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Words come alive

Banu Mushtaq's quiet rebellion, Kiran Desai's language of love, longing, and loneliness, and more as *The Hindu* **Lit for Life 2026** comes to a close



International Booker Prize winner Banu Mushtaq in conversation with Journalist Pankaja Srinivasan. R. RAGU



Author Kiran Desai in conversation with Nirmala Lakshman, Chairperson of The Hindu Group. R. RAGU



Shashi Tharoor, MP, signs a book for L. V. Navaneeth, CEO, The Hindu Group. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

- Narayana Guru's role in Kerala's societal transformation
- Remembering the life and times of Periyar
- Life and literature in the northeast
- *The Hindu* relaunches its modern, refreshed, games section

The all-new Kia Seltos
Presents
THE HINDU LIT FOR LIFE 2026
THE SHARPEST LITERATURE FESTIVAL IN INDIA
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FULL COVERAGE » PAGES 6, 7, & 8

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SNDP-NSS thaw changes Kerala's poll landscape

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
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'Pentagon readies troops to quell Minnesota riots'

WASHINGTON
The Pentagon has ordered about 1,500 active-duty soldiers to prepare for a possible deployment to Minnesota, the site of large protests against the government's deportation drive, U.S. media reported on Sunday. » PAGE 16

Centre in 'denial' over realities of pollution: Cong.

NEW DELHI
Citing a World Bank report that says air pollution claims about one million premature deaths annually in the Indo-Gangetic and Himalayan foothills, the Congress asked how long the Narendra Modi government would continue to remain in "denial" over a deepening public health crisis. » PAGE 4

Crypto players call for tweaks to policy in Budget

NEW DELHI
India's top cryptocurrency players say a few policy tweaks in the upcoming Budget 2026 could go a long way to ensure that capital does not flow out of the country and instead thrives within it, without sacrificing on regulatory requirements like KYC norms and anti-money laundering provisions. » PAGE 5

'Deviation by pilot damaged runway lights in Chennai'

BENGALURU
The Directorate General of Civil Aviation, in its final report, says that the pilot-in-command of the Star Air flight to Bengaluru deviated from the lead line on the taxiway, aligned the aircraft on the runway 07 edge line and initiated the take-off roll, thereby damaging seven runway edge lights at the Chennai International Airport in February 2025. » PAGE 3

PM unveils ₹6,957-cr. elevated corridor project in Kaziranga

Modi flags off two Amrit Bharat trains from poll-bound Assam; cites recent election results to claim the BJP has become the first choice of people in the country; PM accuses Congress of aiding encroachment by infiltrators, and neglecting Kaziranga

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday cited the outcome of the Bihar Assembly election and the Mumbai civic polls to claim that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has become the first choice of the people in the country.

After laying the foundation stone for the ₹6,957 crore Kaziranga elevated corridor and virtually flagging off two Amrit Bharat trains from poll-bound Assam's Kaliabor, he also said that the Congress had lost the trust of the nation.

The 86-km Kaziranga Elevated Corridor is a four-lane National Highway project, which includes 35 km of an elevated road passing through the Kaziranga National Park. "The elevated wildlife corridor will ensure uninterrupted movement of animals and reduce human-wildlife conflict. It will also enhance road safety, reduce travel time and accident rates," an official statement said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi inspects the model of the proposed Kaziranga elevated corridor in Kaliabor, Assam, on Sunday. ANI

Mr. Modi also praised the Himanta Biswa Sarma-led Assam government for stopping rhinoceros poaching in Kaziranga , the "soul of Assam" and a "priceless jewel of the country" that he accused the Congress of neglecting.

The Prime Minister also accused the Congress of handing over Assam's land to infiltrators and helping them encroach on large swathes of land and lauded the government for tackling infiltration and freeing forests and historical and cultural sites from encroachment.

The Prime Minister said that election results across States – including in Kerala's capital Thiruvananthapuram, where the BJP secured the Mayor's post for the first time – reflected a consistent national trend. "The voters today want good governance and development. That is why they like the BJP," he said.

Mumbai's faith in BJP

The country has shown a growing faith and trust in the BJP in recent months, Mr. Modi said. "In the Bihar election, even after 20 years, people helped the BJP win a record number of seats. The results of the Maharashtra Municipal Corporation election were announced two days ago. For the first time, Mumbai gave the BJP a record mandate. People allowed the BJP to serve them in most other cities of Maharashtra," he said.

"The results have also shown that the voters are repeatedly rejecting the negative politics of Congress," he added. He asserted that the Congress has lost the country's trust due to its lack of a development agenda. "Congress took the fourth or fifth spot in Mumbai, where it was born. It has shrunk significantly in Maharashtra, which it ruled for years," Mr. Modi pointed out.

'Syndicate tax' hurting Bengal's development: PM

KOLKATA
Accusing the Trinamool Congress government of imposing a 'syndicate tax' on development in West Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said investments would not come to the State as long as the party remained in power. » PAGE 4



Greenlanders protest against Trump's policy towards the island, in front of the U.S. consulate in Nuuk, Greenland. AP

Trump's tariff threat over Greenland may imperil EU trade deal

Agence France-Presse
BRUSSELS

European Union leaders on Saturday warned against U.S. President Donald Trump's threat to impose tariffs on European countries until he has achieved his purchase of Greenland.

Cyprus, which holds the rotating presidency of the European Council, announced an extraordinary meeting of EU ambassadors in Brussels for Sunday afternoon.

And one senior German Member of European Parliament (MEP) said Mr. Trump's latest threat raised a question mark over the EU-U.S. trade deal agreed last year.

EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa, president of the European Council, issued the joint statement hours after Mr. Trump threatened multiple European nations with tariffs of up to 25%. "Tariffs would undermine transatlantic relations and risk a dangerous downward spiral," they wrote in a post on social media.

'Will remain united'

"Europe will remain united, coordinated, and committed to upholding its sovereignty," they added.

The statement came days after Danish and Greenlandic officials held talks in Washington over Mr. Trump's bid to acquire the territory, without reaching agreement.

"The EU stands in full solidarity with Denmark and the people of Greenland," said the EU statement.

Dialogue essential

"Dialogue remains essential, and we are committed to building on the process begun already last week between the Kingdom of Denmark and the U.S."

Mr. Trump said that from February 1, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Finland would be subject to a 10% tariff on all goods sent to the United States.

German MEP Manfred Weber, head of the largest group in the European Parliament, the conservative EPP, said Mr. Trump's latest remarks called into question the EU-U.S. trade deal negotiated last year. "The EPP is in favour of the EU-U.S. trade deal, but given Donald Trump's threats regarding Greenland, approval is not possible at this stage," he posted on X.

"The 0% tariffs on U.S. products must be put on hold," he added.

Brussels and Washington clinched a deal in July for most EU exports to face a 15% U.S. levy, but both sides are still pushing for additional trade concessions.

Run Mumbai run



Participants in the Tata Mumbai Marathon, 2026 on the newly built coastal road in Mumbai on Sunday. EMMANUAL YOGINI

At least 5,000 dead in Iran unrest: official

Reuters
TEHRAN

At least 5,000 people have been killed in protests in Iran, including about 500 security personnel, an official said on Sunday, citing verified figures and accusing "terrorists" of killing "innocent Iranians". The protests erupted on December 28 over economic hardship and swelled over two weeks into widespread demonstrations calling for the end of clerical rule.

FULL REPORT ON » PAGE 16

8 Opposition leaders booked as row over Manikarnika Ghat intensifies

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

A war of words erupted on Sunday between the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Opposition parties after multiple first information reports (FIRs) were lodged in Varanasi against those allegedly spreading AI-generated images and misleading information on social media regarding redevelopment work at the Manikarnika Ghat. While Opposition parties expressed outrage over the registered cases, calling them dictatorial, the BJP hit back, alleging a calculated attempt to circulate false claims amid the government's rejuvenation push.

The eight booked individuals include Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, Lok Sabha MP Rajesh Ranjan, alias Pappu Yadav, and Congress leader Jaswinder Kaur. The FIRs have been lodged under Section 196 (promoting enmity, hatred, or disharmony between different groups through speech, writing, signs, or electronic means) and Section 298 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023.

Reacting to the FIR against him, Mr. Singh alleged that the redevelopment work had caused destruction at Manikarnika Ghat. Temples were damaged and a statue of Ahilyabai Holkar was defaced, drawing protests from *sadhus* and others, he alleged.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday accused the Congress of spreading "false propaganda" to defame Kashi. He was responding to allegations regarding the demolition of statues and temples at the ghat and viral videos related to it.



Old structures being demolished at the Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi. ANI VIDEO GRAB

"Separate cases have been registered in Varanasi on the petition of Municipal Corporation officials against those allegedly spreading AI-generated images and misleading information on social media regarding the redevelopment work at the Manikarnika Ghat. Based on the complaints received, the police have filed cases against various X handles and individuals. We are keeping a track on social media and using digital footprints to crack down on those spreading rumours," Atul Anjan Tripathi, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Dashaswamedh, Varanasi, said. The booked individuals include leaders of political parties, including the Congress and AAP.

'Dictatorial attitude'

Uttar Pradesh Congress president Ajay Rai said that if the videos were AI-generated, concrete evidence should be made public, and described the cases as reflective of a dictatorial attitude. "I ask the Chief Minister directly: If the video of the statue is AI-generated, concrete evidence of this should be made public. It should also be clarified where the statue went and where it is currently located. The government is trying to conceal the truth by claiming it was an AI video. This contradiction raises questions about the government's own intentions. Yesterday, the Chief Minister visited Varanasi and was scheduled to visit Manikarnika Ghat, but it was suddenly cancelled. The question is, why was this visit cancelled? Was it to prevent the truth from coming out? Congress makes it clear that any tampering with the faith, culture and heritage of Kashi will not be tolerated. The voice of truth cannot be suppressed," Mr. Rai said.

The BJP alleged that the Opposition's attempt to spread falsehoods and provoke outrage reflected political desperation rather than concern for culture.

"At a time when the government is undertaking transparent and sensitive rejuvenation of Kashi's heritage, the Opposition's attempt to spread falsehoods and provoke outrage reflects not concern for culture, but political desperation and a calculated effort to derail development through misinformation," Pushkar Mishra, a senior BJP functionary, said.

A local Congress leader in Varanasi, Manish Kumar Upadhyay, alleged that for the past several years, the manner in which Kashi's historicity, ancient traditions, cultural and religious identity, and civilisation were being affected in the name of development by the local administration at the behest of the government was a matter of grave concern and a subject of self-reflection for residents of the city.

Manikarnika Ghat is among the holiest cremation grounds in Hinduism, believed to grant *moksha* or liberation from the cycle of birth and death, and holds deep cultural significance for devotees across the country.

INBRIEF



TVK chief Vijay arrives in Delhi to appear before CBI again

TVK chief Vijay arrived in Delhi on Sunday to appear before the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) authorities on January 19 in connection with the Karur stampede case. The actor-turned politician, who left Chennai by a chartered plane, arrived at the national capital as per schedule, party sources said, adding he will appear before the federal agency's officials for questioning on Monday. Mr. Vijay, who was questioned at the CBI headquarters here on January 12 for more than six hours, was asked to come again on the following day, but the actor sought another date, citing the harvest festival Pongal. PTI

Two dead, 11 hurt as speeding car hits labourers in Jabalpur

Two persons were killed and 11 others injured after a speeding car hit a group of 13 women labourers in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur district on Sunday, police said. The driver of the car, which did not have a registration number plate, sped away after the accident, they said. The incident took place around 2 p.m. near Ekta Chowk in front of Sigma Colony under Barela police station when the labourers, hired for installing road divider railings, were having lunch, Additional Superintendent of Police Pallavi Shukla said. PTI.

Stalin flags 'interference' in Sahitya Akademi by Centre, institutes new literary award

Best works in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Bengali, Marathi will receive Semmozhi Literary Award every year, the award will carry a cash prize of ₹5 lakh for each language: T.N. CM

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Sunday announced the institution of a national literary award for works in seven Indian languages.

Speaking at the valedictory function of Chennai International Book Fair 2026, he said, "Owing to the interference of the Union Ministry of Culture, the event to announce the Sahitya Akademi Awards 2025 was cancelled a few days ago after the list was finalised. We do not know whether the awards would be announced. Political interference in arts and literature is dangerous."



Promoting literature: Chief Minister M.K. Stalin launching 180 Tamil works translated into other languages at the valediction of Chennai International Book Fair 2026. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

7 Indian languages

Mr. Stalin said writers and stakeholders in arts and literature urged the Tamil Nadu government to act in a constructive manner, responding to the political interference by the Union government in arts and literature.

"In the first phase, the best literary works in the Indian languages of Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Bengali, and Marathi will receive the Semmozhi Literary Award every year. The award will carry a cash prize of ₹5 lakh for each language. Once the Dravida Model 2.0 government is formed, we will strengthen and expand this initiative, making it world-class. We will build libraries across Tamil Nadu. Let us light the flame of knowledge and emerge victorious, working in harmony with each other."

Pointing to the significance of translation and copyright transfer at the book fair, Mr. Stalin said the translation of *Heart Lamp* into English had made Kannada writer Banu Mushtaq famous across the world.

"The visit of such a writer who shares the Dravidian ideal of social justice has brought glory to this book fair. I thank Banu Mushtaq for accepting our invitation," he said.

'Need for harmony'

Stressing the need for harmony and sharing of ideas among languages, he said the ideas cherished by the writers of our land should be shared with all the people of the world and the great ideas from various parts of the world should reach our people.

"Language is not a wall that separates people; rather, it bridges people across the world. This event has made us realise our dream. I congratulate our School Education Minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi and School Education Secretary B. Chandra Mohan on the success of this book fair," he added.

12 detained in U.P. for offering *namaz* 'without permission'

Press Trust of India
BAREILLY

The police say they took 'precautionary action' based on information from people that a vacant house was allegedly being used as a temporary madrasa

The police have detained 12 people in a village in Bareilly district for allegedly offering *namaz* at an empty house "without permission", officials said on Sunday.

A video purportedly showing people offering prayers inside the house has surfaced and is being circulated on social media, they said.

Bareilly SP (South) Anshika Verma said police took precautionary action after receiving information from people in Mohammadganj village that a vacant house was allegedly being used as a temporary madrasa for the past several weeks.

"Conducting any new religious activity or gathering without permission is a violation of the law. Strict action will be taken if such activities are repeated," she said, appealing to people to maintain peace and law and order.

Police said the 12 detained persons were challaned under sections related to breach of peace and later produced before a magistrate, who granted them bail. Efforts are underway to trace three other persons who are absconding.

According to police, preliminary inquiry revealed that the vacant house belongs to one Hanif, and was being used temporarily for Friday *namaz*.

No written permission or valid documents could be produced when sought by the authorities, they said.

Objection by villagers

Police said some villagers had objected to the prayers being held regularly at the house without permission and informed the authorities, following which the police reached the spot and stopped the gathering.

Bringing Akali Dal back to power will drag Punjab into dark era: CM

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday hit out at the Shiromani Akali Dal, warning that returning the party to power will plunge the State back into a "dark era".

Addressing a public gathering at Majitha in Amritsar, Mr. Mann said it was due to the "misdeeds" of the Akalis and the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee - the body responsible for the management of historical gurdwaras - that the State government was compelled to constitute a Special Investigation Team to initiate a probe into the missing 328 'saroops (sacred copies)' of the Guru Granth Sahib.

"Our only objective is to trace the missing 'saroops'. We have no intention of interfering with religious institutions," he said.

The Chief Minister reiterated the supremacy of the Akal Takht - the highest Sikh temporal seat - saying, "Sri Akal Takht Sahib is above all of us. That is why I did not attend the function of the President and chose instead to appear before the Takht."

On January 15, Mr. Mann had appeared before the Akal Takht secretariat in Amritsar after being summoned for his alleged remarks about Sikh traditions and tenets, and submitted his clarification.

'Severe blow'

He said unlike the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government, the Akalis have repeatedly undermined the authority of the Akal Takht. "Jathedars (priests) have been appointed and removed at their whims, dealing a severe blow to the sanctity of these institutions," he said, adding that Congress leaders have "lost their political balance after facing continuous defeats".

Rats in U.P. hospital ward: medical team carries out inspection

Press Trust of India
GONDA

A team from the Department of Medical Education, Uttar Pradesh, visited the medical college in Gonda district on Sunday after a video of rats scurrying inside the hospital went viral on the internet.

The team arrived on the directions of Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak, and carried out a detailed inspection of cleanliness, patient facilities and overall arrangements in various wards of the medical college, officials said.

The action comes after a video showing rats moving freely in the orthopaedics ward, running from the oxygen pipeline to patients' beds, had gone viral a few days ago. Following the video, several Opposition leaders raised questions over the condition of the medical college.

Director (Medical Care) Dr. Sandeepa Srivastava, who led the team, said the State government had directed them submit a report on the entire incident.

'Old guard should step aside when things start running smoothly'

Press Trust of India
NAGPUR

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Sunday pitched for the next generation taking important responsibilities and the old generation stepping aside when things start running smoothly. Mr. Gadkari was addressing a press conference in Nagpur about the Advantage Vidarbha-Khasdar Audhyogik Mahotsav, conceptualised by him and organised by Ashish Kale, president of the Association for Industrial Development (AID).



Union Minister Nitin Gadkari in Nagpur on Sunday. ANI

The Minister said Mr. Kale has involved the young generation in the Advantage Vidarbha initiative. "I believe that gradually, the generation should also change." "Ashish's father is my friend. Now we should be gradually made to retire and the responsibility be given to the new generation, and when the vehicle starts running smoothly, then we should withdraw and do some other work," Mr. Gadkari said.

Mr. Gadkari, who is AID's chief mentor, said this is the third year of Advantage Vidarbha expo, being held in Nagpur from February 6 to 8.

There are very good entrepreneurs in Vidarbha region in various sectors, he said. The objective of the three-day event is to establish Vidarbha as a strong and emerging growth hub on India's industrial map, Mr. Gadkari added.

He also emphasised on the importance of Industrial sector, agriculture and allied sectors and service sector for the development of any region.

Polyester national flags snatching away livelihood of Karnataka khadi workers

Manikanth Gangane
HUBBALLI

For Shantha Basavaraj Gundgal, the national flag manufacturing unit at Bengeri in Hubballi is not just a workplace but a life support. Having lost her husband nine years ago, the unit helped her eke out a living and support her two college-going children.

"This work provided me with a stable income and also lets me take up other temporary jobs on a part-time basis," she said. However, she is worried now because the workload at the unit has come down because of a dip in sales and the pending stock of national flags. This has come at a time when she has to repay her loan at the rate of ₹630 per week.

Another worker at the unit, Ratna Harvi, initially used to earn ₹6,000 to ₹7,000 per month, but now gets only half of it. Children in college and the mounting loan on the small grocery store that her husband runs, keeps them worried.

Annapoorna Doddmani, who manages the unit ensuring strict adherence to Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) guidelines also has the additional responsibility of guiding visitors through the production process, from sourcing raw materials to printing the Ashoka Chakra, ensuring colour durability, and demonstrating the proper folding method for easy flag hoisting. She too looks concerned. "We have received fewer orders compared to previous years," she said.



Women making khadi flags at the country's first BIS recognised national flag manufacturing unit at Bengeri in Hubballi. KIRAN BAKALE

Majority of the workers in the all-women flag manufacturing unit run by Karnataka Khadi Gramodyoga Samyukta Sangha (KKGSS) have similar stories. There are hundreds of women working in khadi units spread across North Karnataka district from where the flag unit sources its raw materials and they are all affected.

The reason

The main reason for the unit being in distress is the amendment brought to Clause 1.2 of Part 1 of the Flag Code of India, which permitted use of polyester and machine-made cloth to stitch the national flag, relaxing the earlier mandatory use of hand-spun and hand-woven khadi cloth.

"The polyester flags are cheaper and come in different sizes, which are not permitted under the Flag Code.

Consequently the sale of khadi flags is hit. We are under pressure to reduce the workforce, but we are managing somehow by assigning different roles in other khadi units. But we are not sure how long we can continue doing so," said Shivanand Mataphati, secretary of KKGSS.

Declining sales

After the debacle caused by the pandemic, the unit had recovered with good sales to the tune of ₹3.94 crore during 2022-23. As the Union government amended the Flag Code to permit flags of polyester and machine-made cloth to facilitate production of many flags during 'Har Ghar Tiranga' drive, the flag sales dipped to ₹1.71 crore during 2023-24 and further dropped to ₹1.21 crore in 2024-25. In the current fiscal, the unit has been able to sell only flags worth ₹65.51 lakh till December.

The women at the flag unit and khadi workers are only hoping that the Centre withdraws the amendment to the Flag Code.

Kalash theft to Red Fort blast, how Delhi Police is leveraging NATGRID for investigations

Alisha Dutta
NEW DELHI

Amid a push by the Ministry of Home Affairs to all police departments in the country to actively use the National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID), primarily intended as a counterterrorism tool, a senior Delhi Police officer said the intelligence-sharing platform has proved instrumental in dismantling organised crime networks.

"Earlier, getting information about a suspect involved seeking permissions and sending requests to several agencies. Now, with NATGRID, information gathering has become much easier as all data are available on one platform," the officer told *The Hindu*.

The master database of NATGRID, conceived after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, contains information from at least 21 organisations. It stores information on tax records, bank accounts, financial transactions, immigration, vehicle ownership, toll payments, and train and flight bookings, among others. It also provides single-window access to FIRs registered at police stations across the country.



NATGRID has aided the police not just in investigating high-profile cases but also in their routine probes, an officer said. FILE PHOTO

The officer said not all law enforcement agencies have fully adopted the information-sharing principle underpinning the platform, citing the November 10, 2025 Red Fort terror incident, which claimed the lives of 15 people. Details about Umar-un-Nabi, who was killed while driving the explosives-laden vehicle, were not uploaded to the platform by the police departments of two States, he said.

"There were no data on Nabi or his vehicle on the portal despite the push for inter-State intelligence sharing," he noted. However, the officer added that Delhi Police, which was probing the case before it was handed over to the National Investigation Agency, was able to learn a lot about the other accused through NATGRID, which helped identify the suspects' hideouts and movements.

Checks and balances

NATGRID has aided the Delhi police not just in investigating high-profile cases but also in their routine investigations, the officer said. "When a gold *kalash* (urn) was stolen during a Jain ceremony near Red Fort, we matched the CCTV image of the suspect with the photo on his passport available on NATGRID," the officer explained.

E-rickshaw driver poses as policeman to avoid toll tax

Press Trust of India
GURUGRAM

A 34-year-old e-rickshaw driver was arrested for allegedly impersonating a police sub-inspector to avoid toll taxes, getting preferential treatment at hotels, and making an overbearing impression, police said on Sunday.

A sub-inspector's uniform, a fake identity card bearing the special police officer rank, a PAN card, and an Aadhaar card were recovered from him.

The police began to look for the impersonator at the complaint of the manager of a hotel.

The manager alleged that, on Saturday, a man wearing a police uniform came to the hotel, booked a room, and produced an Aadhaar card in way of identification.

Later, he returned to the hotel and began making unnecessary inquiries about the room, arousing suspicion.

When the manager probed him more about his antecedents, he panicked and tried to flee, but was caught, according to the complaint.

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Deviation by pilot damaged Chennai runway lights: DGCA

Hemanth C.S.
BENGALURU

DGCA says that the airline operator must impart training to the crew based on the probable cause

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), in its final investigation report, has concluded that the pilot-in-command of a Star Air flight to Bengaluru deviated from the lead line on the taxiway (TWY K), aligned the aircraft on the runway 07 edge line and initiated the take-off roll, thereby damaging seven runway edge lights at the Chennai International Airport in February 2025.

On February 25, 2025, the flight (SDG 8216) operating from Chennai to Bengaluru, with 34 passengers and six crew members, took off from the airport at 4.53 p.m. and landed at the Kempegowda International Airport at 5.33 p.m. All persons on board the flight were safe.

At 7.41 p.m., a security jeep, while carrying out a routine runway inspection at the Chennai airport, reported that seven runway edge lights were found broken on the right side of RWY 07.

According to the DGCA, during this time (between 4.53 p.m. and 7.41 p.m.), there were a total of 45 aircraft movements and none of these aircraft reported any abnormalities in the airfield or to their aircraft.

"After detailed examination, it was observed that SDG 8216, while lining up from TWY K, aligned to the extreme right side of RWY 07 and took off," the DGCA report stated.

It further added that information on this was communicated to the aircraft operator the next day to check for any damage and the operator informed that no abnormalities were observed.

However, by that time, the aircraft had already flown to three sectors.

"After the completion of all the planned sectors (six) of the day, the aircraft was subjected to layover inspection at Bengaluru. During the inspection, no abnormalities were reported on both the main landing gear and nose landing gear," it added.

The regulator concluded the probable cause for the incident was that the pilot-in-command deviated from the lead line on TWY K and aligned the aircraft on the RWY07 edge line, and initiated the take-off roll, which resulted in damage to the runway edge lights.

In its safety recommendations, the DGCA has said that the airline operator should impart appropriate training to the crew based on the probable cause and that it shall provide the airport familiarisation training to all the pilots, as per the laid down procedure in organisation flight crew training manual, before assigning the crew to a new airport.

SNDP-NSS friendship may force alliances in Kerala to recalibrate

Hindu organisations representing Nair and Ezhava interests say they will pursue 'shared goals without compromising their political positions'

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



NSS general secretary, Sukumaran Nair (left) and SNDP general secretary Vellappally Natesan (right). FILE PHOTO

The Nair Service Society (NSS) and the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) on Sunday signalled a thaw in their frosty relationship on the contentious issue of caste-based reservation, and hinted at an alignment ahead of the Assembly election in Kerala.

The Hindu social organisations representing the interests of the electorally significant Nair and Ezhava communities broadcast that they had relegated their long-standing differences on reservation to the back burner to meet present-day "social exigencies". Most Nair groups are in the general category for reservation purposes, while Ezhavas are part of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

However, neither organisation specified the urgency that prompted their need for a compact in a crucial election year, or the nature of their prospective accord. The NSS and the SNDP merely stated that their respective leadership would pursue "shared goals without compromising their independent political positions".

Notably, the NSS general secretary, Sukumaran Nair, differed from the SNDP Yogam's position that the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) had driven a wedge between the organisations by using the LDF government's 2014 proposal to extend 10% reservation to economically weaker sections as a foil. "IUML and SNDP were on the same page concerning reservation then," he said.

SNDP general secretary Vellappally Natesan signalled that the NSS-SNDP differences over reservation are now water under the bridge. He said that the LDF's introduction of EWS in 2020 – clubbed with the creamy layer criteria that excludes the wealthy among socially backward communities from affirmative action benefits – had rendered the reservation issue redundant.

Both leaders singled out the Leader of the Opposition, V.D. Satheesan, for criticism and predicted that the UDF's current political trajectory could potentially diminish the alliance's chances of winning the Assembly polls. Mr. Satheesan insisted that he had spoken against communally divisive rhetoric and had not targeted the NSS or SNDP.

Alliance calculus

Meanwhile, Mr. Natesan's pivot towards the NSS leadership has left opposing alliances in Kerala scrambling to read the political tea leaves.

CPI(M) general secretary M.A. Baby said the party would calibrate its position only after understanding how the alignment would evolve and whom it would ultimately benefit. Kerala Culture Minister Saji Cherian denied insinuations that the NSS-SNDP alliance was part of the CPI(M)'s attempt to consolidate Hindu votes through social engineering.

Former CPI(M) MLA from Kerala joins BJP

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Three-time MLA and Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] leader from Idukki S. Rajendran joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday.

The move comes ahead of the Assembly elections. Mr. Rajendran accepted the party membership from BJP State president Rajeev Chandrasekhar in Thiruvananthapuram.

Mr. Rajendran had represented the Devikulam constituency as a CPI(M) member in 2006, 2011 and 2016. He was a member of the party's district committee. In recent years, Mr. Rajendran's relations with the CPI(M) have been far from cordial. In January 2022, the State secretariat of the CPI(M) suspended Mr. Rajendran from the primary membership of the party for a year following allegations that he had tried to defeat party candidate A. Raja in the Devikulam constituency.

On his change of party, Mr. Rajendran said he felt that a new political intervention was needed to address the problems of the plantation sector.

Along with Mr. Rajendran, Communist Party of India (CPI) leader Gurunathan who was the Chinnakanal grama panchayat president, and Santhosh, a CPI(M) member, accepted BJP membership from Mr. Chandrasekhar.

The BJP said hundreds of people would accept the party membership at Munnar on February 8.

'Chief Minister allocates funds despite Centre denying dues for T.N.'



T.N. Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu on Sunday performs *Bhoomi puja* for an overbridge in Tiruthangal. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Hindu Bureau
SIVAKASI

Despite the Union government's "denial of rightful dues" to Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin is spending a huge sum on all schemes so as not to give up on the people of the State, Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu said on Sunday.

Addressing mediapersons after performing the *Bhoomi puja* for a road overbridge at Tiruthangal of Virudhunagar district, the Finance Minister said that Tamil Nadu government had been flagging its fund requirements with the Union government, but in vain. "We pay [a huge amount of funds] in the Goods and Services Tax to the Centre. But the Centre is not devolving proportionate funds to Tamil Nadu. As the Finance Minister [of Tamil Nadu], I have visited Delhi many times for funds. But the rightful funds are denied [by the Centre]," he said.

But the Chief Minister was allocating huge funds for the development of infrastructure, he said, adding that adequate funds had been allocated for the *Mahalir Urimai Thogai* Scheme, free bus travel for women, free breakfast for schoolchildren, and monthly assistance and free laptops for college students.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam(DMK) had promised to fulfil the long-pending demand for two road overbridges at Sivakasi and Tiruthangal. "People raised doubts about our promise on the Sivakasi road overbridge and were pessimistic about its timely completion. But we have completed it much before schedule," Mr. Thennarasu said. Besides allocating ₹45.6 crore for the road overbridge at Tiruthangal, the Chief Minister had allocated funds for a four-way road between Sivakasi and Virudhunagar and an Outer Ring Road for Sivakasi, he added.

A.P. to launch quantum skilling course for students

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh has enrolled 55,000 students on a mass quantum skilling course on "Quantum Computing: Quantum Algorithms and Qiskit" through the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) set to begin from Monday.

The programme is being organised by the Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education. The NPTEL course which will be delivered by faculty from IIT-Madras and IBM Quantum will offer hands-on exposure to quantum algorithms, quantum error correction and Qiskit programming to equip students with relevant skills.

Balancing act



Acrobats perform on a Chinese pole at the 57th edition of Fit India Sundays on Cycle at Gachibowli Stadium, Hyderabad, organised by the Sports Authority of India along with the Telangana government, on Sunday. G. RAMAKRISHNA

Media cannot involve govt. in 'personal fights', says Revanth

R. Ravikanth Reddy
HYDERABAD



Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy attends a meeting of his party workers in Khammam on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Sunday asked the media not to drag his Cabinet colleagues into their personal fight, and said that media personnel could approach him directly if there are any allegations against his Cabinet colleagues.

"We are working together as a team, unlike the earlier regime where only one person used to make all the decisions," he said. He cautioned party workers not to allow the State government to be dragged into conflicts between two media organisations, and urged voters not to give another opportunity to the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS). He made these comments at a meeting of party workers in the united Khammam district.

Referring to the row over Singareni mines contracts, he said his government would give contracts to the eligible only. He made it clear that the State's interests were paramount than others.

Mr. Revanth Reddy said the day was significant as it marked the death anniversary of former Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao, and stressed that two leaders who implemented landmark welfare schemes should always be remembered.

He recalled that NTR introduced the ₹2-per-kg rice scheme to see happiness in the eyes of the poor, and said the credit for free power supply lay with former Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy.

Amid interest burden, Telangana's total revenue receipts at 54.38% at end of Q3

M. Rajeev
HYDERABAD

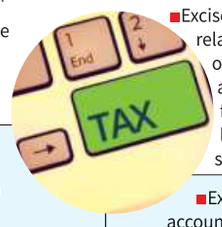
Telangana continues its efforts to wriggle out of the burden cast by interest payment on the long-term debts, even as it achieved overall revenue receipts of ₹1.24 lakh crore, which was 54.38% of the ₹2.24 lakh crore projected for the financial year in the Budget Estimates.

More than half of the revenue receipts was on account of borrowings and other liabilities which stood at ₹65,930 crore during the period. With just three months left for the end of the fiscal year, the State has a long way to go to achieve the projected revenue receipts. Tax revenue at the end of the third quarter was ₹1.13 lakh crore, 65.02% of the ₹1.75 lakh crore of the budget estimates.

Revenue through grants-in-aid and contributions too remained significantly low at ₹3,805 crore, a meagre 16.7% of the ₹22,782 crore projected for the fiscal. Sales tax collections at the end of the third quarter stood at ₹25,126 crore, which was 67.07% of the projected ₹37,463 crore and the State excise duties fetched ₹17,507 crore – 63.38% of the Budget Estimates of ₹27,623 crore.

Expenditure on account of pension payment was on the higher side at ₹15,126 crore. Expenditure on salaries/wages at the end of the third quarter was ₹35,746 crore, 80.37% of ₹44,478 crore of the Budget Estimates, according to the provisional figures submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

Revenue report



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- Revenue through grants in aid and contributions remain significantly low at ₹**3,805** crore
- Sales tax collections at the end of third quarter stood at ₹**25,126** crore, **67.07**% of ₹**37,463** crore
- Excise duties remained relatively low in spite of expectations of a significant rise following hike in licence fee of retail sales outlets
- Expenditure on account of pension payment was on the higher side at ₹**15,126** crore
- Expenditure on salaries was ₹**35,746** crore, **80.37**% of ₹**44,478** crore of estimates

Microscopic crustacean from Kavaratti established as a new genus and species

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A tiny crustacean discovered from the Kavaratti lagoon on the Lakshadweep islands has now been established as a new genus and a new species. The organism, which belongs to the family *Laophontidae* within the *Copepoda* class, is so minuscule that it can be properly studied only with a microscope.

The crustacean has been named *Indiaphonte bijoyi*, with the generic name *Indiaphonte* honouring India and the species name *bijoyi* named after S. Bijoy Nandan, dean, Faculty of Marine Sciences, Cochin University of Science and Technology (Cusat) and a former Vice-Chancellor of Kannur University.



Indiaphonte bijoyi play a key role in maintaining health of aquatic ecosystems.

The new organism has been scientifically described by Neelima Vasu K., a researcher in the Department of Marine Biology at Cusat, in collaboration with Samuel E. Gómez-Noguera, a copepod taxonomist and Professor at UNAM University, Mexico. The discovery has been highlighted in a paper in the journal *Zootaxa*.

The newly described species has a semi-cylindrical, depressed body that is wider in the middle and tapering towards the posterior. It also has antennae-like appendages at the front. Females are slightly larger than males with a body length ranging from 518 to 772 micrometres.

Organisms such as *Indiaphonte bijoyi* are essentially Meiofauna, tiny invertebrate animals less than 1 millimetre in size living in sediments in aquatic environments. With 350 species across 77 genera, the family *Laophontidae* is among the most diverse within the order *Harpacticoida*. Though microscopic in size, they play a vital role in maintaining the health of marine and freshwater ecosystems.

The genus *Indiaphonte* is considered new because it exhibits a unique combination of morphological traits that do not match any previously recorded genus within the *Laophontidae* family.

How long will Modi government live in denial, asks Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Citing a World Bank report on air pollution that claimed around one million premature deaths happen annually in the Indo-Gangetic and the Himalayan foothills, the Congress on Sunday asked how long the Narendra Modi government would continue to remain in "denial" over a deepening public health crisis.

Referring to the World Bank's latest report, "A Breath of Change", Congress general secretary (communications) and former Union Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh said the findings were comprehensive, evidence-based and unambiguous.

The report estimates that air pollution in the Indo-Gangetic Plains and the Himalayan foothills is responsible for around one million premature deaths every year, while causing economic losses amounting to nearly 10% of the region's gross domestic product annually.

In a post on X, Mr. Ramesh said the report underscored the scale and urgency of the crisis, noting that nearly one billion people in the region were exposed to hazardous air on a daily basis. According to the report, such prolonged exposure has shortened average life expectancy by more than three years and imposed a heavy economic burden Stressing the need for "tougher and uncompromising" enforcement of pollution norms , Mr. Ramesh asked, "How long will the Modi government live in denial?"

India invited to join Gaza peace board

New Delhi has not yet responded to the invitation, officials say; the Board of Peace, to be headed by Trump and to include 'other members and heads of state', is expected to oversee funding for the 'redevelopment of Gaza' until the Palestinian Authority completes a 'reform programme'

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

United States President Donald Trump has invited India to be a part of the Board of Peace for Gaza, sources in New Delhi said on Sunday.

U.S. Ambassador Sergio Gor also shared a letter on social media from Mr. Trump to Prime Minister Narendra Modi inviting India.

The Board of Peace for Gaza comprises a group of countries that are being invited by the U.S. to provide a governance structure for the Gaza Strip, as Hamas is being pressured to give up its governance role in the territory as part of Mr. Trump's peace plan.

Officials unwilling to be named said that India has the "invite in hand", though New Delhi has not responded as yet. This comes three days after Mr. Trump announced on social media that the Board of Peace had been formed and that its members would be announced "shortly".

The Trump peace plan for Gaza was first floated on September 29, 2025, when the U.S. President hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House. Following the announcement, Hamas agreed to return all 48 remaining hostages who were being held in Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and Gaza detainees.

As per the plan, Gaza will be administered by the "temporary transitional governance of a technocratic apolitical Palestinian committee", which will consist of Palestinian and international experts. This transitional outfit will be supervised by the Board of Peace, to be headed by Mr. Trump and include "other members and heads of state", as well as the United Kingdom's former Prime Minister Tony Blair.


U.S. President Donald Trump with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Oval Office of the White House on February 13, 2025. AFP

The Board of Peace is expected to handle funding for the "redevelopment of Gaza" till the Palestinian Authority has completed a "reform programme".

The U.S. is expected to work with international partners to develop a "temporary" International Stabilisation Force (ISF) to be deployed in Gaza soon. The U.S. has been in talks with multiple countries across the world for troops to participate in the ISF.

Officials here have maintained that India would not be part of the ISF as it is not a peacekeeping force under the aegis of the United Nations.

On October 9, 2025, however, Mr. Modi had welcomed the Trump peace plan in a post on X.

"We welcome the agreement on the first phase of President Trump's peace plan. This is also a reflection of the strong leadership of PM Netanyahu," he said.

Jordan, Greece, Cyprus, and Pakistan also said on Sunday they had received invitations.
(With PTI inputs)

UAE President arrives today

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India will host UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, on Monday.

The UAE President will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The visit will provide an opportunity for the two leaders to chart new frontiers for the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. It will also enable exchange of views on regional and global issues of mutual interest, where India and the UAE share a high degree of convergence," the External Affairs Ministry said.

As long as Trinamool is in power, investment won't come to Bengal, says Modi

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA


Supporters gather to see Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting, at Singur, West Bengal , on Sunday. PTI

Accusing the Trinamool Congress of imposing a "syndicate tax" on all development in the State, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said investment and business would not come to West Bengal as long as the Trinamool Congress government remained in power.

"Industries will only be set up and investment will come to West Bengal when the law and order situation improves. But in West Bengal, rioters and mafia have a free run. The police are hand in glove with criminals. You know that there is a syndicate tax on all development," the Prime Minister said at a public meeting in Singur.

There was much enthusiasm among the BJP's rank and file over the Prime Minister's public meeting at Singur as the place had become synonymous with the flight of capital from the State. Tata Motors had decided to pull out their small car factory from Singur during the regime of the Left Front government in 2008, due to protest against forcible land acquisition, which was led by Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee.

Mr. Modi, however, did not touch on the development that had rocked the politics of the State almost 18 years ago or promised any fresh investment at Singur. In a government event earlier in the day, Mr. Modi announced development projects worth over ₹830 crore in the State and flagged Amrit Bharat trains connecting Kolkata with other parts of the country.

At the public meeting, the Prime Minister emphasised on "*asol poriborton* [real change]" and repeated the slogan "*Paltano Dorkaar, Chai BJP Sorkaar* [Need change, want BJP government]", which he had coined at a public meeting at Malda on Saturday. "It is necessary that the *maha-jungleraaj* of the TMC goes away from West Bengal," he said.

'Security in jeopardy'

Mr. Modi accused the Trinamool of "playing with national security by aiding infiltrators". "The TMC is playing with national security. They sit on dharnas to protect infiltrators. The TMC is fond of infiltrators as they are their committed vote bank. It can go to any extent to protect infiltrators," he claimed.

Addressing a public meeting in Malda on Saturday, the Prime Minister had emphasised on "illegal infiltration" and said it was changing the demography of the State.

Mr. Modi touched on the issue of border fencing and said the Trinamool government was not providing land to erect fencing along the border. "For the last several years, the Centre has been writing to the TMC government seeking land for border fencing, but the State dispensation did nothing," he said.

The Trinamool reacted sharply to the comments. "Singur doesn't take kindly to liars. This is the land that buried corporate land-grab politics. So when PM stood in Singur today and claimed that no investments are coming to Bengal, he wasn't just distorting facts, he was insulting the intelligence of Bengal's people," the party said in a social media post.

Thronging the river


Crowded bank: People gather to take a holy dip at the Sangam in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on Sunday to mark Mauni Amavasya during the Magh Mela festival. More than 4.52 crore devotees took part in the occassion, officials said. PTI

Tejashwi slams Nitish govt. over death of NEET aspirant

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

The Leader of the Opposition in the Bihar Legislative Assembly, Tejashwi Yadav, on Sunday hit out at the Nitish Kumar-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government over the death of a National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) aspirant, who, according to the post-mortem report, had also been subjected to sexual violence.

Mr. Yadav said that law and order had been buried in Bihar and alleged that the government was treating criminals and rapists as its "guests", going all out to protect and honour them.

"The corrupt system and machine-made double-engine NDA government has become a reliable tool for oppressors, corrupt individuals, criminals, and rapists. The insensitive Nitish government in Bihar, formed through buying votes, is perpetrating atrocities on minor girls, female students, daughters, and women across the State," Mr. Yadav said in a post on X. He also termed the Chief Minister's silence on the matter criminal.

The State government has already formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the case, and Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, who also holds the Home Department portfolio, said on Sunday that whoever was responsible for the incident would be punished.

Govt. is proud of Indian companies investing abroad: Commerce Minister

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The government is proud of the high and growing amounts of investment Indian companies are making outside the country, and is actively encouraging these companies to make acquisitions and investment abroad, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said.

The statement comes at a time when the latest data shows that outward direct investment by Indian companies grew nearly 46% to $20.5 billion in the April-October 2025 period.

"We are proud of it, we are encouraging it," Mr. Goyal told *The Hindu* in response to a query on Friday. "No country has been successful or has become a developed country by being inward looking. You have to be bold and look at going across continents, and expand the frontiers of your own business."

The commerce minister said the government "strongly encourages" Indian businesses to invest abroad and has made regulatory changes to further enable this. "We have relaxed a lot of rules to encourage them to acquire companies world-wide and to set up manufacturing facilities world-wide, and to provide services world-wide," Mr. Goyal said.

According to the Reserve Bank of India, the key destinations for outward FDI from India were Singapore, followed by the U.S. and the U.A.E., which together accounted for more than half of total outward FDI.

The central bank added that around 90% of the outward FDI was in financial, insurance, and business services.

Rahul Gandhi to attend MGNREGA protest

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, will attend a MGNREGA Chaupal in Rae Bareli on January 20 as part of the Congress's nationwide MGNREGA Bachao Sangram, party general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said on Sunday .

An online review meeting of Pradesh Congress Committee presidents and party functionaries resolved to intensify panchayat-level outreach.

Fill vacant faculty positions within 4 months: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has observed that "massification" and "privatisation" of higher education have placed India second globally in student enrolment, but the rush has left behind a trail of deaths, distress, chronic vacancies, and exploitation.

Invoking the court's plenary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution, a Bench of Justice J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan, in a 38-page order, issued a series of directions, including that vacant faculty positions in both public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) must be filled within four months. Appointments of Vice-Chancellors and Registrars must be made within a month of the posts falling vacant, as a matter of practice.

The backlog of pending scholarship disbursements must be cleared within a period of four months by the relevant Central and State government authorities.

It said the number of incidents of students crumpling under pressure to take their own lives has reached "epidemic" proportions even as the National Education Policy, 2020 had set an ambitious target of achieving a 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio by the year 2035.

Purely quantitative expansion without any adequate institutional support framework has left students vulnerable, as directly evidenced by the recurring instances of campus tragedies, the court noted.


SC says the student suicide rate has reached 'epidemic' proportions . FILE PHOTO

Students who interacted with a Supreme Court-appointed National Task Force (NTF) during a survey shared that "extremely rigid attendance policies, overburdening and unplanned phasing/scheduling of the academic curriculum, exam assessment methodologies, faculty shortage, non-transparent or non-existent placement processes" were stressors affecting their mental health.

Medical students spoke about exploitative academic culture coupled with on-call hours being stretched well beyond the prescribed limit - going as far as 36 to 48 hours in one go.

"HEIs cannot shirk away from their fundamental duty to ensure that their institutions as a whole are safe, equitable, inclusive and conducive spaces of learning," the court observed.

Lack of medical help

The NTF found that around 65% of the institutes currently did not provide access to mental health service providers. The court directed that residential HEIs must provide access to round-the-clock qualified medical help, if not on campus, then within a one-km radius to provide emergency health support to students.

The court ordered that the 'Sample Registration System' data on suicides, especially those falling within the age group of 15-29 years, must be centrally maintained.

Media bodies seek new chairperson for Press Council of India

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Media associations on Sunday urged the government to appoint a new chairperson for the Press Council of India as the post fell vacant after Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai completed her tenure last month.

The Press Council of India, a statutory, quasi-judicial body to safeguard press freedom, has been without a chairperson for the first time in its history, the Press Association and journalists' bodies of Mumbai, Assam, West Bengal, Odisha, and Chandigarh-Punjab said in a joint statement in New Delhi.

"The term of the 14th Council ended more than a year ago, but the full 15th Council is yet to be formed, and the post of chairman has not been filled, while the last chairman's three-year extended term ended in December," the statement said.

The Press Council of India comprises 29 members, including the chairperson, with a tenure of three years. Currently, 14 people have been appointed to the council.

INBRIEF



Terrorists engaged in firing, troops deployed in Kishtwar

Additional troops were rushed to a hilly region of Kishtwar after a group of terrorists was spotted and engaged in firing on Sunday. Perched around 3,670 metres above sea level, terrorists were spotted at Son Nar, northeast of Chhatru, Kishtwar, the Army said. Official sources said around three terrorists were suspected to be at the encounter site. A contact was established with terrorists in Son Nar during a deliberate search operation conducted as part of ongoing joint counter-terror operations along with the J&K Police, the Army said. The Army named the ongoing operation "Operation Trashi". Operations remain under way with additional forces sent to reinforce the cordon.

Two children die due to GBS in M.P.'s Neemuch district

Authorities have swung into action after the death of two children due to the Gullian-Barré Syndrome (GBS), an immunological nerve disorder, in Madhya Pradesh's Neemuch district and detection of 18 cases over the past few days, officials said on Sunday. Manasa sub-divisional magistrate Kiran Anjana told *The Hindu* that a special ward had been established at the Civil Hospital for new patients and existing patients had been referred to bigger hospitals.

'Borders should not be decided by tanks or terrorists, but through negotiations'

Polish Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister says his country is 'pleased' with India's reduction in Russian oil purchases; hopes New Delhi shares the view that a world in which the 'law of the jungle becomes acceptable is not a good world'; he expresses optimism for an EU-India FTA soon

INTERVIEW

Radoslaw Sikorski

Suhasini Haidar
JAIPUR


SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Borders should not be decided by "tanks or terrorists", the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Poland, Radoslaw Sikorski, said ahead of his meeting with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Monday. Mr. Sikorski, hoping that India and Poland could have a closer understanding on the issue of Russia's war in Ukraine, said that Poland is "pleased" India has begun reducing its dependence on Russian oil, four years after the war in Ukraine began. The Polish Foreign Minister, one of a number of high-level visitors from Europe to India this month, said the EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is still being negotiated, but he hoped it would be signed at the EU-India summit on January 27. Edited excerpts:

You have referred to India's cut in buying Russian oil and said you are 'pleased' and 'satisfied' – are you convinced that this is a permanent shift, or are these just market adjustments?

Well, Russia lost its most lucrative market for gas and oil in Europe as a result of its aggression against one of its neighbours (Ukraine). We hope India understands our pain, in the sense that we were both colonised in the 19th century; Poland was, so was Ukraine. And we, I think both [India and Poland] believe that the time of European empires trying to colonise other people should be over, and I think both of our regions appreciate how transitory and sometimes accidental borders are, but we also believe that they should be decided through negotiation and adjudication, and not by sending tanks or terrorists.

Do you think the Indian government is shifting its position due to what Poland has been saying?

Well, India is such a huge country that we understand that it needs to have relationships with everyone. But we hope that India shares our view that principles still matter, that a world in which the law of the jungle becomes acceptable is not a good world. I understand that importers always want a bargain, and Russia is forced to sell its oil at a huge discount, and it's sometimes tempting to take advantage of that, but countries should be careful, because we have successfully sanctioned the Russian "shadow fleet". And so, even when Russia sells [crude oil], they might not be able to deliver it.

Is there any sign of a Russia-Ukraine ceasefire? Poland has been seen as anti-ceasefire, given its transfer of weapons and fighter aircraft...

That's not anti-ceasefire. That's just helping the victim of aggression resist the aggressor. Doing nothing means that the aggressor wins. And yes, the war can be over as soon as Mr. Putin decides to stop.

Is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as united, given the U.S. threats against Greenland?

We have had a war within NATO before, when Turkiye landed its paratroopers in Cyprus (the Turkish invasion in 1974). We survived it, and we'll survive this one, too.

Do you expect to see the EU-India FTA being signed next week?

I hope so. There are, of course, both benefits and some sectoral difficulties where we need to be sensitive to each other's pain. But overall, I think President Donald Trump deserves credit for encouraging us to sign, first, the agreement with Latin America (the EU-Mercosur FTA) and now with India [reference to tariffs].

You said there are certain sensitivities that still have to be dealt with – in particular, agricultural market access is believed to have been kept out of the deal. Would Poland support that?

The negotiations are continuing, and we are talking about thousands of products, so it's complicated, and let's leave that to the experts. Since communism collapsed in Poland, when the iconic picture from Poland was of food queues, we are now a huge food exporter. I believe that there are very few product lines in which [India and Poland's] agriculture competes with one another. Together, [India and EU] are two billion people. So there is a great deal of potential. And you have a political system which is more compatible with us than some others. So we have hope [of a deal].

(Read the full interview here: newsth.live/sikorski)

Budget an opportunity to fine-tune crypto policy, say industry players

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI


Cryptocurrencies currently attract a 1% Tax Deducted at Source on every transaction, and a 30% tax on any profit made. REUTERS

India's top cryptocurrency players say that a few policy tweaks in the upcoming Budget 2026 could go a long way in ensuring capital does not flow out of the country and instead thrives within the country without sacrificing on regulatory requirements such as KYC norms and anti-money laundering provisions.

Cryptocurrencies – or Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs), as the government calls them – currently attract a 1% Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) on every transaction, and a 30% tax on any profit made, without the option of setting off losses first.

That is, the 30% tax applies to any profits made on any crypto transactions, without the option of allowing the user to balance these profits against losses made on other crypto transactions.

These tax measures, crypto industry players say, are restrictive and are encouraging crypto investors to invest in foreign exchanges rather than Indian ones.

"As India prepares for Budget 2026, there is a clear opportunity to fine-tune a framework which supports transparency and compliance while fostering innovation," Nischal Shetty, Founder of WazirX, said. "A calibrated reduction in transaction-level TDS and a review of loss set-off provisions could help restore onshore liquidity, improve compliance, and ensure that more economic activity remains within India's regulated perimeter, without compromising oversight or enforcement," he added.

Raj Karkara, chief operating officer at ZebPay, also called for the review of the 30% tax and the 1% TDS, and said that the need was to bring the tax treatment of cryptos in line with other asset classes as a means to ensure more money remains in India.

"From a taxation standpoint, a rationalisation of the current 1% TDS on crypto transactions could meaningfully improve liquidity and encourage stronger onshore participation, while a review of the flat 30% tax on VDA gains, aligned with other asset classes and allowing for loss set-offs, would create a more balanced and predictable investment environment.

A previous analysis by *The Hindu* of the government's TDS data had found that the value of crypto transactions in India had crossed ₹50,000 crore in 2024-25, up from ₹36,270 crore in 2023-24 and ₹22,130 crore in 2022-23.

"The Budget presents an opportunity to strengthen the VDA ecosystem through tax refinements that protect users, maintain financial stability, and support responsible market development," SB Seker, head of APAC for Binance, said.

India's power distribution utilities post ₹2,701 cr. profit in FY 2024-25

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI


Officials express confidence that the Electricity Amendment Bill (2026) would help spur the trend toward profitability. FILE PHOTO

Reversing several years of losses since unbundling and corporatisation of State electricity Boards, India's power distribution utilities – namely, distribution companies (discoms) and power departments – posted a net profit or positive profit after tax (PAT), primarily led by State-run discoms trimming their losses by approximately 80% from FY 2023 to FY 2025, a senior official in the Power Ministry told *The Hindu*.

"One of the main reasons behind this [the overall industry being in net profits] is that the State discoms' after-tax losses have come down sharply in these three years, by about 80%," they stated.

In the financial year 2024-25, India's power distribution utilities collectively posted a net profit of ₹2,701 crore, the Ministry informed on Sunday. For comparable context, the utilities combined had incurred a loss of ₹67,692 crore in FY 2013-14 and had trimmed them to ₹25,553 crore in FY 2023-24.

Officials also expressed confidence that the Electricity Amendment Bill (2026), set to be tabled in Parliament during this Budget Session, would further help spur the trend toward profitability.

Reflecting on the development, Union Minister for Power Manohar Lal, stated, "This marks a new chapter for the distribution sector and is a result of several steps that have been taken to redress the concerns of the distribution sector."

He further held that distribution utilities have also accrued an improved show across all performance indicators. The Aggregate Technical and Commercial losses, an indicator of losses because of technical inefficiencies, theft, billing inefficiencies, and commercial losses combined, have reduced to 15.04% in FY 2024-25 from 22.62% in FY 2013-14.

Additionally, the difference between the average cost of supply and the average revenue realised (ACS-ARR) has also narrowed from ₹0.78/kilowatt-hour (FY 2013-14) to ₹0.06/kilowatt-hour (FY 2024-25). A lower cost-revenue gap indicates lower operating loss for discoms with increased ability to recoup their costs.

Further, the Ministry stated that the Electricity (Late Payment Surcharge) Rules have contributed to a 96% reduction in outstanding dues to generating companies. It has come down to ₹4,927 crore until January this year from approximately ₹1.35 lakh crore in 2022.

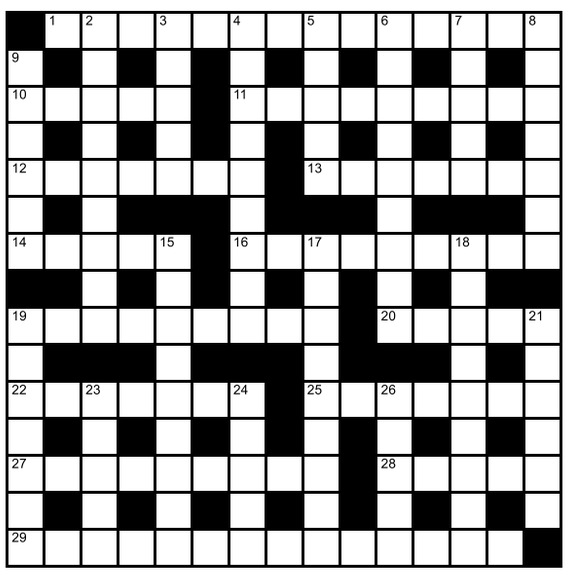
The rules have also brought down distribution utility payment cycles, in other words, billing and payment schedules, to 113 days in FY 2024-25 from 178 days in FY 2020-21.

TH CROSSWORD + 14694

(set by Arden)

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

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

1 The average Joe somehow entertains them (3,2,3,6)
10 He owns stock like in the middle of the sea, mostly (5)
11 SOS once briefly for getting amorous here at the centre (9)
12 Long to get into coach, not in one of the airways (7)
13 Harry liaises to get some lining material (7)
14 Money is repatriated from Iran, I'd say (5)
16 Instrument protected in the middle of winter is undamaged (9)
19 Strangely I'm told, even beards become grey for these people (3-6)
20 French Nobel laureate backed Bush (5)
22 Japanese hostesses sent out — sent out of housing estates, perhaps (7)
25 Snake becomes Greek lover as adjoining characters swap first place (7)
27 Thing to change before midnight — have some cover for retirement (9)
28 Some of the original image reflected in the fashion capital (5)
29 Fancy coat originates from classification (14)

Down

2 Sat on the fence on a plot filled with soil (9)
3 Subject of a cycling holy man in India (5)
4 Accept a raise and go away (4,1,4)
5 Reduces like in rear view (5)
6 Twitter is overactive — that amounts to a lot (9)
7 Regularly held — agrees on margins (5)
8 Stoop shows mistake in time card (7)
9 Displayed emotion over book and encouraged both sides (6)
15 Get chairs arranged for a parliamentary building (9)
17 Checks the way people get into habits (9)
18 Moving drama on sick, old animal... (9)
19 ...only about caring for the living (7)
21 My leaders only need another crown (6)
23 Block ready to be rolled — informing others (5)
24 Small dog has nothing to eat, needs a scrub (5)
26 Own admission in verbatim — daily reviewed (5)

SUDOKU

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

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

S	H	A	N	D	Y	H	E	N
A	S	I	■	■	■	A	U	■
S	E	T	U	P	S	P	R	O
H	E	L	■	C	■	N	R	■
C	A	R	P	O	O	L	S	■
O	■	I	■	M	■	A	E	■
R	E	S	T	A	U	R	A	T
D	■	K	■	T	■	I	H	■
■	■	■	D	I	S	T	R	I
S	■	B	■	C	■	Y	■	C
C	L	U	T	C	H	■	L	A
Y	■	S	■	O	■	F	■	L
T	U	T	O	R	I	A	L	L
H	■	U	■	P	■	I	■	■
E	X	P	O	S	U	R	E	■

M	A	N	■	■	■	H	E	N
A	■	E	■	■	■	U	■	A
R	O	G	U	E	■	■	■	■
R	■	N	■	D	■	■	■	■
L	I	N	E	A	L	■	■	■
■	■	■	T	■	E	■	■	■
■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
■	■	■	D	■	I	■	■	■
■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Bare necessities of life

What are the bare necessities of life? Many of us list luxuries as necessities, because we are so accustomed to enjoying such luxuries. But the basic necessities of food, water, clothing and shelter are enough, and anything more is unnecessary, points out Srimad Bhagavatam. And even with regard to these, the purana advocates the barest minimum as enough for survival, said Valayapet Ramachariar in a discourse.

Suka advises Pareekshit on how a person desirous of moksha should live. Does a person need a cot and a mattress to sleep on? Can he not lie on the ground? As for shelter, have trees stopped sheltering people? Are caves no longer available? Can we not just take some river water in our hand and drink from the palm of the hand? Do we need vessels to hold water? When Nature gives us so much and charges us nothing for them, what is the need to flatter the rich and powerful? Should we indulge in such *nara stuthi*? Once we realise the insignificance of our possessions, we must turn our attention to Lord Narayana, the Supreme One and meditate on Him.

Vedanta Desika's Vairagya Panchakam expresses the same ideas. Desika says it is a sad state of affairs, when even jnanis praise the wealthy for the material benefits that such flattery will get them.

Desika asks if one cannot use grains that lie scattered on the road and wear torn clothes? Even if *Jaadaraagni*, the fire in the belly, were to burn fiercely, he will not seek help from a king, says Desika. He says that he has the indestructible treasure called Narayana, and that there is no need for him to seek riches.

Movement is medicine, says Priti Chawla



Priti Chawla

Technology has become an inseparable part of everyday life, and avoiding it is no longer possible. As dependence on screens increases, it has repercussions for health, on both the body and mind, said fitness coach Priti Chawla on Sunday. Ms. Chawla said that sitting in front of a screen for long periods significantly reduces muscle activation by nearly 90% compared to standing or walking. She said: "Movement is medicine. Small changes matter, and the body adapts quickly and positively when given the chance".

Discussion on writing fiction in times of AI

Where is fiction's place in today's world? What role does it play at a time when AI is being used to write wedding speeches and obituaries? Does fiction make us empathetic, and what, then, is the writer's ultimate motivation to create? Fiction writers Andaleeb Wajid and Keshava Guha sought to answer these questions during a session moderated by Radhika Santhanam on Sunday. They spoke about their creative processes, particularly while constructing characters of genders different from their own. The conversation also touched upon writer's block, oppression, and the role of female readers in the fiction space. Both authors said that while AI has integrated itself into daily life, the technology could hinder the ability to read and write well.



Andaleeb Wajid and Keshava Guha in conversation with Radhika Santhanam in Chennai on Sunday. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Understanding India and its inequalities



Manu Joseph

India is one of the most unequal places in the world. And yet, the poor working classes have not revolted. Why? This is the question author and journalist Manu Joseph tries to answer in his new book *Why the Poor Don't Kill Us*. "Apparently everybody has got this question," he said during a session, delivered in the style of a stand-up monologue that attempted to blend humour, anecdote, and provocation. One of his less obvious explanations for social stability lay in the country's aesthetics, or lack of it.

INBRIEF



The Hindu's Games section relaunched in a new avatar

At *The Hindu* Lit for Life festival on Sunday, Nirmala Lakshman, Chairperson, The Hindu Group, relaunched *The Hindu's* Games section on the website and *The Hindu* app. The relaunched platform includes the Crossword section with Sunday Special Cryptic, Easy Down, and *The Hindu* Mini. The Mini Sudoku section contains easy, medium, hard and killer levels; Word Flower includes Word search and Word Row that is equivalent to *The New York Times's* Wordle. Those interested can explore the Games section at newsth.live/games and scan the QR code to join the WhatsApp group and interact with fellow gamers.



Need to move beyond quick fixes: mental health experts

There is a need to move away from episodic interventions for mental illness and provide longitudinal care, experts said at a session on "Resilience and hope: women and their mental health journeys" on Sunday. In a conversation moderated by Soma Basu, Neha Kirpal, co-founder of Amaha and the India Mental Health Alliance, and Dr. Lakshmi Narasimhan, mental health researcher and practitioner at The Banyan, an NGO working on mental health issues, reflected on lived experience, care models, and the need to move beyond quick fixes in India's mental health discourse. Care cannot be approached in isolation, they said.



A sense of helplessness prevailing in Kashmir: Dulat

A sense of helplessness prevails in Kashmir in the current political scenario and Delhi is not bothered about what was happening there, according to A.S. Dulat, former chief of the Research and Analysis Wing, the country's external intelligence agency. "Kashmir is at a standstill, there is a status quo now. The Kashmiris live on hope more than anything else and there is a sense of helplessness," he said in response to a question from Shobhana K. Nair, Senior Deputy Editor, *The Hindu*, on the evolution of relationship between governments of Jammu and Kashmir and the Centre.

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Banu Mushtaq speaks on encounters that shaped her award-winning book

The International Booker Prize winner highlights the impact of the Bandaya Sahitya movement and speaks about writing from lived experiences; the author describes her writing process as instinctive rather than planned and speaks of her journey into journalism, advocacy, and fiction

Priyamedha Dutta
CHENNAI

That unspoken truths lay at the heart of *Heart Lamp*, was the crux of a compelling session at *The Hindu* Lit for Life, where writer and activist Banu Mushtaq was in conversation with journalist Pankaja Srinivasan. The discussion traced the lived histories, Kannada political movements, and intimate encounters that shaped *Heart Lamp*, Ms. Mushtaq's internationally recognised book that won the International Booker Prize, 2025.

Opening the conversation, Ms. Srinivasan located *Heart Lamp* within a larger moral and political landscape – where everyday injustice forms the texture of ordinary lives. Ms. Mushtaq responded by returning to the Bandaya Sahitya Movement of the 1970s in Karnataka, a period of intense social churn that profoundly influenced her world view.



Making of a masterpiece: International Booker Prize winner Banu Mushtaq in conversation with journalist Pankaja Srinivasan on Sunday. R. RAGU

Key movement

The Bandaya movement, she explained, emerged from widespread unrest among youth who questioned caste hierarchy, patriarchy, class oppression, and linguistic dominance. Alongside the Dalit movements, farmers' collectives, and the feminist movement, Bandaya Sahitya sought to challenge the literary and social status quo that showcased how literature cannot remain detached from lived experiences.

"Though the scale has changed, the spirit of resistance remains active even today," Ms. Mushtaq said. She then spoke about her personal journey into activism and writing. Giving up teaching after marriage and confined within domestic expectations, she described the suffocation that pushed her towards public life. Later, she turned that into journalism, advocacy, and eventually fiction.

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Ms. Srinivasan drew attention to the emotional universality of Ms. Mushtaq's stories – how women from certain socio-economic and religious contexts speak a universal language that goes far beyond the boundaries of Karnataka. Ms. Mushtaq explained that her stories are not direct reproductions of real life, but grow organically from fragments.

"A single sentence, a gesture, a facial expression," Ms. Mushtaq said. "It is how one cooks, or how one sings," she said, describing writing as an instinctive process rather than a planned one.

Only when characters, dialogue, and structure are complete does she "record" the story, almost as if witnessing a film unfold in her mind.

The session closed with a brief glimpse into her forthcoming book – a work, she hinted, would be rich with drama, resistance, and survival.

Real health comes when there are better policies, says Rujuta Diwekar

Preeti Zachariah
CHENNAI

In the past three decades, trends in health have come and gone, but Rujuta Diwekar's advice remains unchanged: eat local, traditional, whole foods, exercise regularly, and get to bed on time.

"We have known each other for 15 years since your first book. And I admire the fact that your messaging hasn't changed at all," said Shonali Muthalaly, Features Editor (Lifestyle and Entertainment), *The Hindu*, who was in conversation with the celebrity nutritionist and writer, at a session titled "Why dieting made us fat: on weight loss, metabolism and why food is not the enemy".



Health capsules: Writer Rujuta Diwekar in conversation with Shonali Muthalaly on Sunday. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

In response, Ms. Diwekar said it was more important than ever before to "speak about local, seasonal, traditional, because everyone can see that time and again, the messaging of the weight loss industry, the food industry and now even the pharma industry and beauty industry keeps changing. They want us to adhere to a new standard every single day." She said this had left people more confused than ever before. Also, less healthy. Part of the problem, she strongly believes, is social media, which is filled with Instagram influencers "who have no clue" offering health advice.

"This whole belief that we have that it takes discipline and willpower to get fit is a misunderstood one, coming out of privilege and not really understanding," she insisted, adding that real health comes when there are better policies, such as those that help protect everyone.

"That is the stuff that improves the health of a nation, and not gyms, protein shakes and probiotics," she says.

Shobhaa De speaks on intimacy, pleasure



Need for dialogue: Shobhaa De with Rosella Stephen, Senior Associate Editor, *The Hindu*, on Sunday. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Sangita Rajan
CHENNAI

Shobhaa De's new book, *The Sensual Self: Explorations of Love, Sex & Romance*, is a wider examination of how we feel about pleasure, more than anything else. "It is not a 'how-to' sex manual, I'm sorry to disappoint," she said. "It's not a Kama Sutra for 2026 at all."

In conversation with Rosella Stephen, Senior Associate Editor, *The Hindu*, Ms. De positioned the book as "part mirror, part memoir, part quest", rooted in lived experience rather than prescription. Reflecting on her early novels, beginning with *Socialite Evenings*, she said the rawness that once shocked readers was deliberate. "There were no books reflecting that new, exciting urban India back then," she said, recalling how the idea that a woman might leave a marriage simply because it did not fulfil her desires unsettled readers.

Ms. Stephen framed Ms. De as a writer who "insisted that India speak frankly and without apology", observing that her work has consistently challenged social discomfort around sex, intimacy, and desire. That discomfort, Ms. De argued, has only deepened over time. "The word 'intimacy' itself is terrifying to our society," she said, adding that for many young people their most intimate relationships are with their phones.

Erosion of romance

Much of the discussion focused on what Ms. De sees as the erosion of romance and sensual attentiveness.

"Holding hands is a language in itself," she said, lamenting the absence of eye contact, flirting, and tenderness. Words such as "courtship" and "suitor", she noted, now invite confusion. "Young people ask me, 'What does it even mean?'" The discussion returned repeatedly to what Ms. De described as society's refusal to prepare young people, especially women, for intimacy. From the romanticised idea of the *suhagraat* to the silence around consent, she argued that ignorance is institutionalised. The insistence on dialogue, rather than instruction, is what gives *The Sensual Self* its relevance.

Experts give valuable advice on wealth building and smart spending habits

S. Poorvaja
CHENNAI

At *The Hindu* Lit For Life, finance experts Rohit Sarin, co-founder of Client Associates and author of *Unlocking Wealth: Secrets to Getting Rich at Any Age*, and Devina Mehra, Chairperson and Managing Director of First Global and author of *Money, Myths and Mantras*, decoded all things wealth, youngsters and their spending habits, and how to wade through the avalanche of financial advice available, in a conversation with Lavanya Mohan, chartered accountant and author of *Money Doesn't Grow On Trees*.



Money matters: Devina Mehra and Rohit Sarin in conversation with Lavanya Mohan on Sunday. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

"We have to get comfortable with what we are spending and what we want to spend in the future. If you are constantly visiting your own finances and going through them, it is a much more fruitful exercise. It is important to get comfortable with your finances," Ms. Mohan said.

Speaking about the pitfalls she sees with present-day spending habits, Ms. Mehra said while it was fine to look at Instagram and get the urge to replicate everything that is out there there was no point jeopardising one's financial future. Emphasising the importance of beginning to invest early, Mr. Sarin said that right from the first pay cheque, youngsters should carve out 10% and begin to invest in a disciplined way.

Writer's block part of the process, not a painful experience, says Kiran Desai

Kiran Desai engages in a conversation with Nirmala Lakshman on love, longing, and the quiet distances that shape relationships, set against textures of class, culture, and displacement; 'Loneliness is an essential component of the vocabulary of migration,' says the Booker Prize-winning author

Sahana Mira S.
CHENNAI



Book talk: Author Kiran Desai in conversation with Nirmala Lakshman, Chairperson of The Hindu Group and founder of *The Hindu* Lit for Life, on Sunday. RAGU R.

In a conversation with Nirmala Lakshman, Chairperson of The Hindu Group and founder of *The Hindu* Lit for Life, on Sunday, Booker Prize-winning author Kiran Desai spoke about how "loneliness is an essential component of the vocabulary of migration", which she chose to look at in her 2025 Booker Prize-shortlisted novel, *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny*.

"The more people, the more lonely we are, such a strange thing," Ms. Desai began, "and perhaps how we are all suffering from being in societies that are unravelling in the midst of change, which leaves us feeling bereft."

Ms. Desai spoke about her compulsion to explore why this was happening, through her novel. The author said that of all the books she might write in the future, this might be the last one that she had written that was set in India.

In her novel, she said, she was writing about far more cosmopolitan protagonists, and wanted to speak about their desire for the Western world, where her protagonists are in fact educated to leave the country.

"There are enormous power divides, enormous divides of race and gender, and when you are out in the big world, you have to overcome them and keep your dignity intact. In a world that is deeply power divided, the location of your dignity is much smaller than you imagine, which is what both my protagonists realise leaving India for a larger landscape," she said, adding how they were searching for home and belonging in the novel.

Sonia's solitude

Ms. Lakshman observed that despite the precise prose, there was lyricism in almost every paragraph of the novel. She also raised the question of whether slowness and deliberation should inform the lives of people in any way. On the case of the protagonist Sonia, the modern, educated woman who was in an abusive relationship in the novel, Ms. Desai said that abuse of women cut across every class.

After Ms. Desai read an excerpt from *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny*, Ms. Lakshman asked how her mother, renowned author Anita Desai, had inspired her, and whether she had become a writer because of her. "I inherited my mother's bookshelf and all her beautiful copies of Indian books that she carried with her to the United States. I also inherited her discipline of writing, and the rhythm of her writing life," she said.

Ms. Desai added that writer's block was a pleasure for her, and that these patient moments were part of her artistic and spiritual practice. "I mull things over, and go over my sentences. I enjoy that meditative time. So I think it is about how you look at it. I don't see it [writer's block] as a painful experience, quite the opposite," she added.

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INBRIEF



Writing and publishing in the age of artificial intelligence

Is there still room for writing? With AI generating reading materials, is this the end of books or is there still hope? These questions were posed by Rosella Stephen, Senior Associate Editor, *The Hindu*, to a panel including Elizabeth Kuruvilla, publishing director of Simon & Schuster, literary agent Kanishka Gupta who runs the Writer's Side, and former editor-in-chief of Penguin Random House India, Manasi Subramaniam, on Sunday at *The Hindu* Lit for Life. They spoke at the session titled "Publishing in the Age of Infinite Voices: Curation or Chaos?". "Perhaps AI could take over the unbelievably boring things publishers do," Ms. Subramaniam said, while Mr. Gupta added using AI to write a book defeats the purpose of literary fiction.



Laura Spinney on the history of language and migration

Today nearly half of humanity speaks an Indo-European language. How did that happen? In a conversation with Aienla Ozukum, about her book, *Proto: How One Ancient Language Went Global*, journalist Laura Spinney traced the history of Proto-Indo-European, which originated on the frontier of Europe and Asia and spread throughout Eurasia. It died a long time ago, but it gave birth to hundreds of other languages. These include Hindi, English, Spanish, Russian, and Greek. Migration has shaped the languages we speak, she explained. "For aeons, people have claimed language as a tool to reinforce their identity and claim superiority. What the story of the Indo-European languages shows is that boundaries have meant very little in this story."



'T.N. advancing brilliantly into modern age with religion'

Gopalkrishna Gandhi, former West Bengal Governor and author of *India and Her Futures*, on Sunday said that while Tamil Nadu is advancing brilliantly into the modern world, he is unsure whether the "unnecessary baggage of the Old is dropped". In conversation with Carnatic singer and author T.M. Krishna at *The Hindu* Lit for Life, Mr. Gandhi, while speaking about the Tamil communities in Sri Lanka and India, said that religion would have naturally yielded its place where commerce, industry, science and technology is booming. "But, in Tamil Nadu, it has not done so. Tamil Nadu is advancing brilliantly into the modern age with religion. But, I am not sure whether what should be dropped in the Old is being dropped as we move into the New," he said.

On verses that speak beyond language



Triple play: Ashwani Kumar and K. Srilata in conversation with Ranvir Shah on Sunday. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Kamalika Chatterjee

The Hindu Lit For Life featured a session titled "*Poets on Poets*" on Sunday, with Ranvir Shah exploring the world of poets and poetry alongside K. Srilata and Ashwani Kumar. The session delved deeply into what shapes a poet's journey. With both artists sharing their encounters and their obstacles, they educated the audience on what poetry feels like in a multi-linguistic country such as India.

While they did agree that translated poetry can be difficult, the only way to do it right is to encapsulate the heart and soul of the poem rather than just words.

"Poetry is the essence of life and love. If you've ever felt emotions, poetry is the true way to express them, as it not only helps you understand yourself more deeply but also allows you to put yourself and your thoughts out there," said Mr. Kumar.

The poets later captivated the audience with readings from several poems.

The session concluded with the felicitation of the winners of *Poetry With Prakriti*, a poetry contest held by the Prakriti Foundation, an arts and culture-based non-governmental organisation. The discussion concluded with a tribute to Geeta Doctor, as Chairperson of The Hindu Group and founder of *The Hindu* Lit for Life Nirmala Lakshman presented the first Geeta Doctor Fellowship instituted by Prakriti Foundation, to Ilampirai, a Tamil and English poet. The fellowship offers a grant of ₹5 lakh to an upcoming poet with no linguistic restrictions.

Gods live in the pain and dreams of ordinary people, says Mari Selvaraj

Udhav Naig
CHENNAI



Stories about life: Film director Mari Selvaraj in conversation with writer and historian Stalin Rajangam on Sunday. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Critically acclaimed and commercially successful filmmaker Mari Selvaraj on Sunday said it was not useful to search for gods in places of worship, as they were intertwined with the lives, pain, dreams, and tears of ordinary people.

He was speaking at the Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall at Lady Andal School at Chetpet, Chennai.

The filmmaker was in conversation with writer Stalin Rajangam during the closing session of *The Hindu* Lit For Life on Sunday.

Responding to a question on the use of indigenous myths in his films such as Kattupechi in *Karnan*, the winged pigs and worship of indigenous gods in *Maamannan* and other works, posed by writer and historian Mr. Rajangam, Mr. Selvaraj explained why and how he incorporated myths into his cinematic narratives.

"My father used to drive away ghosts in my village. I had no belief in gods but my father would keep talking to gods. He used to work all day and in the night, he would speak to gods. My village was stricken with poverty. When someone came to us seeking help to drive away a ghost, my father would start speaking like a ghost or a god. I was confused at the time whether he was an honest man. But he was an honest, hard-working man. I took my art from there," the filmmaker said.

However, Mr. Selvaraj added, "I was never a disciplined guy. I would come home very late, sometimes in the middle of the night. He would wake up in the night, walk outside the village and break four eggs and come back. Next day, I would be asked not to come late by my mother. She would tell me that my father said that I came with my sister who passed away [shown in *Vaazhai*] or my friend who died many years ago."

'Questioning injustice'

"When I started observing my father, I realised that he was living in another world and he was questioning injustice, conversing with people, arguing with them. That's when I realised that gods are closely intertwined with poor people's lives, in their pain, in their tears. It is a waste of time searching for gods in temples but they are present in the tears, questions, pain, and hard work of ordinary people," he said.

When Mr. Rajangam asked whether he felt the burden of political identities and debates around his politics while making films, the filmmaker said, "I want to win over those who are against me. Those who didn't like *Pariyerum Perumal*, *Maamannan*, or *Karnan* today may understand these films 10, 15 years later. Usually, whenever my films release, I am being placed before my film. My critics often slam me before watching my film. Every time I make a film, my hope is that, through my conflicts, questions, moral rights, tears and my pain, I can win everyone over. The only pressure I feel is only from the Censor Board."

Translation invites readers to inhabit new linguistic world: Deepa Bhasthi

Priyamedha Dutta
CHENNAI



Sense and semantics: Deepa Bhasthi in conversation with Nandini Krishnan in Chennai on Sunday. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

At *The Hindu* Lit for Life, Deepa Bhasthi unpacked the choices, politics and power behind translating Kannada into English.

"There is no such thing as proper English." That opening remark by writer and translator Ms. Bhasthi anchored one of the sessions at *The Hindu* Lit for Life titled "Reimagining stories", moderated by writer and translator Nandini Krishnan. The discussion centred on Ms. Bhasthi's acclaimed translation of *Heart Lamp*, the International Booker Prize-winning collection of Kannada stories by Banu Mushtaq.

Ms. Bhasthi was unequivocal that her role went far beyond that of a linguistic mediator.

In selecting, editing and translating these works, she acted as editor, interpreter and cultural custodian, shaping what global readers now recognise as Ms. Mushtaq's literary voice in English.

"It wasn't just the labour of translation," she noted, "but the choices on what to include, what to leave out, that travelled internationally," Ms. Bhasthi says.

Ms. Bhasthi opened the session by reading out an excerpt from the Kannada version of *Heart Lamp*.

On text and texture

The discussion lingered on her decision to retain culturally specific terms such as *ganda*, *pati*, *yajamana*, and *akki roti* without any footnotes. Such choices allow the English version of *Heart Lamp* to carry an accent, a geography and a lived social texture.

Translation, for her, is not about erasing difference but about inviting readers to inhabit another linguistic world. "I am more led by the language than the writer. I want the reader to understand as much of Kannada linguistic culture as possible... If someone can learn a new Kannada word, then why not?" Ms. Bhasthi says.

Ms. Bhasthi spoke about resisting the idea of a "neutral" or "global" English, particularly one shaped by colonial or metropolitan standards, which is why "south Indian speech rhythms deliberately find space in the stories," says Ms. Bhasthi.

She also acknowledged moments of negotiation, particularly with Western publishers unfamiliar with Indian languages. The term "nursing home", she recalled with humour, proved to be one of the rare compromises.

The session also explored how Ms. Bhasthi's translations across different authors demand different forms of attentiveness.

With *Heart Lamp*, she said, the process required immersion into unfamiliar religious and cultural registers, including Urdu and Arabic influences within Kannada.

'Women of all ages'

On being asked about death as an underlying theme across the stories, Ms. Bhasthi spoke about how they are peppered with dark humour rather than being an easy or light read.

"I wanted to ensure that all stages of womanhood are touched upon, from a young bride to an old woman. You realise patriarchy and religious fundamentalism affect women of all ages," Ms. Bhasthi says.

Despite winning one of the world's most prestigious translation prizes, Ms. Bhasthi noted that translators continue to remain marginal figures.

"As long as reviewers keep calling translations 'seamless', they erase the labour and thinking behind every line," she observes.

Ultimately, the session foregrounded Ms. Bhasthi not just as a translator of *Heart Lamp*, but as a thinker reshaping how Indian literature travels, insisting that readers learn to listen to stories that challenge them linguistically.



Cerebral games: Participants of a quiz during *The Hindu* Lit for Life at Lady Andal School in Chennai on Sunday. V. UMESH KUMAR



Audience connect: Members of the audience posing questions after the screening of *Wild Tamil Nadu*. V. UMESH KUMAR



Young enthusiasts: Writer Banu Mushtaq interacting with children at the venue. V. UMESH KUMAR



Indelible impressions: A visitor writing a message at the Lit for Life venue. V. UMESH KUMAR

Remembering the life and times of Periyar



Historic contributions: A.R. Venkatachalapathy in conversation with Kavitha Muralidharan on Sunday. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

B. Kolappan
CHENNAI

Historian A.R. Venkatachalapathy said that the tendency to counterpose the contributions of Kerala's social reformer Narayana Guru with those of social reformer Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, the founder of the Dravidian Movement, was unhealthy and often used to deride and diminish Periyar.

"It is the same with Nehru and Patel [Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel]. If you want to celebrate someone, we are all for it. But if the idea is to run down Nehru, I am not comfortable with it. Narayana Guru's contribution is amazing," he said, responding to a question on the relative success and legacy of Periyar vis-à-vis Narayana Guru.

Mr. Venkatachalapathy was speaking during an interaction with journalist Kavitha Muralidharan, on the topic "Periyar: icon or iconoclast?" He said that any question that grappled with Periyar's personality was inherently difficult.

Recalling Periyar's political journey, he noted that even when Periyar was president and secretary of the Congress, he articulated independent views, notably through his support for the Hindu Religious Endowments Act.

Mr. Venkatachalapathy, who co-edited *The Cambridge Companion to Periyar* with Karthick Ram Manoharan, said that unlike figures such as Vallalar or Thayumanavar, Periyar did not believe in gentle persuasion to make people abandon entrenched beliefs. "He believed in shock therapy," he said.

"In the 1920s, he said idols should be turned over and used as washing stones, and in 1972, he said adultery should be removed from the penal code. When did any lawyer take up the issue of the iniquitous nature of adultery?" he asked.

Mr. Venkatachalapathy said that Periyar's personality was evident in the fact that he refused to be shattered even after the exodus of almost all the major leaders, including C.N. Annadurai, V.R. Nedunchezhian and M. Karunanidhi, following his marriage to Maniammai.

'Bristled with idioms'

"He shifted his base from Chennai to Tiruchi and toured every nook and corner of the State. He used a language that was diametrically opposite to the kind of Tamil platform we were familiar with. His health was also failing. He would sit, informally dressed, express the most provocative ideas, and share his wisdom. Every paragraph of his speech bristled with idioms and proverbs that no folklorist could have collected in the last hundred years," he said.

Speaking about the book's portrayal of Maniammai, Periyar's second wife, Mr. Venkatachalapathy said she was an intellectual in her own right and deserved a separate biography. "If there is a book on Manalur Maniammai (the Communist leader), why not a book on Vellore Maniammai?" he asked. Recalling the calumny heaped on her following her marriage to Periyar in 1949 and 1950, he said that present-day slander spread through WhatsApp could not hold a candle to the attacks she faced then.

He added that from 1944 onwards, Maniammai contributed regularly to *Viduthalai* and *Kudi Arasu*, the official organs of the Dravidar Kazhagam, and that her writings, particularly on Kanthapuranam, were sharp and incisive.

Narayana Guru's life remains relevant even a hundred years later: Tharoor

The social reformer's impact on Dalits in Kerala was arguably deeper than that of Dr. Ambedkar in northern India, says Lok Sabha member; recalling Narayana Guru's 'seminal contributions' to the State, he says his book on the reformer is an attempt to capture essential details of his remarkable life

N. Sai Charan
CHENNAI

Sree Narayana Guru's influence, impact, and success in the lives of Dalits in Kerala were arguably deeper and more transformative than that of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in northern India, said Congress leader and former Union Minister Shashi Tharoor at *The Hindu* Lit for Life in Chennai on Sunday.

Mr. Tharoor, in conversation with L.V. Navaneeth, Chief Executive Officer, The Hindu Group, on the topic (also the name of his book) "*The Sage Who Reimagined Hinduism*", said he had grown up outside Kerala and had only a vague sense of the reformer. "Knowing that practically every neighbourhood and every corner in my [Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha] constituency had a shrine for Sree Narayana Guru, was astonishing as such a giant, who had done so much to transform Kerala society, remained completely unknown outside the State," Mr. Tharoor said.



Remembering a saint: Author Shashi Tharoor speaks on *The Sage Who Reimagined Hinduism* in conversation with L.V. Navaneeth, CEO, The Hindu Group. R. RAGU

When a couple of Kerala's leading newspapers conducted polls at the end of the millennium on the greatest Malayali of all time, Sree Narayana Guru won hands down, Mr. Tharoor said, adding that his book was an attempt to capture the essential details of his remarkable life and the extraordinary lessons, which were incredibly relevant even a hundred years later.

Responding to a question on Narayana Guru's approach to social reform compared with other leaders, Mr. Tharoor said he would rank him in the highest plane because of the way he transformed both the understanding of Hinduism as a faith and the Hindu society, and thereby Indian society, particularly on the issue of caste.

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When Swami Vivekananda visited Kerala, he was so appalled by the caste discrimination he saw, he described the region as a lunatic asylum. Kerala has come a long way, and that the greatest and most seminal contribution to that transformation was that of Sree Narayana Guru, Mr. Tharoor said.

Vaikom Satyagraha

Speaking about the Vaikom Satyagraha, Mr. Tharoor described it as a major event in the nationalist struggle. He said the agitation began when 'untouchables' were denied access to roads leading to a temple in Vaikom. He said Gandhi*ji* believed in passive resistance by Satyagrahis who would sit in front of the barricades.

"While Sree Narayana Guru's followers fundamentally differed on this point, the reformer felt they had to be assertive, but not violent. He urged people to climb onto the barricades and walk into the temple," Mr. Tharoor said.

Storytelling traditions of northeast should be nurtured: Janice Pariat

Saptarshi Bhattacharya
CHENNAI

Literature on India's northeast has to acknowledge the tussle between the freedom to practice people's traditional way of life and attempts to categorise, box, and label them, author and poet Janice Pariat said. Across the region, there were intricate, powerful forms of oral storytelling tradition that carried indigenous knowledge and science, often dismissed as folklore, which required to be nurtured and brought forth, she added.



Rich traditions: Janice Pariat and Jim Kasom in conversation with Aienla Ozukum on Sunday. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Responding to questions from moderator Aienla Ozukum, a publisher, on how the characters in her novel *Everything the Light Touches* navigate between home and exile, and belonging and estrangement, Ms. Pariat felt that the characters were, in fact, motivated by ways of seeing the world.

"It is a book motivated by questions like 'who gets to name the world', 'who gets to impose a way of seeing [it] and render every other way of seeing as superstition, folklore, or even silence'," she said at the session titled "Inside Outside" at *The Hindu* Lit for Life.

Ms. Pariat said traditional ways of life were pushed to the extent of erasure by colonisation and vast amounts of epistemological violence committed on them. Though confined to a geography, the region was alive, muscular, and vibrant only because it was entangled with other places, histories, peoples, and communities, Ms. Pariat added.

Answering questions about the conflict between the intimate Naga life and the external pressures of history and politics in his collection of short stories, *The Last Free Naga*, author Jim Kasom said the central theme of the stories was freedom to practice the Naga way of life, which many mistook as a demand for Naga sovereignty. Modernisation gave rise to the need for an identity but his characters raised questions on the very need for such identity. The book also captured the paradox of the romanticised village life that is serene on one side and the dark shadows of AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act), on the other, he said.

The Chessmaster and a never-ending quest



Mind games: Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand, five-time World Chess Champion, with K.C. Vijaya Kumar on Sunday. M. SRINATH

K. Keerthivasan
CHENNAI

There is no air of pretence about Viswanathan Anand, when he speaks on or off stage. The five-time World Chess Champion wears his stature lightly, and an easy warmth accompanies him wherever he goes. That affability and genuineness were on full display during a conversation titled "The Chessmaster and his moves" with K.C. Vijaya Kumar, Sports Editor of *The Hindu*, during *The Hindu* Lit for Life festival.

At the age of 56, Mr. Anand is in fine physical shape, and more importantly, looking at a busier competitive calendar in the coming season after finishing runner-up in the rapid segment at the prestigious Tata Steel tournament recently. "In fact, this year, I will try to play more often and hopefully be in a situation where my breaks from the game are not so long," Mr. Anand said.

Characteristically downplaying his own role in India's chess revolution, Mr. Anand instead marvelled at the scale and speed of the game's growth since he became a Grandmaster in 1988. "It staggers me," he said. "Out of 92 Grandmasters in India, I believe around 70 became GMs after 2010. On almost any measure, we are at least among the top three nations in chess."

Fitness matters

Fitness, Mr. Anand observed, has become increasingly central to modern sport – and chess is no exception. "A game of chess will exhaust you physically," he said. "When you finish a couple of hours of intense work at the board, you are still running on adrenaline."

Mr. Anand also differed from the commonly held notion that today's youth struggle to focus because of increased distractions. "The real challenge has always been the same – learning how to do intense, fully concentrated work on one problem in order to excel," he said.

What makes Anand a competitive player even now? "It's the pleasure in tricking an opponent (on the board) and winning games," the Grandmaster said, when replying to a question from the audience.

Structuring choices behind theatrical reading of *The Tamils*

Geetha Srimathi
CHENNAI

Prasanna Ramaswamy, editor and director of the theatrical reading of *The Tamils: A Portrait of a Community*, a book authored by Nirmala Lakshman, Chairperson of The Hindu Group, said that translating a massive book about the history of Tamil society into a 55-minute theatrical format required structuring choices.

The reading was presented at *The Hindu* Lit for Life on Saturday by Ms. Lakshman, along with artists Anita Ratnam, Revathy Kumar, Sarvesh Sridhar, Tehzeeb Katari, Brahadeeshwar C. Chandilya, and Nandhini Subbulakshmi.



Nirmala Lakshman, Prasanna Ramaswamy and others at the theatrical reading of the book on Saturday. R. VENGADESH

Interspersed with verses from *Kurunthogai* of Sangam literature, Thirunavakkarasu's *Thevaram*, the *Naalayira Divya Prabandham* and Bharati's patriotic songs, the reading traced excerpts from the book through the Pallava, Pandya, Chola and Chera dynasties, and the contributions of the Maratha, Christian, and the Muslim communities to Tamil culture.

Ms. Ramaswamy said, "I chose the references of art and literature through different ages as discussed in the book as the major

> The book keeps examining the religious history of Tamil Nadu through its political history, which became another marker for me
> **PRASANNA RAMASWAMY**

punctuation and took liberty on sourcing poems to render musically."

The presentation was further divided into different registers of performance – what was spoken directly to the audience, what unfolded as shared dialogue, and what emerged as reflective passages delivered by the actors as readers. Alongside poems referenced in the book, additional poems were sourced and rendered musically. Some sections also incorporated classical dance performance.

"The book keeps examining the religious history of Tamil Nadu through its political history, which became another marker for me," Ms. Ramaswamy said.

Why participatory science is crucial to tackling coconut root wilt disease

Phytoplasma-induced root wilt disease has destroyed large tracts of coconut-growing areas in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala which together account for around 82-83% of India's coconut production; coconut palms that display tolerance under high inoculum pressure and intense vector load hold the key to combating phytoplasma

R. Ranjit Kumar

Coconut is one of the largest horticultural crops in peninsular India, and an increasing number of farmers are taking up coconut plantations due to a lack of labour availability and the intensive attention required to raise annual crops.

The three States of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala together account for about 82-83 % of India's coconut production. Coconut is not only culturally interwoven but also defines the landscape of regions like Alappuzha and Pollachi, known for their pristine beauty.

Now, this carefully cultivated imagery is under threat from a microscopic adversary: phytoplasma. Specifically, phytoplasma-induced root wilt disease has destroyed large tracts of traditional coconut-growing areas in these three States.



Silent battle: Coconut trees at the Vanavarayar Institute of Agriculture at Manakkadavu in Pollachi of Tamil Nadu. K. ANANTHAN

Rapid expansion

Root wilt disease is a debilitating condition. It is classified as a non-fatal disease and was first identified more than a century and a half ago in Erattupetta in Kerala. More than 150 years of sustained scientific research at the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI), Kayamkulam, has yet to yield a definitive cure.

The disease spreads through insect vectors, aided by the movement of wind and uninterrupted stretches of coconut plantations. While the disease has existed for decades, its spread used to be limited. Today, its rapid expansion has caught many farmers unprepared.

In fact both farmers and the scientific community concur that erratic temperatures, especially extremes, and the rise of new sucking pests, particularly whiteflies, have significantly accelerated its spread. The combined effect of abiotic stress induced by climate change and biotic stress from emerging pests has rendered coconut palms increasingly susceptible to root wilt disease. Once a few palms are infected in a region, sufficient inoculum builds up to hasten further spread. Recent assessments indicate that more than 30 lakh coconut palms have already been affected across major coconut-growing regions.

In areas such as Pollachi, where farmers have prospered by adopting intercropping systems in coconut plantations with shade-loving permanent crops like cocoa and nutmeg, the situation has turned into a double disaster. Without the shade of the coconut canopy, cocoa and nutmeg trees simply succumb to thermal stress.

A successful tool

Research institutions have attempted to address this plight through two broad approaches: first by developing standardised integrated cultivation practices using a judicious mix of organic and inorganic inputs, and second by developing resistant and tolerant varieties. Farmers who have religiously followed the recommended practices contend that these measures have done little to prevent the spread of the disease. Once a tree is infested, symptoms appear only after a prolonged incubation period, and often vary, since they are superimposed with those of other diseases such as leaf decay.

The tree quickly becomes unproductive, sheds all its nuts, and assumes a distorted appearance. Even if the disease is not immediately fatal, the palm continues to act as a source of pathogen inoculum. The phytoplasma challenge is not confined to coconut alone. The spread of yellow leaf disease in arecanut across parts of Karnataka serves as a parallel reminder of how vector-borne palm diseases can silently expand when early, field-based interventions are inadequate.

CPCRI Kayamkulam has released one resistant and three tolerant varieties. Institutions such as the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and the Coconut Development Board (CDB) multiply these varieties, but production has been limited to only a few thousand seedlings a year.

Breeding resistant and tolerant varieties remains one of the most successful tools for managing phytoplasma, as demonstrated by the high degree of success in addressing phytoplasma-related diseases in palms across the globe, from the Caribbean to Africa. Steps can be taken to import such varieties under strict quarantine protocols for field evaluation.

However, a more prudent and sustainable approach would be to tap into the reservoir of genetic wealth already standing in farmers' fields within highly infested endemic zones. Coconut palms that display tolerance under high inoculum pressure and intense vector load hold the key to combating phytoplasma.

The government and the scientific community must ensure that participatory selection and participatory breeding are pursued in all earnestness to confront the menace threatening coconut cultivation

A participatory approach to selection offers a credible pathway to addressing the central constraint in combating phytoplasma: identifying and breeding resistant and tolerant varieties. In highly infested regions, systematic participatory selection of coconut palms, combined with structured observation, can be undertaken with farmers playing a central role.

With appropriate training, farmers can be enabled to identify potentially tolerant palms and can be instructed on the importance of careful, long-term observation and record-keeping. This would significantly reduce the burden on scientific institutions while generating richer, field-relevant datasets.

Once tolerant or resistant palms are identified and validated, they can be inducted into decentralised breeding programmes, allowing multiple small, independent selection and evaluation efforts to proceed simultaneously under scientific supervision. Such an approach also enables the isolation of locally adapted varieties suited to specific agro-climatic conditions.

Institutional action

Given the rapid expansion of root wilt disease into new frontiers, mirroring the trajectory of whitefly, which was once confined to a few pockets in western Tamil Nadu but is now a pan-India pest, time is of the essence. Farmers whose palms are selected for breeding can also benefit through royalty mechanisms envisioned under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act while being encouraged to establish nurseries to multiply planting material at scale to replace the vast number of palms being felled.

The government and the scientific community must, therefore, place renewed faith in citizen science and ensure that participatory selection and participatory breeding are pursued in all earnestness to confront the phytoplasma menace threatening coconut cultivation.

Addressing root wilt at this scale requires coordinated institutional action. Central agencies such as CPCRI and the CDB must work closely with the agricultural universities of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. Fragmented research efforts and parallel trials no longer suffice in the face of a fast-spreading phytoplasma threat. A shared framework for data, evaluation, and field validation is essential to translate participatory science into impact.

(R. Ranjit Kumar is managing director, Pollachi Nutmeg Farmer Producer Company, and ICAR-IARI Innovative Farmer Awardee. ranjitkct@gmail.com)

THE GIST

- Root wilt disease is a debilitating condition and is classified as a non-fatal disease
- The disease spreads through insect vectors, aided by the movement of wind and uninterrupted stretches of coconut plantations
- The combined effect of abiotic stress induced by climate change and biotic stress from emerging pests has rendered coconut palms increasingly susceptible to root wilt disease
- Breeding resistant and tolerant varieties remains one of the most successful tools for managing phytoplasma

BIG SHOT



Curious case: An epaulette shark in an aquarium in the U.S. Recently, researchers found these sharks' metabolic rates and hormone levels do not change when they lay eggs. They propose the sharks use energy from daily food intake to produce eggs continuously rather than in one go. JIM CAPALDI (CC BY)

WHAT IS IT?

Visibility: light's right of way

Vasudevan Mukunth

In weather science, 'visibility' is a colloquial term for a quantity called the meteorological optical range. It's defined as the distance a beam of light can travel through the atmosphere before its intensity drops to 5% of its original value.

In an older time, a human observer would stand at a point and look for predetermined landmark objects at known distances, e.g. a water tower at 1 km and a temple at 5 km. If the observer can clearly distinguish the object against the skyline, the visibility is at least that distance. At night, they used lights of known intensity.

Modern weather stations use sensors to measure the visibility. In the direction version, a transmitter shoots a laser beam at a receiver located a specific distance away (often 20-75 m). The receiver measures exactly how much light made it across. In the indirect version, a transmitter projects a beam of light past a receiver, not directly at it. If the air is clear, the receiver sees nothing; If there's fog or dust, the particles scatter the light, deflecting some into the receiver. The amount of scattered light is converted into a visibility distance. The India



Planes seen parked at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi amid dense fog on Saturday. ANI

Meteorological Department also classifies visibility depending on smog (i.e. smoke + fog) intensity. This scheme ranges from 500-1,000 m for 'shallow fog' to less than 50 m for 'very dense fog'. On Sunday, the visibility in Delhi had dropped to 'poor', i.e. 50-200 m.

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Bullying tactics

Trump's weaponisation of tariffs over Greenland could undermine NATO

The Trump administration has vowed to slap a raft of European countries with a 10% tariff on "any and all goods" beginning on February 1 which is then set to increase to 25% on June 1, until an agreement is reached on the U.S. demand to purchase or otherwise acquire the Denmark-administered Arctic territory of Greenland. The latest round of tariffs will add to existing 15% U.S.-imposed trade duties on the countries targeted by the White House, which include Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. While French President Emmanuel Macron described the U.S. action as "unacceptable", U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the move was "completely wrong". The targeted nations have sent a small number of troops to Greenland for what they have called a reconnaissance mission, essentially for military exercises that signal and reinforce Europe's collective commitment to defending the autonomous Arctic territory. Such emphasis by the European Union (EU) clearly reflects concern stemming from the fact that American troops recently entered Venezuela and kidnapped and transported its President Nicolás Maduro to the U.S., and Mr. Trump has since gone on record effectively warning that he might consider intervention – for different purposes and in different circumstances – in Colombia, Cuba, Mexico and Iran next.

Leaving aside the neo-imperialist impulse that is implicit in the Trump administration's plans to control non-allied nations' territories based on the threat of military action, or to bully allies by weaponising tariffs against them, such actions are tantamount to a violation of international law, and in the case of the EU, risk degrading years of progress made on transatlantic trade agreements. First, there is a serious issue of no legislative backing by the U.S. Congress and legal basis for the unilateral action taken by the Trump administration in targeting Denmark and other European countries. Second, the Trump administration is likely to face, this week, a judicial ruling against its use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to impose tariffs across the board. Third, European nations may bring into force what is known as the "anti-coercion instrument", a counter-tariff facility that would limit the trade of major U.S. tech firms and related service providers that conduct significant business in the EU. Whatever the denouement of this Trump-made conflict, it will likely take years, if not decades to heal the worsening transatlantic rift that has beset the region. Meanwhile a weakened NATO will stand less able to assist Ukraine in facing off against the depredations of an aggressive Russia on the eastern front. The need of the hour is enlightened leadership, a far cry from what is presently on offer in Washington.

Crisis in education

Higher education institutions need systemic reforms

In an ongoing case relating to student suicides, the Supreme Court of India has issued nine directions to Central and State governments. Recognising the massification of higher education front-ended by privatisation without a commensurate boost in quality, the Court has taken note of student distress covering financial, social, social injustice and academic issues. The Court has invoked Article 142 of the Constitution and seven of the nine directions relate to record-keeping, reporting, and tracking suicides in higher education institutions (HEI) separately. Two directives order the filling of the posts of Registrars and Vice-Chancellors as well as all vacant faculty positions. Evidently, the Court sees these steps as critical to student well-being.

Across India, ground reportage shows that many public HEIs, especially universities, report 50% vacancies. The University of Madras is a case study as it is the premier State-administered HEI in Tamil Nadu – a State which leads the nation in enrolment in higher education and with a stellar record in women's education. With such a storied legacy, the university was known for quality research besides awarding degrees in affiliated colleges through examinations. Teaching became an important component in the late 1970s, but in the last decade, its decline has been pronounced. No new faculty appointments have been made and the teaching strength is half of the sanctioned strength. The university's research component is just about functional. It boasts of centres for advanced studies such as in philosophy, botany and mathematics, but these are a shadow of their original selves. Today, the humanities, science-based and social science research focused on Tamil Nadu, that the government can leverage from its public universities, has been given short shrift. Vice-Chancellor appointments have been stalled by a recalcitrant Governor. The ambiguity thrown in by the Court on the Presidential reference on a Governor's powers may need to be resolved before Vice-Chancellor vacancies can be quickly filled. Filling faculty positions would have to follow UGC process that takes at least six months and a budgetary commitment that may be helped with Union government support. Availability of qualified faculty can be a hurdle. Corruption and political-ideological appointments have affected quality and need to be addressed. Although the four-month schedule prescribed by the Court might seem daunting, the order is a call to action to fulfil the basic requirements of a robust public higher education system before goals such as Viksit Bharat can be seriously aspired for.

Corruption and prior sanction, case of a divided house



Prashant Bhushan

is an advocate in the Supreme Court of India



Cheryl D'Souza

is an advocate in the Supreme Court of India

On January 13, a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India, comprising Justice B.V. Nagarathna and Justice K.V. Viswanathan, delivered a split verdict on the challenge to the constitutional validity of Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, 1988 ("the section"), in *The Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL) vs Union of India*. Both judgments in this case are exhaustive, exemplifying the best tradition of the Court in bestowing the deepest judicial consideration and exercise of judicial conscience to the issues before the Court. The case had challenged the constitutionality of the section that effectively provided that no police officer would conduct any inquiry or investigation into any offence alleged to have been committed by a public servant regarding any recommendation made or decision taken in the discharge of official functions, without the prior sanction of the appropriate government.

The case was mounted on the premise that corruption is anathema to rule of law and vesting the government with the power to stall corruption investigations (where it may have a vested interest) would allow corruption to go uninvestigated and, hence, unchecked.

Arguments of both sides

In this case, the petitioners argued that the amended section was unconstitutional, being in the teeth of two earlier judgments of the Court. When a Single Directive (a consolidated set of instructions issued to the Central Bureau of Investigation, or CBI, by various Ministries/Departments), requiring prior sanction of the designated authority before initiating investigation against certain categories of public servants, was issued, its legality was challenged.

In *Vineet Narain vs Union of India* (1998) 1 SCC 226, the Court had quashed the Single Directive and held that the final opinion whether to investigate or not has to be made by the CBI and not by anyone else. The executive on its own cannot foreclose inquiry into any allegation of corruption as that would be entering the domain of the investigative agency.

The judgment came in the backdrop of the N.N. Vohra Committee (1993) that presented the frightening criminal nexus between highly-placed politicians, high-ranking bureaucrats, and criminal elements. The Court held that equality before the law under Article 14 and the rule of law itself could only be preserved if investigative agencies are insulated from political, executive and bureaucratic interference.

To bypass the judgment in *Vineet Narain*, the central government enacted the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003. Here it introduced Section 6A to the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act (DSPE) Act, effectively reintroducing the Single Directive. A Constitution Bench in *Dr. Subramanian Swamy vs Director, CBI & Anr* (2014) 8 SCC 682 declared Section 6A of the DSPE Act to be unconstitutional on the ground that the classification of officers based on status in government service, for the purpose of investigation was discriminatory and violative of Article 14. It also held that such power to interdict corruption investigations would encourage the criminal-bureaucrat-politician nexus and thwart unbiased and efficient inquiry/investigation to track down corrupt public servants. The Court held: "... the signature tune in *Vineet Narain* is, 'However high you may be, the law is above you' We reiterate the same. Section 6A offends this signature tune and effectively Article 14."

In the CPIL case, the petitioners argued that the Section 17A of the PC Act is distinguishable from Section 6A of the DSPE Act only in the sense that it expands the scope of protection to all levels of public servants and not just to a particular category of public servants (as 6A of the DSPE Act did). The Section does not just ignore the clear findings arrived at by the Court earlier but also chooses to defy the spirit of those findings. It was further argued that the Section runs contrary to the dictum in *Lalita Kumari vs Government of Uttar Pradesh & Ors* (2014) 2 SCC 1, which mandated registration of a first information report and consequent investigation on the disclosure of a cognisable offence.

The government on the other hand defended the constitutionality of the Section and sought to distinguish it from the earlier judgments of the Court on the ground that the Single Directive was struck down as it was merely an administrative order. It added that the Subramaniam Swamy judgment was dealing with a distinction made between officers of Joint Secretary and above versus officers below – both of which did not apply to the present challenge to the constitutionality of the Section.

Where the judges differed

Justice Nagarathna, while upholding the petitioner's contentions, held Section 17A to be contrary to the objects of the Act and unconstitutional as the requirement of prior sanction from the government, she held, "forestalls an enquiry and thereby in substance protects the corrupt". The Section shields a class of public servants and revives an impermissible protection which was previously struck down in *Vineet Narain* and *Subramaniam Swamy*. She also held that there was a conflict of interest between the government (Minister granting sanction) and the officers whose consent for investigation was sought, since they would often be working in the same department with a meeting of minds about decisions taken, amounting to acts of corruption.

Therefore, such a provision was likely to impede investigation into corrupt officers who may, instead, find protection from higher authorities within the same institutional nexus, thereby allowing unchecked corruption. She also held that there would be a policy bias in the officials tasked with granting sanction as they would lack neutrality while considering a request for approval for carrying out an inquiry or investigation into a complaint *vis-à-vis* a decision taken by a public servant in their department.

Justice Viswanathan, while agreeing with Justice Nagarathna and the petitioners that leaving the power of consent with the government would render the provision unconstitutional, found no fault with the provision of prior sanction per se. He held it to be constitutionally valid, subject to the condition that the grant or refusal of approval would rest not with the government but with an independent agency before the decision is taken by the government.

He observed that striking down the Section would lead to a policy paralysis as he felt that honest public servants needed to be insulted from frivolous and mala fide police investigations. He held that the Lokpal, conceived as an independent anti-corruption authority, would deal with such cases in an independent manner, and that its recommendations would be binding on the government as the PC Act and the Lokpal Act operate in the same normative field. "Both address allegations of corruption against public servants, both recognise the need for screening, and both seek to balance accountability with protection against misuse".

At the core

The core disagreement between the two judges is on how to strike a constitutional balance between protecting honest decision-making public servants and ensuring an efficient anti-corruption regime. There is partial agreement between the two judges on the provision being unconstitutional if the power of granting sanction for investigation was left with the government. There remains disagreement on whether prior approval before inquiry or investigation by a police officer is an impermissible barrier (making the Section unconstitutional) or whether having an independent agency such as the Lokpal as a filter to prevent abuse would overcome this barrier (thereby upholding the Section's constitutionality).

Differing from her brother judge, Justice Nagarathna stated, "whether prior approval must be given, was the question, and not who, within or outside the government should give the approval."

The matter has been referred to the Chief Justice of India for constitution of a larger Bench to decide the issue conclusively.

Prashant Bhushan and Cheryl Dsouza were counsels for the petitioners in this case before the Supreme Court of India

The split verdict in the CPIL case is about protecting honest public servants while also ensuring an efficient anti-corruption regime

India-Germany ties can only soar higher



Philipp Ackermann

is the German Ambassador to India

Last week, we witnessed something rather unusual. Television channels, newspapers and social media were full of images/pictures of two very important leaders – Prime Minister Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz flying kites together in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. It was quite a contrast to the other images of this very substantial meeting. But I actually think that the kite is the perfect symbol to illustrate where Germany's partnership with India is going.

Germany and India have both experienced strong headwinds in recent months. The eroding international trade system is a challenge for both their economies. They both watch the increasing disregard for international law and the disruption of the rules-based global order with great worry. And they both share concerns on the stability in their neighbourhoods. Both countries want predictable conditions. This is what they need for their people to prosper. Based on hard work, on inventiveness and innovation, on education and on science. But it is only in stormy conditions that a good kite flyer shows you what it is capable of – just like the India-German partnership.

Two countries that have economic heft

Chancellor Merz and Mr. Modi are also the leaders of the third- and fourth-biggest economies, respectively, of the world. We are talking about two economic heavyweights. In a few years, India will overtake Germany, to become the undisputed number three in the world. And let me tell you something: Germany will celebrate the day this happens. The world economy is not a zero-sum game, contrary to what some leaders think. When India profits, Germany also profits. A stronger Indian economy means a bigger market for German products, and a stronger footprint of Indian companies in Germany spells more competitive products and services for German businesses and consumers.

One of the central messages of Chancellor Merz in India was that a free-trade agreement between Europe and India is what India and Germany need to propel their economies to the next level. And to become more resilient against unpredictable trade wars and supply chain interruptions. This was Chancellor Merz's first visit outside the Western Alliance, and his first time in India. The invitation to Ahmedabad, to Mr. Modi's home State of Gujarat, was a very special gesture of friendship for Germany. There was a lot of substance to discuss and decide upon, but the Chancellor's personal impressions of this trip are just as significant.

The basis of the migration partnership

Here is an anecdote of the visit – it might sound like a small detail, but there is much more to it. Chancellor Merz had a conversation with young Indians who were about to move to Germany. One of these young women had a casual chat with Mr. Merz in German. This young Indian had been learning German for only four months. And I have been struggling with Hindi for four years now. My excuse is usually *"Maf kijie, lekin* Hindi *kafi mushkil hai* (Sorry, but Hindi is very difficult"), but I can tell you that learning German will also feel like a case of brain jogging at times. The chat that Chancellor Merz had with that young lady epitomises what I admire so much about Indians. They are nimble and quick to adapt, they always have a game plan, and they know how to get there – with a mix of perseverance, smartness and sometimes disarming assertiveness. Many well-established professional pathways and educational opportunities around the world are closing up. But Germany continues to welcome smart, skilled and spirited Indians. Its migration partnership with India is built on safe, legal and predictable migration.

Platinum jubilee of ties

In 2026, Germany is celebrating 75 years of diplomatic ties with India and I cannot imagine a better start into this year than this visit. Today, India and Germany stand closer together than ever before. Not just because external shocks brought them closer together, but because in the previous years, they set a clear strategic direction for their partnership. In the same sense, I believe that the diplomatic anniversary between Germany and India will set them up for future success.

A European Union-India-Free Trade Agreement, a closer defence partnership between Germany and India, and stronger and stronger bonds between their people will be the building blocks for something truly lasting.

I am convinced that by the end of this year, when Mr. Modi and his cabinet will travel to Germany for the biennial Intergovernmental Consultations, India and Germany will celebrate a year of significant progress in their bilateral relations, a year that has started with flying their kites in the skies of Ahmedabad.

A kite is the apt symbol to show where Germany's partnership with India is going

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'Real estate' presidency

U.S. President Donald Trump's reported threat to impose escalating tariffs on a set of European nations unless the U.S. is allowed to 'purchase' Greenland reflects a dangerous conflation of trade policy with territorial coercion. What should be economic statecraft is being deployed as leverage against NATO allies, risking retaliation, alliance rupture, and instability in the already contested Arctic. This fits a broader pattern: remarks urging Canada to become the 51st U.S. state, talk of a "world-class" city in war-ravaged Gaza, the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro followed by moves to control the country's oil business, cheerleading Iranian protesters — and now Greenland. Such actions echo a real-estate dealmaker's mindset, not presidential statesmanship. Tariffs, meanwhile, punish American citizens through higher prices. If Congress remains mute, economic bullying may become a substitute for diplomacy.

Gopalaswamy J.,
Chennai

'Lit for Life' 2026

The 2026 edition of the prestigious 'Lit for Life' was a two-day treasure trove literary event — more so for avid readers of this daily and senior citizens like me. The conclaves have been fostering an ecosystem for the forthright exchange of enlightened views on a plethora of topics. For instance, the appeal advocating scientific and data-driven journalism was laudable. Perhaps a book on all the panel discussions can be brought out.

G. Ramasubramanyam,
Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

It was heartening to have the importance of free speech being highlighted. The issue assumes added significance at a time when the bulk of the media has eroded and the so-called intellectual class has become accustomed to singing from the hymn book of the right wing. It is axiomatic that freedoms of thought and expression are indispensable for unlocking innate potential, creativity and originality.

G. David Milton,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

The prestigious annual literary event should serve as a source of knowledge building. With brilliant minds across the country engaged in conversations on a variety of subjects, the fest has enabled us to nurture our collective love for literature, promote the reading culture, and connect authors with readers.

R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

At Melbourne

Legendary Novak Djokovic is dead right in his line that a Sinner-Alcaraz era is the one looming large over Melbourne. It is time for him to enjoy his game and just try to improve the tally to 25 to create a new world record.

To be frank, it is at the Australian Open, where he owns a record 10 titles, that he has the best chance to rewrite history.

Who knows, he could be lucky enough not to meet either Sinner or Alcaraz during his semi-final clash and even in the finals.

N. Mahadevan,
Chennai

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

A display plan for the Piprawaha relics



Nachiket Chanchani

is an Associate Professor in the Department of the History of Art at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, U.S.

After being dispersed for over a century, ancient gems, charged by their proximity to the historical Buddha's corporeal remains, have been reunited with some other extraordinary relics excavated at Piprawaha, Uttar Pradesh. This partial reunification, made possible by an Indian conglomerate's acquisition of the gems from an overseas seller and their handing it over to the government – is being celebrated by an exhibition in Delhi that Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated earlier this month. How they will be housed once the exhibition closes is an urgent question. If these artifacts are carefully displayed – with lessons absorbed from a study of the ancient cult of relics and with an eye to the future – then this restitution has the potential to shift public opinion of India's beleaguered museums, set new standards for safeguarding its composite heritage, and persuade travellers from afar to circumambulate the land of the Buddha.

Understanding the place of Buddhist relics in early India provides insights into how small, visually indistinguishable, and sometimes unattractive objects, were looked after and appreciated. After the Buddha's passing, his followers periodically divided ash, charred bones and other bodily remains among themselves. These remains were placed in vessels, occasionally with gems and other offerings, and eventually interned in the cores of large hemispherical mounds called stupas. A well-preserved stupa at Sanchi can demonstrate how reliquaries conveyed the power of relics, helped people come close to them, and transformed them. Plausibly first constructed in Ashoka's reign, the stupa was elaborated about two centuries later. New gateways built in the four cardinal directions led to a path that wrapped around the mound's circumference. The gateway posts and architraves bore relief carvings of the Buddha's life, worshippers at sacred centres, and royal and auspicious emblems. Taken together, these reliefs prepared viewers to apprehend and properly approach the relics. Figurations of spirits associated with the site acknowledged its long history while depictions of individuals in exotic clothing recognised foreign travellers who were beginning to traverse the trade routes that intersected near Sanchi. Once they were on the pathway that wrapped around the mound, visitors were partially separated from their mundane surroundings by high railings. Once outside the sacred prescient, they found themselves in the company of monastics eager to cultivate friendships.

The success of such strategies to honour and contextualise the Buddha and communicate his teachings can be attested from the support that locales such as Sanchi received from diverse social strata and their rapid growth into major sacred centres replete with many other edifices and institutions. It can also be gleaned from the gradual development of Buddhist enclaves in lands far removed from the landscapes where the historical Buddha lived. For example, in the rock-cut sanctuaries of peninsular India, the Buddha's presence was subtly communicated by monolithic stupas without relics in their cores that were thoughtfully set in spaces laden with sculptures and sometimes frescoes.

> These historical artifacts are living entities and the museum to be their new home needs to think of long-term plans to engage viewers, historians and students

A strategy for the future

As little survives of the stupa that originally accommodated the Piprawaha relics, these esteemed artifacts are likely to be moved to a public institution in India after the temporary exhibition in Delhi closes. Merely placing them in sterile vitrines in a museum, as if they are lifeless objects, risks perpetuating the colonial paradigm that privileged seeing relics over their ability to lie concealed and yet energise and empower communities.

Thus, the museum chosen as their new home needs to publicly discuss and sensibly implement long-term plans for them. These plans should include designing spaces that prepare diverse individuals to properly approach the Piprawaha relics, give them opportunities to spend time in proximity to the relics as they wish: chanting mantras, quietly meditating, or contemplating their aesthetics, and thereafter allowing them to see the world anew. New grant and fellowship programmes should also be formulated to encourage art historians to collaborate with anthropologists, scientists, film-makers, and others to explicate how historical artifacts are living entities that shape and reflect their environments. The chosen institution must also start designing courses to acquaint postgraduate students and emerging heritage professionals with the principles and best practices of stewardship, with a focus on restitution and interpretation. As a part of this goal, the institution needs to begin collaborating with colleges across India to convene workshops that empower communities living near heritage sites by engaging them in preventing and combating the illicit traffic in antiquities. Teaching communities how to build datasets of cultural assets, helping them understand how trafficking networks often intersect with organised crime, introducing them to the functioning of India's judicial systems, and inspiring them to advocate for updating legislation so that it is aligned to today's ethical concerns and international agreements are also advisable. Once such spaces are designed and initiatives enacted, we can then proudly say that the Piprawaha relics have truly returned to the land of the Buddha and can be fully empowered by their aura and presence.

A municipal corporation, a trifurcation

Instead, the Telangana government should focus on the GHMC's core problems

STATE OF PLAY

Swathi Vadlamudi
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The year 2025 was a milestone for the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), with the expansion of the area under its purview from 650 square kilometres to 2,053 sq.km after the subsumption of 27 peripheral urban local bodies (ULB). The GHMC is now one of India's largest municipal corporations encircled by the 158 km Nehru Outer Ring Road.

Three key ordinances, in late 2025, amending the Telangana Municipalities Act, 2019 and the GHMC Act, 1955, facilitated the GHMC's expansion and the merger of the ULBs which are either within or through which the ORR passed. The ordinances were passed by the Telangana Legislative Assembly during its winter session. The GHMC has now grown from six zones to 12 zones, 30 circles to 60 circles, and 150 wards/divisions to 300 wards/divisions. With the GHMC Council's term set to end by February 11, 2026, new council representatives are to be elected for the 300 wards in fresh elections.

While no official announcement has been made yet, there is talk that the civic body could be divided into three different corporations – Hyderabad, Cyberabad and Malkajgiri. There has been a hurried appointment of additional commissioners in the Cyberabad and Malkajgiri regions, a devolution of powers as well as the reorganisation of the town planning and engineering departments.

Hyderabad is likely to become the largest of all three corporations (150 wards/divisions). Official sources confirm that it would comprise the zones within the core city and the appended regions towards the airport (Rajendra Nagar, Jalpally, Adibatla and Shamshabad). Revenues could be stagnant in the core city with scope for development in the newly added zones remaining limited due to height restrictions around the airport. Cyberabad would encompass all the localities on the western side, which have developed well due to the existence of information-technology and related industries. They include Kokapet, Raidurgam, Serilingampally, Kukatpally, Patancheru, Dundigal, Shamirpet and Medchal. Here, gigantic towers and rising realty prices, rather than road space, water availability and quality of life, seem to attract NRI investments.



Malkajgiri, the 'third corporation to be', largely constitutes the eastern part of the city, home to retired government and private employees, middle- and lower-income groups, and migrant populations. This area still faces issues related to semi-urban settings and poor infrastructure. There is also a 350-acre city garbage dump which limits the scope for development in 5-6 kilometre radius.

The demerger of the GHMC into three separate corporations thus negates the goal mentioned in the merger order 'to tackle uneven growth, service disparities, and fragmented governance in rapidly urbanizing areas...'

The Hyderabad Corporation would in all probability be dominated by the AIMIM, which is poised to increase its tally from 44 to 70-80 seats in a 150-ward council, after the recent ward delimitation exercise. The hard fact is that the AIMIM, with its unrivalled grip on the heritage part of the city for decades, historically displayed no progressive ethos or developmental vision. Its dominance could affect the growth dynamics and cosmopolitan quality of the corporation, with parochial concerns overpowering the larger goals.

The political motive behind all this is undefined, but the Congress party's voter base could expand. During the 2023 legislative elections, all the city-based Assembly constituencies other than those from the Old City were bagged by the Bharat Rashtra Samithi; the demerger could aid the Congress. There are some who believe that the demerger is to aid Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy's pet project, Bharat Future City, about 60 km away from the administrative centre of the State.

The government could learn a lesson or two from the Delhi experiment of 2012 when Delhi was split into three corporations with a stated goal of better civic management. It was hit by financial strain and operational inefficiencies, and the corporations had to be re-unified a decade later. The Telangana government could focus on the deficiencies that plague the GHMC , such as development disparities, woeful staffing, rampant corruption, lack of planning and innovation in urban infrastructure, and unreliable public transport, rather than losing a decade to learn the hard way.

Telangana's stunning rise and its unhinged growth

However, data on this achievement point to the need for policies to be formulated to spread the fruits of growth across the State

DATA POINT

R. Nagaraj and Vikash Vaibhav

Telangana is the richest among major Indian States, with highest per capita income. In 2022-23, the latest year for which data for all States are available, the figure for Telangana stood at ₹3.54 lakh (at current prices).

For Karnataka it was ₹3.44 lakh, Haryana ₹3.24 lakh, Gujarat ₹3.1 lakh, Tamil Nadu ₹3.09 lakh, Kerala ₹2.9 lakh and Maharashtra ₹2.89 lakh.

This is an impressive achievement as these States were ranked higher in 2013-14, at the time of Telangana's formation in June 2014. Using Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and District Domestic Product (DDP) data, the State's performance can be assessed in terms of regional concentration and sectoral spread. These two issues were quite central to the demand for a separate State of Telangana. Neighbouring Andhra Pradesh serves as the comparator for this purpose.

Economic size of Telangana

In 2004-05, Telangana's economic size was about three-fourths of Andhra Pradesh (74%). The gap became almost negligible at the time of the bifurcation (96% in 2013-14). Since then, the State's relative size has remained stable (96.5% in 2024-25). The same holds in per capita terms as well (**Chart 1**). Telangana's per capita income was slightly higher than Andhra Pradesh's in 2004-05 (6%). It steadily rose to 1.3 times by 2013-14, and remained constant since then (1.35 times in 2024-25).

Sectoral composition: At a sectoral level, the relative decline of the agricultural and industrial (and manufacturing) sectors in Telangana has been faster than the national average. The services sector was about 1.25 times that of Andhra Pradesh in 2013-14. This has steadily climbed to 1.47 by 2024-25 (**Chart 2**)

Components of the services sector: Which part of the services sector has driven this? 'Real estate, ownership of dwelling, and Business service' (Real estate and IT) and 'Trade, Hotel, and Restaurants' (THR). Compared to Andhra Pradesh, the former sector jumped from 2 times to 2.7 times during 2013-14 and 2024-25 (**Chart 3**). This performance is closely matched by the second sub-sector. Due to this impressive performance, these two sub-sectors constitute about two-thirds of the services sector output in 2024-25 in Telangana: real estate and IT (35.3%), and THR (29.6%).

What about the geography of economic growth? Undivided Andhra Pradesh had 23 districts of which 10 were carved out to form Telangana. Soon after, in October 2016, Telangana was divided into 21 new districts, with two more formed in 2019. Hyderabad was the only district left undivided.

To gain a perspective, we track the output shares of the original 10 districts since 2004-05. For clarity, the illustration shows only two leading districts: Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy (RR). None of the other eight districts ever contributed more than a tenth of the economy of the State since its creation. In 2022-23, the range was between 4.4% (Nizamabad) and 8.9% (Medak).

The dominance of Metro Hyderabad: Hyderabad, along with its neighbouring RR district, is the State's economically dominant region (**Chart 4**). These two districts (Metropolitan Hyderabad) account for about half of the State's economy (47.5% in 2022-23). They cover less than a tenth of its area (8.7%), and are home to slightly over a fourth of its people (27.9% based on the 2011 Census). Metro Hyderabad's economic share has remained roughly stable over the last decade.

The rise of Ranga Reddy district: RR district was carved out of Hyderabad in 1978, comprising mostly of its rural areas.

In its original creation, it surrounded Hyderabad from all sides. In 2016, as part of a State-wide strategy, RR district was subdivided into three districts. The smaller RR district covered Hyderabad from the south, Medchal-Malkajgiri from the north while the western part became Vikarabad, with Metro Hyderabad as a contagious area.

In 2014, RR district overtook Hyderabad in the metro region to become the economically leading district, mainly due to the booming IT sector. It is a historical irony that RR district (then an undivided district) was one of India's 250 most backward districts (out of 640) in 2006. It is now one of India's richest districts, with a per capita income of ₹ 9.5 lakh in 2023-24.

On the flip side, Vikarabad (which was part of RR district until 2019), has now the State's lowest per capita income (₹1.8 lakh).

Telangana's engine

Telangana's rise is stunning. Metro Hyderabad is its engine, contributing nearly one-half of the State's output, driven by two sub-sectors, namely, real estate-IT, and trade, hotel, and restaurants. However, the engine is unhinged from the rest of the State, with its neighbouring district,

Vikarabad, for instance, is lagging, with just 1.5 % of Telangana's output. In a deepening democracy, such an extremely uneven growth process can lead to social and political backlash, given the State's long history of people's movements and violent struggles. The situation calls for policies to spread the fruits of growth across the State to redress severe spatial imbalances.

R. Nagaraj was formerly with the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research. Vikash Vaibhav teaches at the School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat

Concentrated growth

The data for the charts were sourced from the Economic & Political Weekly Research Foundation and Dataful



CHART 1: Telangana's GSDP and per capita income (pcGSDP) as a percentage of Andhra Pradesh (in constant prices)

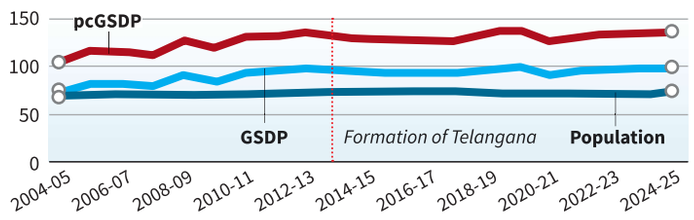


CHART 2: Sectoral performance of Telangana as a percentage of Andhra Pradesh (in constant prices)

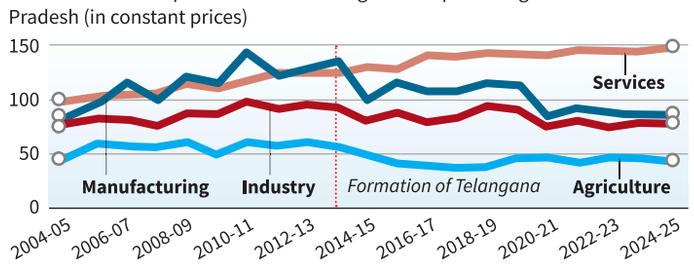


CHART 3: Two major components of Telangana's services sector as a percentage of Andhra Pradesh (in constant prices)

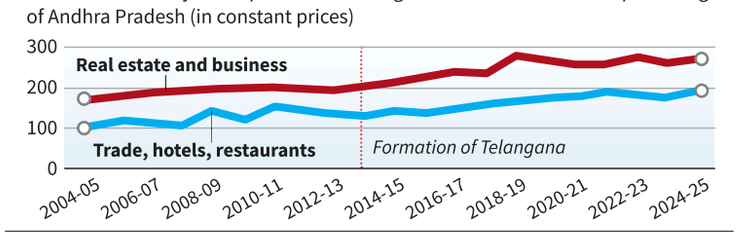
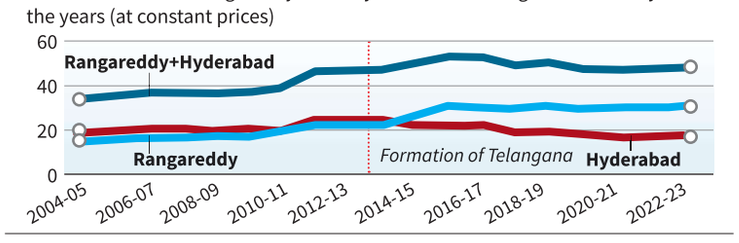


CHART 4: Share of Rangareddy's and Hyderabad in Telangana's economy over the years (at constant prices)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 19, 1976

Library as a Public Movement: Jatti's Call

NEW DELHI, Jan. 18.

The Vice-President, Mr. B.D. Jatti yesterday called for turning the library movement into a public movement to serve the public need in the true sense. Mr. Jatti, who was inaugurating the 22nd All-India Library Conference here, said "while the library movement has doubtless benefited and drawn strength from the Indian Library Association, it has been recognised that this should be a public movement in which there is large participation by lay persons who do not belong to the library profession. Only then it is felt, the movement will serve the public need in the true sense."

Mr. Jatti said it was difficult for people to keep their knowledge and information current and valid but it was essential for efficient, successful and happy existence in modern society. Mr. Jatti said: "It is important that a librarian should be a person dedicated to the task of serving the public through his library and he must possess the requisite technical qualification for his job."

The President of the Indian Library Association, Mr. D.R. Kalia, who presided, said participation in and contribution by the illiterate mass of the country to the national development was crucial.

"The illiterate mass of the Indian population is no doubt culturally advanced and has the traditional wisdom, but it is ill-equipped for a technological society which we are striving to create," he said.

Mr. Kalia regretted that primary schools all over the country were completely devoid of library facilities, though it was the most appropriate stage of education for initiating the reading habit. It was no wonder that they were finding it extremely difficult to raise the quality of school education in this situation. – PTI.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 19, 1926

Government Presses, Madras

There is a proposal to appoint a Committee to consider the question of remodelling the Penitentiary, Madras, so that the printing work now done in the Government Presses in the Mint Street and on the Mount Road and in the Penitentiary may be done in one building. It is anticipated that as a result of the scheme the cost of establishment would be reduced, and overlapping of work would be avoided and a satisfactory condition of things would be secured.

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of tourists who visited Sri Lanka last year

2.3 In million. Sri Lanka received a total of 2.3 million tourists in 2025, with Indian travellers accounting for the largest share, according to figures released by the tourism authority. "India remains the undisputed leading source market, contributing 5,31,511 arrivals." PTI

Countries affected by Trump's tariffs over Greenland dispute

8 Europeans were reeling from U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement that eight countries will face 10% tariffs for opposing U.S. control of Greenland. The responses to the decision ranged from saying it risked "a dangerous downward spiral" to "China and Russia must be having a field day." AP

Accidents involving public transport buses in Delhi in 2024-25

150 Public transport buses on Delhi roads were involved in around 150 accidents, including 40 fatal crashes, in 2024-25, raising road-safety issues. Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) buses were involved in 97 road accidents in 2024-25, of which 21 were fatal, resulting in loss of lives. PTI

India's pharmaceutical exports from April to November 2025-26

20.48 In $ billion. Brazil and Nigeria are emerging as key export destinations for Indian pharmaceutical firms amid global economic uncertainties, as per Commerce Ministry data. Nigeria emerged as one of the fastest growing destinations. PTI

Palestinians killed between date of ceasefire and Jan. 13

447 Those sheltering near the territory's "yellow line" that the Israeli military withdrew to as part of the October ceasefire say they live in fear as Israeli soldiers direct near-daily fire at anyone who crosses or even lingers near it. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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How should India tackle child trafficking?

What is the Palermo Protocol? How does the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 define trafficking? How does the Constitution of India protect children from exploitation? How has the Supreme Court reacted? Why is a strong Centre-State relationship important for countering exploitation?

EXPLAINER

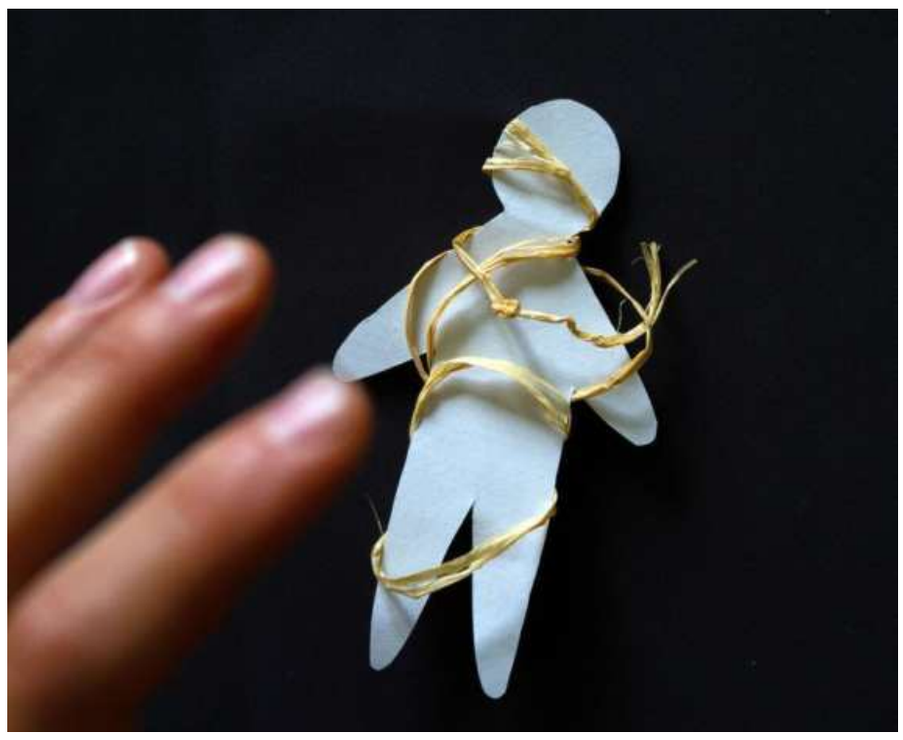
C. B. P. Srivastava

The story so far:

Child trafficking remains a deeply disturbing reality in India. The Supreme Court in its recent decision in *K. P. Kiran Kumar versus State* has given strict guidelines to prevent such offences, and held that trafficking grossly violates children's fundamental right to life as guaranteed by the Constitution. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, in 2022, about 3,098 children below 18 years were rescued. Between April 2024 and March 2025, over 53,000 children were rescued from child labour, trafficking and kidnapping across India. However, the conviction rate for such offences between 2018 and 2022 was only 4.8%.

What is child trafficking?

Internationally, the Palermo Protocol (UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children), 2000 defines child trafficking as 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation.' Presently, Section 143 of Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023 provides that "whoever, for the purpose of exploitation, recruits, transports, harbours, transfers, or receives, a person or persons by, using threats; or using force, or any other form of coercion; or by abduction; or by practising fraud, or deception; or by abuse of power; or by inducement, including the giving or receiving of payments or benefits, in order to achieve the consent of any person having control over the person recruited, transported, harboured, transferred or received, commits the offence of trafficking." The word 'exploitation' is wide enough in its scope and includes physical and sexual exploitation as well. It also includes any form of slavery, servitude, or forced removal of organs.



ISTOCKPHOTO

What are the rights of children?

The Constitution extensively provides for the protection of children. Articles 23 and 24 give protection from human trafficking, begging, forced labour and employment in hazardous industries. Apart from these provisions, the state is also obliged to ensure that children are not abused, and that they are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity. They are protected against exploitation and moral and material abandonment under Clauses (e) and (f) of Article 39 respectively.

The BNS under Sections 98 and 99 specifically addresses the 'selling and buying' of minors. On the other hand, prevention of trafficking for sexual exploitation is provided in the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.

Furthermore, care, protection and rehabilitation for victims of child trafficking is provided under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013 also intends to check such activities by providing a more comprehensive definition of trafficking by including sexual exploitation, slavery, servitude, forced labour, and organ removal. It will cover trafficking irrespective of consent.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 assumes greater significance in this regard. Apart from defining offences covering sexual assault, harassment and child pornography, the Act includes stringent punishments which inter alia include life imprisonment and even death penalty in extreme cases. One of the most important aspects of the Act is that it is gender-neutral. In order to provide rapid trials, about 400 fast track courts set up exclusively for implementing the POCSO Act are in operation across India. These courts have set a target to dispose of around 165 cases per year per court.

What has been the judicial approach?

In *Vishal Jeet versus Union of India, 1990* it was held that trafficking and child prostitution are serious socio-economic problems and hence a preventive and humanistic approach is essential to deal with them. In *M. C. Mehta versus State of Tamil Nadu, 1996*, the Court issued guidelines with a view to prohibiting employment of children in hazardous industries. Moreover, in the *Bachpan Bachao Andolan versus Union of India, 2011* case, the top court issued directions to address widespread exploitation and trafficking of children.

What next?

The guidelines point out that the socio-economic vulnerabilities of the victims must be considered, especially those from marginalised communities. Society is still unable to protect children and adolescents from being criminals or being victims of crimes. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, migration, disasters and breakdown of the family system push children into vulnerability which strengthens the trafficking chain. In recent years, the spread of social media and online platforms has contributed to such offences, especially in terms of recruitment in the name of jobs or opportunities for "modelling". The government must first ensure that the social, economic and political rights of children are well protected with the help of institutions built for the purpose. Second, it must come down heavily on traffickers and ensure that the conviction rate improves considerably so that a deterrence may be created. Moreover, a strong Union-State relationship is also required because law and order and police are State subjects.

C. B. P. Srivastava is President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance, Delhi.

THE GIST

- The Supreme Court in its recent decision in *K. P. Kiran Kumar versus State* has given strict guidelines to prevent such offences, and held that trafficking grossly violates children's fundamental right to life as guaranteed by the Constitution.
- The guidelines point out that the socio-economic vulnerabilities of the victims must be considered, especially those from marginalised communities.
- The Constitution extensively provides for the protection of children. Articles 23 and 24 give protection from human trafficking, begging, forced labour and employment in hazardous industries.

Can the Chinese government arrest its ageing problem?

Why did Chinese President Xi Jinping abolish the one-child policy in 2016? Why has Beijing increased its age of retirement? What are some of the policies China is implementing to increase child birth?

Gunjan Singh

The story so far:

The Chinese population has been consistently declining since 2022. As per the UN, by 2050 the Chinese population will be around 1.3 billion from a peak of 1.4 billion. This also means that the ratio of young to old will change and that around 40% of the population will be over 60. The oft repeated idea of China getting older before it gets richer seems unavoidable. In the hopes of avoiding this very challenge, Chinese President Xi Jinping had abolished the one-child policy in 2016 and replaced it with a two-child policy. In 2021, he extended it to a three-child policy. However, the decline has continued.

What policies did they implement?

There has been a long list of policies which the Chinese government has implemented to mitigate the ageing challenge. The most recent one was implemented on January 1, 2026. The government added 13% VAT on contraceptives and condoms. In 2025, the government announced a subsidy of 3,600 yuan (equivalent to $500 dollars) for new parents for the first three years.

There has also been a waiver of fees for students in the last year of kindergarten while also reducing the fees of kindergartens in the private sector. Moreover, the salaries of kindergarten teachers have been included in fiscal guarantees to ensure that they are timely.

Beijing also raised the retirement age last year. For men, this stands now at 63 (up from 60) and for women it is 58 (up from 55 in white collar jobs) and 55 (up from 50 in blue collar jobs). This was adopted not only to manage the declining workforce but also to postpone the added strain on the government with regards to pension funds. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) has predicted that at the current rate the state pension fund will run out of money by 2035, due to lesser number of people joining the workforce. China has also increased the age cut-off for certain civil service exams from 35 to 38 (people with masters and doctoral degrees can apply till the age of 43). There is also a government backed campaign to encourage young people to marry and have children and to build a "birth-friendly society". However, the Chinese government continues to insert itself in the lives of its citizens as there have been instances of officials calling young married women asking their menstruation dates and their plans of having children. There is also an effort to reduce the 'bride price' (transfer of money from groom's family to the bride's) too. Moreover, the government has plans to introduce love courses for single students in universities.

What are the challenges?

For Mr. Xi, increasing birthrates is linked to the 'rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'. At the 20th Party Congress, Mr. Xi asserted, "We will improve the population development strategy, establish a policy system to boost birth rates, and bring down the costs of pregnancy and childbirth, childrearing and schooling". Further, in a 2021 speech, Mr. Xi argued that Chinese women should be "good wives, good mothers", and "link their future and destiny with the future and destiny of the motherland". As per Xi Jinping, the onus to manage the Chinese population, rising or falling, is on the shoulders of women.

While on the surface it seems that the Chinese government has been undertaking a myriad of steps to boost child birth, they all seem to be failing. The one-child policy, rising costs of living and healthcare, the high cost of bearing and raising children, high unemployment, all play a crucial role when it comes to family planning. The Chinese government is also struggling to manage the existing gender gap. During the one-child policy, there was a push for bearing male children. There are now 30 million more men then women in China.

Gunjan Singh is Associate Professor at OP Jindal Global University.

THE GIST

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- Beijing also raised the retirement age last year. For men, this stands now at 63 (up from 60) and for women it is 58 (up from 55 in white collar jobs) and 55 (up from 50 in blue collar jobs).
- For Mr. Xi, increasing birthrates is linked to the 'rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'.

KEYWORD



GETTY IMAGES

Soft matter: the unusual yet persistent physics inside your bathroom cabinet

Every morning, as you use either your toothpaste or shampoo, you engage with soft matter, materials that flow like liquids under force but hold their shape at rest. This fascinating behaviour challenges our understanding of material properties

Indresh Yadav

Every morning, you perform a small physics activity without realising it. You squeeze toothpaste out of a tube. You apply a force and the paste flows out like a liquid. When you stop squeezing, the toothpaste stays on the brush, holding its shape against gravity. It doesn't drip, spread or collapse into a puddle.

This simple act confronts us with a fundamental question in physics: how do materials respond to forces and what makes something like toothpaste flow when pushed yet remain solid when left alone?

Solid or liquid?

In school, materials are neatly divided into solids and liquids. Solids resist deformation and maintain their shape whereas liquids flow under even the slightest force. But toothpaste, shampoo, gels, and creams do neither in the usual way. They belong to a broad class of materials that modern physics calls soft-matter materials: they can behave like solids or flow like liquids depending on the forces applied and the timescales involved.

What makes soft materials different lies in their internal structure. Their basic building blocks are far larger than atoms or simple molecules, yet far too small to see with the naked eye. In personal care products, these building blocks can be small droplets, microscopic clusters or long and flexible macromolecules suspended in a fluid. Because they are relatively large, even gentle actions like squeezing a tube, shaking a bottle or spreading with a brush or finger, can rearrange them.

Equally important are the forces holding these structures together. In hard solids, atoms are bound by strong interactions that lock them in place. In ordinary liquids, the interactions are weaker, allowing molecules to move freely. But the molecules themselves are small and their own structure doesn't change under gentle forces. In soft materials, on the other hand, the forces between the building blocks are weak and easily disrupted. This makes their internal structure fragile but also highly adaptable. As a result, how soft materials behave depends not only on how strongly they are pushed but also on how quickly. The same force applied in different ways can produce very different outcomes. A slow, gentle stress may leave the internal structure largely intact while a rapid or sudden stress can rearrange it completely, allowing the material to flow.

This sensitivity to both force and time is a defining feature of soft matter. Squeeze a tube of toothpaste slowly and it may barely budge. But squeeze it suddenly and it flows out with ease. Shake a bottle of shampoo and it will pour out freely, but handle it gently and it will feel thick and resistant. In each case, the same material responds differently depending on the rate at which it is forced to move. In fact many shampoos contain long and flexible worm-like molecules dispersed in a liquid. At rest, these molecules are tangled together, forming a loose internal network that gives the shampoo its thickness. When you shake the bottle or pour it out, the molecules are stretched and become aligned with each other, which makes it easier for them to slide past one another.

Under the influence of this motion, the network – the connections between molecules – continually breaks and reforms. The worm-like micelles can for a brief period break into shorter segments and then reconnect, reducing the resistance to flowing. Thus the shampoo becomes more runny. Once the molecules stop moving past each other, they slowly coil back and become entangled with each other once more. This way the network is restored and the shampoo becomes thicker again.

Toothpaste behaves in a similar way, with microscopic structures that are rearranged under pressure and which reassemble when the force is removed. This behaviour is remarkable because the microscopic building blocks are constantly being reorganised, breaking apart, reconnecting, and reshaping themselves in a reversible way. This repeat making and unmaking allows soft materials to adapt smoothly to external forces.

In the end, what we usually call solids and liquids seems to depend on how a material responds to force over time. On very short time scales, even a liquid can resist deformation like a solid while a solid can slowly flow if enough force is applied or enough time is allowed.

The pitch drop experiment

At the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, scientists have been conducting an experiment since 1927, known as the pitch drop experiment, to test the viscosity of pitch, or bitumen, which is a substance derived from tar. At room temperature, pitch seems like a normal solid and can be shattered with a hammer. But according to scientists, pitch is really a liquid with extremely high viscosity – around 200-billion-times that of water.

To demonstrate this, a physics professor named Thomas Parnell heated pitch and poured it into a sealed glass funnel in 1927. After leaving it undisturbed for three years so it could cool and stabilise, he removed a seal from the bottom of the container, allowing the pitch to drip under gravity. In the last almost 100 years, only nine drops have fallen, with the ninth drop in April 2014. Even though this is excruciatingly slow, the fact that it's dropping at all shows that pitch is in fact a liquid. The next drop is expected by 2030. Similar experiments are underway in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

Physicists study this force and time-dependent behaviour in a field called rheology, which examines how materials deform and flow under applied stress. The roots of this study go back to the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who captured it in the aphorism "panta rhei", meaning "everything flows". In soft matter, this metaphor for continuous change, which is in fact a feature inherent to all matter, becomes tangible at the timescales and force levels we encounter in everyday life. Beyond their practical usefulness, soft materials offer insights into the deeper scientific principles of motion, force, flow, and change.

The next time you open your bathroom cabinet, remember you are not just handling personal care products. You are handling materials carefully engineered to balance force and flow, structure, and softness. In their gentle response to a squeeze or a shake lies a rich, hidden chapter of modern physics, playing out out of sight, every day.

Indresh Yadav is an assistant professor in the Department of Physics at IIT-Bhubaneswar.

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

A quiz on Indira Gandhi on the occasion of her becoming Prime Minister for the first time on this date 60 years ago

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1
Though Indira Gandhi became India's first and only woman Prime Minister on January 19, 1966, she was the not the world's first. Which Asian leader has that distinction?

QUESTION 2
Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister following the death of which incumbent premier and where?

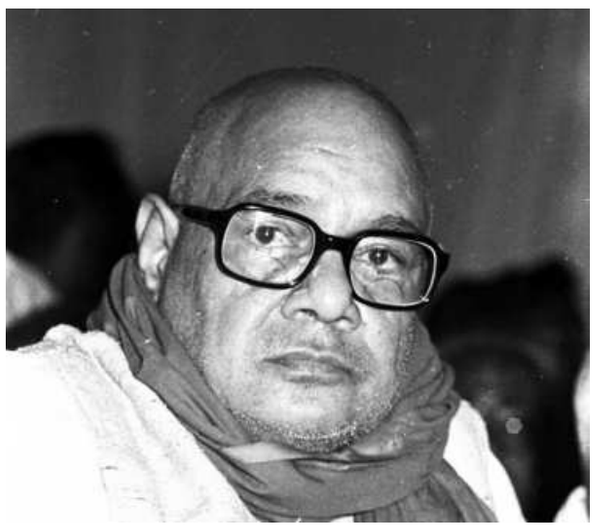
QUESTION 3
Indira Gandhi defeated this veteran political figure to become the leader of the Congress Party and by extension the PM. Name the respected leader who became India's PM in the 1970s.

QUESTION 4
With a cumulative tenure of 15 years and 350 days, she is India's second-longest-serving Indian Prime Minister. Who holds the record?

QUESTION 5
Indira Gandhi was elected to the Lok Sabha from three constituencies starting with Rae Bareli. Which are the other two constituencies?

QUESTION 6
Name the assassins who cut short her tenure as PM on October 31, 1984.

QUESTION 7
How many women did she appoint to full cabinet rank during her terms in office?



Visual question:
Name this Janata Party leader who defeated Indira Gandhi in the 1977 Lok Sabha elections. THE HINDU PHOTO ARCHIVES

Questions and Answers to the January 15 edition of the daily quiz: 1. In 1974, ISRO acquired technology from France in exchange for 100 man-years of engineering work, helping produce parts for this European rocket. **Ans: Ariane**
2. To steer the massive first stage, the PSLV injects this chemical solution into one side of the nozzle's exhaust flow. **Ans: Strontium perchlorate**
3. In February 2017, the PSLV-C37 mission set a world record by launching 104 satellites in a single flight. This SpaceX mission broke the record. **Ans: Transporter-1**
4. Instead of discarding the PSLV's fourth stage (PS4) as debris, ISRO often repurposes it as a stabilised orbital platform called POEM. Expand POEM. **Ans: PSLV Orbital Experiment Module**
5. The PSLV rocket's first stage solid motor is encased in _____ steel. **Ans: Maraging**
Visual: Between the SLV and the PSLV programmes, ISRO ran this programme for seven years. **Ans: Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle**
Early Birds: Tito Shiladitya| Haridas Pal| Sukdev Shet| Gaurav Deshmukh| K.N. Viswanathan



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

His book club event was shambolic

I do not like going to my new school. The class leader is very arrogant and officious

S. Upendran

What is the meaning of 'shambolic'? How is the word pronounced?
Cricket fans who watched the recent Ashes series that took place in Australia will be familiar with this word. Commentators from England used it quite frequently to describe the English team's disastrous performance. Former England captain, Michael Vaughan, referred to his country's preparation for the ill-fated series as 'shambolic'. The word is mostly limited to informal contexts in British English. When you refer to a situation as being 'shambolic', what you are suggesting is that it is disorganised and chaotic. It is difficult to make sense of the situation. The word, which is a combination of 'shambles' and the suffix 'bolic', can be used with people as well.

Don't promote her. She's too shambolic to be put in charge of any department.

As for the pronunciation, the word consists of three syllables; the first rhymes with 'Pam', 'dam' and 'Sam'. The vowel in the second syllable sounds like the 'o' in 'hot', 'not' and 'got', while the final syllable is pronounced like the word 'lick'. The word is pronounced 'sham-BO-lick' with the stress on the second syllable.

What is the meaning of "They made a bomb when they sold the house"? (John Abraham, Bengaluru)
The word 'bomb' is frequently used in informal contexts to refer to money. For example, if you were to say, 'Ajay's new car cost him a bomb', what you are suggesting is that the vehicle was rather expensive – he spent a lot of money on it. Here are a few more examples.

Sheba spent a bomb on her wedding.

On the other hand, when someone 'makes a bomb' on something, they make a lot of money.

Sashi made a bomb in the stock market.

How is the word 'officious' pronounced? (K. Jambunathan)
The word consists of three syllables; the 'o' in the first, and the 'iou' in the third sound like the 'a' in 'china'. The 'ffic' in the second is pronounced like the word 'fish'. The word is pronounced 'e-FISH-es' with the stress on the second syllable. It comes from the Latin 'officiosus' meaning 'full of courtesy, dutiful'. When the word was borrowed into English, it had a positive meaning; it referred to someone who helped people. But over a period of time, the word underwent a radical change in meaning; today, it is mostly used to indicate disapproval. When you refer to an individual as being 'officious', what you are suggesting is that he is meddlesome, someone who keeps annoying people by telling them what they should and should not do – especially about trivial matters.

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Word of the day

Puerile:
of or characteristic of a child; displaying or suggesting a lack of maturity

Synonyms: adolescent, juvenile

Usage: *Nobody liked his puerile jokes.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/puerilepron

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈpjʊɹaɪl/, /ˈpjʊəɹaɪl/

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

Insurance cover in '25

Amit Chhabra

Year 2025 was remarkable for insurance with some great regulatory milestones, including the zero GST reform and for Indians as they started seeing insurance as a foundational decision for financial planning rather than borne out of need to save tax.

This pattern was consciously visible across health and travel cover and even the way people paid for it. Across these verticals, buyers moved towards higher covers, longer policy tenures and broader protection, while payment behaviour showed growing comfort with recurring, automated premium commitments.

Shift to meaningful protection

With the removal of GST on individual health cover, policyholders decided to invest savings into securing a larger cover reflecting the positive change this reform brought to policyholders. Average sum insured jumped by 31%, from ₹14.5 lakh to ₹19 lakh. Tellingly, policies below ₹10 lakh saw a sharp dip of 29% YoY and a 24% slide post GST, whereas covers in the ₹10-25 lakh bracket surged by about 45%. In fact, cover above ₹25 lakh nearly doubled.

This showed Indians became more aware of healthcare inflation and treatment realities. Unlimited health plans, a niche segment a year ago, accounted for a meaningful share of purchases of about 16% in 2025.

Perhaps the most significant trend is the move towards longer tenures. with 4- and 5-year tenures increasing by 56% and 62%, each clearly showing consumers' preference for continuity over annual decision fatigue.

The awareness is deepening well beyond metros with tier-3 cities now accounting for a dominant share (70%) of health cover purchases. Younger buyers, too, are entering earlier, choosing stronger covers and add-ons such as Day 1 benefits and OPD riders.

Travel insurance

A similar transformation in consumer behaviour was seen in travel cover as well with a 15% YoY growth in policy issuance. It was also observed higher sum insured selections was the norm.

People traveling to the U.S. and Canada increasingly opted for covers as high as $5,00,000, acknowledging the realities of overseas healthcare costs. For Europe, Asia and other regions, $2,50,000 emerged as the preferred safety net. The reason for such covers is explained by the claims data. While the most frequent claims included baggage delays and trip disruptions, it was medical emergencies that continued to prevail claim value. After all, a single hospitalisation abroad can outweigh the cost of an entire trip. The spike in coverage is explained by the rise in the number of senior travellers who constituted 15% of insured travellers.

Payments: backbone of insurance

In 2025, UPI firmly emerged as the default mode, accounting for almost two-thirds of all premium payments. UPI Autopay registrations also rose and recorded around 1.5 million new registrations. This showed consumers are increasingly comfortable treating insurance like a subscription service rather than a one-time transaction. This was especially visible in life insurance where monthly payments dominated at 94% while annual payments accounted for only about 5%. In health cover, buyers were split with 61% opting for annual payments, and 35% choosing monthly.

Emergence of Buy-Now-Pay-Later for insurance premiums showed a subtle shift indicating rising demand for short-term liquidity support without the traditional credit friction. Besides, a spike of about 15% in purchases on GST exemption and the sharp rise in festive periods showed insurance decisions still influenced by timing. Regulatory relief, rising medical costs and digital-first payment rails together pushed buyers towards higher protection, longer tenures and frictionless ways to pay. 2025 firmly cemented the fact that insurance is moving away from being an impulsive purchase to being a conscious choice towards financial stability.

(The writer is Chief Business Officer, General Insurance, Policybazaar.com)

Send queries on personal finance and investing to the moneywise@thehindu.co.in ID. Our experts in personal finance will respond to select queries, but will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund, share or fixed deposit.



Usual procedure: Questions of ownership are beyond the purview of banks or financial institutions. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Nominee vs. legal heir: who is legally entitled to funds?

If a nominee has been appointed for a bank account, the bank may release funds to the nominee; however, ownership of those funds follows inheritance law, or a Will, not the nomination form

MONEY TRANSFER

Vaishali R. Venkat

We must plan for the seamless transfer of our money and assets to those we intend to leave them to after our demise. Unfortunately, many people mistakenly assume that merely nominating someone for each asset is sufficient and nomination per se automatically transfers ownership to the nominee after the death of the account holder or asset owner. In reality, asset ownership works very differently.

> In most cases, a nominee acts as a custodian or trustee, receiving or holding money/asset on behalf of legal heirs who are rightful owners under succession law

> Nomination eases fund transfer but does not determine ownership. With just nomination, money/assets may not be distributed/ transferred as intended

Who is a nominee?

Let's say Karthik appointed his 21-year-old daughter, Sudha, as the nominee for all bank deposits and savings account. This means Sudha is merely the designated person to receive the money from the bank after Karthik's demise; she is not the sole owner of the funds released by the bank. In other words, nomination ensures a smooth and hassle-free release of funds by the institution, but does not confer ownership.

Legally, in most cases, a nominee merely acts as a custodian or trustee, receiving or holding the money or asset on behalf of the legal heirs who are the rightful owners under the inheritance law. For instance, assume Karthik is also survived by his mother, wife and a son. In that case, the mother, wife, his son and daughter are all his legal heirs and legally entitled to his monies and assets. Therefore, though the bank may hand over the funds/assets to his daughter, who is a nominee, the legal heirs are entitled to claim their lawful share in accordance with the succession law. In short, the nominee acts only as a custodian, whereas ownership of the funds or assets vests in the legal heirs.

Why nominee is paid?

After the demise of an account holder, the bank/financial institution releases the funds to the nominee to avoid delays and administrative complications. They are more concerned with the seamless transfer of funds; questions of ownership are beyond their purview. Payment to the nominee enables the bank to close the account and discharge its responsibility.

However, such payment neither determines/transfers ownership of the funds nor overrides legal heir rights under respective succession laws.

Who is a legal heir?

A legal heir is the one who is entitled to inherit the money/assets of the deceased person under succession law or a valid Will. In short, they are the rightful legal owners of the funds. In Karthik's case, his mother, wife, son and daughter are all legal heirs.

Legal heirs are determined by personal laws such as the Hindu Succession Act, Indian Succession Act, the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937 or any other applicable inheritance laws.

The Hindu Succession Act is applicable to Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, and includes Virashaiva, a Lingayat or a follower of the Brahmo, Prarthana or Arya Samaj. The Indian Succession Act applies to Christians and Parsis and, by implication, to Jews and others not governed by the Hindu or Muslim personal law. For Muslims in India, inheritance and succession matters are governed by the Muslim Personal Law.

In the absence of a valid Will, these laws determine who the heirs are and the proportion in which they are entitled to inherit the deceased person's assets. Where a valid Will exists, it governs inheritance, but succession laws apply to assets not covered by the Will or where the Will cannot legally operate.

In Karthik's case, if he passed away without leaving a valid Will, the manner in which his money and assets are distributed to his legal heirs will be determined by the applicable succession law based on his religion. If Karthik is a Hindu, then, as per the Hindu Succession Act, his mother, wife, son, and daughter would inherit his assets as legal heirs in the manner prescribed under that law, irrespective of who is named as the nominee. Therefore, even if Karthik had appointed his daughter Sudha as the nominee, such nomination would not make her the sole owner of the funds or assets, nor would it confer full ownership upon her.

What if there is a Will?

If Karthik had executed a valid Will, his assets would be distributed in accordance with the Will, and the provisions of the Hindu Succession Act would apply only to any property not covered by the Will.

Succession laws would apply only to assets not covered by the Will or where the Will is invalid or incapable of being given effect to. Nomination eases fund transfer and does not determine ownership. Relying only on nomination is not estate planning and money/assets may not be distributed/transferred as intended. Note: while nomination rules and succession laws apply to most financial assets, insurance cover operates differently.

(The writer is an NISM & CRISIL-certified Wealth Manager and certified in NISM's Research Analyst module)

Setting up SIP on an active fund

THINKINVESTOR

Each year, statistically test the risk-adjusted return of investments in active funds. This will help you be mindful of the fact if each fund is generating returns as per hopes to achieve life goals

Venkatesh Bangaruswamy

Deciding whether to invest in active or passive equity funds is not easy. Choosing a passive fund is simple and behaviourally optimal. Investing in an active fund can generate positive alpha. The additional cash flow generated from the positive alpha can be useful while achieving life goals. But negative alpha can hurt you more than the positive alpha of the same magnitude giving you happiness.

Yet, many invest in active funds in the hope of generating consistent positive alpha. In this article, we discuss the process you can adopt to manage the risk, and the regret associated with active funds.

Active process

Systematic investment plans (SIPs) are meant to make investment process easy. So, it is natural for an individual to set up a SIP in an equity fund to match the time horizon for a life goal. For instance, an eight-year SIP for an eight-year goal. This argument works well if the SIP is on an index fund or an ETF, as the before-cost returns on these funds must mirror that of the benchmark index.

In contrast, SIPs on active funds should be set up for 12 months at a time regardless of the time horizon for a life goal. Why? You invest in an active fund to earn positive alpha.

So, you must evaluate the fund's performance on an annual basis. Hence, the SIP for 12 months at a time.

You must be mindful of the choices you face with active funds at the end of each 12-month period through the time horizon for a life goal. The following are the choices: You should renew SIP for another 12 months if you are satisfied with the fund's performance. What if you are not satisfied with the performance? You can still renew the SIP if you decide to stay with the fund for another year. Otherwise, you have two choices. Either switch to another active fund or switch to a passive one.

If you switch to a passive fund, you can set up the SIP for the remaining time horizon for the life goal.

Conclusion

Every year, you must statistically test the risk-adjusted return (Sortino Ratio) of your investments in active funds.

Following this process will help you be mindful of whether each fund is generating returns according to your expectations to achieve your life goal. Your investments in active funds may have generated handsome returns in the past. It is nevertheless important that you review their annual performance.

(The author offers training programmes for individuals to manage their personal investments)

Bank Name	Interest Rates (%) Highest Slab	1-year Tenure	3-year Tenure	5-year Tenure
Small Finance Banks				
AU Small Finance Bank	7.10	6.35	7.10	6.75
Equitas Small Finance Bank	7.30	7.00	7.00	7.00
ESAF Small Finance Bank	7.60	4.75	6.00	5.75
Jana Small Finance Bank	7.77	7.00	7.50	7.77
Shivalik Small Finance Bank	7.50	6.00	6.75	6.25
slice Small Finance Bank	7.75	6.25	7.50	7.00
Suryoday Small Finance Bank	8.00	7.25	7.25	8.00
Ujjivan Small Finance Bank	7.45	7.25	7.20	7.20
Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	7.50	6.00	7.50	7.00
Private Sector Banks				
Axis Bank	6.45	6.25	6.45	6.45
Bandhan Bank	7.20	7.00	7.00	5.85
City Union Bank	6.75	6.50	6.50	6.25
CSB Bank	7.00	5.00	5.75	5.75
DBS Bank	6.60	6.30	6.40	6.25
DCB Bank	7.15	6.90	7.00	7.00
Federal Bank	6.75	6.25	6.75	6.40
HDFC Bank	6.45	6.25	6.45	6.40
ICICI Bank	6.50	6.25	6.45	6.50
IDFC FIRST Bank	7.00	6.30	7.00	7.00
IndusInd Bank	7.00	6.75	6.90	6.65
Jammu & Kashmir Bank	7.00	6.50	6.65	6.60
IDBI Bank	6.50	6.20	6.35	6.25
Karnataka Bank	6.65	6.50	6.15	6.15
Kotak Mahindra Bank	6.70	6.50	6.40	6.25
RBL Bank	7.20	7.00	7.20	6.70
SBM Bank India	7.30	7.00	7.10	7.00
South Indian Bank	6.60	6.35	6.20	5.70
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	7.10	6.80	6.60	6.60
YES Bank	7.00	6.65	7.00	6.75
Public Sector Banks				
Bank of Baroda	6.45	6.10	6.25	6.30
Bank of India	6.70	6.25	6.25	6.00
Bank of Maharashtra	6.65	6.20	5.25	5.00
Canara Bank	6.50	6.25	6.25	6.25
Central Bank of India	6.50	6.20	6.00	6.00
Indian Bank	6.45	6.10	6.05	6.00
Indian Overseas Bank	6.60	6.50	6.10	6.10
Punjab National Bank	6.40	6.10	6.30	6.10
Punjab & Sind Bank	6.60	5.85	5.85	5.95
State Bank of India	6.45	6.25	6.30	6.05
Union Bank of India	6.30	6.25	6.00	5.90

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.) Upto 30 lakh	Above 30 lakh & upto 75 lakh	Above 75 lakh
	(In %)		
Public Sector Banks			
State Bank of India	7.25-8.70	7.25-8.70	7.25-8.70
Bank of Baroda	7.20-9.00	7.20-9.00	7.20-9.25
Union Bank of India*	7.15-9.50	7.15-9.50	7.15-9.50
Punjab National Bank	7.25-9.10	7.20-9.00	7.20-9.00
Bank of India	7.10-10.00	7.10-10.00	7.10-10.25
Bank of Maharashtra	7.10-9.90	7.10-9.90	7.10-9.90
Punjab and Sind Bank	7.30-10.70	7.30-10.70	7.30-10.70
Indian Overseas Bank	7.10 #	7.10 #	7.10 #
Indian Bank	7.15-9.55	7.15-9.55	7.15-9.55
Central Bank of India	7.10-9.15	7.10-9.15	7.10-9.15
Private Sector Banks			
Kotak Mahindra Bank	7.70 #	7.70 #	7.70 #
ICICI Bank	7.45 #	7.45 #	7.45 #
Axis Bank	8.35-11.90	8.35-11.90	8.35-9.35
HSBC Bank	7.45 #	7.45 #	7.45 #
South Indian Bank	7.80 #	7.80 #	7.80 #
Karur Vysya Bank	8.50-10.65	8.50-10.65	8.50-10.65
Karnataka Bank	7.30-11.68	7.30-11.68	7.30-11.68

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.) Upto 30 lakh	Above 30 lakh & upto 75 lakh	Above 75 lakh
	(In %)		
Federal Bank	8.75 #	8.75 #	8.75 #
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	7.90 - 9.30	7.90 - 9.30	7.90 - 9.30
Bandhan Bank	8.41-12.58	8.41-12.58	8.41-12.58
RBL Bank	8.20 #	8.20 #	8.20 #
CSB Bank	8.05 #	8.05 #	8.05 #
HDFC Bank	7.90 #	7.90 #	7.90 #
City Union Bank	8.25-9.50	8.50-10.00	8.75-10.50
Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)			
LIC Housing Finance	7.15 #	7.15 #	7.15 #
Bajaj Housing Finance	7.15 #	7.15 #	7.15 #
Tata Capital	7.50 #	7.50 #	7.50 #
PNB Housing Finance	7.90 #	7.90 #	7.90 #
GIC Housing Finance	8.20 #	8.20 #	8.20 #
SMFG India Home Finance	10.00 #	10.00 #	10.00 #
Aditya Birla Capital	7.75 #	7.75 #	7.75 #
Sammaan Capital	8.75#	8.75#	8.75#
ICICI Home Finance	7.50 #	7.50 #	7.50 #
Godrej Housing Finance	7.75 #	7.75 #	7.75 #

***Extra interest rate concession of 0.05% for borrowers opting for insurance policy**
Rates as on January 14 #onwards Source:Paisabazaar.com

Rane looks for resurgence



Betting on future: Harish Lakshman is sanguine despite global uncertainty, auto sector will find the going good.

Vinay Kamath

Exactly 35 years ago, in the January 1990 issue of a business magazine, this writer had written about the Chennai-based (then Madras) Rane group. Featuring vice-chairman L. Lakshman and his younger brother L. Ganesh, later to be Chairman of the group, the article said: "The Madras-based Rane group wears its conservatism on its sleeve and wholeheartedly swears by its virtues, but that has not stopped it from approaching the ₹100-crore turnover mark!"

If that was the extent of ambition then, today the Rane group – still admittedly conservative, and spearheaded by Lakshman's son, Harish, the current Chairman, who took over from Ganesh – has seen group revenue burgeon to ₹7,413 crore in FY24-25 (21% from international markets), serving customers in over 30 countries, with eight business units and 31 manufacturing plants.

Over 80 years old, Rane is among the older business groups in Chennai, catering to the automotive sector with a variety of components ranging from steering systems and brakes to engine components and light metal castings; over 67% goes to passenger vehicles, 23% to commercial vehicles, and the rest to tractors and two-wheelers.

Positive outlook

Harish Lakshman is sanguine that, despite the global uncertainty, the automotive sector will find the going good. "I believe it should sustain because GST 2.0 is a significant step that's going to spur demand. I have had conversations with senior executives of our customers like Maruti, Tatas and Mahindra – they're all quite optimistic that the footfall at dealerships is going up considerably. In fact, the Maruti MD was saying that the number of helmets inside the dealerships is going up, which means two-wheeler buyers are coming in to look at the lower-end cars!"

U.S. tariff uncertainty

Almost 45% of Rane's exports go to North America and Mexico, so the uncertainty over U.S. tariffs is unsettling. To diffuse the risks, Rane is increasing exposure to European markets and Southeast Asia, which, he says, is a difficult market to crack because of the strong Japanese influence. Rane had established a manufacturing plant in the U.S. in 2016 for light metal castings but sold it in 2023. Asked if the company would again establish a beachhead in the U.S., Lakshman is cautious. "In hindsight, if you are not making a very high-technology product, where the differentiation is based on manufacturing efficiency, that's not going to happen. Some high-tech manufacturing can potentially move back to the U.S., but I don't see us making an engine valve or casting in the U.S.," he explains.

Quality management

Lakshman is unfazed by the shifting trend to EVs, saying 92% of the group revenue is agnostic to what the power train is – whether an IC engine or an EV. "So, even if the whole world flips to electric tomorrow, Rane will lose 7-8% of sales. But I'm personally convinced that the pace of growth in EVs will continue to increase in the next 15-20 years. There are new opportunities for Rane because EV brings its own new set of technologies. So, we keep looking and evaluating opportunities and, at the appropriate time, we will place some bets," he elaborates.

The Rane group, like other business groups in Chennai such as TVS and Ashok Leyland, has received three Deming Grand and five Deming awards for its units for the sustained quality of its components. A walkabout at the Rane Madras factory at Varanavasi, near the Oragadam industrial estate on the outskirts of Chennai, shows an orderly plant with high levels of efficiency and discipline. Surrounded by landscaped gardens and a Miyawaki forest with fruit-bearing trees and a huge pond for rain water harvesting, this spic-and-span plant makes several engine components such as rack and pinion steering gears, tie rods, ball joints, et al, which go into PVs and CVs. Seated on benches in an open hut on a green lawn, sipping tender coconut water, a gentle breeze wafting in from the trees around, you may forget you are in a factory space! The Demings, Lakshman says, is the culmination of the total quality management (TQM) journey Rane embarked on in the early 2000s. "It was a very important initiative for the group to fix our quality mindset, standardisation of processes across the organisation, and our planning. These were all essential skills. I joined the group in 1999 and we started the TQM journey in 2001," he explains. As Lakshman says, earlier there were no systems and processes as everything was person-dependent, like in many traditional family-run companies. "The biggest benefit that TQM brought us is systems across functions – from finance to manufacturing and engineering to purchasing."

India's strategic metamorphosis from back office to a global brain trust

By fostering deeper industry-academia collaborations to upskill workforce in deep tech and offering capital subsidies for Tier-II expansion, India can ensure GCC revolution remains sustainable for the next decade; govt. must introduce a "Single-Window Clearance" system specifically for GCCs

NEWS ANALYSIS

P. Saravanan
A. Paul Williams



Niche area: GCC boom catalysed high-value employment and regional development. KOMMURI SRINIVAS

By early 2026, a profound transformation had occurred. India had become a strategic nerve centre for the global corporate elite. What were once known as captive centres are now Global Capability Centres (GCCs), sophisticated hubs that do not merely support the parent company but also define its future. This transition from cost-cutting centres to global growth engines marks a watershed moment in India's economic history.

The evolution of Indian GCCs progressed through four distinct waves, culminating in the current GCC 4.0 era. Initially, these centres were established to exploit labour arbitrage and handle routine IT and business process tasks. However, in the last few years, there has been a decisive move toward end-to-end product ownership. Today, nearly 58% of GCCs in India are investing heavily in Agentic AI or autonomous AI systems that can reason and execute complex tasks, thereby moving beyond mere experimentation to enterprise-scale deployment. These centers now manage global strategy leadership, high-end R&D, and proprietary intellectual property (IP) creation, making them indispensable nodes in the global value chain.

Mutual Prosperity

For multinational corporations (MNCs), the Indian GCC offers a unique competitive advantage: access to a multi-dimensional talent pool at a scale found nowhere else. With India housing over 1,800 GCCs and employing nearly 2 million professionals, firms can now drive faster innovation cycles through a follow-the-sun model. Beyond technology, these centers have become global "Centres of Excellence" (CoEs) for finance, legal, and HR, allowing parent companies to centralise most critical functions in a high-skill, high-efficiency environment.

Centres of excellence

Today, Indian GCCs act as Global Centres of Excellence (CoEs) that drive high-end R&D in fields such as Quantum Computing, Semiconductor Design, and Agentic AI. They no longer support the parent firm. They have end-to-end product lifecycles, from initial conceptualisation and architecture to global deployment and customer feedback loops.

For the Indian population, the GCC boom catalysed high-value employment and regional development. These roles are intellectually stimulating and offer compensation far above that of traditional service-sector jobs, creating a new class of global professionals. Perhaps most significantly, growth is finally trickling down into Tier-II and Tier-III cities such as Coimbatore, Indore and Kochi.

This geographic diversification reduces the strain on saturated metros like Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

Navigating headwinds

Despite the record growth, the GCC ecosystem faces challenges that could threaten its momentum. The primary risk is the widening of the talent gap. Although India produces millions of engineers, the demand for niche skills in AI security, cloud architecture and quantum-resistant cryptography vastly outstrips the supply. This has triggered a fierce war for talent, leading to wage inflation that could eventually erode the value proposition of MNCs.

Furthermore, GCCs hold more critical global data and have become prime targets for State-sponsored cyber-attacks. With the implementation of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, the pressure on GCCs to maintain flawless cybersecurity governance has reached unprecedented levels. Simultaneously, the introduction of the OECD's Global Minimum Tax (Pillar Two) fundamentally alters the tax arbitrage benefit that many MNCs previously enjoyed. With a global floor of 15% tax and the continued bone of contention regarding India's 24% mark up for software R&D under Safe Harbour rules, fiscal predictability has become a top-tier board concern. Finally, geopolitical volatility and protectionism pose long-term risks to investment.

As of early 2026, global trade professionals are increasingly wary of U.S. tariff volatility and re-shoring policies that encourage MNCs to return critical data operations to home markets. While India remains an attractive destination owing to scale, any shift toward digital sovereignty in Western nations could slow the pace of new GCC setups. Additionally, as India-based centres now handle 13.7% of global cyber-attack incidents (Cyfirma Report, 2023), the threat of State-sponsored espionage and intellectual property theft has made cybersecurity the most expensive operational mandate for modern GCCs.

Way forward

To secure India's position as the world's innovation capital, policymakers must transition from regulators to active facilitators. The National GCC Policy Framework, proposed in the 2025-26 budget cycle, is a step in the right direction, but execution is the key. The government should introduce a "Single-Window Clearance" system specifically for GCCs to streamline the establishment of legal entities. Additionally, rationalising transfer pricing norms and providing tax safe harbours for R&D-intensive operations will provide the fiscal certainty that global boards demand.

By fostering deeper industry-academia collaborations to upskill the workforce in deep tech and offering capital subsidies for Tier-II expansion, India can ensure that its GCC revolution remains sustainable for the next decade.

(Saravanan is a professor of finance and accounting at IIM Tiruchirappalli and Williams is the Head of India at Sernova Financial. Views are personal)

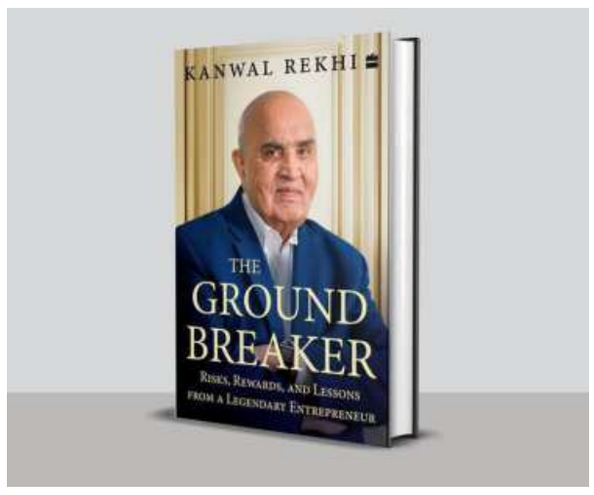
'Start-up profitability is measure of efficiency'

If 10 million Indians become entrepreneurs over the next 20 years, almost all our economic and employment problems will be solved, says Indian-American entrepreneur Kanwal Rekhi, founder of TiE in a conversation with The Hindu businessline

INTERVIEW

Kanwal Rekhi

Vinay Kamath
K.V. Kurmanath



Iconic Indian-American entrepreneur Kanwal Rekhi is on a whistle-stop tour of India to talk to entrepreneurs, as well as promote his book, The Ground Breaker, published by Harper Business, which details his life story. From a refugee from Rawalpindi in Pakistan to an early life in a lower middle-class, cramped house in Kanpur, Rekhi's break came when he cracked the IIT entrance exam and joined IIT-Bombay. Later, moving to the U.S. for his postgraduate degree in 1967, when that country opened up for immigration, Rekhi lived the American dream –warts and all – getting laid off, founding successful companies and becoming rich. The first Indian-American CEO to take a company public on the Nasdaq, Rekhi later founded and built The IndUS Entrepreneurs (TiE) into a large global network. In Hyderabad and later in Chennai, at the Madras Management Association, Rekhi met *businessline* for a conversation. Excerpts:

Can you list a few remarkable experiences or inflection points in your long journey?

Getting into IIT-Bombay was a life-changing moment, and the U.S. opening up to engineers was one too. My first three jobs, they didn't last very long as I was laid off. I had a job offer with IBM that I foolishly didn't accept. And IBM, which was 80% of the computer industry at the time, blacklisted me for life. It looked pretty awful at the time but, looking back, that was a good thing because now 80% of the industry didn't have a job for me and I had to fend for myself, try harder. When I got back to California after my third lay-off, I was very focused on stability. I worked for a defence contractor doing flight simulators for the Air Force and Navy. I did so well that one of the generals told me I had become a national asset. So, when I decided to leave that company to go do my own, he was very unhappy. That was a turning point. Marrying my wife, Anne, was also a life-changing event because she was an American and she accepted me as a partner. Inter-racial marriages were not very common those days.

How did you go on to start TiE?

I am a tough businessperson, very focused on profits and efficiency. But I realised we had to become messengers, role models, mentors for younger people when India began liberalising in 1991. The idea was to encourage people to become entrepreneurs. When we reflected on our own lives, we realised we had a very lonely journey, no believers in us, no mentors. Like any organisation, it has had ups and downs. It is right now on the up; we have close to 70 chapters globally. In India it's in around 23 cities. TiE has done much better than we expected.

Since you were in Hyderabad for the inauguration of KREST (Kanwal Rekhi Rural Entrepreneurship and Startup Centre) in Nizamabad, Telangana, please explain its scope and the opportunities

We have long had this divide between 'India' and 'Bharat'. India is modern, on the move, educated, and scientific; Bharat is stuck in the mud. This divide cannot, and must not last. We need to bootstrap Bharat out of that. My thought is that India is finally on the right track regarding entrepreneurship. We are putting faith in people, their enterprise and energy. India is becoming a modern, scientific, entrepreneurial nation – that is our brand worldwide now.

How do we apply that to the 'Bharat' side? How do we help them bootstrap quickly? KREST is our attempt to bring technology and new ways of doing things to tier-3 cities and villages. We want to empower village entrepreneurs through drip irrigation, solar power, and soil testing. If 10 million Indians become entrepreneurs over the next 20 years, almost all our economic and employment problems will be solved.

What will KREST do on the ground?

The model is based on what Desh Deshpande has been doing in Hubballi for 20 years. We bring in young kids, equip them with skills to make them employable and teach them technologies that can be deployed immediately in villages.

For example, you can electrify a village quickly with solar cells, batteries, and LED lights, which are now very cheap. We can use technology to improve water wells and conduct soil testing to determine the best crops. KREST focuses on creating small-scale entrepreneurs, who take these solutions back to villages. It's an experiment; we'll learn and scale up as we go. We aren't claiming any proprietary value – we want to open it up for others to replicate.

What are your views on AI? Do you think it's mostly hype, or a transformative tool?

I've never been into the hype. I see AI no differently than the steam engine, electricity, the telephone, or the Internet. It is a productivity-enhancing tool. Every such tool eventually creates more jobs and wealth, because you can do more with the same resources.

In the short term, there is an adaptation cycle in which it may replace some roles but, overall, it's a boon. Look at what happened with computers in India in the '70s – people protested, fearing job losses. Instead, software became India's saviour. AI will do the same. It will also be a great equaliser for rural areas, by making people with fewer formal skills more productive.

You've famously said that "any fool can burn money" (referring to start-ups splurging money raised from investors). Do you see more sense prevailing in the start-up ecosystem now?

Every business eventually has to produce more than it consumes. You cannot have a business that is always burning cash. We've seen some start-ups struggle with this. When I started Excelan, I was profitable at $10 million in revenue.

Profitability isn't just a romantic notion, it's a declaration of independence. Once you are profitable, you don't depend on market forces or external capital to survive. Profitability is also a measure of efficiency – does your business have the right to survive?

You've watched the Indian talent landscape for decades. What is your message to Indian students today, especially those looking toward the U.S.?

When I finished at IIT in 1967, there were no jobs in India. You either joined an MNC as a trainee or you left. Today, India is different. There are huge opportunities here, and venture capital is available. You don't have to go to America to prove yourself any more.

Furthermore, the era when America welcomed us with open arms, because it was falling behind in engineering, is ending. That was an abnormal 60-year cycle. America doesn't need us as much now, and it is facing its own internal challenges. All the smart people staying back in India are ultimately good for India.

You often say that entrepreneurship and democracy go hand-in-hand. Could you elaborate why?

We are much better off than we were. Democracy and free markets are a matched pair – both are about choice. You choose your candidate; you choose your product. When we matched democracy with socialism, we limited those choices. We've come a long way since the days of "licence raj" and quotas. Entrepreneurship spreads wealth and empowers people to assert their rights. It's a self-reinforcing cycle.

MADRID

‘U.S. invasion of Greenland would make Putin happiest man on earth’



REUTERS

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said a U.S. invasion of Greenland “would make Putin the happiest man on earth” in a newspaper interview published on Sunday. He said any military action by the U.S. against the Arctic island would damage NATO and legitimise the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. REUTERS

KYIV

Two killed in mass Russian drone attack on Ukraine, says Zelenskyy



AFP

Two persons were killed and dozens more wounded in a mass Russian drone attack across Ukraine overnight, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Sunday. He said the Sumy, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Khmelnytskyi and Odesa regions were targeted in an attack that included more than 200 drones. REUTERS

KARACHI

Six dead, many trapped after fire breaks out at Pak.’s Karachi mall



REUTERS

Six persons, including a firefighter, were killed, and several others remained trapped more than 12 hours later after a massive fire broke out at a huge shopping mall in Pakistan’s Karachi, officials said on Sunday. The firefighters and rescue teams were trying to put out the fire 16 hours after it started, officials said. PTI

ESCUINTLA

Police regain control of Guatemala prison after guards taken hostage



REUTERS

Guatemalan police on Sunday regained control of a high security prison, freeing nine guards taken hostage by gang member inmates, authorities said. The gang members are still holding 28 hostages at the Fraijanes II and another nine at the Preventivo prison, located east and on the outskirts of the Guatemalan capital. AFP

Netanyahu objects to Gaza panel, holds coalition meet

Agence France-Presse
JERUSALEM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convened a meeting of his ruling coalition partners on Sunday after objecting to the composition of a Gaza advisory panel formed by the White House, according to an official and media reports.

The White House announced this week the setting up of a “Gaza Executive Board,” which would operate under a broader “Board of Peace” to be chaired by U.S. President Donald Trump as part of his 20-point plan to end the war in Gaza.

The executive board, described as having an advisory role, includes Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Qatari diplomat Ali Al-Thawadi, alongside other regional and international officials.



Benjamin Netanyahu

Late on Saturday, Mr. Netanyahu’s office objected to the composition of the executive board.

“The announcement regarding the composition of the Gaza Executive Board, which is subordinate to the Board of Peace, was not coordinated with Israel and runs contrary to its policy,” the office of Mr. Netanyahu said.

“The Prime Minister has instructed the Foreign Affairs Minister to contact the U.S. Secretary of State on this matter.”

It did not explain the reason for its objection, but Israel has previously objected strongly to any Turkish role in post-war Gaza, with relations between the two countries deteriorating sharply since October 2023.

$1 billion membership

Meanwhile, a draft charter sent to about 60 countries by the United States administration calls for members to contribute $1 billion in cash if they want their membership to last more than three years, according to the document seen by Reuters.

(With Reuters inputs)

‘Pentagon readies 1,500 troops for possible deployment to Minnesota’

Trump had threatened on Thursday to invoke the Insurrection Act to deploy military forces if officials fail to stop protesters from targeting ICE agents; tensions rose after an ICE agent fatally shot U.S. citizen Renee Good on Jan. 7 during a traffic stop

Reuters
WASHINGTON

The Pentagon has ordered about 1,500 active-duty soldiers to prepare for a possible deployment to Minnesota, the site of large protests against the government’s deportation drive, U.S. media reported on Sunday.

The Army placed the units on prepare-to-deploy orders in case violence in the northern state escalates, the *Washington Post* reported, citing unnamed defence officials, adding that it is not clear whether any of them will be sent.



Members of Customs and Border Protection and other security forces stand guard during a protest in Minneapolis. REUTERS

The White House told the *Post* in a statement that it is typical for the Pentagon “to be prepared for any decision the President may or may not make”. The Pentagon and the White House did not immediately respond to requests from Reuters for comment.

U.S. President Donald Trump threatened on Thursday to use the Insurrection Act to deploy military forces if officials in the state do not stop protesters from targeting immigration officials after a surge in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents.

“If the corrupt politicians of Minnesota don’t obey the law and stop the professional agitators and insurrectionists from attacking the Patriots of I.C.E., who are only trying to do their job, I will institute the INSURRECTION ACT,” Mr. Trump posted on his Truth Social platform.

Confrontations between residents and federal officers have become increasingly tense in Minneapolis, Minnesota’s most-populous city, after an ICE agent fatally shot Renee Good, a U.S. citizen and mother of three, on January 7 as she was driving away after being ordered to exit her car.

Mr. Trump, a Republican, has sent nearly 3,000 federal agents from ICE and Border Patrol to Minneapolis and neighbouring St. Paul since early last week. Local leaders have accused the President of federal overreach and of exaggerating isolated episodes of violence to justify sending in troops.

Syria announces ceasefire with Syrian Democratic Forces

Associated Press
RAQQA

Syria’s new leaders, since toppling Assad in December 2024, have struggled to assert full authority

The Syrian government on Sunday announced a ceasefire with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), taking almost full control of the country and dismantling the Kurdish-led forces that controlled the northeast for over a decade.

The announcement comes as tensions between government forces and the SDF boiled over earlier this month, eventually resulting in a major push by government forces toward the east. The SDF appeared to have largely retreated after initial clashes on a tense front line area in eastern Aleppo province.

Syria’s Defence Ministry said it ordered the fighting to halt on the front lines after the agreement was announced. The SDF did not confirm the agreement, nor immediately respond to a request for comment.

Syria’s new leaders, since toppling Bashar al-Assad in December 2024, have struggled to assert their full authority over the war-torn country. An agreement was reached in March that would merge the SDF with Damascus, but it didn’t gain traction as both sides accused each other of violating the deal.

Civic unrest



Students and other demonstrators gather for the first protest of the year, after months of rallies demanding political accountability and elections, following the deadly collapse at the city’s railway station, in Novi Sad, Serbia, on Saturday. REUTERS

Clash among rebel groups in Colombia leaves nearly 30 dead

Agence France-Presse
BOGOTÁ

A firefight in the Amazon between rival leftist rebel groups in Colombia has left 27 people dead, an army source said on Sunday.

Both groups broke away from the once powerful FARC guerrilla army when it signed a peace accord with the government in 2016 after decades of combat.

Now these dissident splinter groups are fighting each other in the Guaviare region of the Amazon as they seek control of drug trafficking routes, illegal mining and extortion operations.

The recent fighting pitted rebels under a leader named Ivan Mordisco, Colombia’s most wanted man, and another who goes by the nom de guerre Calarca.

Army sources said the death toll was preliminary. The army said on Saturday on X that the combat was mainly about control of territory.

A video that the army shared with AFP shows more than 20 bodies in combat fatigues lying on a dirt road.

Mordisco held peace talks with the government of leftist President Gustavo Petro but dropped out in 2024 and has since stepped up attacks on civilians and security forces.

The forces led by Calarca have also held intermittent peace talks with the government.

At least 5,000 dead in Iran unrest, says official, as judiciary hints at executions

Reuters
TEHRAN

At least 5,000 people have been killed in protests in Iran, including about 500 security personnel, an Iranian official in the region said on Sunday, citing verified figures and accusing “terrorists and armed rioters” of killing “innocent Iranians”.

Nationwide protests erupted on December 28 over economic hardship and swelled over two weeks into widespread demonstrations calling for the end of clerical rule – resulting in the deadliest unrest since Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution.

U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to intervene if protesters continued to be killed on the streets or were executed.



Iranians attend an anti-government demonstration during the nationwide protests in Tehran, Iran, on January 9. AP

However, Iran’s judiciary indicated that executions may go ahead.

“A series of actions have been identified as Mohareb, which is among the most severe Islamic punishments,” Iranian judiciary spokesperson Asghar Jahangir told a press conference on Sunday.

Mohareb, an Islamic legal term meaning to wage war against God, is punishable by death under Iranian law.

The Iranian official, who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the issue, also said some of the heaviest clashes and highest number of deaths were in the Iranian Kurdish areas in the country’s northwest.

Separately, Iranian authorities have said they are considering “gradually” restoring Internet access after imposing an unprecedented communications shutdown 10 days ago, which rights groups say masked a protest crackdown.

Iraq announces complete withdrawal of U.S.-led coalition from its territory

Agence France-Presse
BAGHDAD

Iraq said on Sunday U.S.-led coalition forces had finished withdrawing from bases within the country’s federal territory, which excludes the autonomous northern Kurdistan region.

“We announce today... the completion of the evacuation of all military bases and leadership headquarters in the official federal areas of Iraq of advisers” of the U.S.-led coalition, the military committee tasked with overseeing the end of the coalition’s mission said.

With the withdrawal, “these sites come under the full control of Iraqi security forces”, it said in the statement, adding that they would transition to “the stage of bilateral security relations with the United States”.



The U.S. and allied troops had been deployed to Iraq and Syria since 2014 to fight the Islamic State group. REUTERS

The vast majority of coalition forces had withdrawn from Iraqi bases under a 2024 deal between Baghdad and Washington outlining the end of the mission in Iraq by the end of 2025 and by September 2026 in the Kurdistan region.

U.S. and allied troops had been deployed to Iraq and Syria since 2014 to fight the Islamic State group, which had seized large swathes of both countries to declare their so-called “caliphate”.

The jihadist group was territorially defeated in Iraq in 2017 and in Syria in 2019, but continues to operate sleeper cells. The vast majority of coalition troops withdrew from Iraq over previous stages, with only advisers remaining in the country. The military committee on Sunday said Iraqi forces were now “fully capable of preventing the reappearance of IS in Iraq and its infiltration across borders”.



Anti-ICE protesters in front of Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building in Minneapolis on Saturday. REUTERS

Pro- and anti-ICE protesters clash in Minneapolis

Associated Press
MINNEAPOLIS

Protesters for and against the Trump administration's latest immigration crackdown clashed in Minneapolis on Saturday as the Governor's office announced that National Guard troops had been mobilised and stood ready to assist state law enforcement, though they were not yet deployed to city streets.

There have been protests every day since the Department of Homeland Security ramped up immigration enforcement in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul by bringing in more than 2,000 federal officers.

A large group of protesters turned out in downtown Minneapolis and confronted a much smaller group of people attending an anti-Somali and pro-Immigration and Customs Enforcement rally. They chased the pro-ICE group away and forced at least one member to take off a shirt they deemed objectionable.

In Minneapolis, snowballs and water balloons were also thrown before an armoured police van and heavily equipped city police arrived. "We're out here to show Nazis and ICE and DHS and MAGA you are not welcome in Minneapolis," protester Luke Rimington said. "Stay out of our city, stay out of our State. Go home."

During the daily protests, demonstrators have railed against masked immigration officers pulling people from homes and cars and other aggressive tactics.

On Friday a federal judge ruled that immigration officers cannot detain or tear gas peaceful protesters who are not obstructing authorities, including while observing officers during the Minnesota crackdown.

Israeli troops killing Palestinians who cross their ambiguous ceasefire line

Of the 447 Palestinians killed between the ceasefire taking effect and Tuesday, 77 fell to Israeli gunfire near the line, including 62 who crossed it; experts say in some places the line is unmarked, while in others it has been laid nearly half a kilometre deeper than what was agreed to in the deal

Associated Press
CAIRO

A dividing line, at times invisible, can mean life or death for Palestinians in Gaza.

Those sheltering near the territory's "yellow line" that the Israeli military withdrew to as part of the October ceasefire say they live in fear as Israeli soldiers direct near-daily fire at anyone who crosses or even lingers near it.

Of the 447 Palestinians killed between the ceasefire taking effect and Tuesday, at least 77 were killed by Israeli gunfire near the line, including 62 who crossed it, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Among them were teenagers and young children, *The Associated Press* found.

And although the military has placed some yellow barrels and concrete barriers delineating the limits of the Palestinian zone, the line is still unmarked in certain places and in others was laid nearly half a kilometre deeper than what was agreed to in the ceasefire deal, expanding the part of Gaza that Israel controls, according to Palestinians and mapping experts.

"We stay away from the barrels. No one dares to get close" said Gaza City resident Ahmed Abu Jahal, noting that the markers are less than 100 metres from his house – instead of the roughly 500 metres outlined in a map put out by the Israeli military.

As of Tuesday, the military had acknowledged killing 57 people around the yellow line, saying most were militants. It said its troops are complying with the rules of engagement in order to counter militant groups, and are informing Palestinians of the line's location and marking it on the ground to "reduce friction and prevent misunderstandings."

Under the ceasefire, Israel withdrew its troops to a buffer zone that is up to 7 kilometres deep and includes most of Gaza's arable land, its elevated points and all of its border crossings. That hems more than 2 million Palestinians into a strip along the coastline and central Gaza.

People of all ages, some already dead, have been showing up almost daily at the emergency room of Gaza City's Al-Ahli hospital with bullet wounds from straying near the line, said hospital director Fadel Naeem.

Amid the vast destruction, the demarcation line often isn't easy to detect, Mr. Naeem said. He recounted picking his way through undamaged paths during a recent visit to the southern city of Khan Younis. He didn't notice he was almost across the line until locals shouted at him to turn back, he added.



Dubious indicator: A yellow block demarcates the 'yellow line,' that separates the Israel-held and Palestinian zones in Gaza Strip. AP

The Israeli military said most of the people it has killed crossing the line posed a threat to its troops. According to a military official, troops issue audible warnings and then fire warning shots whenever someone crosses the line. Many civilians retreat when warning shots are fired, though some have been killed, the official acknowledged.

Zaher Shamia, 17, lived with his grandfather in a tent 300 metres from the line in northern Gaza's Jabaliya refugee camp. On December 10, he was playing with his cousin and some friends near the line, according to a video he took before his death. Suddenly, shots rang out and the video stopped. Soldiers approaching the line with an armoured bulldozer had fired on the teens, hitting Zaher, said a witness.

A neighbour eventually found Zaher's body, which had been crushed by the bulldozer, said Zaher's grandfather, Kamal al-Beih: "We only recognised him from his head."

Two doctors, Mohamed Abu Selmiya and Rami Mhanna, confirmed that the teen had been killed by gunshots and then run over by a bulldozer. The military official said he was aware that Shamia was a civilian and that the military was looking into it.

Maram Atta said that on December 7, her 3-year-old daughter, Ahed al-Bayouk, was playing with siblings outside of their tent, which was near the yellow line along Gaza's southern coast. Ms. Atta was preparing lentils when she heard aircraft overhead, then shots. A stray projectile whizzed close to her and struck Ahed, who was dead before they reached the clinic.

"I lost my daughter to what they keep calling a 'ceasefire'" said Ms. Atta, crying. "What ceasefire are they talking about?"

A military official denied the killing.

A permanent takeover?

The line's exact location is ambiguous, differing on maps put out by the Israeli military and the White House.

Neither matches the line troops appear to be marking on the ground, according to Palestinians and geolocation specialists.

Chris Osiek, an open source intelligence analyst and consultant, has geolocated a number of yellow blocks based on social media videos. He found at least four urban areas where troops set the blocks several hundred metres deeper into Gaza than the military map-specified yellow line.

"This is basically what you get when you simply let Trump make an image and post it on Truth Social and let the IDF make their own," he said, using the acronym for the military. "If it's not a proper system, with coordinates that make it easy for people to navigate where it is, then you leave the ambiguity free for the IDF to interpret the yellow line how they basically want."

The military official dismissed such criticism, saying any deviations from the map amount to just a few metres. But to Palestinians hemmed in by widespread destruction and displacement, every few metres lost is another house that can't be sheltered in – another they doubt will ever be returned.

Under the ceasefire, Israeli forces are only supposed to remain at the yellow line until a fuller withdrawal, though the agreement doesn't give a timeline for that. With the next steps in the deal lagging and troops digging into positions on the Israeli side, though, Palestinians wonder if they are witnessing a permanent land takeover.

In December, Israel's Defence Minister described the yellow line as "a new border line – serving as a forward defensive line for our communities and a line of operational activity." The military has continued levelling buildings inside the Israeli-held zone, turning already damaged neighbourhoods to moonscapes. Almost all of the city of Rafah, on Gaza's border with Egypt, has been razed over the past year. The army says this is necessary to destroy tunnels and prepare the area for reconstruction.

In some places, demolitions since the ceasefire have encroached beyond the official yellow line.

Smoke and ashes



Damaged buildings in the aftermath of a forest fire in the Biobío region in Chile on Sunday. A state of catastrophe has been declared in two southern regions of the country after raging wildfires killed at least 15 people and forced tens of thousands to evacuate. REUTERS

Portugal's presidential poll may see more gains for Europe's populists

Associated Press
LISBON

A record 11 candidates are standing in Portugal's presidential election on Sunday, with a populist party leader poised to possibly bring another political breakthrough for Europe's growing far-right parties.

The large field makes it unlikely that any candidate will capture more than 50% of the vote for a first-round win. That would leave the two top candidates to compete in a runoff ballot next month.

Almost 11 million people are eligible to vote in the election, with most results expected late in the day. The winner will replace President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, who has served the limit of two five-year terms.



Andre Ventura votes during the Portugal presidential election in Lisbon on Sunday. REUTERS

Polls opened at 8 a.m. on a mostly sunny day across the country and were due to close 12 hours later.

Among the front-runners, according to recent opinion polls, are André Ventura, the leader of the populist Chega (Enough) party. Chega's surge in public support made it the second-largest party in Portugal's Parliament last year, just six years after it was founded.

One of Mr. Ventura's main targets has been what he calls excessive immigration, as foreign workers have become more conspicuous in Portugal in recent years. "Portugal is ours," he says.

During the election campaign, he put up billboards across the country saying, "This isn't Bangladesh" and "Immigrants shouldn't be allowed to live on welfare." Such blatant anti-immigrant sentiment expressed in public was unthinkable in Portugal just a few years ago.

Other leading candidates are from the country's two main parties that have alternated in power for the past half-century: Luís Marques Mendes from the centre-right Social Democratic Party, currently in government, and António José Seguro of the centre-left Socialist Party.

Only one woman is among the candidates. Portugal has never had a female or non-white head of state. A runoff between the top two finishers on Sunday will be held on February 8.

After six years, President Trump heads into Davos storm, with an eye on home

Agence France Presse
WASHINGTON

Donald Trump returns to the Davos ski resort next week after unleashing yet another avalanche on the global order. But for the U.S. President, his main audience is back home.

Mr. Trump's first appearance in six years at the World Economic Forum gathering of the world's political and global elite comes amid a spiralling crisis over his quest to acquire Greenland.

Fellow leaders at the mountain retreat will also be eager to talk about other shocks from his first year back in power, from tariffs to Venezuela, Ukraine, Gaza and Iran.

Yet for the Republican President, his keynote speech among the Swiss peaks will largely be aimed at the United States.

U.S. voters are angered by the cost of living despite Mr. Trump's promises of a "golden age," and his party could be facing a kicking in crucial midterm elections in November.

That means Mr. Trump will spend at least part of his time in luxurious Davos – a place where leaders can easily look out of touch with ordinary people – talking about U.S. housing.

A White House official said that Mr. Trump would "unveil initiatives to drive down housing costs" and "tout his economic agenda that has propelled the United States to lead the world in economic growth."

The 79-year-old is expected to announce plans allowing prospective home-buyers to dip into their retirement accounts for down payments.

Unpopular in polls

Billionaire Trump is keenly aware that affordability has become his Achilles' heel in his second term. A CNN poll last week found that 58% of Americans believe his first year back in the White House has been a failure, particularly on the economy.

Mr. Trump's supporters are also increasingly uneasy about the "America First" President's seemingly relentless focus on foreign policy since his return to the Oval Office.



The stage is prepared for the opening concert at the World Economic Forum venue in Davos on Sunday. AP

But as he flies into the snowy retreat, Mr. Trump will find it impossible to avoid the global storm of events that he has stirred since January 20, 2025.

Mr. Trump will be alongside many of the leaders of the same European NATO allies that he has just threatened with tariffs if they don't back his extraordinary quest to take control of Greenland from Denmark.

Those threats have once again called into question the transatlantic alliance that has in many ways underpinned the western economic order celebrated at Davos. So have the broader tariffs Mr. Trump announced early in his second term, and he is set to add to the pressure on Europe in his speech.

He will "emphasise the United States and Europe must leave behind economic stagnation and the policies that caused it," the White House official said.

The Ukraine war will also be on the cards. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is hoping for a meeting with Mr. Trump to sign new security guarantees for a hoped-for ceasefire deal with Russia, as are G7 leaders.

But while the largest-ever U.S. Davos delegation includes Secretary of State Marco Rubio, special envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner, who have all played key roles on Ukraine, no meeting is assured.

Mr. Trump is reportedly considering a first meeting of the "Board of Peace" for Gaza at Davos, after announcing its first members in recent days.

Questions are also swirling about the future of oil-rich Venezuela following the U.S. military operation to topple its leader Nicolas Maduro, part of Mr. Trump's new approach to his country's "backyard."

But he may also pause to enjoy his time in the scenic spot he called "beautiful Davos" in his video speech to the meeting a year ago.

The forum has always been an odd fit for the former New York property tycoon and reality TV star, whose brand of populism has long scorned globalist elites.

But at the same time, he relishes the company of the rich and successful.

His first Davos appearance in 2018 met occasional boos but he made a forceful return in 2020 when he dismissed the "prophets of doom" on climate and the economy.

A year later he was out of power. Now, Mr. Trump returns as a more powerful President than ever, at home and abroad.

BREACHING THE FORTRESS

Kiwis halt India's winning streak in ODIs at the Holkar Stadium



R.V. MOORTHY

New Zealand ended India's winning streak in ODIs at the Holkar Stadium in Indore. The 41-run loss in the series decider halted India's seven-match unbeaten run at the venue. India had beaten England and Australia twice besides getting past the West Indies, South Africa and the Kiwis once prior to Sunday's loss.

NO WORRIES

Skipper Gill backs strike-bowler Kuldeep to 'learn and grow'



FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

India captain Shubman Gill said he was not worried about Kuldeep Yadav's form. "It happens sometimes. Kuldeep, the way he has been bowling, has always been a strike bowler for us. It is unfortunate that he wasn't able to pick as many wickets as he would have liked to, but it happens. These are the series where you learn and grow".

EXCELLENT WORK

Mitchell praises Kiwi groundsmen for helping the team prepare well



R.V. MOORTHY

International cricket means you get to travel the world and experience different surfaces and different ways of scoring runs on them. I'd say our preparation back home has been excellent, and we're very fortunate to have groundsmen in New Zealand who do a great job helping us prepare for these conditions — Daryl Mitchell.

GROWING IN STATURE

Harshit has been impressive in the series with the bat: Gill



R.V. MOORTHY

Harshit (Rana) has been impressive in the series with the bat. He is someone who is clearly improving. Number eight is a very important position for us. When we look at other teams around the world, they bat very deep. I'm very happy with how he is growing and contributing to the team — Shubman Gill.

Kohli special goes in vain as Kiwis script history

Mitchell and Phillips flatten the Indian attack as the visitors post an imposing 337; Nitish and Harshit try hard in the company of the 'chase master', but the Black Caps hold their nerve





Turning point: Centurions Mitchell and Phillips added 219 for the fourth wicket as the Kiwis overcame the early setbacks. R.V. MOORTHY

NZ IN INDIA

Tarun Shastry
INDORE

Different ground, different surface, different conditions – historic outcome. Daryl Mitchell once again proved to be India's chief tormentor, hammering his second consecutive century (137, 131b, 15x4, 3x6), while Glenn Phillips complemented him with a scintillating hundred (106, 88b, 9x4, 3x6). Their belligerent 219-run fourth-wicket partnership proved decisive as New Zealand scripted its first-ever ODI series victory in India as the hosts fell short by 41 runs in the decider at the Holkar Stadium on Sunday.

Chasing 338, India suffered early blows, losing Rohit Sharma in the fourth over to Zak Foulkes and captain Shubman Gill to Kyle Jamieson in the seventh. Shreyas Iyer's stay was brief, falling to Kristian Clarke, while left-arm spinner Jayden Lennox sent back K.L. Rahul, leaving India in trouble at 71 for four in the 13th over.

Virat Kohli (124, 108b, 10x4, 3x6) then took charge. He stitched an 88-run fifth-wicket partnership along with Nitish Kumar (53, 57b, 2x4, 2x6).

Nitish was eventually dismissed by Clarke and Lennox accounted for Ravindra Jadeja as India slipped to 178 for six. Kohli and Harshit Rana (52, 43b, 4x4, 4x6) threatened to pull off a heist. The two added 99 runs off just 69 balls before Foulkes accounted for the latter. Kohli's special knock was ended by Clarke and with it went India's hopes.

Earlier, after Gill opted to bowl, Arshdeep Singh struck off the fourth ball, dismissing Henry Nicholls for a duck.

Harshit removed Devon Conway in the next over as New Zealand slipped to five for two. Mitchell and Will Young then rebuilt with composure. Young attacked with fluent drives and a pull over deep backward point off Harshit before falling to him, ending a 53-run third-wicket stand.

Mitchell found an able ally in Phillips. The pair gradually lifted the tempo, running hard between the wickets and keeping the scoreboard ticking.

Mitchell signalled intent by launching Kuldeep Yadav straight down the ground for a six off his first ball.

Momentum decisively swung in the 40th over as Jadeja was taken for 13. Kuldeep, too, bore the brunt, conceding 19 in the following over.

Phillips brought up his second ODI century with a sublime off-side drive. Arshdeep ended the mammoth partnership by dismissing Phillips, while Mohammed Siraj removed Mitchell.

However, skipper Michael Bracewell's 18-ball 28 ensured the visitors posted an imposing total.

SCOREBOARD

NEW ZEALAND
Devon Conway c Rohit b Harshit 5 *(4b, 1x4)*, Henry Nicholls b Arshdeep 0 *(1b)*, Will Young c Jadeja b Harshit 30 *(41b, 5x4, 1x6)*, Daryl Mitchell c Kuldeep b Siraj 137 *(131b, 15x4, 3x6)*, Glenn Phillips c Rahul b Arshdeep 106 *(88b, 9x4, 3x6)*, Michael Bracewell (not out) 28 *(18b, 1x4, 3x6)*, Mitchell Hay lbw b Kuldeep 2 *(6b)*, Zak Foulkes c Kuldeep b Arshdeep 10 *(8b, 1x4)*, Kristian Clarke b Harshit 11 *(5b, 1x4, 1x6)*, Kyle Jamieson (not out) 0 *(0b)*; Extras (b-5, nb-2, w-1): 8; Total (for eight wkts. in 50 overs): 337.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-5 (Nicholls, 0.4 overs), 2-5 (Conway, 1.1), 3-58 (Young, 12.1), 4-277 (Phillips, 43.1), 5-283 (Mitchell, 44.1), 6-286 (Hay, 45.2), 7-304 (Foulkes, 47.1), 8-327 (Clarke, 48.6).

INDIA BOWLING
Arshdeep 10-1-63-3, Harshit 10-0-84-3, Siraj 10-0-43-1, Nitish 8-0-53-0, Kuldeep 6-0-48-1, Jadeja 6-0-41-0.

INDIA
Rohit Sharma c Clarke b Foulkes 11 *(13b, 2x4)*, Shubman Gill b Jamieson 23 *(18b, 4x4)*, Virat Kohli c Mitchell b Clarke 124 *(108b, 10x4, 3x6)*, Shreyas Iyer c Foulkes b Clarke 3 *(10b)*, K.L. Rahul c Phillips b Lennox 1 *(6b)*, Nitish Kumar c Young b Clarke 53 *(57b, 2x4, 2x6)*, Ravindra Jadeja c Young b Lennox 12 *(16b)*, Harshit Rana c Nicholls b Foulkes 52 *(43b, 4x4, 4x6)*, Mohammed Siraj c Hay b Foulkes 0 *(1b)*, Kuldeep Yadav run out 5 *(3b, 1x4)*, Arshdeep Singh (not out) 4 *(2b, 1x4)*; Extras (lb-1, nb-1, w-6): 8; Total (in 46 overs): 296.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-28 (Rohit, 3.6), 2-45 (Gill, 6.4), 3-68 (Shreyas, 11.2), 4-71 (Rahul, 12.5), 5-159 (Nitish, 27.3), 6-178 (Jadeja, 32.1), 7-277 (Harshit, 43.4), 8-277 (Siraj, 43.5), 9-292 (Kohli, 45.4).

NEW ZEALAND BOWLING
Jamieson 9-0-58-1, Foulkes 9-0-77-3, Clarke 9-0-54-3, Lennox 10-0-42-2, Mitchell 1-0-10-0, Phillips 8-0-54-0.

Toss: India.
Player-of-the-Match and Player-of-the-Series: Mitchell.
New Zealand won by 41 runs to clinch three-match series 2-1.
Next match: First T20I: January 21, Nagpur, 7 p.m.



Sublime effort: Kohli threatened to pull off a heist before falling to Clarke. R.V. MOORTHY

Arsenal extends lead despite Forest stalemate

Agence France-Presse
NOTTINGHAM

Arsenal opened up a seven-point Premier League lead despite failing to break down Nottingham Forest in a 0-0 draw at the City Ground on Saturday.

Later on Sunday, potential challenger Aston Villa lost to Everton 1-0 at home.

In the Bundesliga, Bayern Munich came from behind to win 5-1 at RB Leipzig on Saturday.

In the Serie A, Napoli beat Sassuolo 1-0 to stay six points behind Inter Milan in third while Juventus, in fifth, faltered in Sardinia.

The results: Premier League: Wolves 0 drew with Newcastle 0; Aston Villa 0 lost to Everton (Barry 59).
LaLiga: Getafe 0 lost to Valencia 1 (Gaya 84); Atletico Madrid 1 (Sorloth 48) bt Alaves 0.
Serie A: Parma 0 drew with Genoa 0.
On Saturday: Premier League: Nottingham Forest 0 drew with Arsenal 0.
LaLiga: Mallorca 3 (Muriqi 5, 42, 69-pen) bt Athletic Bilbao 2 (Gomez 8, Nico Williams 45); Real Betis 2 (Ruibal 57, Fornals 83) bt Villarreal 0.
Serie A: Cagliari 1 (Mazzitelli 65) bt Juventus 0; Napoli 1 (Lobotka 7) bt Sassuolo 0.
Bundesliga: RB Leipzig 1 (Romulo 20) lost to Bayern Munich 5 (Gnabry 50, Kane 67, Tah 82, Pavlovic 85, Olise 88).



Change of fortunes: Last year's runner-up Vidarbha crossed the final hurdle. K. MURALI KUMAR

Taide's timely ton sets up Vidarbha's maiden Hazare Trophy triumph

CRICKET

N. Sudarshan
BENGALURU

Vidarbha produced a nerveless performance to beat Saurashtra by 38 runs and win its maiden Vijay Hazare Trophy at the BCCI Centre of Excellence, near here, on Sunday.

After Atharva Taide (128, 118b, 15x4, 3x6) helped set up a target of 318, Harvik Desai's Saurashtra could only reach 279 as Vidarbha came up with an excellent bowling effort to disprove the accepted maxim that chasing teams invariably won.

If not for a 93-run fifth-wicket stand between Prerak Mankad (88, 92b, 10x4) and Chirag Jani (64, 63b, 3x4, 2x6), Vidarbha's margin of victory might have been more comprehensive.

Both Prerak and Jani were let off once, the former on 70 and the latter on 14. But it was captain and left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey who emerged as the man with the golden arm, trapping the dangerous-looking Prerak leg-before on the backfoot.

Jani's dismissal, with 68 runs needed in less than six overs, brought the defending Ranji Trophy champion closer to the coveted white-ball trophy.

It was not long before Chetan Sakariya was excised by speedster Yash Thakur (four for 50) to earn Vidarbha the triumph that more than made up for the disappointing loss to Karnataka in last year's final.

Earlier, after being asked to bat, the Vidarbha openers were mostly steady. There were a few top-edges and inside-edges, giving rise to a few nervous moments. However, Dubey & Co. banished those jitters with some clean and crisp hitting from time to time.

Aman Mokhade did not score big, falling for 33 (45b, 4x4) to finish his season with 814 chart-topping runs. But Vidarbha had a new hero in Taide, who conjured his first century of the tournament in the all-important contest.

That he scored the most against this season's highest wicket-taker Ankur Panwar (31 from 18 balls) was a good indicator of the quality of his innings.

The pick-up shots off pacer Sakariya, and the rousing pulled sixes off Dharmendra Jadeja and Prerak, showcased his overall mastery.

Vidarbha stood at a dominant 213 for one when Taide scooped a low full-toss from Panwar to Prerak at mid-on. Though the outfit wobbled from there, losing wickets at regular intervals, Darshan Nalkande hit 13 of the 16 runs that came off the final over to take his team to 317 for eight. It was a cushion that eventually proved handy.

The scores: Vidarbha 317/8 in 50 overs (Atharva Taide 128, Yash Rathod 54, Ankur Panwar 4/65) bt Saurashtra 279 in 48.5 overs (Prerak Mankad 88, Chirag Jani 64, Yash Thakur 4/50).
Toss: Saurashtra.
PoM: Taide; **PoS:** Mokhade.

Lancers shoot out Dragons; Tigers rally to beat Pipers

HIL - MEN

Y.B. Sarangi
BHUBANESWAR

Table-topper Vedanta Kalinga Lancers edged Accord Tamil Nadu Dragons via penalty shootout to remain unbeaten and register its sixth successive win of the Hockey India League at the Kalinga Stadium here on Sunday.

Following a 1-1 deadlock after the regulation period, Lancers beat Dragons 4-1 in the shootout for their second victory through a tie-breaker.

The Tamil Nadu-based team suffered its third loss on the trot.

The determined Dragons seized the momentum in the 19th minute. Following their ill-trapped first penalty corner, Blake Govers beat Krishan Pathak on the left off a penalty stroke.

Five minutes later, Dilpreet Singh deflected in Liam Henderson's cross from the left. But Dragons relied on a video referral to get it cancelled.

Dragons maintained the pressure with their organised and quick moves before Lancers got three consecutive short corners and Alex Hendrickx drew parity with a fast one in the penultimate quarter.

In the shootout, Cooper Burns, Angad Bir Singh, Antoine Kina, and Arthur van Doren scored for the host, while Uttam Singh was the lone scorer for Dragons. Custodian Jed Snowden, who replaced a brilliant Pathak in the tie-breaker, made a superb save.

Defending champion Shrachi Bengal Tigers erased a two-goal deficit to beat bottom-placed SG Pipers 3-2 in its last round-robin engagement to post its third win and finish on a high.

Pipers struck early when Aditya Lalage passed it to Dilraj Singh and the latter tapped it in.

Pipers, who saw three of their goals being disallowed due to different reasons, doubled their lead with Tomas Domene's penalty corner conversion.

The relentless Tigers earned six short corners and Jugraj Singh found the mark with a low flick to reduce the margin before the final break.

Abhishek Nain utilised an aerial ball to equalise. Affan Yousuf's winner frustrated Pipers in a contest that was interrupted by heated exchanges.



Jubilant bunch: Lancers players gather around shootout hero Snowden. BISWARANJAN ROUT

The results: Shrachi Bengal Tigers 3 (Jugraj Singh 45-pc, Abhishek Nain 45, Affan Yousuf 48) bt SG Pipers 2 (Dilraj Singh 5, Tomas Domene 31-pc).
Vedanta Kalinga Lancers 1 (Alex Hendrickx 44-pc) drew with Accord Tamil Nadu Dragons 1 (Blake Govers 19-ps); *Lancers won 4-1 via shootout.*

INBRIEF



Eintracht Frankfurt fires coach Toppmoller

Dino Toppmoller paid the price for Eintracht Frankfurt's leaky defence as he was fired on Sunday ahead of two crucial games that will decide whether Frankfurt avoids an early exit from the Champions League. Toppmoller had been with Frankfurt since 2023 and led the team back to the Champions League after finishing third in the Bundesliga last season. The club in a statement said their working relationship ended with immediate effect. U-21 coach Dennis Schmitt and U-19 coach Alexander Meier will take temporary charge of Frankfurt ahead of Wednesday's game at Azerbaijani club Qarabag.

England's Pakistan-origin players receive visas

The ICC has stepped in to facilitate visa formalities for all 42 players and officials of Pakistan origin bound for the Men's T20 World Cup in India. In the England squad, cricketers of Pakistan lineage include spinners Adil Rashid, Rehan Ahmed and pacer Saqib Mahmood. The USA will be represented by Ali Khan and Shayan Jahangir, while the Netherlands have Zulfiqar Saqib to name a few. It is learnt that visas have already been cleared for England players Rashid, Rehan and Saqib. Members of the Netherlands squad have also received their visas. Canada staff member Shah Saleem Zafar has been granted clearance. Visa arrangements are underway for players and officials of Pakistan nationality or origin who are part of teams from the UAE, the USA, Italy, Bangladesh and Canada.



Ball girl collapses in Australian Open heat

Play was halted during an Australian Open first-round match on Sunday when a ball girl fainted in soaring temperatures, with players Zeynep Sonmez, *in pic with the girl*, and Ekaterina Alexandrova rushing to help her.

Pankaj Advani claims his 11th National snooker crown

Pankaj Advani overcame a late fightback from former champion Aditya Mehta to win 6-3 and claim his 11th National snooker title in the 92nd edition of the premier championship in Bahadurgarh (Haryana) on Sunday. Advani won 30-67 (51), 70 (70) -38, 77-6, 75-38, 141 (133) -0, 0-121 (51, 70), 6-67, 63-57, 63-1.

An retains title with a scintillating display

The Korean World No. 1 proves too good for the second-ranked Wang as she repeatedly sets up the Chinese, making her work for every point; Taiwanese Lin pulls off an upset victory over the higher-ranked Indonesian Christie in just 38 minutes in the men's singles summit clash

INDIA OPEN SUPER 750

Uthra Ganesan
NEW DELHI





A cut above the rest: An and Lin emerged champions with straight-game wins in their respective finals. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

She came, she saw, she won, again. An Se-young continued to prove why she is the most dominant women's badminton player in the world at the moment, retaining her India Open title with a comprehensive 21-13, 21-11 victory over World No. 2 Zhi Yi Wang here on Sunday.

If her dismantling of Ratchanok Intanon in the semifinals was a masterclass, the Korean served a reminder in the final that she had a lot more in her arsenal. The finalists may have been separated by just one place in the world rankings, but on the court, An was simply unbeatable.

She began with probing her opponent at the net, bringing Wang closer with deceptive drops only for the latter to realise they were non-returnable and hit the net or the net cord. She repeatedly set up the Chinese, making her work for every point only to fire a powerful smash down the line, hugging the marking tape on the mat.

With her range of strokes complemented by a strength that Wang struggled to counter, An raced to 7-1 in the opening game before the former switched plans, forcing the latter to go long and wide, earn quick points and close the gap to 15-13. But that was to be the last of her challenge, the second game being even more one-sided with An letting out a scream as the shuttle went wide at the net.

Taiwan's Chun-Yi Lin, meanwhile, completely dominated Jonatan Christie, upsetting the higher-ranked Indonesian in straight games 21-10, 21-18 in just 38 minutes in the men's singles final. Lin, who had to work hard for his previous wins against Lakshya Sen and Victor Lai, did not allow any space and controlled the play even as an increasingly frustrated Christie faded away despite a few sparks of fightback in the second game.

The results (finals): Men: Chun-Yi Lin (Tpe) bt Jonatan Christie (Ina) 21-10, 21-18.
Doubles: Wei Keng Liang & Chang Wang (Chn) bt Hiroki Midorikawa & Kyohei Yamashita (Jpn) 17-21, 25-23, 21-16.
Women: An Se-young (Kor) bt Zhi Yi Wang (Chn) 21-13, 21-11.
Doubles: Liu Sheng Shu & Tan Ning (Chn) bt Yuki Fukushima & Mayu Matsumoto (Jpn) 21-11, 21-18. **Mixed:** Dechapol Puavaranukroh & Supissara Paewsampran (Tha) bt Mathias Christiansen & Alexandra Boje (Den) 19-21, 25-23, 21-18.

Already a bonafide legend, An continues to chase perfection

Uthra Ganesan
NEW DELHI



Perfectionist: An says she is disappointed when she makes mistakes and loses a point. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

'How does one beat you' evoked confusion and eventually a giggle from An Se-young as the 23-year-old finally realised the question after winning her 10th match against Zhi Yi Wang in the final of the India Open, her sixth title in as many tournaments.

"I know everyone will try their best to win against me (but) I will try my best not to lose," she smiled.

It is a question few have managed to find an answer to on the World Tour. Last year, An, Paris Olympics champion, reached 12 finals in 15 events, winning 11, a 94.8 match winning percent. It is still not perfect enough for the Korean.

She admits constantly winning is a pressure but also gave a peep into the mindset that makes her so intimidating.

"I feel pressure but I don't think about my feelings. I just try to do my best on the day and focus on the game.

"I am disappointed when I make mistakes and lose a point and when I do, I think I have to do more, try and find out my mistakes and work on them," she said.

This from a player who hasn't dropped a game in nine matches and conceded a grand total of 115 points in five matches here.

"She is stable, strong and plays faster in every aspect. She is one of the strongest opponents but Chen Yu Fei and Tai Tzu Ying are also tough opponents. I will try to improve my abilities and skills, change some strategies and beat her in the future," Wang insisted.

While most other players have struggled with the drift and wind inside the cavernous arena, specially on the far side of the courts, An seems to be unaffected with all the small talk.

"It is not easy," she protested with a laugh when asked about the conditions. "Every player has a different style of playing. I only want to do my best, I see how the court is going on and match my speed and everything else with the court to counter the drift," she shrugged.

Her coach declared they were working on getting even better. "The semifinal (against Ratchanok Intanon) I think was perfect but since she doesn't think so, we are working on her movements, footwork and attacking strokes to get better," coach Lee Hyun-Il explained through a translator. An's own idea of perfection is a 21-0 win. It may not happen soon but the thought is scary enough.

BWF to continue its 25-second time clock trials to curb delays

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) will test its 25-second time clock at the Indonesia Masters next week, continuing trials at select World Tour tournaments to curb tactical delays and standardise match flow, a move that has drawn mixed reactions from players and coaches.

Under the system, the clock starts once the umpire updates the score, with both server and receiver required to be ready to serve and receive before 25 seconds expire.

China's World No. 2 Wang Zi Yi welcomed the move, saying the players would adapt if the rule was enforced uniformly.

"If the rule is going to apply, players will adjust to it. It will address the issue of delay by players," Wang said.

Umpires retain discretion to allow longer breaks in exceptional circumstances such as medical intervention or extensive court mopping.

Tokyo Olympic champion Chen Yu Fei said adjusting after physically demanding rallies could be challenging.

"I think when we finish long rallies, I feel 20-25 seconds is not enough but we can try," she said after finishing at the semifinal.

Approved by the BWF Council at its meeting on August 29 last year, the rules came into effect at the Australia Open Super 500 from November 18 to 23 as part of the federation's initiative to improve sport presentation and ensure continuous play.

Former India doubles player and current coach B. Sumeeth Reddy said standardising the rule was necessary but cautioned that practicality must be factored in.

"Some matches finish fast because players don't take breaks, while some last forever because of repeated pauses. From a spectator's point of view, that becomes boring," he said.

However, he warned against rigid enforcement after physically draining rallies.

The BWF has conducted preliminary system tests without enforcement and plans further trials in the coming months alongside consultations with member associations, coaches and players before deciding on permanent adoption of the system.

Susaki powers Haryana Thunders to the top

PWL

Sports Bureau

Japanese star Yui Susaki proved her mettle, winning by technical superiority 16-0 in just 57 seconds against Saarika to lead Haryana Thunders to a 6-3 victory against Delhi Dangal Warriors and top position on the points table in the Pro Wrestling League in Noida.

In the day's other face-off, UP Dominators produced a dominant performance for a 7-2 win against Tiigers of Mumbai Dangals, led by Under-20 World Champion Antim Panghal's 15-0 technical superiority win against Jyoti Sihag.

The results:
Haryana Thunders 6-3 Delhi Dangal Warriors
Men: 57kg: Ankush Chandram (Haryana Thunders) bt Shubham Kaushik (Delhi Dangal Warriors) 13-3.
65kg: Sujeet Kalkal (Delhi Dangal Warriors) bt Tumur Ochir Tulga (Haryana Thunders) 2-1.
74kg: Turan Bayramov (Delhi Dangal Warriors) bt Parvinder (Haryana Thunders) 8-1.
86kg: Vafaeipour Hadi Bakhtiar (Delhi Dangal Warriors) bt Ashirov Ashraf (Haryana Thunders) Forfeit.
125kg: Anirudh Gulia (Haryana Thunders) bt Ronak (Delhi Dangal Warriors) 13-0.
Women: 53kg: Yui Susaki (Haryana Thunders) bt Saarika (Delhi Dangal Warriors) 16-0.
57kg: Neha Sangwan (Haryana Thunders) bt Karla Godinez Gonzalez (Delhi Dangal Warriors) 18-2.
62kg: Iryna Koliadenko (Haryana Thunders) bt Anjli (Delhi Dangal Warriors) 13-0.
76kg: Kajal Dhochak (Haryana Thunders) bt Anastasiya Alpyeyeva (Delhi Dangal Warriors) 6-5.
UP Dominators 7-2 Tiigers of Mumbai Dangals
Men: 57kg: Aman Sehrawat (Tiigers of Mumbai Dangals) bt Sagar (UP Dominators) 16-1.
65kg: Vishal Kaliraman (UP Dominators) bt Ali Rahimzade (Tiigers of Mumbai Dangals) 3-2.
74kg: Abhimanyu Mandwal (UP Dominators) bt Naveen Malik (Tiigers of Mumbai Dangals) 4-0.
86kg: Mukul Dahiya (Tiigers of Mumbai Dangals) bt Mykhailov Vasyl (UP Dominators) 15-2.
125kg: Jaspooran Singh (UP Dominators) bt Oleksandr Khotsianivskyi (Tiigers of Mumbai Dangals) 3-1.
Women: 53kg: Antim Panghal (UP Dominators) bt Jyoti Sihag (Tiigers of Mumbai Dangals) 15-0.
57kg: Tapsya Gahlawat (UP Dominators) bt Alina Filipovych (Tiigers of Mumbai Dangals) 9-0.
62kg: Nisha Dahiya (UP Dominators) bt Olha Padoshyk (Tiigers of Mumbai Dangals) 5-0.
76kg: Mansi Lather (UP Dominators) bt Jyoti Berwal (Tiigers of Mumbai Dangals) 2-1.

Martyn reveals he was given '50-50 chance' of survival

Agence France-Presse
MELBOURNE



In retrospect: Martyn acknowledged that his experience was a reminder of "how fragile life is". FILE PHOTO

Australian Test cricket great Damien Martyn has revealed he was only given a 50 percent chance of surviving after being put in an induced coma with meningitis last month.

The 54-year-old former batsman, who played 67 Tests between 1992 and 2006 and 208 ODIs, was rushed to hospital on December 27. He was in a coma for eight days, but miraculously pulled through and is now back home.

In a heartfelt social media post late Saturday, Martyn said it was touch and go whether he would live and the experience was a reminder of "how fragile life is".

"After being given a 50-50 chance of surviving, I came out of the induced coma eight days later not able to walk or talk. And yet four days after that, with the doctors in disbelief, I walked, talked and proved to them all why I should be released from hospital to start my recovery," he said.

"So happy to be home, to be able to put my feet in the sand on the beach and to start thanking all those people that reached out to me and my family in their unwavering support," he added.

"Bring on 2026... I'm back."

Martyn, known as one of the game's great strokemakers, became a key figure in Steve Waugh's all-powerful Australia side, hitting 13 centuries and averaging 46.37.

Arjun beats Praggnanandhaa; Gukesh draws with Sindarov

CHESS

Press Trust of India
WIJK AAN ZEE



Quick work: Arjun emerged victorious in just 32 moves. FILE PHOTO: DEBASISH BHADURI

Top seed Arjun Erigaisi scored a convincing victory over compatriot R. Praggnanandhaa, while World Champion D. Gukesh played out a hard-fought draw against World Cup winner Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan in the first round of the Tata Steel Masters here.

The first victory was scored by Hans Moke Niemann of the United States, who was pleasantly surprised to notice an optical blunder by Slovenian Vladimir Fedoseev early in the middle game.

Fedoseev resigned as early as on move 16 when material loss was inevitable.

German Vincent Keymer was the other winner as he scored at the expense of Dutch star Anish Giri.

Arjun, Keymer and Niemann share the lead on a full point, a half point ahead of Gukesh and seven others.

Arjun faced the Queen's Gambit accepted against Praggnanandhaa, who erred early in the middle game as his King got stuck in the centre.

Arjun calculated precisely to cause a huge damage to an already weakened King. The game was over in just 32 moves.

Gukesh came close but could not convert his advantage in to a victory over Sindarov who played white.

The Queen's gambit declined, has been in Gukesh's arsenal for quite some time now, and he came up with a stylish queen sacrifice that should have sealed the game on another day.

However, Sindarov was quite resourceful and kept providing resistance even though it looked that his king was in mortal danger. The longest game of the day's contest was drawn after 78 moves.

The other Indian in fray, Aravindh Chithambaram also started off with a draw against Matthias Bluebaum of Germany.

The results (round 1): Javokhir Sindarov (Uzb) drew with D. Gukesh; Arjun Erigaisi bt R. Praggnanandhaa; Aravindh Chithambaram drew with Matthias Bluebaum (Ger); Hans Moke Niemann (USA) bt Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo).
Vincent Keymer (Ger) bt Anish Giri (Ned); Jorden van Foreest (Ned) drew with Thai Dai Van Nguyen (Cze); Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus (Tur) drew with Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb).



Collective success is King's catalyst

The leg-spinner is quick to shift focus on team work when individual performances are discussed; she feels being a late entrant to the national side has been a blessing in disguise, is looking forward to her stint at the WPL, passing her knowledge to youngsters

Kavita Menon

There are figures attached to Alana King's career that others might frame and celebrate – a seven-wicket haul in a World Cup match and a unique Test five-for at the Melbourne Cricket Ground that helped seal an Ashes whitewash. But she carries them lightly.

Ask her about standout days or mind-boggling spells, and she immediately shifts the focus towards the group, the work, and the shared result. It is a perspective that shapes not only the way she plays, but also how she processes success, guiding how she approaches each match and measures the value of every contribution.

It's striking to consider how different things might have been for Australia and herself had she not answered that defining phone call, a reward of her quiet hard work. It catapulted King to the biggest stage, with the national team landing its newest leg-spin talent.

The call that changed everything

The bold move from Victoria to Western Australia the season prior, coupled with a strong Women's Big Bash League (WBBL) campaign, had paid off and placed King firmly on the radar. And that career-altering moment came ahead of the 2022 Women's Ashes series.

"That phone call will live rent-free in my head. I think as soon as I got into camp, the whole group made me feel really welcomed. I felt like I belonged. Things changed a lot from that moment," she recalled in a conversation with *The Hindu*.

King, coming in as a replacement for injured Georgia Wareham, had no expectations of playing and was content simply to be around the squad, absorbing as much as she could. But little did she know that her maiden cap was far closer than anticipated.

"To play the first T20 and then go on to make all three debuts in that series was pretty remarkable. I don't think it really hit until that first game of the Ashes, that first T20 at Adelaide Oval, when I was singing the anthems with my teammates. I was like wow this is a really cool moment I'm getting to live."

Debuting at 26, slightly later than many of her peers, King realised a childhood dream with her ever-supporting family watching from the stands. "I came into the Australian squad at a later age, but I think I was a lot more mature as a cricketer and as a person. I wouldn't have it any other way," she recalled.

To the fast lane

Australia backed its new entrant across the Ashes, and King repaid the faith with wickets in all but one game, playing her part in a dominant home series win and, in turn, earning a maiden World Cup call-up.

The 2022 Women's ODI World Cup in New Zealand remains a special chapter. King finished as the team's second-highest wicket-taker with 12 scalps in nine matches, including a pivotal three-wicket haul in the final against defending champion England.

Just two months into her international career, King had ascended to the highest throne – a World Cup winner with Australia. From there, the trajectory only continued upward, fuelled by a simple mantra: "Do anything to help this team win". She had steadily evolved into a lethal weapon for the Green & Gold juggernaut, her versatility and willingness to embrace any role emerging as decisive assets. Whether it was constricting the run flow, unsettling batters, or shifting seamlessly into her preferred wicket-taking mode, she delivered every time.

An Ashes of a lifetime

If King had not already become a familiar name in the women's game, she certainly did during the historic 2025 Women's Ashes – a series that would soon be remembered as Alana King's Ashes.

She began with 11 wickets across the ODIs, highlighted by a sublime five-for that handed the home side a commanding lead. Three more scalps followed in the T20Is, setting the stage for the series-defining Test at the MCG.

King struck early, grinding through a marathon 23-over spell to take four wickets in the first innings. She matched it in the second, but wanted one more – not for the milestone, but to get Australia over the line.

England's final pair resisted stubbornly, yet it was fitting that King delivered the decisive blow, sealing an innings victory and her maiden Test five-for. The effort etched her name onto the MCG honours board, making her only the second woman after Peggy Antonio to do so.

She finished with 23 wickets, equalling Ashleigh Gardner's Ashes record, but it was the 16-0 clean sweep that mattered most. "It was an incredible series as a collective. To play a big part in that, I'm very proud of. We celebrated the victory because they don't come around all that often in the Ashes," she said.

If King had not already become a familiar name in the women's game, she certainly did during the historic 2025 Women's Ashes – a series that would soon be remembered as Alana King's Ashes

When winning isn't guaranteed

For all the dominance Australia has enjoyed, the past two years have also delivered sobering reminders of how unforgiving elite cricket can be. The invincibility that once defined the side was punctured in consecutive World Cup semifinals – first at the 2024 Women's T20 World Cup, and then again at the 2025 Women's ODI World Cup.

"We were quite disappointed that we stumbled in the semifinal. Unfortunately, the last couple of years, we've lost two crucial games in the World Cup," she admitted.

The title holder was stunned by India, the eventual champion, only two months ago. "It hurts, no doubt. It's always good in hindsight because you can always say, we should have done this or we could have done that. But at the end of the day, credit to India.

"They outplayed us. It was a really important game. For them to go on to win the World Cup, no doubt they would have done the whole of India proud. It's going to do a world of good for the women's game all around," she said.

That solitary loss, as brutal as it was, did little to overshadow the broader picture of Australia's campaign. Six wins from seven matches, and a washout, meant it once again completed a flawless group stage.

The run was aptly capped by another crowning moment for King – a rare seven-wicket haul, the first such feat in World Cup history. "It was one of those days, and it all happened really quickly. I didn't obviously take it in then," said King, who uprooted South Africa in quick time.

"I got spoken about a fair bit, which I get a little bit embarrassed about. It was great that my mum and dad were there to witness it. It doesn't come around that often. I'll remember it for the rest of my career and even post my career."

There was pride in the performance, but she accepted it would have felt more rewarding if the team had finished on a high note. "I don't really look at personal accolades too much. I would have loved to have that included in a World Cup win, but it was not meant to be."

Sharpening the edge

The highs of personal achievement are never an endpoint, but a foundation for the next challenge for King. Her leg-spin, always her go-to weapon, is honed relentlessly, with hours spent refining variations and upping her skill.

"When you're under pressure, you're going to go to the ball that you're going to feel most comfortable with," she explained. "I spend a lot of time working on that. No doubt, you have to work on a few variations to make sure you're keeping ahead of the game and the batters."

She approaches each game with focus, curiosity, and a drive to improve. "Whether it's variations or just tactical things, I think I learn a lot from my own peers, my teammates and the coaches and mentors that I've got around me.

"I keep having honest conversations with people I know who are going to give me the truth and not sugarcoat anything on where I need to get better at. I'm definitely looking forward to the challenge this year," King said.

The upcoming India series on home soil offers a fresh test. She is well aware of the threat posed by a rejuvenated and inspired line-up. "India is going to be a massive threat in all formats of the game. It's going to be a very exciting series," she said.

Challenges ahead

But before the multi-format schedule and an all-important T20 World Cup, there's the Women's Premier League, where King is donning the Delhi Capitals jersey, in as a replacement for fellow Aussie Anabel Sutherland.

Initially going unsold in this year's mega auction and getting scant game time with her previous franchise, UP Warriorz, King is ready for what's to come. "It feels like I've blinked and I'm back in India," she quipped. "No doubt, I would have loved to have a bit more game time last year, but that's the way cricket goes, especially franchise cricket.

"But I think it's just an exciting time to be here. I get to pass on some knowledge to the younger generation, the domestic players over here, and learn from them as well. I'm playing with some new international players I haven't played with before. I've never worked with Jonathan Batty before, so I'm excited for that.

"If I'm in the best 11, I'm in the best 11. I'll go and play my role. I'm here to enjoy it, contribute to the team and learn as much as I can."

For King, it's a constant quest to better herself, with the bigger picture always in mind. Her humility and commitment to collective success keep her a step ahead, both in the game and beyond. And she will continue to move forward the same way she always has – focused on the work, anchored in the team and content to let her mastery speak for her.



THE GIST

For King, the highs of personal achievement are never an endpoint, but a foundation for the next challenge. Her leg-spin, always her go-to weapon, is honed relentlessly, with hours spent refining variations and upping her skill

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From back office to cutting edge, India emerges as hub for GCCs

The availability of a large, cheaper English-speaking IT workforce led foreign firms to begin setting up subsidiaries in the country 40 years ago. Today, multinational companies have deepened their presence in this multi-billion dollar oasis in the job market, with at least one Global Capability Centre being established every week. From playing a supporting role, GCCs are now shaping the business, finds **Aroon Deep**

When chipmaker Texas Instruments set up shop in Bangalore in 1984, a photograph was taken at the office's doorstep of wooden crates being carefully unloaded from a bullock cart as an employee looks on. The grainy image would go on to surface in retellings of the journey of India's information technology (IT) industry for decades to come. The crates contained parts for a private satellite dish that the firm's executives would use not only to stay in touch with its headquarters in Dallas - which landlines could already do - but also transmit software code. Gatekept Internet access was two years away.

Over 40 years on, the firm is often cited as perhaps the first Global Capability Centre (GCC) in India. A big reason behind it taking the trouble of setting up a sophisticated communication link with its head office and opening an offshore unit exists even today: the availability of a large and cheaper English-speaking IT workforce in India.

There are over 1,800 GCCs in India today. According to some industry estimates, at least one GCC is being established every week in the country. "The total revenue generated by GCCs in the last five years has grown from $40.4 billion in FY19 to $64.6 billion in FY24 with a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 9.8%," Minister of State for Electronics and IT Jitin Prasada said in a written reply in Parliament in August 2025.

> If you gave me an opportunity to go abroad, maybe I would for one or two years, but I would definitely want to come back here. This is because with the GCC boom, there are more opportunities here
>
> **GAYATHRI SUBRAMONIAN**
> Human resources executive, Staples, Inc.



On the rise: GCCs are mushrooming in India's urban centres, allowing foreign firms to hire Indian talent at scale without bearing relocation costs. The model, a hit with governments, provides career growth pathways to people who may have struggled to find Indian firms willing to pay for their skills. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Shift in geopolitical reality

It has historically been cheaper for companies to hire Indians who immigrate to the U.S. than to set up local operations. Indians were welcomed, if not always with open arms, with the promise of a better life. This is no longer the geopolitical reality, with many immigration hotspots like the U.S. sharply limiting newcomers.

"We are seeing right now that mobility issues are very challenging," says Sangeeta Gupta, senior vice-president at Nasscom, the main industry body for Indian and global IT firms. Even in the past, emigration opportunities were only available in "pockets", but now those are also shrinking, she says.

"Today, if I am a mid-level or senior-level talent, [going abroad] may be on my agenda. But it is not the only agenda that I am looking at because if I'm not a high-end PhD in data science and AI [candidate], the opportunities for me are going to be very, very limited in different markets unlike in the past. So clearly, I think working in a GCC is a great opportunity," she says.

Employees may be inclined to agree. Since they are not exactly freshers, foreign companies tend to pay them a competitive salary, even if the pay is not weighing down balance sheets as much as a western counterpart. As Gupta points out, GCCs "aren't big campus hirers", preferring to secure mid- or late-stage recruits who can "hit the ground running" and contribute to their parent organisations immediately.

Gayathri Subramonian, human resources executive at Staples, Inc., has a lot to appreciate about working at GCCs and the India arms of multinational companies. Generous leave policies, two-day weekends, and a "flat organisational structure" were all a departure from a domestic manufacturing conglomerate in Chennai where she started her career, she says.

"My husband studied in the U.S., worked there, and moved back," Subramonian says. "Personally, I never wanted to go abroad. If you gave me an opportunity to go abroad, maybe I would for one or two years, but I would definitely want to come back here," she says. This is because with the GCC boom, there are more opportunities here, she adds.

Staples is a household name in the U.S. for stationery and office supplies with no consumer-facing presence in India. The firm's recently opened office in Chennai's Perungudi, 100 strong and growing, forms an "innovation hub" that is "focused on building seamless technology solutions", according to its website. The firm is not the only company that is unrecognisable to Indian firms but leveraging the country as a talent hub. Target, the big box U.S. retailer, has over 4,000 employees in its Bengaluru GCC. Rakuten, a Japanese e-commerce giant, has over 1,700 people in its 20-storey office in Domlur, Bengaluru.

A key turning point

While the opportunity to build a GCC was always ripe for the taking, it took more than shifting sentiments on immigration for global firms to pour serious money into the construct. A key turning point was the COVID-19 pandemic. "What we have seen post COVID is almost a very rapid acceleration of global companies" setting up shop in India, Gupta says. There has been a "hockey stick" growth in GCCs in India, she adds, with States eager to attract businesses.

This is a striking departure from the days of the entry of Texas Instruments. For that firm, the then Rajiv Gandhi government had to break "26 different rules", according to *Embedded Autonomy*, a 1995 Stanford University Press book by Peter Evans on different countries' digitisation baby steps. In spite of that political support, the firm set up its Indian unit only after two States turned it away, the book says, citing a Silicon Valley newsletter published by a network of Indian professionals. Now, Tamil Nadu, one of those States, has taxpayer-funded investor facilitation organisations like Guidance Tamil Nadu boasting about its "pro-business policies" for GCCs.



> Since firms opening a GCC aren't exactly pinching pennies, there is little pressure to cut costs when setting up. If I look at productivity, it is 25-30% better because you are hiring laterals who are qualified to do the job
>
> **SMITHA HEMMIGAE**
> Co-founder and managing director, ANSR Global

At one level, the terminology of GCCs is a branding coup. The term itself is several years old - it is not clear who coined it, its first use buried under a deluge of adopters and imitators over the late 2010s - but it has coincided with a vigorous accompaniment of any firm entering India to save on costs and leverage local talent.

"When we started the whole GCC journey in India, we used to have something called the Captive Forum," Gupta says. "We used to say, 'Oh, these are companies that are captive of their parent enterprise and that's the only work they do'." However, captivity, understandably, doesn't make for a fulfilling sense of identity, or even decent branding, she says.

"These companies came back and said, 'No, that's a very narrow kind of word. It obviously is also not something that helps us attract talent and doesn't really communicate the work we do.' So we pivoted to the second phase, where we called them Global In-house Centres because we were trying to be very straight about these being in-house arms for global companies," she adds.

"We shifted in 2018-19 to GCCs, because they said it is more than just about cost-effective talent; it is about deep capabilities that we are building out, whether it is finance and accounting capabilities on the business process outsourcing side, which is not just hiring people and doing the same process, but reimagining those processes; or it is the pure tech capability. And increasingly, it is a lot more about cybersecurity, AI, and those kinds of skills also that people are focusing on," Gupta says.

Support to find footing in India

There is a whole industry now to help GCCs find their footing in India, from scouting office space - building it if necessary - to providing the kind of corporate consulting that is needed to get foreign firms to set up a fully functional office in India. ANSR Global, headquartered in Bengaluru, is the "biggest" firm in this space, says Smitha Hemmigae, the firm's co-founder and managing director, in an interview from her office in the city.

Since firms opening a GCC aren't exactly pinching pennies, Hemmigae says, there is little pressure to cut costs when setting up. "We have always set it up for value first," she says. "Generally, if I go back and look at productivity, it is 25-30% better because you are hiring laterals who are qualified to do the job."



> What we have seen post COVID-19 is almost a very rapid acceleration of global companies setting up shop in India. There has been a 'hockey stick' growth in GCCs in the country, with States eager to attract businesses
>
> **SANGEETA GUPTA**
> Senior vice-president, Nasscom

This fact, which comes up in multiple conversations about GCCs, has its own implications. These firms are, in some sense, the natural successors to the IT industry in an age of increasing automation and a global climb up the enterprise services value chain ladder. However, as Hemmigae points out, "there is no bench". In other words, everybody is hired for a certain role, with an expectation that their existing experience positions them well to succeed.

That also means that unlike in an IT set-up, this is not a phenomenon that could give poor but educated people a pathway into the middle class. But that doesn't mean there are no upsides: GCCs can keep high-value people within the country, paying taxes within the country and being a part of the local economy directly.

For that well-positioned part of the job economy, white-collar professionals who can find their way in a global firm, this is making work here a more compelling prospect than it perhaps has been in the past. When the India operations of global firms were all back office jobs, Subramonian says, "it was just a supporting [role in] the business". Now, she says, "we are also shaping the business in some form". "So that contribution makes us feel like we are part of the core business... there's a lot of action happening here."

This does not mean, however, that Indians who can secure good opportunities to go abroad are leaving at a slower pace. Sanjaya Baru, journalist-turned-political adviser to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, wrote in *Secession of the Successful* last year that this trend is actually growing. Baru's optimism about GCCs as a counterweight is tempered.

"While Indian reports on GCCs tend to focus on the number of jobs being created in India and the attractive remuneration being offered, there is little focus on the role that such GCCs play in sustaining the global dominance of U.S. firms," Baru writes, arguing that while employees working in these firms do acquire skills that they can then entrepreneurially deploy in service of founding domestic champions, this "remains a pious hope", an article of faith.



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>
> **ALOUK KUMAR**
> Founder, Inductus

If the trend reverses and foreign firms cut back on GCC investments, the skills Indians have brought to the table may not immediately benefit Indian industry, he argues.

"Given the low level of investment [in research and development and other] competencies that global firms are hiring in GCCs, the question is moot when and whether local demand for such services would substitute for global demand if and when foreign firms choose to reduce their dependence on Indian GCCs," he says.

"What if hiring by GCCs comes to a halt? [This may not] happen in the short- to medium-term, but what such questions draw one's attention to is the fact that if local demand for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and high-tech skills does not rise, the growing supply of such skills will mean that Indian talent will continue to serve foreign firms."

On the cusp of another rebranding

For now, at any rate, the business of setting up GCCs remains compelling. Alouk Kumar, founder of Inductus - another firm that has helped a handful of GCCs set up shop in the country - estimates that employees get paid an average of "1.2 lakh to 1.5 lakh" a month, a sum that would put most employees in the top 2% of the country.

"The current GCCs have an average of around 1,100 employees", but this number will come down as smaller firms abroad also seek to open GCCs at a smaller per-unit scale. Kumar says small- and medium-sized businesses are averse to even having a local entity due to paperwork and "other headaches" that entail. Inductus and some other firms have started offering to hire and pay candidates on their behalf, technically becoming their employer, he says.

As GCCs evolve and adapt, they may also be on the cusp of another rebranding. After scrapping terms like captive centres and Global In-house Centres, Gupta says, "Now, people are saying, 'No, GCC also is not a good enough word. We should be called global innovation hubs'."

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Battle for survival: Tribal farmers of Inumuru village showing the remains of the maize crop allegedly destroyed by revenue and police officials on December 22, 2025. (Bottom) Tribespeople explaining the incident. K.V.S. Giri

Ploughing through tribal sustenance

A land dispute between tribal and non-tribal interests at a remote hamlet in Eluru district escalated when standing maize crop grown by Koya families was destroyed using tractors on December 22, 2025, allegedly by revenue and police officials. **G.V.R. Subba Rao** finds out what happened that day

The morning of December 22 2025 began quietly at Inumuru, a nondescript tribal hamlet on the forest edge in Antarvedigudem panchayat. The maize crop, tall and green, stood blanketed in low-hanging fog over the field. Women, engrossed in chores, moved busily through the narrow lanes separating the huts, and the laughter of children chasing goats along field bunds beckoned the settled routines of tribal life to yet another day.

For the Koya families who lived here, the land was not something written on papers or stored in offices far away. It was a matter of memory; it's where their parents, grandparents and those before them had bent their backs to grow their sustenance.

Little did they know that by 3 p.m. that day, the calm they were used to in the hamlet would be irreparably shattered.

"I was in the field when we heard the distant roar of engines. We thought it was some farmer from the neighbouring village, but got to know soon that police and revenue officials, along with the *Bhuswami* (landlord) were there. The tractor ploughed through our maize, destroying months of effort in minutes," says P. Rama Durga, a 30-year-old resident of the hamlet.

The tribespeople ran to the edge of the fields, shouting and waving their hands, but the tractors pressed on. Revenue and police officials were there in support of the landowner, Yandrapragada Satyanarayana, a resident of the nearby Doramamidi village. Satyanarayana and his family members claim ownership of the land where the tribespeople grow their crops.

"I remember my alludu (a term meaning nephew or son-in-law but generally used by local tribeswomen to address their kin) Chander's cry, raw and hoarse, as he tried to push a machine away with his bare hands. Smoke from the engine mingled with the dust and the sweet smell of crushed maize," recalls Papamma, a tribal woman in her early fifties.

Chander, who is in his early thirties, alleged that Buttaigudem Sub-Inspector of Police (SI) D. Umamaheswar Rao struck him on the forehead with a stick when he stood in front of the tractor to stop it from destroying the crop. "Villagers rushed me to a nearby hospital, where I got three stitches," he says.

Papamma, who went to rescue Chander that day, recalls the police action as one that came without any warning. Men were struck first, then women. One man fell, blood running down his forehead, and a woman trying to pull him up was hit across the back. Another screamed as she was pushed to the ground. The air was filled with shouts, cries and the relentless mechanical growl of the tractor destroying the crop.

> I was in the field when we heard the distant roar of engines. We thought it was some farmer from the neighbouring village, but later got to know that the police and revenue officials, along with the landlord, had come. The tractor ploughed through our maize, destroying months of effort in minutes.
>
> **P. RAMA DURGA**
> A resident of the hamlet

By the time the sun began its descent, a portion of the seven-acre land used by 57 families for collective cultivation of maize had turned into a wasteland, with maize stalks and young cobs crushed into the earth. "I could hear the trembling sobs of our relatives. I had never seen our village like this, so small, so powerless," says Chander.

What the police say

The police, however, have a different version of the incident. The SI claims that the police acted solely to maintain law and order at Inumuru, where revenue officials were removing illegal tribal occupation of disputed land.

The SI said he, along with a constable, went to Inumuru to protect the revenue officials. As the eviction was under way, a large number of tribespeople, outnumbering both the police and revenue officials, gathered at the spot.

The situation turned tense when the tribespeople rushed towards the landowner and officials. Some people were holding sticks and sickles. While trying to restrain one individual wielding a stick, that person suffered a minor injury. "It was not an assault. The injury occurred during an attempt to prevent further violence," he says.

Tellam Balaji, another villager, demands to know why the police should intervene in a civil dispute. The villagers tried to prevent the eviction by forming human chains and pleading with the officials, the landowner and even the tractor driver, but in vain.

"One of them shouted something about 'illegal crops' and 'encroachment,' but to us, this was our life, our survival. The maize was not encroachment; it was sustenance."

Buttaigudem Tahsildar P.V. Chalapathi Rao, however, asserts it was indeed encroachment. "The land measuring 23.01 acres in survey numbers 210, 217 and 218 legally belong to Yandrapragada Satyanarayana, as per revenue records and settlement orders. Based on repeated complaints and official inquiries, police protection was sanctioned," the Tahsildar says.

If it was indeed private land, wonders Rama Durga, how the government could allot five acres at the same location to the kin of Nagi Reddy, a Kondareddy tribal man allegedly gunned down by miscreants over the land dispute in the 1990s? The *adangal* (land record) by Chodem Gangulu, who used to collect tax for Gutala zamindar, clearly showed that the land didn't belong to the *bhuswami*.

> The occupants refused to vacate the land. When we tried to explain the legal position, they turned violent, assaulted revenue staff and damaged official vehicles. The villagers sprinkled chilli powder in my eyes. An FIR has been registered at Buttaigudem police station.
>
> **P.V. CHALAPATHI RAO**
> Buttaigudem Tahsildar

"The officials tampered with the records after the online system was introduced," she alleges.

Agency regulations vest the authority to issue protection orders in tribal land disputes with the District Collector.

But tribespeople allege that in Buttaigudem mandal, Tahsildars and Revenue Divisional Officers (RDOs) routinely issue such orders. More troubling, they say, is the alleged political patronage behind such actions. Leaders from across party lines have been accused of backing non-tribal landholders in the matter.

Case against tribespeople

The second blow for the tribespeople came soon after the incident. Cases were registered against 20 villagers – 13 men and seven women – on charges of "obstruction, violence and lawlessness".

Chalapati Rao says he and his staff were attacked while inspecting the land. "The occupants refused to vacate the land. When we tried to explain the legal position, they turned violent, assaulted revenue staff and damaged official vehicles. The villagers sprinkled chilli powder in my eyes. An FIR (No.131/2025) has been registered at Buttaigudem police station," he says.

Tellam Ramakrishna, a CPI(M) leader and a resident of the hamlet who is one of the accused, claims that he was not even present at the hamlet when the incident occurred. "But my name was included in the police case."

Who actually owns the land?

Antarvedigudem panchayat, of which Inumuru is a part, of Buttaigudem mandal is a former Gutala Zamindari estate in a hilly terrain. It has been witnessing a long-standing land dispute between non-tribal pattadars (landholders) and local tribespeople.

According to officials, the disputed land parcels in revenue survey numbers 210, 217, and 218 were purchased through registered sale deeds beginning in 1959, and the buyers have been paying land revenue tax regularly ever since.

In 1985, the Director of Settlements, Andhra Pradesh, after examining sale deeds, revenue records and possession, ruled that these land parcels were never notified under estate abolition or land transfer regulation (LTR) provisions, were not taken over by the government and were not hit by Regulation 1 of 1970. The same year, the Special Deputy Collector (Tribal Welfare-Eluru) confirmed that possession of major portions of the land by non-tribals did not violate tribal land regulations.

Ramakrishna, however, disputes this. The Special Deputy Collector gave a verdict in favour of the tribespeople in 2004, wherein he stated that Satyanarayana was in possession of the land in contravention of the provisions of the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation (APSALT-1959) Regulation 1/59 and 1/70.

But the same court issued another order in 2022, favouring a non-tribal claimant (Satyanarayana), a decision the tribespeople allege was influenced by political pressure. "How can the Special Deputy Collector go back on the earlier verdict and pass another in favour of Satyanarayana (petitioner)? If the petitioner has any grievance, he should approach the appellate authority, not the same court," says Ramakrishna.

The matter is now pending before the Andhra Pradesh High Court. Despite the case being sub judice, revenue officials acted on a "protection order" and proceeded to enforce possession through police action, alleges Ramakrishna.

Tahsildar Chalapathi Rao says that official records reflect valid settlement pattas and lawful title. Protection orders were repeatedly issued by the RDO over the years owing to obstruction by the tribespeople. Despite these orders, the tribespeople currently cultivate about seven acres. Attempts by revenue and police officials to enforce protection reportedly led to clashes, resulting in a criminal case against the tribespeople for allegedly assaulting officials and landholders, he says.

On how her tribe was robbed of their rights, Rama Durga says: "They (non-tribals) lured our forefathers with *uppu sepa* (salted dry fish) and *pogaku* (tobacco), taking advantage of their ignorance of law and rights. Our elders, who knew only hard work and survival, were made to believe that salt, tobacco and a piece of cloth were enough. They were cheated and dispossessed [of their land]. But times have changed. We are educated, aware and no longer willing to accept injustice. We will fight to reclaim what we believe is rightfully ours."

