranny just as Shivaji had risen against the one in his age.

In his statement in the Sessions Court, on June 6, 1929, Bhagat Singh said that a new movement which "has arisen in the country, and of that dawn we have given a warning, is inspired by the ideal which guided Guru Gobind Singh and Shivaji, Kamal Pasha and Riza Khan, Washington and Garibaldi, Lafayette and Lenin."

From vituperative declamations by his opponents while he lived to overtly hagiographical accounts by his followers, the memory of the man who once wrought havoc on the Mughal empire is now a plaything for politicians hoping to garner votes by extolling his bravery, his intelligence, and his drive. A whole cottage industry of sorts has sprung up to make budget movies and pulpy novels on Shivaji; sometimes verging on the ludicrous, with the gods themselves appearing as characters therein. Many a contradiction is evidenced as self-declared democrats laud a king who ruled in feudal times.

But few visit upon what made Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj such a magnetic figure both while he lived and in centuries hence.

It was not through divine providence but through human will that he fought against a quantitatively larger enemy and wrought a just rule in place of an unjust one, albeit under the auspices of monarchy. It was not merely that he fought well but that he fought for what was right; to empower those who were destitute and to liberate those who were enslaved.

*This is the second of a two-part series on Shivaji's reign.*



**FROM THE ARCHIVES**

## Know Your English

**K. Subrahmanian S. Upendran**

"My mother tells me you're going to buy a new car."

"Yes, that's right."

"What kind? A Fiat?"

".... no, I'm buying a General Purpose Vehicle."

"A General Purpose Vehicle! I've never heard of that."

"That's what Jeeps were called when they first came out."

"Jeeps were called 'General Purpose Vehicles'?"

"Yes, that's right. You see, during World War II, that's when the jeep was invented in the U.S., the official designation for the car was 'General Purpose Vehicle'. Since it was too long a name, people shortened it to GP."

"The short form for 'General Purpose', I suppose."

"Exactly. And 'GP' became 'jeep.'"

"That's interesting. So, when are you picking up your jeep?"

"Tomorrow at 3-30."

"At 3-30! Are you taking the day off, then?"

No, I'll leave office around 2-30. My boss said he'd wink at my absence."

"Wink at? What does it mean?"

"When you 'wink at' something, you pretend not to see something although you have actually seen it. You forgive someone although he's done something wrong. For example, the policeman winked at my failure to stop at the red light."

"He must have been a nice policeman. Can I say, these days most politicians wink at corruption?"

"Why just politicians? I think all of us have begun to wink at corruption."

"That's true. We all make so many mistakes and ..."

"... We try to paper over them."

"What does 'paper over' mean?"

"It means 'to conceal something, to cover something up.' You pretend that everything is ok, when in fact, it's not. For example, during elections, members of a political party will paper over their differences."

"Later they'll try to paper over the mess they've made."

"True. All of us try to paper over our mistakes some time or the other."

"How come you're in such a forgiving mood today? Is it because you're getting your jeep tomorrow?"

"May be!"

Published in *The Hindu* on January 2, 1996.

**THE DAILY QUIZ**

## Here's a quiz on Chhatrapati Shivaji on his 345th death anniversary

**Prathmesh Kher**

**QUESTION 1**

On June 11, 1665, Shivaji signed a treaty with Jai Singh (who represented Aurangzeb). What is it called?

**QUESTION 2**

Shivaji had an older brother who died as part of a failed rebellion at the hands of Afzal Khan. What was his name?

**QUESTION 3**

Name Shivaji's half-brother who ruled Tanjore on his behalf?

**QUESTION 4**

Name the Maharashtrian scholar who retrieved the first painting of Shivaji (made in 1677) from the British archives in 1933.

**QUESTION 5**

What is the name of Shivaji's tutelary (family) deity?



**Visual question:**

What is this instrument? And what is its significance vis-a-vis Shivaji's legacy?

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

- The first non-Italian pope in 455 years. **Ans: Pope John Paul II**
  - This international Portuguese filmmaker is known for his film *Past and Present*. **Ans: Manoel de Oliveira**
  - This crime boss was convicted on 13 criminal counts, including the murder of Paul Castellano. **Ans: John Gotti**
  - This soap opera debuted as a five-part miniseries on American television. It revolved around an affluent and feuding Texas family, the Ewings. **Ans: Dallas**
  - This movie had its world premiere in Washington, D.C. in 1968 and was directed by Stanley Kubrick. **Ans: 2001: A Space Odyssey**
  - This German sculptor and painter was a pioneer of the Dada movement and surrealism in Europe. **Ans: Max Ernst**
- Visual: Identify this British actor. **Ans: Alec Guinness**
- Early Birds:** Siddhartha Viswanathan| Anju Sharma| Prince Samuel| Tamal Biswas| Tito Shiladitya

Please send in your answers to [dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in](mailto:dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in)

## Word of the day

**Disputatious:**

inclined or showing an inclination to dispute or disagree

**Synonyms:** combative, contentious, litigious

**Usage:** Due to his disputatious manner, he was not much missed when he resigned his post.

**Pronunciation:** newsth.live/disputatiouspro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /ˌdɪspjuˈteɪʃəs/, /ˌdɪspjəˈteɪʃəs/

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

## IN BRIEF



## ‘Rupee may trade between ₹85.5 and ₹87.5/dollar in FY26’

Domestic economic conditions are supportive to the rupee and may trade between ₹85.5 to ₹87.5 against the dollar in fiscal 2026, according to a research note by Bank of Baroda. Improved growth prospects, slowing inflation and stable external deficits will benefit the rupee. The risks from the U.S. tariff actions are not immediately certain, it said. The rupee spot price depreciated 2.5%, closing at ₹85.45 a dollar as on March 31 2025, according to data from Google Finance.

## Poonam Gupta appointed as RBI Deputy Governor

The Union Government has appointed Poonam Gupta as the Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Ms. Gupta, who is currently serving as the Director General of the National Council for Applied Economics Research (NCAER), will replace Michael Debabrata Patra. Ms. Gupta will hold the position for three years. She has assumed various roles in academia, think tanks and government and non-government organisations including the IMF and World Bank.

## Swaraj Tractors, clean tech arm to set up 26 MW solar project

In a bid to introduce the use of green energy extensively in tractor manufacturing, Swaraj Tractors, a division of the Mahindra Group, has announced its collaboration with Mahindra Susten, the group's clean-tech arm, to establish a 26 MW solar energy installation in Bathinda district. The project is expected to generate approximately 60 million kWh of renewable energy annually, contributing to the abatement of around 54,600 tonnes of CO2 emissions.

## AI legacy widebody aircraft gets new look

Jagriti Chandra  
NEW DELHI

The first of Air India's (AI) 13 legacy Boeing 777 wide-bodies rolled back from Singapore on Wednesday sporting a revamped passenger cabin – new seat covers, fresh carpeting and a sharp interior lift.



A more thorough makeover is now delayed until 2026.

The aircraft returned from Singapore where its interiors underwent 'colour, material and finish (CMF)' rework for 52 days to help passengers experience new feel and look.

This is only an interim enhancement programme for aircraft interiors and includes new upholstery for passenger seats, new carpeting and curtains and a fresh coat of paint on the cabin panels as well as lavatories, said a senior official of the airline.

AI aims to conclude heavy cabin refresh programme for the 13 B777s used for flying some of the most profitable ultra long-haul routes to the U.S. and Europe by December 2025. A more thorough makeover for the planes, such as replacement of seats and dysfunctional in-flight entertainment screens are now delayed until 2026 after being originally scheduled to start in 2023.

## Container cargo movement at ICTT rises 11%

The Hindu Bureau  
KOCHI

DP World's International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT) set a new record in 2024-25 handling 8,34,665 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units), growth of about 11% year-on-year. The earlier record was 7,54,237 TEUs achieved in 2023-24.

The transshipment volume, too, went up to a record high of 1,69,562 TEUs. Movement of cargo was also high in various segments such as foreign exports, coastal exports and reefer volumes.

## ‘Evolving risk driving cyber cover demand’

N. Ravi Kumar  
HYDERABAD

Rising cyber threats, contractual requirements as well as regulatory changes are making businesses opt for and renew cyber insurance policies, an insurance web aggregator's study findings showed.

Cyber insurance is no longer perceived as an optional risk-transfer tool but a core component of enterprise risk management. Businesses have come to recognise the recurring and evolving nature of cyber risks. Almost 100% of cyber insurance clients are renewing policies, Policybazaar said on the study by

## ‘Only Indian steel for govt. contracts’

Centre rejigs procurement policy to shut out foreign competition, bans suppliers from nations that bar Indian firms from government tenders with a reciprocal clause; China continues to be among the ‘target’ nations, say industry sources

Abhishek Law  
NEW DELHI

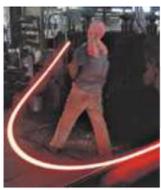
India has revamped its procurement policy – Domestically Manufactured Iron & Steel Products Policy - 2025 – and in the process, has cracked down on surging steel imports that have hit domestic market stability and are threatening the survival of primary mills.

The new policy's stringent procurement rules mandate a clear preference for indigenously produced steel for government contracts, shutting out foreign competition.

A reciprocal clause bans suppliers from nations that

## Steely resolve

The Centre has directed all ministries and departments to prioritise iron and steel products manufactured within the country



Revised policy covers items such as flat-rolled steel, bars, rods, and railway materials

Materials must comply with the 'Melt & Pour' norm, wherein the steel must be melted and solidified in India

Capital goods used in alloy production like furnaces, rolling mills must achieve at least 50% domestic value addition

bar Indian firms from their government tenders.

All ministries, departments, and their affiliated agencies have been directed to prioritise iron and steel products manufactured within India with im-

mediate effect. This includes items such as flat-rolled steel, bars, rods, and railway materials.

These materials must comply with the 'Melt & Pour' condition, meaning the steel must be melted

and solidified in India.

Industry sources say China continues to be among the target nations under these revised procurement rules.

There are also efforts to slow imports from other Asian countries, with which India has free trade agreements (FTAs).

## Bar on enquiries

The new policy explicitly prohibits Global Tender Enquiries (GTE) for iron and steel products and limits such enquiries for capital goods valued up to ₹200 crore unless approved by the Department of Expenditure.

This measure aims to

protect domestic manufacturers from foreign competition in government contracts.

The policy introduces a reciprocal clause, wherein entities from countries that restrict Indian companies from participating in government procurement will be barred from bidding in India for steel-related items, unless explicitly permitted by the Ministry.

Additionally, the revised policy states that capital goods used in the production of the alloy, such as furnaces and rolling mills, must achieve at least 50% domestic value addition.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

## Macrotech accuses HoABL of trademark violation using fabricated documents

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

Real estate company Macrotech Developers Ltd. (Lodha) has accused House of Abhinandan Lodha (HoABL) of using fabricated documents to indulge in trademark violation for furtherance of the latter's business activities.

In its filing with the exchanges, Macrotech alleged that HoABL had fabricated a board resolution of Macrotech and a PAN

## A mediation process is currently on to settle IPR disputes between the two companies

card of its independent director Ashwani Kumar.

"The fraudulent document was then used to manipulate government records and change HoABL group company names, allowing them to operate under the Lodha name by in-

fringing Macrotech's intellectual property rights," Macrotech alleged.

Currently, a High Court initiated mediation process is on for settlement of IPR

disputes between the two companies controlled by the Lodha brothers. The House of Abhinandan Lodha does not admit any of the allegations of fraud and forgery sought to be attributed to us, said a spokesperson for HoABL, which is mostly into plotted real estate development.

## ‘India produced 1,681 locomotives in FY25’

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

India achieved a record production of 1,681 locomotives across various categories in financial year 2024-25, the Union Ministry of Railways said on Wednesday.

This marks an increase of 209 locomotives, or 19%, compared with the 1,472 locomotives produced in the previous financial year 2023-24, a railways spokesperson said.

This record-breaking production is the highest ever for locomotive manufacturing in the country. "This surpasses the total

locomotive production of regions such as the United States, Europe, South America, Africa, and Australia," the spokesperson further said.

Between 2004 and 2014, India produced a total of 4,695 locomotives, with a national annual average of 470.

In contrast, from 2014 to 2024, locomotive manufacturing witnessed a significant surge, with 9,168 locomotives produced, raising the annual average to approximately 917.

The majority of the locomotives produced in the country were intended for freight trains.

Jagriti Chandra  
NEW DELHI

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A more thorough makeover is now delayed until 2026.

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## RIL enters e-sports arena via BLAST JV

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

RISE Worldwide Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL) and BLAST Esports Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of BLAST ApS, said they would form a joint venture to conduct e-sports business in India.

The JV will bring BLAST's globally-recognised e-sports properties and production techniques to India while co-creating new tournament IPs tailored to the fast-growing gaming market, RIL said in a statement.

BLAST is a European-based e-sports entertainment company and one of the biggest tournament organisers in the world.

Devang Bhimjyani, head of Reliance Sports, said

## India is the fastest growing gaming market with a gamer base of more than 600 million

with this JV, Reliance will extend its interest in sports into e-sports and leverage RISE's ability to market and promote sporting events and teams

India is the fastest growing gaming market with a massive gamer base of more than 600 million (18% of total gamers globally). India's gaming market is likely to grow at a CAGR of about 19% to reach \$9.2 billion by 2029 from \$3.8 billion in 2024, RIL said.

The global e-sports market is likely to rise to \$16.7 billion by 2033 from \$2.8 billion in 2024.

## Digital travel



Code of conduct: Passengers walk on a platform as they arrive from London at the Eurostar terminal of Brussels-Midi train station in Brussels, on Wednesday. Travellers from Europe will now need a digital Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) permit, which U.K. officials said they were rolling out to boost security and streamline entry process. AFP

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KOCHI

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The transshipment volume, too, went up to a record high of 1,69,562 TEUs. Movement of cargo was also high in various segments such as foreign exports, coastal exports and reefer volumes.

## ‘Evolving risk driving cyber cover demand’

N. Ravi Kumar  
HYDERABAD

Rising cyber threats, contractual requirements as well as regulatory changes are making businesses opt for and renew cyber insurance policies, an insurance web aggregator's study findings showed.

Cyber insurance is no longer perceived as an optional risk-transfer tool but a core component of enterprise risk management. Businesses have come to recognise the recurring and evolving nature of cyber risks. Almost 100% of cyber insurance clients are renewing policies, Policybazaar said on the study by

its corporate insurance arm PBF.

Companies with more than ₹10 crore turnover are leading the offtake, especially those in BFSI, IT and technology, healthcare and logistics industries besides start-ups. BFSI and tech sectors lead the list due to high regulatory and operational risks.

First-time buyers make up about one-third of the cyber insurance clients.

Premium payout for liability insurance among businesses last fiscal was estimated at ₹3,500-₹4,000 crore. Of this, cyber insurance accounted for approximately 20-30%, Policybazaar said.

## ‘India logged 93.2-bn UPI transactions in H2FY24’

The Hindu Bureau  
BENGALURU

India's UPI transactions volumes surged 42% year-on-year during the second half of FY2024, reaching 93.23 billion, according to 'India Digital Payments study' released by Worldline, a payment services provider.

The UPI transaction value surged 31% YoY to ₹130.19 trillion, it reported.

Grocery stores, restaurants, pharmacies and government services accounted for 68% of the transaction volume and 53% of total transaction value, as per the study.

## ‘Apple to expand India output to 25% by 2028, up from 14% in FY24’

Mini Tejaswi  
BENGALURU

Apple plans to expand India-based output to 25% by 2028, up from 14% in FY24, said a report put out by Caggemini Research Institute on Wednesday.

Indian manufacturing facilities produced 14% of Apple's total iPhone output in FY24, making India the largest producer of Apple smartphones outside China, as per the report titled, 'The Resurgence of manufacturing: Reindustrialisation strategies in Europe and the U.S.'

"Apple plans to expand India-based output to 25%



Apple of the country: India is now the largest producer of Apple smartphones outside of China. REUTERS

by 2028," it said.

Broadening the scenario, it said, in recent years, U.S. organisations have been looking at "frien-

dier" shores such as India, Mexico, Vietnam and Malaysia, as possible manufacturing bases.

In Southeast Asia, rein-

## MARKETS

## MARKET WATCH

	WEDNESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	76,617	0.78
US Dollar	85.52	-0.02
Gold	94,150	0.00
Brent oil	74.70	-0.01

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter	2369.40	34.15
Adani Ports	1195.45	20.70
Apollo Hosp	6732.15	99.85
Asian Paints	2306.65	-9.35
Axis Bank	1084.45	-1.15
Bajaj Auto	8072.95	79.90
Bajaj Finserv	1390.95	-6.15
Bajaj Finance	8669.25	-28.95
Bharti Elec	282.40	-9.60
Bharti Airtel	1754.60	30.45
Cipla	1452.35	-8.10
Coal India	397.50	-0.15
Dr Reddys Lab	1150.00	-2.20
Eicher Motors	5355.50	48.30
Grasim Ind	2616.50	-2.50
HCL Tech	1527.55	-2.80
HDFC Bank	1796.90	29.05
HDFC Life	696.15	3.25
Hero MotoCorp	3783.95	21.90
Hindalco	661.20	-2.55
Hind Unilever	2237.90	4.05
ICI Bank	1331.25	12.80
IndusInd Bank	702.45	19.75
Infosys	1550.15	23.65
ITC	409.05	-2.60
Jio Financial Services Ltd.	229.78	-0.64
JSW Steel	1055.90	-0.35
Kotak Bank	2154.60	8.70
L&T	3419.90	-16.90
M&M	2637.55	-0.35
Maruti Suzuki	11716.10	235.00
NestleIndia	2210.70	-23.30
NTPC	351.75	-0.40
ONGC	250.64	2.57
PowerGrid Corp	286.75	-2.55
Reliance Ind	1251.15	-1.45
SBI Life	1559.85	14.60
State Bank	775.95	4.25
Shriram Finance Ltd.	639.40	1.95
Sun Pharma	1713.65	15.30
TataConsumerProduct	1062.70	70.45
Tata Motors	671.90	0.05
Tata Steel	154.69	1.57
TCS	3543.95	-6.85
Tech Mahindra	1423.05	27.90
Titan	3098.45	111.50
Trent Ltd.	5862.50	105.75
UltraTech Cement	11250.95	-127.70
Wipro	263.60	1.00
Zomato Ltd.	212.03	10.02

## EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on April 02

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	85.30	85.62
Euro	92.13	92.48
British Pound	110.41	110.83
Japanese Yen (100)	57.13	57.34
Chinese Yuan	11.73	11.78
Swiss Franc	96.52	96.90
Singapore Dollar	63.50	63.76
Canadian Dollar	59.52	59.76
Malaysian Ringgit	19.15	19.24
Australian Dollar	53.74	53.94

Source: Indian Bank

## U.S. cities won by Trump would be most hurt by tariffs



**Wrong choice:** Many states that backed Mr. Trump in the last election are most dependent on exports. AP

### Associated Press

The U.S. cities most vulnerable to a trade war with Canada turn out to largely be in the states that helped return United States President Donald Trump to the White House—a sign of the possible political risk that he's taking with his sweeping tariff plans.

A new analysis released last week by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce detailed the areas most dependent on exports to Canada, with San Antonio and Detroit topping the list of 41 U.S. metro areas.

The findings show that the United States' 25% tariffs on Canada and Canada's retaliations could inflict meaningful damage in many key states for U.S. politics. The analysis was conducted before the Republican president announced March 26 that he was placing additional 25% tariffs on imported autos and parts starting on April 3.

### Liberation day

April 3 is also when a slate of additional, but unknown tariffs are expected to be announced, what Mr. Trump has dubbed "Liberation Day."

Mr. Trump has placed a tariff rate of 25% on many goods from Mexico and Canada, with a lower 10% tax on energy products and potash from Canada. Some of those tariffs have been suspended or delayed, though they're set to fully hit in April. Canadian leaders have warned that the United States would suffer in the form of higher prices, fewer jobs and slower growth because of the trade war initiated by Mr. Trump.

But an analysis by the Brookings Institution found that the economic pain would be more severe in countries such as Mexico and Canada because those countries are more reliant on the United States in terms of trade.

Mr. Trump's stated reason for the tariffs is to stop illegal immigration and drug smuggling, though he's also said that he dislikes the trade deficit with both countries and has taunted Canada by suggesting that it could become the 51st state of the United States.

### Some metro areas most impacted

Nearly half of what San Antonio exports, with its aerospace, auto and energy sectors, goes to Canada. About 40% of what the auto-driven Detroit area exports also goes to Canada.

Mr. Trump's wins in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin were crucial for his overall victory in November's presidential election—and Milwaukee and Pittsburgh also rank in the top 10 for exposure to a trade war with Canada.

Other cities that are most dependent on exports to Canada include Kansas City, Missouri; Louisville, Kentucky; Nashville, Tennessee; Columbus, Ohio; Chicago; and Cleveland. All of those states aside from Illinois backed Mr. Trump in the last election.

### Agence France-Presse

HAVANA  
In communist Cuba, some customers are more equal than others, as a 40-year-old math teacher who was out shopping recently in Havana with his son discovered.

The pair passed a spanking new shop situated on the ground floor of a luxury hotel in the upmarket Miramar neighborhood.

But "we had barely put a foot inside when they told me it (payment) was in dollars," Michael, the teacher, who declined to give his surname, told AFP.

"Let's go, this isn't for us," he told his son, making a beeline for the door. The state-owned supermarket, which opened in January, is the first of sever-

al dollar-denominated stores set to open across the island, as part of a bid to boost its battered economy.

Prime Minister Manuel Marrero said the move was a "necessary process" for the state to get its hands on some of the dollars circulating "illegally" on the black market.

The Caribbean nation of 9.7 million is experiencing its worst economic crisis in 30 years, marked by shortages of food and fuel, recurring blackouts and shortage of hard currency.

Remittances from Cuban migrants are the island's second-biggest source of precious dollars, after the payments it receives from loaning tens of thousands of doctors to around 60 countries, in-

# The Australian dollar is losing its way as markets' risk compass

The Aussie's relationship with U.S. stocks is weaker than at any time since the pandemic as Mr. Trump's trade war accelerates what was a slow but decade-long decline in the currency's relationship with global risk; the Aussie has risen almost 2% this year while U.S. shares have dropped over 4%

### NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters  
SINGAPORE/SYDNEY

**T**he Australian dollar's surprising resilience in the face of the hit to market sentiment from U.S. tariffs is raising questions whether its long-standing role as a proxy for risk is ending.

The Antipodean currency just notched its steadiest quarter for two years, rising almost 2% this year to around 63 cents, even as U.S. shares have dropped more than 4%.

The breakdown in that correlation is slowing trade in the Aussie, hurting Australian investors in the U.S., and highlighting how U.S. President Donald Trump is rocking the pillars of financial markets. It is a consequence of an unusual turn in the U.S. dollar, which, says Bank of America currency strategist Oliver Levingson, has shot lower together with stocks for only the third time in 25 years.

"It's just not playing its game," said Nick Twidale, chief analyst at online broker AFX, referring to the Aussie, adding that his firm is seeing a drop in trading volumes of the currency. "It feels like the Aussie has lost its correlation."

The Aussie earned its reputation as markets' "risk" proxy from Australia's



**Little cheer:** U.S. dollar has dropped along with stock prices for only the third time in 25 years. REUTERS

lia's export profile, since Australia sells ingredients of economic growth: iron ore, coal and gas.

Over the four decades the currency has been freely convertible, the expectation that those bellwether exports justify it tracking the global mood has been self-reinforcing and earned it an outsized role in foreign exchange trade.

Australia is the 13th-largest economy in the world and its currency is the world's sixth-most traded.

Now, according to analysts at Westpac, its relationship with U.S. stocks is weaker than at any time since the pandemic as Mr. Trump's trade war accelerates what had been a slow but decade-long decline in the Aussie's relationship



Our conjecture is that Trump's presidency has fundamentally rewired the relationship between currencies and equity risk metrics

**RICHARD FRANULOVICH**  
Head of foreign exchange, Westpac

with global risk.

"Our conjecture is that Trump's presidency has fundamentally rewired the relationship between currencies and equity risk metrics," Westpac's head of foreign exchange, Richard Franulovich, said in a note.

The other big changes analysts point to in the past decade are the steady growth of Australia's off-

shore investment portfolio, and a shift in reliance on commodities, with the result that Australia's net international assets have sharply surged.

"The country is literally less leveraged to global growth compared to what it used to be, just from the balance of payments perspective," said Lachlan Dymally, head of currency trading at Bank of America in Australia.

### Correlation slips

A risk proxy is a valuable tool, when it works.

The Aussie has been an avenue to bet in either direction on the global economy and especially China, since China is Australia's top export market, in a reliably liquid asset that is widely traded.

# Counting potential toll of Trump's tariffs on Asia

Associated Press  
BANGKOK

The trade war that U.S. President Donald Trump has escalated in his second term is a challenge for all Asian economies, large and small, in an era when the most populous region of the world is expected to drive global economic growth.

Export manufacturing and free trade helped transform China and other Asian countries into economic powerhouses over the past decades. Mr. Trump's barrages of tariffs, aimed at compelling companies to keep or set up their factories in the United States, are rupturing trade agreements often made at great political cost to trading partners.

The White House says



**Proven recipe:** Free trade helped transform Asian countries into economic powerhouses over the past decades. AFP

the criteria for raising tariffs will include not just U.S. trade deficits but also various taxes, exchange rates, government subsidies and various non-tariff trade barriers.

Higher costs already have led many manufacturers to shift away from China to other economies

in South and Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America. But for now the prevailing uncertainty over what Mr. Trump will do with what he calls "reciprocal" tariffs may lead most to sit tight and see what comes next.

Here's a look at how higher U.S. tariffs might af-

fect some major Asian economies.

**China:** Despite some decrease in trade since Mr. Trump launched a trade war with China during his first term in office, the U.S. trade deficit has continued to climb, hitting \$295.4 billion last year.

China, the world's No. 2 economy, has leaned heavily on exports to make up for weak demand at home. The ruling Communist Party has made exports of autos, especially electric vehicles, and batteries a priority, but 27.5% tariffs on auto exports and 102.5% duties on EVs have in effect closed the U.S. market for its automakers. China is the second largest supplier of auto parts to the U.S. behind Mexico.

During Mr. Trump's first term, higher tariffs led

leader Xi Jinping to champion a shift to high-tech production. That will likely continue as U.S. pressure intensifies, causing job losses due to changes in manufacturing rather than direct damage from the tariffs themselves, Raymond Yeung of ANZ Research said in a report.

**Japan:** Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said Tuesday that his government was making last ditch efforts to get the United States to exclude his country from auto tariffs. The U.S. absorbs about one-fifth of Japan's exports, or about 1.5 million passenger cars a year.

Even though major Japanese automakers like Toyota Motor Corp, Honda Motor Co, and Nissan Motor Co have factories in the U.S. and increasingly, in

Mexico, it's an important industry back home. Nearly 5.6 million people are employed in auto-related jobs, according to the Japan Automobile Manufacturing Association.

**Taiwan:** More than 60% of the self-governed island's economy comes from exports, and it ran a trade surplus with the U.S. of nearly \$74 billion last year. Computer chips are one of Taiwan's biggest exports to the United States, along with computers and other office machines and consumer products.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp is expanding its U.S. factories in Arizona, enticed by U.S. incentives and its own strategic needs. In early March, its CEO C C Wei pledged \$100 billion in new U.S. investments.

# Cuba resurrects dollar-only stores, a symbol of inequality

Agence France-Presse  
HAVANA

In communist Cuba, some customers are more equal than others, as a 40-year-old math teacher who was out shopping recently in Havana with his son discovered.

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al dollar-denominated stores set to open across the island, as part of a bid to boost its battered economy.

Prime Minister Manuel Marrero said the move was a "necessary process" for the state to get its hands on some of the dollars circulating "illegally" on the black market.

The Caribbean nation of 9.7 million is experiencing its worst economic crisis in 30 years, marked by shortages of food and fuel, recurring blackouts and shortage of hard currency.

Remittances from Cuban migrants are the island's second-biggest source of precious dollars, after the payments it receives from loaning tens of thousands of doctors to around 60 countries, in-



**Crisis economy:** Cuba is witnessing a severe shortage of food, fuel and hard currency. AFP

cluding neighbors Venezuela and Brazil.

But many Cubans have no access to greenbacks. That leaves the country divided between the haves,

who can purchase plentiful goods in dollar-payment stores, and the have-nots like Michael, who is paid in Cuban pesos—which he then converts in-

to MLC, a virtual currency introduced in 2019 that has lost much of its value.

As Michael was leaving the dollar-denominated store, customers were

emerging with trolleys piled high with goods—a rare sight of plenty in Cuba, where store shelves are often empty. The shortages, coupled with paltry wages (the average monthly salary is around 5,000 pesos, or \$42), mean that people can rarely manage to fill their carts.

"Here we've always found what we're looking for," said Enzo Puebla, an engineer. He receives dollars from relatives overseas, using them to buy eggs, cooking oil and meat—goods rarely stocked in MLC-payment stores.

Such is the contrast between the two stores that Cubans have nicknamed them "the prince and the pauper."

"The main problem of dollarization is that it's par-

tial," Cuban economist Mauricio de Miranda told AFP, noting that while consumer goods may be available in dollars, salaries are not. "This naturally leads to the exclusion of people who have no way of obtaining dollars," Mr. Miranda, a researcher at Javieriana University in the Colombian city of Cali, said.

Cuba has a long, turbulent relationship with the dollar. After the Nationalist revolution, the dollar was strictly banned. It took the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba's main ally, to bring a change of heart.

### Drop in tourism

Cuba blames its current economic woes on a tightening, during Donald Trump's first presidency, of the six-decade-long US

trade embargo.

But it is also reeling from a decline in tourists, who are put off by the widespread shortages and blackouts, and a failed monetary reform in 2021 that drove up the price of dollars on the black market.

The government has billed its partial dollarization strategy as a temporary measure aimed at reviving the economy—and says its ultimate goal is to wean Cubans off the U.S. currency altogether.

For Tamarys Bahamonde, a Cuban economist at the American University in Washington, it's an illusory goal.

Cuba, she argued, is a "nearly textbook case of the difficulties you face when you try to de-dollarize an economy."

## JERUSALEM

## Over 30 killed as Israel moves to seize 'large areas' in Gaza Strip



Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip is expanding to seize "large areas," Defence Minister Israel Katz said, while officials at hospitals inside the Palestinian territory said Israeli strikes overnight and into Wednesday had killed more than 30 people, of which nearly a dozen were children. AP

## WASHINGTON

## Liberal wins Wisconsin Supreme Court election in blow to Trump



Donald Trump was dealt a spinning blow by voters in Wisconsin as they elected a liberal judge to the State's Supreme Court, despite his advisor Elon Musk pouring millions into the race to sway the polls. Liberal judge Susan Crawford (in picture) beat Trump-backed Brad Schimel after more than 95% of the vote was tallied. AFP

## NAYPYIDAW

## Man rescued in Myanmar as civil war hampers quake relief efforts



Rescue crews in Myanmar pulled a 26-year-old man out alive from the rubble in the capital city of Naypyidaw, but most teams were finding only bodies five days after a massive earthquake struck. So far, 2,886 people have been dead and 4,639 injured. Meanwhile, the civil war ravaging the country is hampering relief efforts. AP

## WASHINGTON

## U.S. approves sale of fighter jets worth \$5.58 billion to Philippines



The U.S. said it approved the possible sale of \$5.58 billion in F-16 fighter jets to the Philippines, as Washington backs its ally in rising tensions over China. The U.S. State Department said it was green-lighting a sale that includes 20 F-16 jets and related equipment to the Philippines, a treaty-bound ally of the U.S. AP

## U.S. to deploy its second aircraft carrier in West Asia

Agence France-Presse  
WASHINGTON

The United States is increasing the number of aircraft carriers deployed in West Asia to two, keeping one that is already there and sending another from the Indo-Pacific, the Pentagon said on Tuesday.

The announcement comes as U.S. forces hammer Yemen's Houthi rebels with near-daily air strikes to rein in the threat they pose to civilian shipping and military vessels in the region.

The *Carl Vinson* will join the *Harry S. Truman* in West Asia "to continue promoting regional stability, deter aggression, and protect the free flow of commerce," Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said.

## Chinese drills simulate strikes on Taiwan's ports, power grid

The live-fire military exercises lasted for two days and focused on middle and southern parts of Taiwan Strait and East China Sea; Beijing had sent forces the previous day to surround the island

Agence France-Presse  
TAIPEI

China's military on Wednesday said it had completed two days of exercises that included "live-fire" drills and simulated strikes on key ports and energy sites aimed at Taiwan, the self-ruled island it claims as its own.

The surprise manoeuvres were condemned by Taiwan, while the U.S. criticised it as "intimidation tactics". They came less than a month after Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te called China a "foreign hostile force".

Named "Strait Thunder-2025A", the drills were



Counter measures: Four Taiwan Air Force Mirage 2000 fighter jets prepare to take off from the Hsinchu Airbase on Wednesday. AFP

in the middle and southern parts of the Taiwan Strait as well as the East China Sea, the military said.

The military also said it had held "long-range live-fire drills" and practised

hitting "simulated targets of key ports and energy facilities".

Fighter jets circled over Pingtan, the closest point on the mainland to Taiwan and where there is a mili-

tary base. China's *Shandong* aircraft carrier also carried out drills testing the ability to "blockade" Taiwan, the Eastern Theater Command said.

Beijing's Foreign Ministry warned on Wednesday the "punishment will not stop" until Taiwan's leaders stop pushing for what it says is independence from China.

Wednesday's drills in the strait came a day after China sent its Army, navy, air and rocket forces to surround Taiwan, prompting Taipei to dispatch its own air and maritime forces. Taiwan's Defence Ministry said there was no live-fire near the island on Wednesday.

## Top Gun and Batman star Val Kilmer dies aged 65

Agence France-Presse  
NEW YORK

Val Kilmer, one of the biggest Hollywood actors of the 1990s who shot to fame playing Iceman in the original *Top Gun*, has died aged 65 after a career of memorable hits and on-set bust ups.

The cause of death was pneumonia, his daughter Mercedes Kilmer told the *New York Times* on Tuesday, which was the first publication to announce the news.

He battled throat cancer after being diagnosed in 2014 and appeared in the *Top Gun* sequel and a 2021 documentary appearing physically diminished and with a raspy voice.

His film credits include blockbusters such as Oliver Stone's *The Doors*, in which he played Jim Morri-



Val Kilmer

After a cameo in Quentin Tarantino-written *True Romance*, Kilmer also went on to star alongside Al Pacino and Robert De Niro in *Heat*. But he developed a reputation as a difficult actor who sometimes clashed with directors and co-stars.

## Tributes flow in

Tributes flowed in on Tuesday from some of his past directors, however.

Francis Ford Coppola, who worked with him for *Twixt*, wrote that Kilmer "was a wonderful person to work with and a joy to know", while *Heat* director Michael Mann also praised his range and "brilliant variability".

The official *Top Gun* account on X posted a picture of Kilmer as Iceman, saying he had left an "indelible cinematic mark".

## Modi's visit great opportunity for India and Sri Lanka: FM

'If you consider the global geopolitical situation, China, India, U.S., and Russia are playing a big role; therefore, as a small country, we must have a good relationship with all those countries'

## INTERVIEW

## Vijitha Herath

Meera Srinivasan



Head of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Sri Lanka from April 4 to 6, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath spoke to *The Hindu* in Colombo, on key agreements to be signed, the 'change' in India's engagement with Colombo, and Adani Green reopening negotiations. Edited excerpts.

## What is on the agenda when PM Narendra Modi visits Sri Lanka later this week?

The Indian Prime Minister is coming to Sri Lanka on the invitation from our President. It will be a great opportunity for us. I think it is a great opportunity for both countries.

PM Modi arrives in Sri Lanka on the night of April 4th, after participating in the BIMSTEC summit in Thailand. The following day, there will be a Guard of Honour for the Prime Minister at Independence Square. Soon after, they will arrive at the Presidential Secretariat, to a short welcome ceremony. A delegation level meeting headed by the Sri Lankan President and Indian Prime Minister will be held, followed by the signing of eight MoUs and a couple of virtual openings. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake will confer the

'Mitra Vibhushana' honour on PM Modi. The leaders will address the media after that. The next morning [April 6], our President and PM Modi will go to Anuradhapura [ancient capital in North Central Province]. They will offer prayers at the Sri Maha Bodhi [Bo tree considered sacred by Buddhists], following which they will go to the Anuradhapura Railway station to inaugurate the signal system for the northern railway line.

## Could you elaborate on the MoUs?

Yes, eight MoUs are to be signed. One is on energy grid connectivity between the two countries, the second is to develop Trincomalee as an energy hub - that's a tripartite agreement among India, Sri Lanka, and the UAE. Then, we have one on digital initiatives.

The fourth is in the area of defence - although some in opposition are raising issues, it is only to do with training programmes and receiving some equipment. Nothing in the agreement is harmful for Sri Lanka. The re-

maining MoUs are related to cooperation in the health sector, development projects in the Eastern Province and debt restructuring.

## How do you see India Sri Lanka relations shaping up after the NPP [National People's Power] came to power?

Historically, especially in the 1980s, there was an issue. Now the world has changed, India has also changed, Sri Lanka, too, has changed. With the shift in global politics, we too have changed our stance. After coming to power, the NPP government began building close ties with India. We are continuing to do that and strengthen our relationship. India is our closest neighbour, and we share historic and civilisational ties. Buddhism came from India, we have close [religious and cultural] links.

## Your government has taken a firm position against the Adani power project, citing high tariffs. Do you think this will impact FDIs and India ties, as some in Sri Lanka fear?

In regard to the Adani power project, pricing is the only issue. The other Adani project is going on very well - the West Container Terminal project at the Colombo Port [executed by Adani Ports] is very much on track. So, the criticism from some in the Opposition that our position affects FDIs or our India ties

is incorrect. There has been no such impact, foreign investments are continuing to come in. As far as the power project is concerned, they [Adani Green] sent us a letter again, indicating their willingness to reopen negotiations. We have stated our position on the need to lower the tariff, and we are open to discussion based on that.

## Sri Lanka is located in a strategically important region. Does your government feel pressured to balance India and China?

Actually, there is no pressure, but we are balancing [ties]. If you consider the global geopolitical situation, everyone knows very well that China, India, the U.S., and Russia are playing a big role. Therefore, as a small country, we must have a good relationship with all those countries.

We see value in being part of regional bodies such as the BIMSTEC [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation] and IORA [Indian Ocean Rim Association] that we chair. We are also connecting with ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations]. These are very important to our economy, our regional security and maritime partnerships. Our foreign policy is maintaining good ties with all our partners, keeping in mind the best interests of Sri Lanka and its people. We will always pay attention to our national integrity and sovereignty.

## Memories of war



Falkland War veterans and relatives attend a vigil in San Andres de Giles in Argentina's capital of Buenos Aires on Wednesday as part of the 43rd anniversary of the war fought between the South American company and the U.K. over the Falkland islands. AFP

## Military confrontation 'almost inevitable' if Iran nuclear talks fail, says French FM

Agence France-Presse  
PARIS

France's Foreign Minister warned on Wednesday that a military confrontation with Iran would be "almost inevitable" if talks over Tehran's nuclear programme failed.

"In the event of failure, a military confrontation would appear to be almost inevitable," Jean-Noel Barrot said in parliament, adding that it would severely destabilise the region.

Earlier on Wednesday, President Emmanuel Macron chaired a meeting on Iran.



Jean-Noel Barrot

clear weapons. Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has promised to hit back.

"Our confidence and our conviction remain intact," Mr. Barrot said. "Iran must never acquire nuclear weapons."

"Our priority is to reach an agreement that verifi-

bly and durably constrains the Iranian nuclear programme," he added.

Since taking office in January, Mr. Trump has reinstated his "maximum pressure" policy, which in his first term saw the U.S. withdraw from a landmark 2015 agreement on Iran's nuclear programme and reimpose sanctions on Tehran.

**Complaint against Iran** Mr. Barrot also announced that France would "soon" lodge a complaint against Iran at the International Court of Justice over the fate of two detained French nationals.

The complaint would be filed over "the violation of the right to consular pro-

tection", he said, referring to Cecile Kohler and Jacques Paris, who were detained in Iran in May 2022 on accusations of seeking to stir up labour protests.

Western countries have for years accused Iran of detaining their nationals on trumped-up charges in a policy of state hostage-taking to use them as bargaining chips to extract concessions.

"We are going to step up pressure on the Iranian regime even further," Mr. Barrot said.

He also said "additional European sanctions against Iranian officials responsible for the policy of state hostage-taking" would be announced in the coming days.



**Constant effort:** Brazilian indigenous leader of the Kayapo people, Raoni Metuktire, AFP

## Brazilian indigenous chief is staving off Amazon destruction

**Agence France-Presse**  
METUKTIRE

You don't need a GPS to find the home turf of the Amazon's most famous resident, Brazilian Chief Raoni Metuktire.

As you approach his Capoto/Jarina Indigenous territory in Mato Grosso state, large single-crop farms of soybean or maize give way to lush, verdant rainforest. This is the epicenter of a half-century battle led by the globe-trotting activist against illegal miners and loggers hacking away at the world's biggest rainforest.

Instantly recognisable by his wooden lip plate and feathery headdress, Raoni is believed to be about 90. Three decades ago, he toured the world with British activist-rock star Sting to press for Indigenous rights. His home village of Metuktire, named after his clan belonging to the Kayapo people, is accessible chiefly by boat along the Xingu River, a tributary of the Amazon.

The formidable chief lived most of his life in one of the straw-and-wood huts arranged in a wide circle around a forest clearing. He now resides mostly in the nearby city of Peixoto de Azevedo for health reasons, but will be back on his home soil Friday to receive President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Raoni ahead of the visit said that he would press Mr. Lula to halt plans for an oil mega-project at the mouth of the Amazon river. "I don't allow illegal miners or timber traffickers on our land."

Only 0.15 percent of Capoto/Jarina territory, which occupies an area four times the size of the mega-city of Sao Paulo, has been affected by deforestation, according to official statistics.

# 'Qatargate' scandal roils Israel with arrest of Benjamin Netanyahu's aides

Investigation claims that some of those close to the Prime Minister were recruited to promote Qatar in Israel even though the two countries have no formal diplomatic ties; they are accused of receiving payments from the Qatar government; Netanyahu slams the probe as a 'political witch hunt'

**Agence France-Presse**  
JERUSALEM

Israel has been gripped by allegations linking aides of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to financing from Qatar, which hosts Hamas leaders and helped broker the release of hostages from Gaza.

Dubbed 'Qatargate' by Israeli media, the reports that sparked the investigation claimed that some of the people closest to Mr. Netanyahu were recruited to promote Qatar in Israel, even though the two countries have no formal diplomatic ties.

At least two of Mr. Netanyahu's aides are suspected of receiving payments from the Qatari government to promote Doha's interests in Israel.

With the investigation ongoing, some details remain unclear.

Allegations of ties between members of Mr. Netanyahu's close circle and the Qatari government have swirled in the Israeli press since mid-2024.

The affair ramped up on Monday when two aides, one current and one former, were arrested and Mr. Netanyahu was called in for questioning in a probe he slammed as a "political witch hunt".

Though the Israeli leader is not a suspect, he is separately on trial over



**Intense outcry:** Anti-government demonstrators take part in a protest against the 'Qatargate' affair, outside the Israeli Parliament in Jerusalem. FILE PHOTO

corruption and breach of trust allegations.

### Two suspects

"They are holding Yonatan Urich and Eli Feldstein hostage," Mr. Netanyahu said in an angry video post after being questioned.

Asked for comment, a Qatari government official said it was "not the first time we have been subject of a smear campaign by those who do not want to see an end to this conflict or the remaining hostages returned to their families". The official also said Qatar would "continue our mediation efforts" on the war.

Yonatan Urich, who has been working closely with Mr. Netanyahu for most of the past decade, started out as the social media manager for the Prime Minister's right-wing Likud party.

Mr. Urich also co-owns a media consulting firm called Perception with Yisrael Einhorn, who has also worked with Mr. Netanyahu.

It is not the first time influential Israeli figures have been accused of receiving payments from Qatar.

According to Israeli media reports, Perception

was hired to improve Qatar's image ahead of the 2022 World Cup, though Mr. Urich and the firm denied the claims at the time. Eli Feldstein is already under investigation for leaking classified documents to journalists during the short time he worked unofficially as the Prime Minister's military affairs spokesman.

### Trips to Doha

According to reports, Mr. Netanyahu was seeking to offer Mr. Feldstein a more permanent role but after failing to receive the necessary security clearance, he

remained an external contractor.

Last month, an investigation by Israel's Channel 12 alleged that while working for Mr. Netanyahu, Mr. Feldstein received a salary from Jay Footlik, a known U.S. lobbyist for Qatar.

Further reports on Monday said Mr. Feldstein promoted Qatar to Israeli journalists and arranged trips for them to Doha.

Mr. Footlik owns a consulting firm, Third Circle Inc., registered under the US Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) as working for Qatar.

An Israeli court on Tuesday said suspicions were related to Third Circle and funds aimed at "projecting a positive image of Qatar" in relation to its role as a mediator for a truce and hostage release agreement in Gaza.

A final name that has been linked to the affair is Israeli businessman Gil Birger, who this month told Israel's state broadcaster that he had been asked by Mr. Footlik to pay Mr. Feldstein through his company.

Jonathan Rynhold, head of political studies at Bar-Ilan University, said the affair "ties all bad things relating to Mr. Netanyahu together in one package".

"This links Netanyahu directly to the policy of appeasing Hamas," Mr. Rynhold said, referring to Is-

rael allowing Qatar to send millions of dollars in cash into Gaza that many now believe strengthened Hamas and enabled it to conduct its October 7, 2023, attack.

Still, the affair has piled more pressure on Mr. Netanyahu, who has clashed with the judiciary over his bid to sack Ronen Bar, the head of the Shin Bet domestic security agency.

Mr. Bar's relationship with the Netanyahu government soured after he blamed the executive for the security fiasco of Hamas's October 2023 attack and, crucially, following a Shin Bet probe into Qatargate.

### Fighting back

It is unclear how Mr. Netanyahu will manage the fallout from the affair.

"It is too early to say how it will develop," said Professor Gideon Rahat of the Hebrew University.

"Will he need to sacrifice these two people? If he sacrifices them, will they open their mouths?" Rahat said.

For now, he is fighting back and "framing it as though the secret service is after him because he wants to kick out the head of the secret service", Mr. Rahat added. "In a normal country, if the Prime Minister had spies in his office, he would resign, but we are not in normal times."

## AI coming for anime but Ghibli's Miyazaki irreplaceable, says son

**Agence France-Presse**  
TOKYO

Artificial intelligence risks taking Japanese anime artists' jobs, but nothing can replicate Hayao Miyazaki, the creative lifeblood of the studio behind classics such as *Spirited Away*, his son said.

Thanks to ChatGPT's new image generator, the internet is awash with pictures imitating Studio Ghibli's whimsical style, raising fresh debate over potential copyright infringements.

Movies such as *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Howl's Moving Castle* are famous for their lush nature and fantastical machinery, painstakingly drawn by hand.

While the studio has not commented directly on the image trend, Goro Miyazaki predicted that AI could one day replace animators. "It wouldn't be surpris-



Goro Miyazaki

ing if, in two years' time, there was a film made completely through AI," he said in an interview last week.

Despite the rapid changes, new technology also brings "great potential for unexpected talent to emerge", added Mr. Goro, Studio Ghibli's managing director.

He was speaking at the Ghibli atelier in western Tokyo, days before the San Francisco-based ChatGPT maker OpenAI released its latest image generator.

OpenAI, which is already facing a barrage of copy-

right lawsuits, said generating images in the style of individual living artists is banned, but "we do permit broader studio styles".

"Our goal is to give users as much creative freedom as possible," the U.S. company said.

Japan is grappling with a shortage of skilled animators, partly because most spend years in low-paid jobs to learn the ropes.

Mr. Goro's father founded Studio Ghibli with Isao Takahata in 1985, a year after directing the post-apocalyptic *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*.

After Takahata's death in 2018, Hayao - now 84 - continued to create films with 76-year-old producer Toshio Suzuki.

"If those two can't make anime or can't move, then what happens?" Mr. Goro said when asked about Ghibli's future. "It's not like they can be replaced."

Despite his age, Mr.

Hayao won his second Oscar last year with *The Boy and the Heron* - likely his last feature film.

Anime cartoons are usually for children, but Takahata and Mr. Hayao, men "from the generation that knew war", included darker elements that appeal to adults, Mr. Goro said.

"It's not all sweet - there's also a bitterness and things like that which are beautifully intertwined in the work," he said, describing a "smell of death" that permeates the films.

"That's actually what makes the work so deep." Mr. Goro joined Studio Ghibli in 1998 and directed animations including the 2006 feature *Tales from Earthsea* and 2011's *From Up on Poppy Hill*.

He also oversaw the development of the Ghibli Museum and newly opened Ghibli Park in Japan.

## Soaring spirits



**Celebrating togetherness:** Tethered hot air balloons, mostly made from recycled paper, during the annual hot air balloon festival held since 1950 to celebrate Id-ul-Fitr in Wonosobo, Indonesia, on Wednesday. AFP

## 'India must use window of opportunity to finalise 'stronger' FTA with Sri Lanka'

**T. Ramakrishnan**  
CHENNAI

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi planning to visit Sri Lanka shortly, economist-writer Razeen Sally, who served as an adviser to Ranil Wickremesinghe during 2015-17 when the latter was Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, has called upon Sri Lanka to use the "window of opportunity available now" to finalise a "stronger" bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) with the neighbour.

In an interview with *The Hindu* on Tuesday evening, the 60-year-old academician, who had stints at the London School of

Economics (LSE) and National University of Singapore (NUS), said the present Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna-led National People's Power (NPP) government "is sympathetic to India and much less defensive vis-à-vis India than [those of the governments led by] the Rajapakas." Besides, there "is a change in the climate of opinion which is favourable to India", as a result of what the country did during the 2022 economic crisis in Sri Lanka.

### Closer ties

The proposed FTA could "cover services; allow freer movement of some classes

of workers and overcome protectionist blockages in both countries - which are, I think, more on the Sri Lankan side," the economist said, adding that closer relationship between the two neighbours "should not upset other powers - China and the U.S. - which have stakes in Sri Lanka."

Emphasising that "it is not the job" of India to provide dollars of aid to Sri Lanka "in perpetuity," Mr. Sally, however, renewed the call for economic integration of the island nation with southern States of India, an argument, which Mr. Sally himself admitted, was being



RAZEEN SALLY  
Economist

made for over a generation.

In 2003, Mr. Wickremesinghe, then Prime Minister, while delivering a lecture in Chennai, floated the idea of building a bridge linking Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu with Talaimannar in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka as

The National People's Power government is sympathetic to India and much less defensive vis-à-vis India than the Rajapakas

part of his larger vision of regional economic integration, encompassing his country and the southern region of India.

### Huge potential

Acknowledging that "the political roadblock among certain sections of Sri Lanka is Tamil Nadu," Mr. Sally

emphasised that "geography essentially tells you what the advantages are. There exists huge potential for closer links between Sri Lanka and individual States - government to government, business to business, and business to government." He added: "We are talking of Tamil Nadu and three or four other States that are economically doing very well."

To a question whether the current government was receptive to the idea of Sri Lanka's integration with the supply chain of south India, Mr. Sally replied that "it is up to groups outside the government - business and civil

society - to make the case and find people in the government to champion the case.

On the political and economic situation in Sri Lanka, the economist, with both British and Sri Lankan roots, said the ruling NPP-JVP formation "has become the principal force" in the country with no effective Opposition in the political landscape. So far, there had been no corruption charges against it.

### Economic situation

On the economic front, the stabilisation package, worked out by the previous Wickremesinghe government and the Central

Bank of Sri Lanka, in line with the IMF [International Monetary Fund] programme, had gotten Sri Lanka out of an economic crisis. "But, it has not put Sri Lanka on the path of recovery." The current government had to "go beyond the IMF reforms", and the country should grow faster to pay its debts, which would become due in 2027, apart from generating extra revenue for other requirements.

However, if Sri Lanka stuck to only the IMF reforms, the country might "drift along at a fairly low level of economic growth, sowing the seeds for the next economic crisis."

## CHANGE OF JERSEY

I was emotional but once I got the ball I was fine, says Titans' Siraj



K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

I was here for seven years, changed the jersey from red to blue and was emotional but once I got the ball I was fine. I am Ronaldo's fan and hence the celebration (after taking Phil Salt's wicket). My mindset is to have belief and the pitch does not matter — Gujarat Titans' Mohammed Siraj.

## ON RIGHT TRACK

Nortje is close to match fitness, says KKR mentor Bravo



GETTY IMAGES

Anrich Nortje is the fastest in the group. The physio will have a better idea as to how far he is (in terms of match fitness). At the moment, I think, we are all impressed with his work ethic, with his bowling loads. Very close (to match fitness), I must say. But it also has to do a lot with the combination and the opposition — Dwayne Bravo, KKR mentor.

## MISDEMEANOUR

LSG bowler Digvesh fined for 'letter-writing' send-off to Priyansh



SPORTZPICS/IPL

Lucknow Super Giants spinner Digvesh Singh Rathore was fined 25 per cent of his match fees and handed a demerit point for his unusual 'letter-writing' celebration after dismissing Punjab Kings batter Priyansh Arya. The BCCI penalised Rathore for "breaching the IPL Code of Conduct" during LSG's match against PBKS at the Ekana Stadium.

## FULLY FIT

Samson to return as RR captain after NCA clearance for 'keeping'



FILE PHOTO: K.V.S. GIRI

Sanju Samson is set to return as Rajasthan Royals captain after receiving clearance from the National Cricket Academy to keep wickets in the IPL. "The clearance comes after an assessment of his fitness by NCA. Samson will resume captaincy from the team's next match against the Punjab Kings," Rajasthan Royals said in a release.

# Effervescent Buttler helps Titans lord it over Royal Challengers

The Gujarat outfit registers an emphatic eight-wicket win with 2.1 overs to spare; the consistent Sai Sudharsan shines again; Siraj's fiery spell jolts the home team before Livingstone leads the recovery in the company of Jitesh and David

IPL-18

**N. Sudarshan**  
BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Indian Premier League homecoming went awry as Gujarat Titans registered a thumping eight-wicket victory with more than two overs to spare at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Wednesday.

A fiery fast-bowling performance from RCB old-timer Mohammed Siraj (three for 19) and an effervescent batting effort from Jos Buttler (73 n.o., 39b, 5x4, 6x6) brought Titans their second victory from three matches even as it handed RCB its first defeat in three.

Chasing a modest 170, the visitors did not set the PowerPlay ablaze, scoring just 42 runs for the loss of skipper Shubman Gill (14, 14b, 1x4, 1x6). But Buttler's calculated assault in the middle overs ensured that the Titans were always ahead of the curve.

The 34-year-old attacked Impact Player Rakish Dar, smoking him for two sixes on the leg-side in the ninth over, and then carted Liam Livingstone for a six and a four in the 15th to bring up his half-century from 31 balls.

Impact Player Sherfane Rutherford proved the ideal partner (30 n.o., 18b, 1x4, 3x6) and the two smashed Josh Hazlewood for three sixes in the 18th over to bring the contest



Dealing in boundaries: Buttler's knock was studded with five fours and six sixes. K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

to a manic end. Put in to bat, RCB was reeling at 42 for four as the Titans' pace trio of Siraj, Arshad Khan and Ishant Sharma bowled short and into the body and reaped the right rewards.

Virat Kohli was out caught at long-leg off Arshad while Phil Salt was cleaned up by Siraj, who also went on to rearrange

Devdutt Padikkal's stumps. Skipper Rajat Patidar was trapped in front by Ishant. But Livingstone (54, 40b, 1x4, 5x6) combined for 52 runs with a hustling Jitesh Sharma (33, 21b, 5x4, 1x6) and for 46 runs with the towering Tim David (32, 18b, 3x4, 2x6).

The 31-year-old was relieved by Rahul Tewatia

at long-on when on nine and he duly capitalised. At one stage, he was on 35 from 34 balls but took a special liking to Rashid Khan and caned the leggie for 39 off just 17 deliveries.

The three maximums in the 18th gave RCB the final kick that helped it amass 64 from the last five overs. But in the end, even that proved inadequate.

## SCOREBOARD

## ROYAL CHALLENGERS

Phil Salt b Siraj 14 (13b, 1x4, 1x6), Virat Kohli c Prasad b Arshad 7 (6b, 1x4), Devdutt Padikkal b Siraj 4 (3b, 1x4), Rajat Patidar lbw b Ishant 12 (12b, 2x4), Liam Livingstone c Buttler b Siraj 54 (40b, 1x4, 5x6), Jitesh Sharma c Tewatia b Sai Kishore 33 (21b, 5x4, 1x6), Krunal Pandya c & b Sai Kishore 5 (5b, 1x4), Tim David b Prasad 32 (18b, 3x4, 2x6), Bhuvneshwar Kumar (not out) 1 (2b); Extras (lb-4, w-3): 7; Total (for eight wks. in 20 overs): 169.

## FALL OF WICKETS

1-8 (Kohli, 1.4 overs), 2-13 (Padikkal, 2.2), 3-35 (Salt, 4.4), 4-42 (Patidar, 6.2), 5-94 (Jitesh, 12.4), 6-104 (Krunal, 14.2), 7-150 (Livingstone, 18.2), 8-169 (David, 19.6).

## TITANS BOWLING

Siraj 4-0-19-3, Arshad 2-0-17-1, Prasad 4-0-26-1, Ishant 2-0-27-1, Sai Kishore 4-0-22-2, Rashid 4-0-54-0.

## GUJARAT TITANS

B. Sai Sudharsan c Jitesh b Hazlewood 49 (36b, 7x4, 1x6), Shubman Gill c Livingstone b Bhuvneshwar 14 (14b, 1x4, 1x6), Jos Buttler (not out) 73 (39b, 5x4, 6x6), Sherfane Rutherford (Impact Player for Ishant) (not out) 30 (18b, 1x4, 3x6); Extras (lb-3, w-1): 4; Total (for two wks. in 17.5 overs): 170.

## FALL OF WICKETS

1-32 (Gill, 4.4), 2-107 (Sai Sudharsan, 12.3)

## RCB BOWLING

Bhuvneshwar 4-0-23-1, Hazlewood 3.5-0-43-1, Dayal 3-0-20-0, Rasikh (Impact Player for Padikkal) 3-0-35-0, Krunal 3-0-34-0, Livingstone 1-0-12-0.

Toss: Titans.

PoM: Siraj.

## Next assignment

GT: April 6 vs SRH Hyderabad, 7.30 p.m.

RCB: April 7 vs MI Mumbai, 7.30 p.m.

# KKR, SRH will aim to rouse themselves from a slump



Exciting match-up: The Cummins-Venkatesh showdown should be interesting. K.R. DEEPAK



**Y.B. Sarangi**  
KOLKATA

The previous year's finalists — Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad, lying low for now with just a win apiece — will look to regain momentum when they meet in the Indian Premier League at the Eden Gardens here on Thursday.

Title-holder KKR will have the dual challenge of containing SRH's explosive batters and realising its own batting potential.

KKR has struggled as only three of its batters — Quinton de Kock, captain Ajinkya Rahane and Angkrish Raghuvanshi — have gathered nearly 60 per cent of its runs.

KKR's below-par total (116), resulting in a humiliating loss, against Mumbai Indians warrants a few measures to revive its bat-

ting — that includes Venkatesh Iyer, Rinku Singh and Andre Russell — on a run-getters' paradise.

The fact that SRH's Travis Head, Aniket Verma, Ishan Kishan and Heinrich Klaasen have scored more runs than KKR's aggregate (443) in three matches shows the stark difference in firepower so far in both camps.

However, KKR can take a cue from Lucknow Super Giants and Delhi Capitals, who earned early breakthroughs and restricted SRH's batters.

KKR's opening bowlers, such as Spencer Johnson and Harshit Rana, should strike in the PowerPlay and set the stage for the spinners like Sunil Narine and Varun Chakaravathy.

Following two defeats, SRH, which began by threatening the highest IPL total, will aspire to

erect another massive one.

The Pat Cummins-led attack, comprising Mohammed Shami, Harshal Patel and Adam Zampa, has enough ammunition to tackle any opposition.

Its better head-to-head record (19-9) and home environment should comfort KKR in this crucial test.

## Today's match



Kolkata, 7.30 p.m.

## HEAD-TO-HEAD

Played: 28

KKR 19 | SRH 9

## PREVIOUS MEETING

KKR won by eight wickets, 2024 final

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1 (SD & HD) & JIHOTSTAR

# Shreyas keeps things calm, the bowlers have been raving about his composure: Hopes

**Pranay Rajiv**  
LUCKNOW

Shreyas Iyer couldn't have asked for a better start to his captaincy stint with Punjab Kings.

On Tuesday, he led his side to a convincing eight-wicket victory over Lucknow Super Giants, slotting the Kings second in the points table, behind RCB on NRR.

## In sizzling form

Shreyas has also extended his rich vein of batting form — he was India's top-scorer in the Champions Trophy 2025 victory — with back-to-back fifties.

The 30-year-old has successfully adapted his pronounced open stance from the 50-over format into IPL, accumulating 149 runs in the two games for the Kings without getting

dismissed. What has stood out for Shreyas this time is his strike rate of 206.94, a significant leap from his IPL strike rate of 127.47 before the season.

## The key

The key to this surge has been an improved six-hitting ability.

Shreyas has already bludgeoned 13 maximums in IPL 2025 — the most he has ever hit in a season is 21, in 2015.

Shreyas' confidence with the bat has been reflected in his leadership as well.

Against Gujarat Titans in the season opener, he marshalled his side to a nervy 11-run win, while against LSG, he used his bowling resources astutely.

Against an in-form Nicholas Pooran, he backed

Yuzvendra Chahal, a risky move given Pooran's proficiency against leg spin. The gamble paid off as Chahal dismissed the West Indian with a googly.

## Drawing praise

His leadership qualities have drawn praise from Punjab Kings' fast-bowling coach James Hopes, before the LSG match.

"He keeps everything calm on the field. The bowlers were raving about his communication and composure under pressure."

Shreyas remains the only captain to have led two different teams into an IPL final — Delhi Capitals in 2020 and Kolkata Knight Riders in 2024.

Punjab Kings, which has just one final appearance, will hope he can change its fortunes too.



Back to basics: Shreyas has successfully adapted his pronounced open stance from the 50-over format to the IPL. SANDEEP SAXENA

# Smart bowling, reckless batting have changed trends: Bravo

**Y.B. Sarangi**  
KOLKATA

Kolkata Knight Riders mentor Dwayne Bravo thinks a combination of smart bowling and reckless batting has resulted in a drop in high-scoring aggregates in the ongoing Indian Premier League.

Analysing the trend of less number of 200-plus totals, Bravo said, "You have to try to out-think the batter and be brave. You will see that with our bowling group. The batters are not having that value on the wicket any more. They're a bit reckless because they think as though it's a flat pitch. The impact player is there. A lot of teams have batted longer, so the value for batsmanship is no longer there... I guess it's a combination of both."

About KKR's batting, which has not realised its



Refocus: Russell and KKR will look to make amends. K.R. DEEPAK

potential, Bravo said, "We have an aggressive batting line-up, but that's not cricket. My message to the batters is that the basics of the game are still required. These guys need to apply themselves a bit more, and I think they understand that."

Bravo expected KKR to fight back against Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Eden Gardens here on Thursday. "We're not the only team

that has two losses and one win. It's important for us to bounce back and that is our main focus right now," said Bravo on Wednesday.

SRH fielding coach Ryan Cook said his team's morale was high despite two consecutive defeats. "Everyone's staying in good spirits. We've got a team that's very well bonded. The morale is good, looking forward to getting a win tomorrow," said Cook.

**IN BRIEF**



**Jaiswal makes shock switch from Mumbai to Goa**

Yashvi Jaiswal has quit Mumbai and will now represent Goa in domestic cricket from the forthcoming season. The India opener has obtained the NOC from Mumbai Cricket Association.

**Korea blanks India 3-0 in WJT opening Group B league game**

Fourth seed Korea blanked India 3-0 in the opening Group B league match of the Asia-Oceania World Junior Tennis (under-14) girls' tournament at Kuching (Malaysia) on Wednesday. Fifth seed Japan and host Malaysia are the other teams in India's group.

**The results: League: Korea bt India 3-0** (Lee Yerin bt Srishti Kiran 6-2, 6-2; Lim Yerin bt Jenji Kanabar 7-5, 6-3; Kim Seohyeon & Lee bt Jenji & Aaradhy Meena 6-3, 6-0).

**Riya beats Fontenel, moves into the second round**

Riya Bhatia beat Chelsea Fontenel of Switzerland 6-1, 6-4 in the first round of the \$40,000 ITF women's tennis in Bujumbura, Burundi.

**Other results: Doubles, pre-quarterfinals: \$680,140 ATP, Houston:** Federico Gomez (Arg) & Santiago Gonzalez (Mex) bt Sriram Balaji & Miguel Reyes-Varela (Mex) 7-6(3), 6-3. **€145,250 Challenger, Menorca, Spain:** Daniel Cukierman (Isr) & Joshua Paris (GBR) bt Anirudh Chandrasekar & David Hernandez (Esp) 7-6(4), 5-7, [10-5].

**\$15,000 ITF women, Sharm El Sheikh:** Barbara Dessolis & Marcella Dessolis (Ita) bt Lakshmi Gowda & Basant Kaur (USA) 7-5, 6-1.

**First round: \$40,000 ITF women, Bujumbura:** Alyssa Reguer (Fra) bt Pooja Ingale 6-3, 6-4; Darja Suvirjonkova (Srb) bt Laalithya Kalluri 6-2, 6-1.

**Jadumani advances to men's 50kg semifinals**

National champion M. Jadumani Singh pipped Great Britain's Ellis Trowbridge 3-2 to move into the men's 50kg semifinals at the World Boxing Cup Brazil 2025 in Foz do Iguacu. He will face former Asian under-22 champion Asilbek Jalilov for a place in the final. However, three Indians, Nikhil Dubey (75kg), Jugnoo (85kg) and Narender Berwal (+90kg), lost their respective matches. Dubey was beaten 5-0 by Brazil's Kaue Belini, Jugnoo was defeated by France's Abdoulaye Traore 4-1 and Narender was ousted by Kazakhstan's Daniyal Saparbay 3-2.

**Real Madrid huffs and puffs its way past Sociedad**

Real Madrid needed extra time to get past Real Sociedad and reach its second Copa del Rey final in three seasons on Tuesday. Antonio Rudiger scored the decisive goal in extra time to allow the host to advance 5-4 on aggregate score.

**The result:** Real Madrid 4 (Endrick 30, Bellingham 82, Tchouameni 86, Rudiger 115) drew with Real Sociedad 4 (Barrenetxea 16, Alaba 72-og, Oyarzabal 80, 90+3) (AET). (Real Madrid advances 5-4 on aggregate).

**Arsenal suffers blow as defender Gabriel is injured**

Arsenal defender Gabriel Magalhaes was forced off with an apparent right hamstring injury early in the Premier League game against Fulham on Tuesday, throwing into doubt his availability for next week's CL meeting with Real Madrid.



**Hay, Sears shine as NZ beats Pakistan in second ODI**

Ben Sears took five for 59 as New Zealand bowled out Pakistan for 208 to win the second ODI by 84 runs in Hamilton on Wednesday, taking an unassailable 2-0 lead in three-match series. Earlier, Mitch Hay was left stranded on 99 as New Zealand made 292 for eight after being sent in.

**The scores:** New Zealand 292/8 in 50 overs (Hay 99 n.o.) bt Pakistan 208 in 41.2 overs (Ashraf 71, Naseem 51, Sears 5/59). **Toss:** Pakistan. **PoM:** Hay.

**Bengaluru holds the aces over Goa after a thumping win in the first leg**

After Jhingan's own goal in the first half, the host drives home the advantage with Mendez's goal in the 51st; the reverse fixture will be on Sunday

**ISL**  
**Ashwin Achal**  
BENGALURU

**B**engaluru FC outclassed FC Goa 2-0 in the first leg of their ISL semifinal here on Wednesday.

In front of nearly 20,000 spectators at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium, an own goal from Sandesh Jhingan and a clean hit from Edgar Mendez allowed BFC to take a giant step towards reaching the final.

The scrappy encounter saw the home team take the lead just before half-time, when Jhingan failed to safely clear a cross.

Manning the near post, the defender was under

pressure from Ryan Williams, resulting in a header into his own net. Williams nearly doubled the lead in quick time, when a through ball from Suresh Wangjam left him unmarked.

A weak side-footed shot, however, was dealt with ease by FCG goalkeeper Hrishik Tiwari. Williams made up for the lapse in the second half, finding Namgyal Bhutia with a perfectly weighted pass. Bhutia, with all the space in the world, sent

the ball into the box. Spanish forward Mendez lay in wait, and found the side netting with a crisp strike.

It was a disappointing outing for FCG.

The visitor won the possession battle, but did little else of note.

**Crosses galore**

There were inviting crosses galore, but no willing teammates at the receiving end.

BFC goalkeeper Gurpreet Sandhu was left with little or nothing to do, as strike after strike sailed far and wide.

Entering the second leg of the semifinal, which will be held in Goa on Sunday, BFC holds all the aces.

**The result:**

BFC 2 (Sandesh Jhingan-og 42, Edgar Mendez 51) bt FCG 0.



**Stellar show:** BFC took a giant step towards reaching the final. K. MURALI KUMAR



**Team to beat:** Mohun Bagan will hope to continue its dominance over JFC. FILE PHOTO: DEBASISH BHADURI

**JFC eyes positive result against MBSG**

**Sports Bureau**  
JAMSHEDPUR

League shield champion Mohun Bagan Super Giant will start its playoff campaign with an eye on the double crown when it meets Jamshedpur FC in the first leg of the second semifinal of the ISL at the JRD Tata Sports Complex on Thursday.

Mohun Bagan returns to action after a prolonged break of almost a month since it lifted the league title with a 2-0 win over FC Goa on March 8. This may put the Mariners at a slight disadvantage against JFC, which is high on enthusiasm after gaining a confidence-boosting win against a strong NorthEast United FC in the one-legged eliminator barely three days ago.

Looking at its recent form, Mohun Bagan will be counted as the favourite as Jamshedpur has not been able to secure a win in the last six meetings against the Kolkata team.

JFC head coach Khalid Jamil hoped that his team will stay positive after the win against NEU FC and secure the initial advantage against Mohun Bagan.

"There are two legs to play and we are facing a very good team. Since we are playing at home, we must think for a positive result," Jamil said.

Bagan head coach Jose Molina said his team is eager to win the cup and will be looking for a win.

"We are absolutely happy with the season, but we want to win the ISL cup too and we are ready for it," he said.

**Legends Faceoff: Figo, Puyol as captains**

**Sports Bureau**  
MUMBAI

From Luis Figo to Rivaldo, from Pedro Munitis to Carles Puyol and from Michael Owen to Xavi Hernandez, some of the legendary footballers who have made El Clasico even more special for football fans will be in action at the Dr. D.Y. Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai on Sunday in the Legends Faceoff exhibition match between FC Barcelona Legends and Real Madrid Legends. Puyol and Figo will be in charge of their respective teams.

**The squads: Real Madrid**

**Legends:** Luis Figo (Capt.), Pedro Contreras, Kiko Casilla, Francisco Pavon, Fernando Sanz, Agustin Garcia, Pedro Munitis, Ruben de la Red, Antonio Toni del Moral Segura, Jorge Zoco Ostiz, Ivan Perez, Jesus Enrique Velasco Munoz, Jose Luis Cabrera, Juan Jose, Olalla Fernandez, David Barral Torres, Christian Karembeu, Fernando Morientes, Pepe, Michael Owen.

**Barcelona Legends:** Carles Puyol (Capt.), Jesus Angoy, Vitor Baia, Jofre Mateu, Fernando Navarro, Roberto Trashorras, Javier Saviola, Phillip Cocu, Frank de Boer, Giovanni Silva, Rivaldo, Marc Valiente Hernandez, Ludovic Giuly, Ricardo Quaresma, Gaizka Mendietta, Sergi Barjuan, Xavi, Jose Edmilson Gomes de Moraes, Patrick Kluivert.

**Forest beats United, Saka scores on Arsenal return**

**PREMIER LEAGUE**

**Agence France-Presse**  
LONDON

Nottingham Forest beat Manchester United 1-0 to close in on Champions League football next season as Bukayo Saka scored in Arsenal's 2-1 win over Fulham on his return from injury on Tuesday.

Former United winger Anthony Elanga came back to haunt his former club with a stunning solo effort after just five minutes at the City Ground to earn all three points for Nuno Espirito Santo's side.

Third-placed Forest extended its lead over Newcastle in sixth to 10 points.

Thanks to the strong performance of English sides in European competitions this season, the top five will almost certainly qualify for the Champions League.

Elanga was discarded by United in 2023 after a bright start to his career at Old Trafford, but is one of many Forest success sto-



**Triumphant comeback:** Saka celebrates after scoring Arsenal's second goal against Fulham. GETTY IMAGES

ries fulfilling his potential under Nuno. The Swedish international collected possession deep inside his own half but showed blistering pace to burst into the United box before firing low past Andre Onana. Ruben Amorim resorted to sending on centre-back Harry Maguire as a makeshift striker in the closing stages and he nearly grabbed an equaliser in stoppage time when his shot was cleared off the line by Murillo.

Arsenal maintained some pressure on leader Liverpool by cutting the

gap at the top to nine points.

Saka stole the headlines by coming off the bench to head in on his first appearance since December 21.

Mikel Merino's deflected effort had given Arsenal a first-half lead.

Rodrigo Muniz pulled a goal back in stoppage time, but defeat is a blow to Fulham's ambitions of European football next season.

**The results:** Arsenal 2 (Merino 37, Saka 73) bt Fulham 1 (Muniz 90+4); Nottingham Forest 1 (Elanga 5) bt Manchester United 0; Wolves 1 (Strand Larsen 21) bt West Ham 0.

**Sandhu in joint lead with Arjun**

**GOLF**

**Sports Bureau**  
GREATER NOIDA

Yuvraj Sandhu shot into the lead with a second round score of five-under 67 in the ₹1.5 crore Adani invitational golf championship at the Jaypee Greens Golf and Spa Resort on Wednesday.

Two-time champion this season, 28-year-old Yuvraj was joined in the lead at seven-under 137 by Arjun Prasad who had a three-under 69 this day.

Yuvraj was on song, converting seven birdies on the first 10, and narrowly missed a hole-in-one on the third.

"As there was no wind in the morning, I took advantage of the conditions. I lost a shot or two to the wind in the afternoon," said Yuvraj.

Playing his fourth successive tournament, Yuvraj thanked the tournament physio for helping him get rid of the shoulder pain.

"I have had two solid days so far. I am looking

forward to be in the leader group with Yuvraj for the second time this season," said Arjun Prasad.

The overnight leaders Saptak Talwar and N. Thangaraja were not as good in the second round. Saptak had a par round and slipped to the fifth spot with five-under 139.

Sri Lankan Thangaraja, another champion this season, had two-over 74 and placed joint seventh with Om Prakash Chouhan and Shaurya Bhattacharya at three-under 141.

The cut fell at three-over 147.

It meant 60 professionals and one amateur, 19-year-old Sukhman Singh, made it to the third round.

**The leading scores:** 1T. Yuvraj Sandhu (70, 67), Arjun Prasad (68, 69) 137; 3T. Harendra Gupta (72, 66), Honey Baisoya (70, 68) 138; 5. Saptak Talwar (67, 72) 139; 6. Aryan Anand (70, 70) 140; 7T. Om Prakash Chouhan (68, 73), N Thangaraja (67, 74), Shaurya Bhattacharya (70, 71) 141; 10T. Gaurav Pratap Singh (72, 70), Ajeetesh Sandhu (71, 71), Aman Raj (72, 70), Tapendra Ghai (73, 69), Dhruv Sheoran (70, 72) 142.

**SC notes objections to clauses of AIFF draft constitution**

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday heard the objections to the clauses of the All India Football Federation's (AIFF) draft constitution prepared by former apex court judge L. Nageswara Rao.

Senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, amicus curiae in the case, referred to the national sports development code to submit before a bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and Joymalya Bagchi that only the secretary and the treasurer should be asked to observe the cooling off period.

"We want that the constitution of the AIFF should be in alignment with national sports code and FIFA regulations," he said.

The hearing remained inconclusive.

Under the draft constitution, the AIFF executive committee would have 14 members.



K.R. DEEPAK &amp; SANDEEP SAXENA

# Impact Player – a tussle between evolution and a level-playing field

The rule has redefined batting dynamics in the IPL and has benefitted teams like SRH, PBKS and DC allowing them a daredevil approach to daunting totals with an extra batter; the flip side is the absence of the all-rounder and its impact on Indian cricket with top players wanting the rule to be scrapped

R. Kaushik

Followers of the Indian Premier League will identify Vikram Solanki as the Director of Cricket with Gujarat Titans, the champions on debut in 2022. The Udaipur-born Solanki, who celebrated his 49th birthday on Tuesday, played 51 ODIs and three T20Is for England between 2000 and 2007 with modest returns, but he will go down in history books as the first 'Super Sub' in international cricket.

The Super Sub was introduced in One-Day International cricket in July 2005, sending hordes of statisticians, mainly, and scorers across the world into a tizzy. Cricket was always supposed to be 11 versus 11; the Super Sub would make it 12 vs 12 or, in many instances 12 vs 11. How was this cricket?

As an experiment, the Super Sub idea lasted only eight months. Fundamentally flawed because it magnified rather than neutralised the effect of the toss, it met its logical denouement in March 2006 with numerous luminaries, among them then Australian captain Ricky Ponting, exhorting a rollback to the original 11 vs 11 face-off. Because the Super Sub had to be named *before* the toss, it negated the advantage for the captain who lost the toss and conferred a distinct edge to the side that hit it lucky with the coin.

The decision makers within the International Cricket Council acted swiftly, though had they been a little more prudent in the lead-up to the unleashing of the Super Sub, it might not have been the worst idea, never mind if the scoring/statistician community was up in arms.

More than a decade later, the concussion sub came into the picture, in 2019. The catalyst for this move was undoubtedly the tragic incident involving Phil Hughes in a Sheffield Shield encounter towards the end of 2014. The prime example of a concussion sub emerging as one of the leading batters for his country is Marnus Labuschagne, the first such player in Test cricket when he came on to replace an injured Steve Smith, who was struck on his helmet by Jofra Archer in the Lord's Test of August 2019. Labuschagne made 59 in his first hit in Test cricket, and despite his recent travails, averages 46.76 from 57 Tests.

The concussion sub is a permanent feature now, used - sometimes misused or abused, one might say - in all formats across all levels but a novelty that the IPL sprung on the game is yet to catch on. In a

more nuanced variant of the discarded Super Sub, the IPL permitted the use of an Impact Player from the 2023 edition onwards. Outside of the designated 11, each side can nominate five reserves, from whom the Impact Player can be summoned at any stage. Because this was delinked from the outcome of the toss - any of the five could be used in that capacity, so long as only four overseas players were part of the 12 - it provided a greater level-playing field compared to the Super Sub, though the bowling community might hold a dim view on this development.

## Batting luxury

Ironically, while the Impact Player has freed up the minds of batting groups and spawned a dramatic increase in the rate of scoring and team totals, the thinking behind this innovation was to bolster bowling depth. In theory, teams could swap a batter for a specialist bowler when they defended a target, thereby precluding the need to rely on the infamous 'bits-and-pieces' players. In reality, it has triggered a change in mindsets and attitudes from a batting perspective.

The Impact Player might not always make an impact, but the luxury of being able to call up an additional batting resource in the event of a collapse has emboldened teams to shed conservatism and concentrate on all-out attack. That the top five scores of all time in the IPL have come since the start of the 2024 edition is no coincidence.

The once-preferred approach of beginning carefully and then exploding in the second half has now been emphatically thrown out the window. There are no more sighters even if the new ball is swinging or nipping around. No one has benefited from this more than Sunrisers Hyderabad, who have produced scores of 287, 286 and 277 in the last season and a quarter, taking aggression to ridiculously new heights and marrying it with a consistency that makes them comfortably the most feared batting unit of the competition.

When an Impact Player delivers, it sends a frisson of excitement and satisfaction in the support staff that works out match-ups and the rest and decides who is best suited for that role. Already this season, a slew of such players has made a telling difference, none more so than Ashutosh Sharma, against Lucknow Super Giants.

Rishabh Pant's men had amassed 209

for eight in their 20 overs and Delhi Capitals were reeling at 65 for five after 6.4 overs when Ashutosh strode in to join Tristan Stubbs, the exciting young South African. The Capitals needed 145 more in 80 deliveries but were fast running out of batters. Among those already back in the hut were skipper Axar Patel and Faf du Plessis, the South African who had captained Royal Challengers Bengaluru for the preceding three years.

Ashutosh started slowly, steadying the chase with stands of 48 and 55 respectively with Stubbs and the relatively unknown Vipraj Nigam. Because Stubbs had taken only 22 balls for his 34 and Nigam had scored even more furiously - 39 off just 15, at a strike-rate of 260 - Ashutosh was able to play himself in without feeling the need to score rapidly. Perhaps he had an inkling of what was to come, of how much responsibility he'd have to shoulder. Perhaps he believed that there would come a time when it would all be up to him and therefore it made no sense to take a chance or three early on and throw it all away.

When the Nigam show ended, the Capitals required 42 in 23 deliveries with three wickets in hand; that became 39 in 17 with two wickets remaining when Mitchell Starc ate up five balls in making two before falling to leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi. Only Kuldeep Yadav and Mohit Sharma were left. The former is no mug with the bat but not exactly a power-hitter while the latter averages 7.34 at a strike-rate of 94.94 in 166 T20s. It was now entirely in Ashutosh's hands, the fate of the match.

At one point 20 off 20, the powerful right-hander positively exploded towards the closing stages. Pant and his team believed all they needed was one false stroke, but none was forthcoming. Targeting his areas, mainly straight down the ground, the 26-year-old smashed five fours and as many sixes so that his last 11 deliveries produced a remarkable 46 runs.

Despite having their backs to the wall, despite the required rate mounting and the wickets tumbling, the Capitals won by one wicket with three deliveries to spare. A massive half an hour. Extraordinary doesn't even begin to do justice to the carnage at the gob-smacked ACA-VDCA Stadium in Visakhapatnam, the Capitals' temporary home at the start of their campaign.

Ashutosh is the most visible but not the only Impact Player to make a difference at this early stage of this year's skirmishes.

As recently as on Tuesday, but under far less pressure, Nehal Wadhwa justified his introduction with a 25-ball 43 not out in Punjab Kings' eight-wicket rout of, well, Lucknow Super Giants again. Maybe they, more than anyone else, will have deep reservations about the Impact Player, considering how adversely that has impacted their fortunes and left them languishing at sixth in the table a fifth of the way into the league phase.

The Impact Player hasn't been discussed on a global platform and no other major T20 league has followed in the IPL's footsteps.

Indeed, there was a concerted push from many captains for the scrapping of this rule ahead of this season; among those who have spoken out against this are Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and A.B. de Villiers. But the IPL has gone ahead and extended this concept to the next three seasons, sparking genuine fears that what might be good for the most visible franchise-based league in the world might not necessarily be good for Indian cricket because it will, as it already has, stymie the unearthing of genuine Indian all-rounders.

"It brings an added excitement, clearly, for the audience," Mo Bobat, RCB's Director of Cricket, observes. "It also makes sure that games stay live for longer, which is useful. And I think that also is relevant here (at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru), where games stay live for longer because you can chase quite a lot in the end. So, in many ways, it makes it very exciting for people."

Bobat's loyalty is to RCB, as it must be, and he isn't particularly fussed about how the Impact clause affects Indian cricket *per se*.

Hence, it was no surprise to hear him say, "If you were someone who was particularly bothered about Indian cricket's future, you might ask a few questions around what it's done to the all-rounder. But me in this position right now, that isn't a major concern. It's a case of us trying to make sure that we use it to our advantage."

The IPL's insistence on the Impact Player, yet to surge into international consciousness, hasn't adversely impacted the national team's fortunes. India remained unbeaten at the T20 World Cup last year on their way to the title and are unbeaten in their last nine bilateral series. Maybe we are overstating the adverse effect on the Indian all-rounder. Or maybe, just maybe, we are being clairvoyant?

## THE GIST

▼ The Super Sub idea introduced in July 2005 lasted only eight months. Fundamentally flawed because it magnified rather than neutralised the effect of the toss, it met its logical denouement in March 2006

▼ Impact Player is a nuanced version of the discarded Super-Sub. When an Impact Player delivers, it sends a frisson of excitement and satisfaction in the support staff

▼ There was a concerted push from many captains for the scrapping of this rule ahead of this season. But the IPL has gone ahead and extended this concept to the next three seasons, sparking genuine fears