



# THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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## Army pays tributes to 2 soldiers killed in blast

Jammu: Army personnel pay tribute to two soldiers who were killed in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast near the Line of Control in Jammu's Akhnoor sector on Wednesday. General Officer Commanding of the Jammu-based White Knight Corps, Lieutenant General Navin Sachdeva led the wreath-laying ceremony for the slain soldiers | 11

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Foundation

## Adani Foundation pledges integrated 'Healthcare Temples' at Mumbai and Ahmedabad.

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Ahmedabad

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TAMIL NADU CORPORATION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN (Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department, Government of Tamil Nadu) File No.1033/HR/TSRLM/2024 Dated:12.02.2025 REQUEST FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR A HUMAN RESOURCE AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SENIOR CADRE OFFICERS IN TAMIL NADU CORPORATION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN

KERALA STATE INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES LTD. (A Government of Kerala Undertaking) Thiruvananthapuram - 14 Tel: 0471 2326947, Exn.23, 9 Email: hrd.ksiet@gmail.com, www.ksie.net ATTENTION ARCHITECTS !!

Arcil Premier ARC Asset Reconstruction Company (India) Ltd., (Arcil) CIN-U65999MH2002PLC134884 | Website: www.arcil.co.in Acting in its capacity as Trustee of Arcil-SBPS-073-I Trust set up in respect of financial assets relating to Revathy Polymers

PUBLIC NOTICE My Wife MANIYAMMAL R. W/o 4557419L. Ex-NK(TS) S RAJU, residing at No 211, Main Road, Keezhasinthaicherry - Vill, Melasinthaicherry - Po, Uthamapalayam - Tk, Theni - Dist, Tamilnadu - State, Pin - 625 524. her Name was wrongly entered as MANIYAMMAL only and Date of Birth also wrongly entered as 05-05-1967 in my Army Records. Shall henceforth be known as MANIYAMMAL R and her Date of Birth is 15.07.1967.

AUXILO E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the below Borrower/ Guarantors that the below described immovable property mentioned in SCHEDULE-I inter alia secured to Auxilo Finance Pvt Limited [AFPL] (Secured Creditor), the Physical Possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of AFPL on 30th March, 2024, will be sold by E-Auction on 04th March, 2025 on "As is where is" & "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" basis towards recovery of total sum of Rs. 2,82,35,677.84/- (Rupees Two Crores Eighty Two Lakhs Thirty Five Thousand Six Hundred Seventy Seven and Paise Eighty Four Only) which is total outstanding as on 17.11.2022 and the future contractual interest thereon and other cost and charges till the date of realization from Borrower/Co-Applicant as mentioned below:

Office No. 63, 6th Floor, Kalpataru Square, Kondiviti Road Andheri (East) Mumbai 400059- Maharashtra E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the below Borrower/ Guarantors that the below described immovable property mentioned in SCHEDULE-I inter alia secured to Auxilo Finance Pvt Limited [AFPL] (Secured Creditor), the Physical Possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of AFPL on 30th March, 2024, will be sold by E-Auction on 04th March, 2025 on "As is where is" & "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" basis towards recovery of total sum of Rs. 2,82,35,677.84/- (Rupees Two Crores Eighty Two Lakhs Thirty Five Thousand Six Hundred Seventy Seven and Paise Eighty Four Only) which is total outstanding as on 17.11.2022 and the future contractual interest thereon and other cost and charges till the date of realization from Borrower/Co-Applicant as mentioned below:

Government of Tamil Nadu Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department District Rural Development Agency, Erode Roc.No. 5682/2024/A11 Dt. 10.02.2025 Notice Inviting Tender 2024-25 SCPAR - Anthyur New Panchayat Union Office Building

PAT Western Ghats Coffee Processing Federation 3/161D, Pallakadu, Kamatchiamman Kovil Street, Pandrimalai village, Dindigul 624212 Cell: 94420 92210, ceo@patwesternghats.com TENDER NOTICE: PAT-WGCPF/TN.01/2025 Date: 13.02.2025 Sealed tenders are invited from Registered Civil Engineers/Contractors (with a minimum of five years of experience in construction) for the establishment and construction of a Coffee Processing Units at S.F.No: 148/1, 149/1, 151/2 & 152/2, Pandrimalai Village, Dindigul West Taluk, Dindigul District. The tender should be submitted in separate envelopes for the Technical Bid and Financial Bid, along with an earnest money deposit of Rs. 3,84,750.00/- for 2% of Estimate Amount in the form of a Demand Draft (DD) in Favor of PAT Western Ghats Coffee Processing Federation, payable at Adalur, Dindigul. The last date of Tender submission is 27.02.2025 up to 03.00 PM and Tender will be opened on 27.02.2025 at 03.30 PM at PAT Western Ghats Coffee Processing Federation, Pandrimalai, Dindigul. Details of construction works for proposed CFC:

APTUS POSSESSION NOTICE Appendix IV (rule 8 (1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002) 8B, Doshi Towers, 205, Poonamalle High Road, Kilpauk, Chennai - 600 010. Whereas, the undersigned being the authorized officer of Aptus Finance India Private Limited under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued demand notice dated calling upon the borrowers to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers and the public in general that the undersigned has taken "Symbolic Possession" of the property described herein below in exercise of the powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rule.

Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd. Corporate Office : 802, Natraj By Rustomjee, Western Express Highway, Sir M.V. Road, Andher East, Mumbai - 400069, Maharashtra. Madurai Branch : Door No.409/1, No.Plot-409, First Floor, Sethu Arcade, Aringar Anna Nagar, 7th East Street, RS.No.79,Part, Shatamangalam Village, Ward No.34, Madurai North Taluk, Madurai-625020, Tamilnadu.

E-AUCTION - SALE NOTICE E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of immovable Properties under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Asset and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged, possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of Madurai Branch of Aadhar Housing Finance Limited will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" with no known encumbrances Particulars of which are given below:-

Asset Reconstruction Company (India) Ltd., (Arcil) CIN-U65999MH2002PLC134884 | Website: www.arcil.co.in Acting in its capacity as Trustee of Arcil-SBPS-073-I Trust set up in respect of financial assets relating to Revathy Polymers PUBLIC NOTICE FOR SALE THROUGH ONLINE E-AUCTION IN EXERCISE OF THE POWERS UNDER THE SECURITIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002 (SARFAESI ACT) READ WITH RULES 6, 8 & 9 OF SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002

CHANGE OF NAME Selvi, S. Rabiya Begum (Islam), Daughter of Thiru. S.Sirajudeen, Born on 18th July 1989, (District of Birth : Sivagangai), Residing at No. 15, Ambalakar Tharu, Karaikudi, Sivagangai - 630 001, has converted to Hinduism with the name of S.UDHAYA CHANDRIKA on 2nd January 2025. S.RABIYA BEGUM Sivagangai, 6th January 2025.

BEFORE THE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL AT MADURAI O.A.No. 85 of 2024 M/s. Karur Vysya Bank., Asset Recovery Branch, Melur Main Road, Mattuhavani, Represented by its Authorized Officer/ Senior Manager. ... Applicant

1) M/s. Janani Home Appliances, Represented by its Proprietor, AR Hospitals Opposite, Madurai Main Road, Ramanathapuram- 623 501 2) K.Kasinathan, S/o.Kilavan, Proprietor of M/s. Janani Home Appliances, AR Hospitals Opposite, Madurai Main Road, Ramanathapuram- 623 501 Having another address at No.1/998-1, Arul Nagar, Bharathi Nagar, Pattinamkattan, Ramanathapuram- 623 503.

PUBLISHED AS PER THE DIRECTION OF THE HON'BLE TRIBUNAL Please take notice that the above applicant Bank has filed the above application against you to recover the loan amount with subsequent interest and its costs. The above said case Posted on 06.03.2025 for your appearance. You should appear either in Person or through your counsel on 06.03.2025 at 10.30 a.m. Before the Registrar Court in the Tribunal (BSWL Level-IV Building, 1st Floor, CTO Compound, Tallakulam, Madurai) otherwise it will be decided in accordance with law. V.Sukumar Mark.J.Jackson P.Balamurugan R.Anbarasu B.Narayana Sudalai Muthu Advocates House-B' Ground Floor, Pomnani Garden, Uthangudi, Madurai-107.

QuoteExpress IF I HAVE SEEN FURTHER THAN OTHERS, IT IS BY STANDING UPON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS > ISAAC NEWTON

Union Bank of India Asset Recovery Branch - Madurai No. 51, Rosary Church Building, Town Hall Road, Madurai - 625001. E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES Appendix-IX E- Auction Sale Notice for sale of immovable assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002. Notice hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the borrower(s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/ charged to the Secured Creditor, the possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of Union Bank of India, (Secured Creditor), will be sold on "As is Where is", "As is what is", and "whatever there is" mentioned below, for recovery of dues as mentioned hereunder to Union Bank of India from the below mentioned Borrowers (s) & Guarantor (s). The Reserve Price and the Earnest Money Deposit are also mentioned below.

2) Name and address of the Borrower, Co-Aplicant and Guarantor :- 1) Mr.Mahadevan S, 1/62, Thamarakki North, Thamarakki, Sivagangai District-630562, Also at: Mr. Mahadevan, Plot No1, Keelakuyil Kudi Road, Vadivelkarai Village, Madurai west Taluk, Madurai-625019. 2) Mrs. Sinthamani Sekar (Co-Aplicant), 1/62, Thamarakki North, Thamarakki, Sivagangai - 630562. Dues amount : Rs.1,94,68,453.00 (Rupees One Crore Ninety Four Lacs Sixty Eight Thousand Four Hundred and Fifty Three Only) as on 31-01-2025 and further interest at contractual rate & cost thereon. Description of immovable secured assets to be sold : In Madurai District, Madurai South Registration district, Thiruparankundram Sub District, Madurai South Taluk, Vadivelkarai Village in Resurvey No 18/6A1, at present as per sub division in Patna No.345, in Nanja Resurvey No 18/6 B, Measuring 0.075 Ares i.e. 17 Cents in which Northern 4800 Sq.ft. of the house site and bounded on the : North : Plots in Resurvey No 18/5, East : Plots in Resurvey No 18/7 A, South : Southern Portion of Plots in Resurvey No.18/6 B, West : 30 feet wide road in Resurvey No.18/6B and 18 / 6A3 Within these boundaries an extent measuring East to West at Northern side 58 feet, East to West at Southern side 58 feet and on the North to South at Eastern side 65.75 feet North to South at Western side 65.75 feet measuring 3814 Sq.ft. of the house site and including the road 986 Sq.ft. on the Western side and thereby total measuring 4800 Sq.ft. i.e. 11 Cents 04 Sq.ft. of the House Plot no .1 with Residential Building constructed thereon and other amenities. The Property is owned by Mr. S.Mahadevan, S/o. Sekar. Type of Possession : Physical Possession Reserve Price : Rs.73,00,000.00 EMD : 10% of Reserve price. Bid Increment: Rs.75,000.00 The details of encumbrance, if any known to the Secured Creditor : Nil; However also bidders are requested to make their own enquiry. Account Number: 799401980050000, AC Name: Inward RTGS, IFSC Code: UBIN0579947, Mr.AR. Saravanan, Branch Head & Authorised officer, Asset Recovery Branch - Madurai. Cell: 9974010664, Branch Contact No: 9321219006. Last date of EMD submission : on or before the commencement of e-Auction Date & Time of auction : 03.03.2025 (Monday) (12.00 PM to 05.00 PM) (with 10 min unlimited auto extensions) Note : The Amount of EMD 10% Should be paid through https://baanknet.com website and the balance amount of sale price should be paid through the Account Number mentioned in the Sale Notice. For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, Please refer to the link provided as mentioned below banks website and e-auction website. Particulars of the property / asset (viz extent & measurements specified in the E-Auction Sale Notice) have been stated to the best of information of the Authorized Officer and Authorized Officer shall not be answerable for any error, misstatement or omission, Physical extent & dimensions may differ. website: https://baanknet.com and https://www.unionbankofindia.co.in/auction-property/view-auction-property.aspx Place : Madurai Date : 12.02.2025 Authorized Officer For Union Bank Of India



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## JAN INFLATION AT 5-MONTH LOW OF 4.3%

Retail inflation was 4.31% last month, down from 5.1% recorded in Jan 2024

### INFLATION FALLS FOR THIRD STRAIGHT MONTH

Consumer Price Index-based retail inflation is the lowest since August's figure of 3.65%. After touching 6.21% in October, it has fallen consistently. Inflation in the food basket fell to 6.02% in January, down from 8.02% in the year-ago month



54.2% was the year-on-year inflation in coconut oil price in JAN 2024

3.2% industrial production growth in December 2024, down from 4.4% growth recorded a year earlier



## Tough bill to curb illegal immigration

MUKESH RANJAN @ New Delhi

A draft legislation with more teeth to curb illegal immigration is likely to be introduced in Parliament in the second leg of the ongoing Budget session. Called the Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025, it has provisions of a jail term of up to seven years for any person who uses a fake passport or arranges for someone's illegal entry into India.

The bill also puts the onus on transport carriers to remove any foreigner denied entry into the country and empowers the immigration officer to arrest such individuals without an arrest warrant.

The draft bill seeks to replace four existing laws - The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, Foreigners Act, 1946 and Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000.

Quoting the contents of the draft bill, a source said, "any foreigner whose entry has been refused shall be handed over to the transport carrier by the Immigration Officer and it shall be the responsibility of that carrier to ensure his removal from India without delay."

It also has provisions to slap a penalty of ₹2-5 lakh on erring carriers. If a carrier fails to pay the penalty, it could be seized or detained.

Sources said universities, medical colleges, hospitals and private residences will be made responsible for providing information about foreigners residing on their premises.

Modi, Macron firm up plans to take strategic cooperation to next level

## India, France to jointly develop N-reactors, AI

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

INDIA and France on Wednesday decided to strengthen their strategic partnership as Prime Minister Narendra Modi sat down with French President Emmanuel Macron to firm up plans to bolster cooperation in nuclear energy and artificial intelligence (AI).

Both countries will join hands to develop small modular reactors (SMRs) as well as advanced modular reactors (AMRs). New Delhi and Paris will also work together to develop safe, secure and trustworthy AI. France has already announced plans to invest 110 billion euros in AI.

Modi and Macron agreed to enhance cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region with a joint declaration of intent for 'triangular development' to support the economic growth of countries in the region.

The two leaders also visited Marseille—the second-most populous French city after Paris—where Macron hosted a private dinner for Modi. There they jointly inaugurated India's Consulate General and toured the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) facility.

"The area of SMRs and AMRs has come up in more recent times, but has progressed quite quickly and the reason that you see a letter of intent is because both countries feel that there are real possibilities in



PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI'S VISIT TO FRANCE FROM FEB 10-12 WAS HIS SIXTH VISIT TO THE COUNTRY IN 10 YEARS

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Both sides reached understanding on 'triangular development cooperation' to provide financial support and technical collaboration to implement projects in third countries across the Indo-Pacific
- Pact signed between Department of Science and Tech and Institut National de Recherche en Informatique et en Automatique to establish the Indo-French Center for the Digital Sciences
- Nuclear energy to be a major component of India's energy mix
- India, France to jointly develop Small Modular Reactors and Advanced Modular Reactors
- India and France to join hands to develop ethical AI
- France to support India's bid for permanent UNSC membership
- India opens consulate in Marseille; the decision to do so announced in July 2023

taking this forward in the very near future," Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri told reporters during a briefing in Marseille.

Misri said the demand for SMRs and AMRs has been identified as crucial, as AI will require vast amounts of electricity. "The amount of electricity that will be needed, if it is going to be sustainable, then it has to be something like nuclear power-driven electricity. That is the area in which SMRs and AMRs can play a key role,"

the foreign secretary added.

As for the trilateral cooperation, India and France will look to deliver projects in third countries "by seeing how we can leverage our respective strengths and our capabilities, whether it is in terms of financial support or technical collaboration or capacity-building collaboration," Misri said.

The bilateral roadmap on AI envisions that the norms reflect democratic values and promote human development.

## Pre-poll freebies creating a class of parasites: SC

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Wednesday criticised the practice of political parties giving freebies ahead of the elections, saying it has made people unwilling to work.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih said people were not willing to work as they were getting free ration and money.

It was hearing a plea concerning the right to shelter of homeless persons in urban areas. "Rather than promoting them to be a part of the mainstream of the society by contributing to the development of the nation, are we not creating a class of parasites?" the bench asked. Prashant Bhushan, appearing for one of the petitioners, said there was

hardly anybody in the country who did not want to work, if they had work. To this, Justice Gavai said, "You must be having only one-sided knowledge. Because of the freebies in Maharashtra, which they just announced prior to the elections, agriculturists are not getting labourers."

During the hearing, one of the petitioners alleged that providing shelter to the homeless is last on the government's priority list. When the petitioner claimed the authorities showed compassion only for the rich, the court expressed its displeasure. "Don't make a speech of Ramlila Maidan in this court," Justice Gavai told the petitioner. "Don't make a political speech here. We won't permit our courtrooms to be converted into a (place of) political battle," Justice Gavai said.



EXPRESS READ

## TN education report to be out soon: Min

Chennai: School Education Minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi said his department will release data from an assessment conducted for 10 lakh students in TN, which is a broader exercise than the ASER report. BJP chief K Annamalai and Governor R N Ravi had cited the ASER report to question TN's educational standards | P4

## Bid to disrupt peace over kandhuri: TN

Madurai: The state on Wednesday told the HC that attempts are being made to disrupt peace by raising issues over kandhuri festival at Thiruparankundram dargah. "Madurai collector has sent a report stating that the practice of animal sacrifice as a form of worship exists as a tradition and is followed by Muslims," it told the court | P6

## Trouble for EPS as HC allows EC to probe into AIADMK leadership fight

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

THE Madras High Court on Wednesday allowed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to proceed with the hearings concerning the leadership dispute in the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and freezing of the party's 'two leaves' symbol.

The order is seen as a setback to incumbent chief Edappadi K Palaniswami as the proceedings and any adverse outcome thereof may affect his hold in the party, which is smarting under a series of electoral debacles under his leadership.

A division bench of Justices R Subramanian and G Arul Murugan, however, directed the ECI to strictly confine its proceedings to the

stipulations under paragraph 15 of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968, that deals with splinter groups of a political party and satisfy itself that there exists a dispute over the internal issues of the party. The Madras High Court had granted the stay on ECI proceedings on January 9. P7

Not a setback, HC agreed to our stand: EPS supporter | P6



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State is delaying nod to prosecute Velumani: NGO

# Lack of premium brands in Tasmac leaves customers dry and not high

Officials claim supply is delayed in a few outlets due to ongoing computerisation work

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

CHENNAI-BASED NGO Arappor Iyakkam on Wednesday alleged that the state government has been delaying giving sanction to the DVAC to file charge sheets against former minister and AIADMK MLA S P Velumani for over a year.

Quoting an order of a Chennai special court dated January 9, 2025, the NGO said that the DVAC has named Velumani in their chargesheet in a 2021 case pertaining to corruption in the Greater Chennai and Coimbatore corporations when he was the local administration minister. The court proceedings show that there are two charge sheets against Velumani and that DVAC is awaiting prosecution sanction in these cases from the TN departments.

The NGO questioned why DMK was "protecting the corruption" of the AIADMK.

Arappor Iyakkam's convener Jayaram Venkatesan said, "If the state continues to delay, Arappor Iyakkam will be forced to again move against contempt of an order of the HC."

S GURUVANMIKANATHAN @ Chennai

CUSTOMERS visiting elite outlets run by Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (Tasmac) wishing to get a load on are left disappointed due to the under supply of premium Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and beer brands. Many allege their preferred brands are frequently out of stock. Meanwhile, Tasmac acknowledged the delay in supply in a few outlets due to ongoing computerisation work.

A recent visit by TNIE to Elite Tasmac shops in Anna Nagar, Velachery, and other areas of Chennai revealed that many popular liquor brands were unavailable.

MPrakash (38), a customer at Velachery's elite Tasmac shop, said, "It looks like certain premium IMFL brands are not consistently stocked, and are cleared out of the shelves as soon as they arrive. Tasmac recently introduced the 100%



Tasmac's sales report shows decline in the IMFL turnover in January 2025 | P JAWAHAR

malt beer. But, whenever I enquire for it, the staff say that it is out of stock. We are forced to buy other brands."

Another customer shared, "Many customers argue with salesmen due to unavailability of their preferred liquor."

Some customers alleged that Tasmac staff are forcing them to buy only specific brands. "To avoid confusion, Tasmac should

display the list of available liquor brands and their prices outside the shops," a consumer suggested.

Tasmac officials, however, denied widespread non-availability of such brands. Tasmac intends to roll out computerisation and QR-code-based billing in all outlets, which requires the clearing of available stocks in the outlets without QR codes.

Moreover, there were some delays in supplying new stock, which need to carry QR codes and be registered into the on-line system before reaching the outlets, officials said.

Tasmac's sales report accessed by TNIE showed that there was a decline in the sales of IMFL in January 2025 compared to January 2024. While 57.13 lakh boxes of IMFL (each containing 48 bottles) were sold in January last year, this year 55.11 lakh boxes were sold, a decline of 3.54%. Beer sales saw an even sharper drop of 6.97% compared to last year's January sales. Despite decline in the volume of sales, Tasmac's revenue in the same period jumped from ₹4,526 crore to ₹4,633 crore due to price increase.

A senior Tasmac official said "We supply all fast-moving liquor brands to all our 4,800 retail outlets. However, some stocks may not be available at all shops," adding that such issues would be addressed.



A carcass of Olive Ridley turtle on Edward Elliotts beach | MARTIN LOUIS

# Turtle deaths: TN wildlife board to meet on Feb 14

SV KRISHNA CHAITANYA @ Chennai

IN the aftermath of the mass Olive Ridley turtle deaths at the beginning of this year's nesting season, the meeting of standing committee of the State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) will be convened on February 14 to deliberate on reasons for deaths, actions taken so far and future conservation strategy for the turtles.

The meeting, chaired by Forest Minister K Ponnudi, will be attended by Supriya Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary, Environment, Forests and Climate Change, who has returned to the department after serving as health secretary for a few months. Top forest officials, SBWL members and experts in the field of turtle conservation will also take part.

Supriya Sahu told TNIE, "The meeting is to take stock of the situation since the nesting has just begun. The

mitigation efforts taken so far, after the mass turtle deaths, seem to be yielding results. The nesting has improved. We will continue to improve our efforts, seeking more inputs from experts."

The meeting comes in the wake of the death of hundreds of endangered Olive Ridley turtles on Chennai beaches. Close to 1,200 turtles washed ashore dead in Chennai and Chengalpattu.

In response, the state intensified its efforts. The NGT had sought a detailed action report following the mass deaths, questioning the delay in enforcing mandatory turtle excluder devices (TEDs) in trawl nets.

However, the nesting activities have seen an uptick now, with the Besant Nagar hatchery recording 74 nests with 8,500 eggs as of February 10. Neelankarai hatchery has 7 nests, according to Chennai Wildlife Warden Manish Meena.

# TN seeks ₹74 cr to relocate Thengumarahada villagers

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

TAMIL Nadu Finance, Environment and Climate Change Minister Thangam Thennarasu submitted a ₹74.4 crore proposal to Climate Change Minister Thangam Thennarasu in Delhi, to facilitate the relocation of Thengumarahada villagers from the buffer zone of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in the Nilgiris.

Seeking clearances and funding for several state projects, Thennarasu, along with Tamil Nadu Environment, Climate Change and Forests Secretary Supriya Sahu, urged the Centre to expedite the approval, citing its importance for tiger conservation and the frequent human-wildlife conflicts.

The state submitted the proposal to the Compensatory Af-

orestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAM-PA) under the Union Environment Ministry. Likewise, a proposal was submitted to create a green shield for coastal and forest ecosystems in Thoothukudi, at ₹27.53 crore.

Thennarasu also thanked the union for accepting TN's request to exempt industrial sheds up to 1,50,000 square metre from environmental clearance, to aid industrial growth.

Additionally, the state minister sought swift clearance for TN's proposal to reconstitute the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) and the State Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC), as their current tenure ends in April 2025. The union minister assured to provide speedy clearance, a press release said.



## FLOATING LIGHTS

The Kapaleeswarar temple in Chennai's Mylapore, all decked out, for the annual float festival | P JAWAHAR

# No plans to capture or relocate wild jumbo in Thadagam: Officials

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Coimbatore

THREE weeks since the deployment of two kumkis, a wild elephant that allegedly killed an elderly person and damaged crops at Varappalayam near Thadagam has not returned to human habitation. A forest department officer said there are no plans to capture and relocate the elephant. Currently, a lone kumki Chinnathambi is deployed in Varappalayam to



As many as 20 staff have been deployed on the forest boundaries from where the elephant could come out | EXPRESS

chase away elephants that come out of the forest.

Heeding to farmers demand, the forest department deployed two kumki elephants—Suyambu and Muthu—from the Kozhikamuthi camp. But they were sent back as they went into musth. "We have now deployed Chinnathambi to prevent elephants from entering farm lands and residential areas. The problematic elephant has joined a herd, which con-

sists of six to eight elephants. We are monitoring it. Twenty staff have been deployed on the forest boundaries. In the last three weeks, the animal came out once or twice but did not cause trouble," an officer said.

On January 2, the elephant had killed 69-year-old K. Natarajan of Dhaliyur near Thadagam. "We will send a proposal to the chief wildlife warden. The animal will be relocated only if continues to be

problematic. It has remained quiet for the last three weeks," the officer said. Tamil Nadu Farmers Association General Secretary P Kandhasamy said even after kumkis were deployed, the elephant entered farmland in Najundapuram on January 24 and 26. "We called off our protest after the North RDO gave an assurance that it will be captured and relocated. However, nothing has been done so far," he said.

# Talks between Samsung and SIWU fail, stir to continue

CHENNAI: The conciliatory talks between Samsung and Samsung India Workers' Union (SIWU), mediated by the labour department, failed to reach a resolution on Wednesday.

A section of workers will continue their sit-in protest against the company with the next round of discussions scheduled for February 14.

The workers are demanding the revocation of the suspension of three union leaders who had attempted to meet company officials on January 31.

"The company representatives refused to heed to our demand. We also insisted that no

action should be taken against any other employee without a proper inquiry. Since they did not agree to revoke the suspension of the three union leaders, we have decided to continue the protest," said E Muthukumar, Kancheepuram CITU secretary and president of SIWU.

The CITU has also announced a protest outside the Directorate of Industrial Safety and Health on Thursday, demanding the government to take action against Samsung, SH Electronics and other industries allegedly engaged in illegal production using temporary workers. ENS

## Daily Starscope

PETER VIDAL

13<sup>th</sup> February: Yesterday I mentioned that Capricorn is a sign of spiritual rebirth. The reason is that in the ancient world people associated it with the transition from darkness to light, pointing to a rise in wisdom and enlightenment. Of course, only some people get to this point, but everyone can be more aware of their place in the universe.

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr. 20)

For the second day running your emotional alignments are strong, something which you never find easy mainly because feelings can be such messy things. It's all a question of relaxing into it, accepting whatever happens. Go with the flow, as they say!

Taurus (Apr. 21 - May 21)

Your natural instinct for self-preservation is boosted by two very helpful aspects to Venus, the planet which represents your emotional needs and desires. Your intellect and instincts should be functioning as one, so your judgment could be impeccable - hopefully!

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

You must get your priorities right. First among these is the need to co-operate with other people, whether at work or at home. It therefore follows that you should be as charming as possible. You must be a good listener for that's one of the best ways to see to it that others do take you seriously.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

Not everything works out as expected, but then what would life be like if everything went according to plan? Pretty boring, probably. Bear this reassuring and simple truth in mind over the coming days as partners, loved ones and colleagues start to play up.

LEO (July 24 - Aug. 23)

This is a time for realism. You should accept that errors have occurred and that you'll soon be in a position to work out who was responsible and why. There is no need to apportion blame, only to prevent the same errors being repeated. In fact, if you learn from your mistakes you will deserve praise.

VIRGO (Aug. 24 - Sept. 23)

You ought to be able to ensure that partners are never again in a position to force your hand. However, whether such an aim is realistic is another matter. Probably the best you can do is state your case and attempt to win them over to your way of thinking.

LIBRA (Sept. 24 - Oct. 23)

You may be under some extra pressure at the moment, but it's all friendly. You are being urged to be more outgoing, confident in your ideas and public with your feelings. At all times, come back to the central requirement - the development of your unique talents.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24 - Nov. 23)

People you live with can be very difficult to pin down. Sometimes you wonder what they actually want! As it happens, somebody close should soon alter direction, lifting a burden from your mind. Emotionally, professionally and personally, all the pieces of the jigsaw should now be beginning to fall into place.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23 - Dec. 22)

There may be few individuals who are genuinely happy with recent discussions and agreements. This is partly because your latent perfectionism is coming out, so you can try to see such discontent as very useful, encouraging the desire to do better next time round.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 23 - Jan. 20)

You can't stay as you are for ever - neither do you want to. If new routines or methods are to be accepted, it must be with an option for change in the near future. The point is that it is only when you put your plans into practice that you'll identify the pitfalls.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 21 - Feb. 19)

Secret, hidden or suppressed feelings are once again bubbling over. You should be aware that, even if your behaviour has been impeccable, others could still be annoyed or envious. That may be their responsibility rather than yours, although you might have to sort them out and restore common sense.

PISCES (Feb. 20 - Mar 20)

You still have all your wits about you, thank goodness. In fact you may be able to see sense where other people are completely confused. The only thing bothering you may be a long-distance affair, or even a family connection which is stretching the limits of your affections.

Solutions to Yesterday's puzzle

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

CROSS WORD

ACROSS

- Present-day churchman has to manage (10)
- Artist who is male and French (5)
- Accurately defined new recipes (7)
- Very short measure - examination is abandoned (7)
- Snide sort of chap (5)
- Edison redefines being in a legal position (6)
- Ran fast when bombarded (6)
- Those in trouble show spirit (5)
- A doctor appears in fast time - that's brilliant! (7)
- Caterer involved in domestic row (7)
- One who gets up some enterprise recklessly (5)
- Timekeeper is little help (6,4)

DOWN

- Mondy's arrangement for current suppliers (7)
- In the meantime I'm after this (5)
- Transfix politician caught in a lie that's absurd (6)
- Vaguely related to part of a latte (7)
- Rule that holds George initially in check (5)
- Dreadful Sweden riot is a job for top journalist (4,6)
- Home building team on site (10)
- Poor Dad is in contempt (7)
- Deranged senator gives great offence (7)
- Notwithstanding it's a vestment with back fastening (6)
- Her ma strayed into the women's quarters (5)
- A month in advance (5)

JUMBLE UNSCRAMBLE THESE JUMBLES, ONE LETTER TO EACH SQUARE, TO FORM FOUR ORDINARY WORDS.

BY DAVID L. HOYT AND JEFF KNUREK

MLITI  
CLOLA  
SIYEFT  
CNCTAE

THE STUDENTS WERE EXPERIENCING SUCCESS WITH MULTIPLICATION, BUT ---

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Yesterday's Jumbles: FLOWN SLOSH STOCKY FIASCO  
 Answer: The wintry weather turned the food-tasting contest into a -- "CHILLY" COOKOFF



The TNUHDB tenements in Periyar Nagar of Rajakoor lies in a shambles | KKSUNDAR

# Few takers for dilapidated TNUHDB flats in Rajakoor

Dwellers seek govt intervention over lack of transport, crumbling infra

JEYALAKSHMI RAMANUJAM @Madurai

CRUMBLING walls, overgrown bushes and stagnant water; elements that are characteristic not just to abandoned houses, but also to the multi-storied residential apartments constructed by the Tamil Nadu Urban Housing Development Board (TNUHDB) at Rajakoor near Madurai.

With a lack of adequate facilities and poor infrastructure, there are few takers for these flats. In the first phase, 1,566 flats were built nearly a decade ago under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) for ₹47.75 crore.

Located in Rajakoor's Periyar Nagar, a good 18 km away from Madurai city limits, these tenements with over 2,000 flats built in three phases have little to offer for the residents — no access to transport, healthcare or education facilities. In 2017-18, 1,088 houses were constructed for ₹89.75 crore in phase II, while 512 houses were constructed in phase III for ₹50.18 crore in 2022-23.

TNIE visited the tenements and spoke with the residents, mostly conservancy workers

who depend on work in the city. Kalidas (36) told TNIE, "While I am happy that I was allotted a house after paying just ₹17,500, there are many practical difficulties staying here. I work at the Government Rajaji Hospital in Madurai as a cleanliness worker, and a few of my colleagues were allotted houses here. However, due to a lack of facilities, many do not prefer to stay here. I had to get my house repaired when I moved in. The roof of the 16th block in the phase II tenement may collapse at any moment. We often see poisonous insects and snakes crossing the pathways in the evenings."

T Banumathi, another resident said, "I work as a conservatory worker at GRH. Just one bus is available at Rajakoor bus stand at 5.30 am to reach GRH. I must walk 2 km to reach the bus stand and catch the bus, spending an average of ₹100 for transport. The government officials must visit, and if possible, stay here so they can understand the difficulties we face. In case of any medical emergency, we find it extremely difficult to avail transport."

Speaking to TNIE, Vanessa Peter, founder, Information and Resource Centre for the De-

prived Urban Communities (IRCDUC) said the Madurai district administration should immediately convene the District Habitat Committee, along with the TNUHDB and provide basic services at the resettlement site. Quarterly grievance redressal meetings should be conducted on-site to address the concerns of the resettled families.

Social activist V Ramachandran told TNIE, "Easy access must be given to women and children. Have the quality audit agencies been appointed properly? While resident welfare associations (RWAs) were created to maintain the tenements, they are non-functional. TNUHDB is taking three years to allot the houses; it must be reduced to three months."

A TNUHDB official, on the condition of anonymity, said, "Tenders have been floated to lay road, and road facilities will be made available within four months. We will visit the tenements and carry out all essential work. As per norms, the beneficiaries must pay ₹270 as maintenance fee to the RWA, and the same amount will be released by us for maintenance. As most beneficiaries do not reside here, they do not pay."

# No foul play in college student's death: Cops

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Sivaganga

AFTER conducting a detailed inquiry into the death of a 21-year-old girl on the premises of a private college near Kallal early on January, a senior district police officer on Wednesday ruled out any foul play and told TNIE the incident was suicide.

S Preethi Devi (21) of Veeramankapuram in Tirunelveli, a third-year BSc Agriculture student at a private college, was found unconscious on the campus ground on January 7. She was taken to a private hospital

in Karaikudi and later shifted to a private hospital in Madurai. She succumbed to her injuries at Government Rajaji Hospital in Madurai on January 8.

Following the incident, the Kallal police registered a case under BNSS. The girl's father P Selvakumar lodged a petition with Tirunelveli collector and sought action against the college administration alleging they were behind the death. In protest, the family received her body three days after the death,

sources said.

The incident garnered attention after CPM state secretary P Shanmugam issued a statement on January 16, demanding explanation as to how the girl gained access to the locked terrace of the campus, and why the police termed it a suicide before concluding investigation.

Speaking to TNIE, a police officer said the inquiry was conducted in a scientific manner and statements of the college administration, friends and family were record-

ed. The CCTV footage was examined and by the end of the inquiry, the incident was found to be a suicide, the officer added.

The officer said the police are yet to confirm the reason for the extreme step, but hinted it could be depression. If someone is found to have abetted the suicide, appropriate action will be taken against them.

(Assistance for those having suicidal thoughts is available on the Tamil Nadu health department's helpline 104 and Sneha's suicide prevention helpline 044-24640050)

## KARAIKUDI CASE



## EXPRESS READ

### SI suspended for fake assault claims

Sivaganga : The Somanathapuram police station SI, who allegedly raised false assault charges on a VCK functionary was suspended. A departmental inquiry was held after SI Pranitha claimed she was assaulted inside the station by few persons, including a VCK functionary Ilaya Gowthaman. Preliminary investigation revealed that Pranitha admitted herself to the hospital, and in her press briefing, raised false and exaggerated assault allegations. Ramanathapuram range DIG Abhinav Kumar suspended her. ENS

### Cracker mishap: Another worker dies

Virudhunagar: A 37-year-old woman succumbed to her injuries, following a fire mishap at a cracker manufacturing unit in Virudhunagar district on January 5, on Wednesday. With the death of R Veeralakshmi, the death toll from the incident rose to three. 50-year-old K Ramalakshmi died on the day of the fire mishap, while Veeralakshmi, K Kasthuri (31), P Vaitheeswari (32), N Murugeswari (55), J Manickam (50) and S Daniel (33) were injured. However, Daniel also succumbed to injuries on January 9. ENS

### Multi-vehicle collision kills 3 in Virudhunagar

Virudhunagar: Three persons were killed in an accident on Wednesday. Sources said the deceased were M Selvam (36) of Virudhunagar, D Vinoth (36) of Tiruchy and S Velmurugan (43) of Kovilpatti. Selvam, a fire unit worker crashed into a parked lorry near Pusaripattivilakku with his two-wheeler, and died. Vinoth stopped his load van seeing this.

V Rameshkarthick ran over Vinoth with his lorry. Vinoth and one Velmurugan were killed. Vachakarapatti police registered a case against lorry driver K Ishwaran and Rameshkarthick. ENS

### 250 kg ganja meant to be smuggled to Sri Lanka seized

Ramanathapuram: A special team caught 250 kg of ganja, meant to be smuggled to Sri Lanka, in Rameswaram on Wednesday. Police sources said that based on a tip-off, a narcotics team conducted vehicle inspections in Rameswaram. On seeing the police, few persons left the car and fled. Upon suspicion, police seized the car and inspected it, and found bundles of ganja weighing 250 kg. The ganja was brought from a different state and was headed to Sri Lanka by sea, sources added. Further investigation is under way. ENS

### Ornamental fisheries workshop in Madurai

Madurai: The fisheries department hosted a special workshop on value addition in ornamental fisheries cluster in Madurai on Wednesday. The Department of Fisheries along with State Fisheries Department and National Institute of Fisheries Post Harvest Technology and Training (NIFPHATT) and National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) hosted the workshop. It focused on innovative strategies to enhance economic value of ornamental fish. Principal Scientist, CIFA Dr Saroj Kumar Swain was present. ENS

## Protest over non-payment of CAS salaries

MADURAI: Demanding the state government to disburse career advancement scheme (CAS) salaries to them, members of Madurai Kamaraj, Manonmaniam Sundaranar, Mother Teresa and Alagappa University Teachers' Association (MUTA) staged protests in front of government-aided colleges in Madurai city on Wednesday. Over 50 members from MUTA raised slogans against the government in front of Saraswathi Narayanan College, Madura College, Vellaichamy Nadar College, Sourashtra College and Madurai Kamaraj University College, among others. Protestors said in 2021, the government passed a G.O. to issue CAS promotions to teachers in universities, government and aided colleges across the state. However, most aided colleges only received the orders, but are yet to release salaries till date. They urged CMMK Stalin to allot funds for salaries without delay. ENS

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# HC verdict on Two Leaves TN on Thiruparankundram row: Won't let miscreants disrupt religious concord

'ECI has accepted that it will decide if it has powers before going into probe'

T MURUGANANDHAM @Chennai

THOUGH many perceived the Madras High Court's verdict on Wednesday allowing Election Commission of India (ECI) to inquire into the representations submitted by individuals regarding AIADMK's intra-party affairs as a setback for the party, its senior leader and former law minister C Ve Shanmugam said it was not a blow as the court has agreed on its contentions.

Addressing the media, he said the AIADMK's argument was the ECI should decide whether it had powers to inquire into the internal affairs of a political party. "Accordingly, the HC today directed the ECI to decide whether it has the power to inquire into the internal affairs of the party before starting its inquiry. So, the HC has accepted our prayer clearly," he added.

Shanmugam said the ECI has the power to decide whether a political party is registered in accordance with the Constitution. Also, when there is a split in a party, it can decide which group should be recognised as the party.

"The Commission can take on the record when a recognised political party informs about any changes in the by-



FILE PIC

laws, office-bearers, etc. It has no powers to go into whether the changes are correct or not. That power lies only with courts," Shanmugam added.

Political analyst Tharasu Shyam said the HC ruling was not a setback as in many cases ECI had accepted before various courts that it had no powers to inquire about the internal affairs of a party. "If the ECI goes ahead with inquiring into AIADMK's affairs, it would open up a Pandora's box. If the AIADMK moves the Supreme Court, it is highly likely that the SC would stay the HC order," he added.

He said the ruling can also infuriate AIADMK cadres against those who petitioned to

the ECI since it could lead to freezing of the party's symbol and as a consequence this anger could strengthen party general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami.

Former AIADMK leaders like V Pugazhendhi, who were among those who moved the court, and former CM O Panneerselvam welcomed the HC ruling. "We are not for freezing the Two Leaves symbol. But we don't want that symbol to be with Edappadi K Palaniswami," Pugazhendhi said.

TNCC president K Selvapurunthagai raised suspicion whether the BJP was behind the recent developments as part of the latter's attempt to get the AIADMK into its alliance.

R SIVAKUMAR @Chennai

ALLEGING that miscreants are attempting to disrupt communal harmony and peace by raising unnecessary issues over the Kandhuri festival at the Dargah in Thiruparankundram hills, the Tamil Nadu government on Wednesday told the Madras High Court that it would not allow anyone to disrupt peace and will also ensure that religious sentiments and beliefs of none of the communities are harmed.

The submission was made by State Public Prosecutor Hasan Mohamed Jinnah before Justice G K Ilanthiraiyan when a petition filed by S Yuvaraj, vice-president of Bharat Hindu Munnani, North Chennai, seeking a direction to the police to grant permission to hold a procession with vel (spear) with chanting of bhakthi songs at Kanthakottam in Chennai on February 18 to show solidarity with the protesters in Madurai came up for hearing.

The SPP said that granting permission for continuous protests on the issue will disrupt communal harmony. He said the state will not permit any such protests and it is taking all necessary measures to ease tension in Thiruparankundram and restore harmony.

Jinnah told the court that the worship rights over the hills, which has now become a controversy, was settled even before Independence by the courts. He said the Madurai collector has sent a report to the government stating that "the practice of animal sacrifice and consumption of meat as a form of worship exists as a tradition and is followed by the Muslim community".

Moreover, he said animal sacrifice in worship is followed

### Continuous protests will disturb peace: TN

Granting permission for continuous protests will disrupt communal harmony, the SPP said, adding that the state is taking necessary measures to ease the tension in Thiruparankundram

in Hindu temples like Alagar Kovil, Pathinettampadi Karupapasamy Thirukovil, Pan-

dimuneeshwarar temple and the Malaiyandi Karupapasamy temple in Madurai district.

Saying that the route sought by the organisation in Chennai is a busy area with narrow streets abuzz with commercial activities and asserting that the procession would disturb communal harmony, the SPP urged the court to reject the plea. Asking the petitioner to suggest alternative route for the procession, the judge adjourned the matter to Friday.

## Interfaith marriages should be registered under Act to be considered legal: Court

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Madurai

THE Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court recently observed that interfaith marriages have to be registered under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, to be considered legal. There is a need to create awareness among brides and grooms about these legal procedures, the court added.

A bench comprising Justices R M T Teekaa Raman and N Senthilkumar made the observations while dismissing an appeal filed by a Hindu woman against an order passed by a Family Court in Madurai, dissolving her marriage with a Christian man on the ground that their marriage was not registered under the Act.

The couple's marriage had been solemnised in 2005 at the bride's house as per Hindu customs. However, due to some dispute, they got

estranged. Citing that their marriage was not registered under the aforesaid Act, the husband filed a suit to dissolve the marriage, which was allowed by the Family Court.

Hearing the woman's appeal against the said order, the judges observed that a marriage under Hindu Law with Hindu customs, rites and ceremonies is not permissible between a Christian and a Hindu. Section 5 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, prescribes that "both parties" to the marriage must be a Hindu. Under the Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872, at least one of the two parties of the marriage should be Christian. But under the Special Marriage Act, marriage between 'any two persons' may be solemnised irrespective of religion or faith, they said.

Though the woman claimed that their marriage took place in church and not as per Hindu customs, she could not prove the same, the judges added, and upheld the Family Court's order.

## AEROSPACE FIELD State invites France's GIFAS for strategic collaboration

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Chennai

THE Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO) on Wednesday invited Groupement des Industries Françaises Aéronautiques et Spatiales (GIFAS), the French Aerospace Industries Association that has many industry leaders as its members, to visit Tamil Nadu for in-depth discussions on strategic collaboration, technology partnerships and investment opportunities.

This comes after Sandeep Nanduri, managing director of TIDCO delivered a presentation in the presence of Frederic Parisot, CEO of GIFAS, during Aero India 2025, highlighting TN's potential in the sector.

He highlighted the state's strong MSME supplier base, which plays a pivotal role in supporting the global Aerospace & Defence (A&D) sector through cutting-edge innovation, advanced manufacturing capabilities and supply chain excellence. Tamil Nadu is rapidly emerging as a global hub for aerospace and defence, powered by its rich industrial heritage, skilled workforce and progressive policies, TIDCO stated.

India already hosts more than 60 companies that are members of GIFAS with more than 30 industrial sites operational in the country. A total of 55% of French exports to India are in the aeronautical sector and almost all of them are from GIFAS companies.

## MP moves Bill for nat'l disaster panel featuring all states

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Chennai

DMK MP P Wilson has moved a private member's Bill in the Rajya Sabha to amend the Disaster Management Act, 2005, to substitute the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) which comprises only the prime minister and members appointed by the PM, with a broader and more inclusive National Disaster Management Council (NDMC) with representatives from all states.

The Bill has been introduced in the backdrop of complaints that the union government has

been failing to allocate funds for restoration and rehabilitation works in the disaster-affected areas in Tamil Nadu even after central teams assessed the extensive damages caused by cyclones and floods.

"This amendment aims to ensure that there is a structured, transparent and equitable mechanism for the allocation and utilisation of funds dedicated to disaster management, thereby ensuring that states severely affected by disasters are not left underfunded or neglected. The NDMC would pri-

oritise funding based on the severity of the disaster's impact and urgent needs of affected states," the DMK MP said while explaining the objectives and reasons for introducing such a Bill.

Wilson also said the new amendment will ensure equitable and efficient allocation of resources, prioritising support for the states with the greatest needs. He said this approach would enhance national resilience and preparedness in the face of disasters.

The DMK MP also pointed out that the NDMA was formed to enable the union to aid the states when disaster strikes and currently, the NDMA follows a one-size-fits-all ap-

proach. He said with states' representatives being part of the proposed NDMC, the unique requirements of each state would be brought to the fore and considered while making decisions.

Wilson pointed out that an NDMC comprising representatives from all states would only strengthen the constitutional guarantee of cooperative federalism. "All states can participate in the deliberations of the NDMC and the process of releasing funds would become transparent and objective when all stakeholders are heard," he added.

The NDMC would prioritise funding based on the severity of the disaster's impact and urgent needs of affected states

-P Wilson, DMK MP

## 'Bypoll win indicates pro-incumbency wave'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Chennai

STATING that even AIADMK votes have gone to the DMK in the recent Erode East by-election, Electricity Minister V Senthilbalaji said, in a post on X on Wednesday, there was only 'pro-incumbency' in TN for the state government.

The bypoll results have boosted the confidence of DMK leaders, with the victory being quoted in speeches and social media posts.

In his X post, Senthilbalaji further said there is a wave across the state in favour of Chief Minister M K Stalin and its effects will be reflected in the 2026 Assembly election.

Along the same vein, HR&CE Minister P K Sekar Babu on Tuesday, replying to a query regarding political strategist Prashant Kishor's meeting with TVK president and actor Vijay, said, "We have the strong support of the people. The Erode East by-election was an example. This victory is but a precursor to the 2026 Assembly polls. DMK will definitely win over 200 seats."

Speaking to TNIE, DMK students wing president R Rajiv Gandhi said, "It is true that DMK drew on AIADMK votes in the bypoll. This shows that our leader Stalin has become the accepted leader for pro-Dravidian people in general, cutting across differences."



### PRAYING FOR PEACE

Buddhist monks of the Nipponzan Myohoji order during inauguration of 'Peace Walk' at Gandhi Museum, Madurai | K K SUNDAR

## TN to soon release its own educational survey covering 10L students

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Chennai

SCHOOL Education Minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi on Wednesday said the school education department will soon conduct an assessment covering 10 lakh students across the state and release its results to show the educational standards of Tamil Nadu.

He stated that Governor R N Ravi and BJP state president K Annamalai have been using surveys such as ASER, which are not comprehensive, to claim that the standards of education in Tamil Nadu have fallen behind Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. However, this new survey will shed light on the actual conditions, he said.

Speaking to reporters after inaugurating the state-level science exhibition under the Vanavil Mandram scheme at the Anna Centenary Library, Minister Poyyamozhi said that in states like Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, the ASER survey, conducted by the Pratham Foundation, is carried out by the respective District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs). "In Tamil Nadu, it is conducted by 25 organisations that are not well-known. ASER is a household survey and does not even visit schools," he said, raising questions regarding the credibility of the survey.

Meanwhile, representatives of the Pratham Foundation in TN stated that in 2018, they col-

laborated with DIETs to conduct the survey in 12 districts in the state. "The survey is carried out among DTEd students, however, due to a shortage of students in DIETs across many districts, we were unable to collaborate with them. We are now considering BEd students for the next survey," said a representative. He also noted that the volunteers are trained by the Pratham Foundation before conducting the survey and emphasised that the collaboration would not impact the results.

Addressing the non-release of the Samagra Shiksha (SS) scheme funds, the minister said he had released data on funds allocated to each state. "BJP state president K Annamalai,



The department will also release a report in March on strict actions taken against over 230 teachers accused of sexually harassing students over the past decade

Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, TN minister

instead of arguing with us, should speak to BJP leaders at the centre and ensure that TN receives its due, as it affects 40 lakh students in the state. The non-release of funds has led to a financial crunch, impacting several schemes," he said.

He further accused Annama-

lai of supporting "anti-Tamil and anti-student policies" of the union government as he belongs to the party instead of being productive and sensible. Talking about the PM-SHRI and Samagra Shiksha schemes, Minister Poyyamozhi said the two are not connected. "Samagra Shiksha has been implemented since 2018. Suddenly, they are linking it with PM-

SHRI from 2023. The committee we formed to review the PM-SHRI scheme has clearly stated that it introduces the three-language policy, which goes against the existing policy in TN," he said. He further added that Annamalai should file an RTI application to find out how the department utilised the ₹44,000 crore allocated in the state budget.

The minister also stated that the department will release a report in March detailing the strict actions taken against more than 230 teachers accused of sexually harassing students over the past decade. The department has also urged students to call the 14417 helpline to report any such incidents.

"This meeting is being held here on the instruction of our general secretary and leader of opposition," he added.

Earlier in the day, a large number of AIADMK cadre gathered in front of Sengottaiyan's house, setting off speculation that he is holding consultations on his next move. However, he said it was a usual gathering of supporters.

Speaking to reporters, Sengottaiyan said, "I returned to Gobichettipalayam today after visiting the Patteeswarar temple in Coimbatore yesterday (Tuesday). Party functionaries and cadre come to my house every day. This is usual."

# 1 more killed in Kerala jumbo attack, UDF calls for hartal

### Forest dept draws up 10-point plan to mitigate human-wildlife conflict

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kochi

ON a day the news broke of another tribal youth being trampled to death by a wild elephant in Wayanad — the fourth such death in the state in 48 hours — a high-level meeting of the forest department chalked out a 10-point action plan to mitigate the human-wildlife conflict.



Considering the gravity of the situation, services of the employees from the social forestry wing will be used to coordinate the conflict mitigation measures. Patrolling will be strengthened and vista clear-

ance will be undertaken on either side of forest roads. Also, modern cameras will be installed at conflict hot spots for real-time monitoring.

In the second wild elephant attack death on consecutive days in Wayanad, Balakrishnan, 27, of the Kattunayakan tribe, was killed near the Erattukundu tribal settlement in Attamalla on Tuesday. His body was found on Wednesday morning. Attamalla is adjacent to the landslide-affected areas of Mundakkai and Chooralmala.

On Monday, Manu, a 45-year-old tribal man, was trampled to

death by a wild elephant while he was returning from a temple festival in Noolpuzha. The rampant wild animal attacks have triggered protests in the district, with the UDF calling a 12-hour hartal in Wayanad on Thursday.

As part of the human-wildlife conflict mitigation measures, the forest department has decided to issue notices to the owners of private estates located near forest boundaries to remove the overgrowth immediately. Directions have been issued to range officers to conduct vista clearance to remove overgrowth on either side of the roads passing through forest stretches.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

WE should strive to master artificial intelligence (AI) instead of becoming its slaves, opined experts at the international conference on media and social responsibility 2.0, organised by DG Vaishnav College here.

Inaugurating the second day of the conference, Prabhu Chawla, editorial director, The New Indian Express (TNIE), expressed concern over the prevailing trend in media industry.

He shared his views on how media houses are now deviat-



TNIE's Editorial Director Prabhu Chawla at DG Vaishnav College | EXPRESS

ing from the job of passing information to society.

"Responsibility of the media is to inform and enlighten and not to ignite and provide personal insights to the people", said Chawla. He also voiced concern over the growing dependency on AI.

"Artificial Intelligence is a tool developed to dehumanise society", he said, adding, "AI can be a tool but it must not dictate you."

Kristen Rudisill, professor at University of Ohio, delivered the keynote address on the role of media in shaping public

discourse. In a panel discussion on 'Media and AI', experts discussed in detail the pros and cons of AI in the media industry.

Industry experts Venkataraghavan, product engineer, AI, Federal; Iyan Karthikeyan, mission director, Fact Check Unit, Government of Tamil Nadu; and academicians Deborah Raj and Jayakrishnan shared their thoughts on how AI in media can pose risks such as the spread of misinformation, bias, and privacy violations and how it needs to be used with caution.

## TN pockets to see 2-3°C above normal temp

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

THE Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC) on Wednesday predicted that the maximum temperature is likely to be 2-3°C above normal at isolated pockets across Tamil Nadu until Friday.

Dry weather is expected to prevail over TN, Puducherry, and Karaikal the next week. "The sky will remain clear with no rain and winds will be calm," said RMC official. He said a deviation of 2°C on either side is considered normal. Both Kodaikanal recorded 3.3°C higher than normal with temperature at 22.5°C.

## Chinnalapatti residents decry sewage discharge in pond

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Dindigul

SEWAGE discharge into Kariyan kulam in Chinnalapatti town panchayat near Dindigul has left villagers fuming, and groundwater contamination has become a cause for concern.

Speaking to TNIE, A Govindan (45) of Chinnalapatti said, "Kariyan kulam is spread over 12 acres and located near a private school in Chinnalapatti town panchayat. Civic authorities installed three borewells to supply water to residential areas a few years ago. However, for past few weeks, locals noticed drain water from Shanthi Nagar, Ponn-

ann Nagar, Janatha Colony and Somasundram Nagar being discharged into the pond. They found the water had a bluish-green tinge. They found effluents from dyeing units mixed in the water."

Councillors raised the issue at a council meeting, but no action was taken. They petitioned Rural Development and Panchayat Minister I Periasamy. An official from Chinnalapatti panchayat said, "We proposed to construct concrete drains for ₹50 lakh after inspection. We found these drains were not connected to main drain canals and overflowed into the pond. The project will be executed"

## Disappointed by CB-CID's act in Kallakurichi: Former CPM TN secy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Dindigul

FORMER CPM state secretary K Balakrishnan said that he has been disappointed by the recent actions of the CB-CID in many cases in the state, including the Kallakurichi case in which the FIR mentioned the name of a victim's mother.

Balakrishnan said, "In the Vengavasal issue, CB-CID reported that victims themselves are culprits. In the Kallakurichi Srimathi case, CB-CID pursued cases related to the ri-

ots, which was aftermath of the girl's suicide. However, the CB-CID has filed an FIR including the victim's mother as an accused. Besides, this is happening when the victim's mother is enduring a long legal battle. Whereas, the police are claiming that the cries of the mother are the direct reason for triggering riots in Kallakurichi."

While we welcome the state government's decision to offer patta to over 86,000 people in Tamil Nadu, Balakrishnan said they recently received news re-

garding an order by the SC/ST Commission. "Former CM O Panneerselvam allegedly acquired Panchami land and transferred ownership under his name. A complaint was registered with Tamil Nadu State Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The transfer was found to be illegal, and the authority was directed to cancel patta. We strongly condemn such acts, where politicians use their influence to misuse provisions to buy Panchami land," he said.

## Minister's meet with Kamal sparks speculations

Chennai: The meeting of HR & CE minister PK Sekar Babu with Makkal Neethi Maiani (MNM) chief and actor Kamal Haasan on Wednesday sent political analysts into a frenzy that the meet was to discuss the latter's Rajya Sabha candidature. Sources said the minister met him to extend an invitation to a function in Chennai to celebrate the birthday of CM M K Stalin on March 1. The official statement from MNM called it a 'courtesy visit' at the actor's office. MNM, which is in alliance with the DMK, was not offered seat in the LS election but promised a Rajya Sabha seat.

## ECI can settle internal dispute within AIADMK: HC

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

VACATING the stay, which was granted on January 9 by the court, the bench said, "We find that the commission does not lack inherent jurisdiction or there is no total absence of jurisdiction."

Senior counsel C Aryama Sundaram, appearing for EPS, had

contended that the ECI lacked jurisdiction to proceed with the representations submitted by P Ravindranath (son of former CM O Panneerselvam), KC Palanisamy, Va Pugazhendhi, MG Ramachandran and Suriya Moorthy on the issues of party symbol and organisational elections. He had also argued that the ECI cannot hold quasi-judicial proceedings.

The court said, "We conclude that we cannot, sitting under Article 226 (of the Constitution), go into the nature of the allegations made in the complaints that are subject matter before the ECI and conclude as to whether they provide the jurisdiction or satisfaction to it that a dispute under paragraph 15 does exist."

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES  
OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER  
CANAL CIRCLE, BURLA

**e-Procurement notice no.-ACECCB-03/2024-25**  
Bid Identification No.- ACECCB/03/2024-25

1	Type of the work	: Road Work
2	No of works	: 1(One) no.
3	Class of contractor	: 'A' & 'B' class
4	Bid identification No	: ACECCB-03/2024-25
5	Estimated cost	: Rs.248.16 Lakhs (Approx)
6	Period of completion	: 11 (Eleven) Calendar Months including rainy season
7	Date and time of availability of bid documents in the portal	: Dt.14.02.2025 at 11.00 AM to Dt.02.03.2025 up to 5.30 PM.
8	Last date/ time for receipt of bids in the portal	: Dt.02.03.2025 up to 5.30 PM.
9	Date of opening of Technical Bid (Cover-I)	: Dt. 03.03.2025 at 11.30 AM, O/o Additional Chief Engineer, Canal Circle, Burla
10	Date of opening of Financial Bid (Cover-II)	: To be intimated later
11	Name and Address of the Officer inviting Bid	: Additional Chief Engineer, Canal Circle, Burla-768017 Email id: aceccburla12@gmail.com

1. Any addendum/corrigendum/ cancellation/erratum of tender can also be seen in the said Website.  
2. Further details can be seen from Government Website <http://tenderodisha.gov.in>.

OIPR- 32460/11/0005/2425

Sd/- ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER,  
CANAL CIRCLE, BURLA

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(A University established by the Government of Odisha)

No: IIT-BH/15006 Date: 10.02.2025

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**TRANSMISSION CORPORATION OF TELANGANA LIMITED**  
e - TENDER NOTICE

The TGTransco invites online Bids under e-procurement for supply of the following items

Sl.No.	Name of the work	Specification No.
1	132kV/70kN & 120kN SRC Insulators	TGPM22-04/2025
2	220kV/70kN & 120kN SRC Insulators	TGPM22-05/2025
3	70kN & 120kN Anti Fog Disc Insulators	TGPM22-06/2025

Tenderers can have further details and download the tender schedule from e-procurement market place i.e., [www.tender.telangana.gov.in](http://www.tender.telangana.gov.in). Contact Nos.: CHIEF ENGINEER/P&M, TGTransco, Phone: 040-2339600 (Extn.: 3487/3583/3490/3332) 040-23303736, [www.tgtransco.com](http://www.tgtransco.com)  
DPR R.O. No: 996-PPCL-AGENCY/IA/17/2024-25 Sd/- Chief Engineer/P&M

**CITY UNION BANK LIMITED**  
Credit Recovery and Management Department  
Administrative Office, No. 24-B, Gandhi Nagar, Kumbakonam - 612 001, Phone: 0435 - 2432322  
Fax: 0435-2431746, Mob. 93443 03728 E-mail: [credit@cityunionbank.com](mailto:credit@cityunionbank.com)

**CANCELLATION OF TENDER CUM AUCTION SALE NOTICE**

We refer to our Tender Cum Auction sale notice dated 29.01.2025, Published on 30.01.2025, in "The New Indian Express" & "Dinamani" Newspapers, for the account of M/s. SRK Building Mall, S Vimalapandian with its Tirunelveli Branch, intimating the date of Tender Cum Auction sale to be held on 10.02.2025 at our Perambalur Branch stands cancelled and withdrawn.

Place : Kumbakonam  
Date : 12.02.2025 Authorised Officer  
Regd. Office : 149, T.S.R. (Big) Street, Kumbakonam, Thanjavur District, Tamilnadu - 612001, CIN - L65101TN1904PLC001287, Telephone No: 0435 - 2402322, Fax : 0435 - 2431746, Website : [www.cityunionbank.com](http://www.cityunionbank.com)

**NAVY CHILDREN SCHOOL**  
CBSE AFFILIATED SCHOOL UPTO XII STD  
(RUN BY NAVY EDUCATION SOCIETY)

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for appointment for the following posts at Navy Children School (NCS), Arakkonam :-

(a) Appointment on Adhoc basis  
❖ PRT : General  
❖ PGT : Biology, English & Mathematics

(b) Appointment on Contractual basis  
❖ Ayah  
❖ Peon  
❖ Night Watchman

Last date of submission of Resume / Application is 28 Feb 25.  
Details of eligibility criteria along with Application form may be downloaded from the school website.

Website: [www.ncsarakkonam.nesnavy.in](http://www.ncsarakkonam.nesnavy.in)  
E-mail ID: [ncsarakkonam@yahoo.com](mailto:ncsarakkonam@yahoo.com)  
Phone: 9488758004, 9061752717 (Time: 0900-1500 hrs)

**Karur Vysya Bank**  
No.16, A.A.Road, Gnanoliyapuram  
Madurai-625016, Phone:0452-2600113 & 2604734  
Email: [maduraido@kvbmail.com](mailto:maduraido@kvbmail.com)

**NOTICE TO THE BORROWER INFORMING ABOUT SALE (30 DAYS NOTICE)**  
RULE 6 (2)(b) (6) OF SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES 2002

To  
Borrower: Mr.S.Murugan, S/o Mr.Subbiah, Sole Proprietor: M/s J M S Vegetables, Guarantor: Mr.M.Senthil Kumar, S/o S.Murugan, Both at: 59, Athithiravadar Street, Jakkampatti, Aundipatti - 625 512, Also at: 36A, 13th Street, Iyer Layout, Singanailur, Coimbatore - 641 005

Sir/Madam,  
Sub - Sale of property belonging to Mr.S.Murugan, Sole Proprietor: M/s J M S Vegetables, for realization of amount due to Bank under the SECURITIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002

Karur Vysya Bank, Kathirnarasapuram Branch, No.116, Ward 2, Main Road, Kathirnarasapuram-625512 the secured creditor, caused a demand notice dated 18.03.2024 & substituted service by affecting News Paper Publication (The New Indian Express & Dinamani) on 23.05.2024 under Section 13(2) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002, calling upon you to pay the dues within the time stipulated therein. Since you failed to comply the said notice within the period stipulated, the Authorised Officer, has taken possession of the immovable secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act read with Rule 6 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on 13.08.2024 and the same was published in "The New Indian Express (English) and Dinamani (Tamil) newspapers on 18.08.2024.

Even after taking possession of the secured asset, you have not paid the amount due to bank. As such, it has become necessary to sell the below mentioned property by holding public auction after 30 days from the date of publication of this notice. The date and time of e-auction along with the Reserve Price of the property and the details of the service provider, in which the e-auction to be conducted, shall be informed to you separately.

Therefore, if you pay the amount of ₹ 4,07,218/- (Ac.No.1111.286.17) due to the bank along with subsequent interest, costs, charges and expenses incurred by bank before the date of publication of sale notice, no further action shall be taken for sale of the property and you can redeem your property as stipulated in sec. 13 (8) of the Act, failing which the sale notice under the Act will be published in the newspaper specifying one of the following modes mentioned below, to sell the secured assets:

- By obtaining quotations from the persons dealing with similar secured assets or otherwise interested in buying assets; or
- By inviting tenders from the public; or
- By holding public auction including through e-auction mode; or
- By Private Treaty.

**SCHEDULE OF PROPERTY**

In Theni District, Periyakulam Registration, Aundipatti Sub-Registration, Aundipatti Village, Aundipatti Town Panchayat Residential Building with Vacant site at S.No.465/1, New S.No.2513/2, Patta No.2326 (R.T.R.643/11-20/10/11), Old Door No.250, New No.59, Assit No.6862, Old Ward No.6, New Ward No.13, Adhi Dravidar South Street, with water connection No.2312 and EB connection No.531-008-168, to the extent of 579 ½ Sq ft bounded by East: The House of S.Gandhi (Other Share), North: Common Pathway, West: 12 feet wide Common Pathway, South: Selvaraju House and Common Wall, measurement: East West on the North-30 feet, East West on the South-31 feet, North South on the West- 19 feet, North South on the East-19 feet, total 579 ½ Sq.foot.

Date : 17.01.2025 Authorised Officer  
Place: Madurai The Karur Vysya Bank Ltd

**ODISHA MINING CORPORATION LIMITED**  
OMC House, Bhubaneswar-751001, Odisha  
CIN: U13100OR1965SGC000313, [www.omcltd.in](http://www.omcltd.in)

**E-auction Notice (19.02.2025 - 179th & 180th E-auction)**  
**IRON ORE CLO & FINES**

CAD-2555: The Odisha Mining Corporation Ltd intends to sell various grades of Iron ore CLO & Fines produced at Daitari and Gandhamardan Regions (Block - A & B) and Guali, Jiling Langelota, Tiringpahar, Khandbandh, Banspani, Unchabali (Mahaparbat) & Roida 'C' Mines of Barbi Region in Keonjhar District and Khandadhar/Kurmitar Mines under Koiria Region in Sundargarh District, Odisha through e-auction which will be conducted by MSTC Ltd. The e-auction shall be held from 11.00 A.M. to 2.00 P.M on 19.02.2025.

For details, please visit the website of MSTC i.e. [www.mstcecommerce.com](http://www.mstcecommerce.com)  
OIPR- 30005/11/0142/2425 Sd/- CHIEF GENERAL MANAGER (S&M)

**OSBI STATE BANK OF INDIA**  
LINGAMPATTI BRANCH, KOVILPATTI  
Baluhavanam, Kadalayur Road, Lingampatti, Tuticorin- 628502.

**POSSESSION NOTICE - FOR PROPERTY U/S 13 (4) OF SARFAESI ACT 2002**  
(For Immovable Property)

Notice is hereby given under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, a demand notice was issued on the dates mentioned against each account and stated hereinafter calling upon them to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of receipt of said notice.

The Borrower and Guarantor having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower and Guarantor and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of power conferred on him/her under section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Act on the dates mentioned against each account.

The Borrower / Guarantor in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the STATE BANK OF INDIA for an amount and interest thereon.

Name of Account of Borrowers & Address	Demand Notice Date	Possession Notice Date	Outstanding Amount
Borrowers: Legal heir's of Mr. Ponselvam, 1. Mrs. Jabes Gnana, J.R, W/o. (late) Mr. Ponselvam, 2. Mr. Jerome. P.I, S/o. (late) Mr. Ponselvam, 3. Mr. Arunachalam, F/o. (late) Mr. Ponselvam, 4. Mrs. Seeni, M/o. (late) Mr. Ponselvam, all are residing at, 4/486, Kurinchi Nagar, Thanakkankulam, Thirunagar, Madurai.	02.12.2024	12.02.2025	Rs.77,97,227/- (Rupees Seventy Seven Lakhs Ninety Seven Thousand Two Hundred and Twenty Seven only) as on 04.02.2025

**DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY MORTGAGED / CHARGED**

**Item-1:** Madurai South Registered District, Madurai South Taluk, Thiruparankundram Sub Registrar Office Jurisdiction, Now Thiruparankundram Village limits, Thirunagar Town Panchayat, Town Old ward No. 10, at presently Madurai Corporation Ward No.98, New Ward No: 94, Elakuvanar Street Re Survey No: 109/4C out of 39 cents, 10 cents on the western side, in that housing plot measuring 2226 sq ft measuring on the eastern side as per Madurai house taxation old taxation No:115/65592, New Taxation No:115/094/90452, Door No:5A and by old taxation no:115/65592, New Taxation no:115/094/2931, Door No:5B concrete house building and its Boundaries: East by:Common Road (South North Direction), I st Item Bounded on the North by: Sarathammal's Site, South by: 2<sup>nd</sup> items belongs to Smt. Roselin Rajarathinam, West by:House belongs to Dr. Vasuki Jeyarathinam, and 6 feet Breadth East West Street within this Boundaries Measuring, East-West on the both sides 53 feet, South- North on both sides 42 feet, Totally 2226 sq.ft=5.11 cent. Above property comprised in Re survey no:109/22 as per the new sub division patta no 7816.

**Item-2:** Madurai South Registered District, Madurai South Taluk, Thiruparankundram Sub Registrar Office Jurisdiction, Now Thiruparankundram Village limits, Thirunagar Town Panchayat, Town ward no. 10, at presently Madurai Corporation Ward No:98, New Ward No: 94, Elakuvanar Street Re Survey No: 109/4C out of 39 cents, 1 1/2 cents on the western side and, Resurvey no:109/4D out of 2 Acre 285 cents, 56 1/4 cents on the Northern side in which 8 1/2 cents in western side, totally measuring 10 cents house site in the site 92 3/4 sq ft on the western side sold to Sagayaraj and balance 4359 1/4 sq ft left as house site and its boundaries, 2<sup>nd</sup> Item bounded on the East by: Common Road (South North Direction) North by: 1<sup>st</sup> items belongs to Smt. Roselin Rajarathinam, South by: Govindasamy Naidu's Punja Land, West by: Common Road in survey no:106, Within this Boundaries Measuring: East-West on both sides 106 feet, South- North on both sides 42 feet, Totally 4452 sq ft= 10.22 cent, Above property comprised in Re survey no: 109/4C1A as per the new sub division patta no 7816.

Date : 12.02.2025  
Place : Lingampatti  
Authorised Officer  
State Bank of India

**यूको बैंक UCO BANK**  
(पूर्व यूको बैंक का उत्तराधिकारी) (A Govt. of India Undertaking)

**KOLLAM BRANCH**  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Khaise Building, Beach Road, Kollam-691001  
Phone: 0474-2742915, 2746301, 2762184.  
e-mail: [quilon@ucobank.co.in](mailto:quilon@ucobank.co.in)

**[Rule-8(6)] SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES**  
E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE ASSETS UNDER THE SECURITIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002 (SARFAESI) READ WITH PROVISION TO RULE 6(B) OF THE SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) & Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the symbolic possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of UCO Bank, (secured creditor), will be sold on "As is where is" & "As is what is" & "Whatever there is" on 30-04-2024 for recovery of dues as mentioned hereunder to UCO Bank from the below mentioned Borrower & Guarantors. The Reserve Price and the Earnest Money Deposit are also mentioned hereunder.

**Name & Address of the Borrower/Mis United Blue Metals, EP-XVII/548, Vanchimukku, Perumpuzha, Kollam - 691504 and Guarantors (1) Mr.Ajesh.A, S/o Mr.N. Ashokan (Managing Partner & Guarantor - Mis United Blue Metals), Muzhara, Koni, Pathanamthitta, Kony, Kerala - 689 091 (2) Mr.Venkatesh Prasad, S/o Mr.Prasad Divakara Panicker (Partner & Guarantor - Mis United Blue Metals), Om Shakthi, Uliyayokil Nagar, Kerala - 691 019 (3) Mr.Akhil Sajj, S/o Mr.Sai Surenandran (Partner & Guarantor - Mis United Blue Metals), Maleplavilla Veedu, Cherukonam, Kamanallor P.O, Thrinkovilattom, Kollam - 691 576 (4) Mr.Biju Thomas, S/o Mr.Thomas (Partner & Guarantor - Mis United Blue Metals), Meda Thekkattil, Aravilla Nagar, Kuresepuza, Kavanad PO, Kollam - 691 053 (5) Mr.Saji S, S/o Mr.Surenandran (Guarantor - Mis United Blue Metals), Maleplavilla Veedu, Cherukonam, Kamanallor P.O, Thrinkovilattom, Kollam - 691 576**

**Date of Demand Notice: 16-05-2024** **Date of Possession: 05-08-2024**  
Recoverable Amount : Rs. 14,16,25,331.18 as on 31-01-2025 inclusive of interest upto 31-01-2025 plus further interest and other incidental charges thereafter

**Note:** Notice under section 13(2) of SARFAESI Act, 2002 issued on 16-05-2024 for Rs.13,99,09,080.82 (Rupees Thirteen crore nine lakhs nine thousand eighty and paise eighty two only) as on 30-04-2024 with interest up to 30-04-2024.

**Description of Properties:** PROPERTY - 1: All that part and parcel of the land, crusher and granite quarry unit admeasuring 9.57 Acres comprised in Sy.No.794 (33 Cents), 795/1 (74 Cents), 795/2 (5 Cents), 795/3 (1 Acre 22 Cents), 795/4 (1 Acre 4 Cents), 795/2 (6 Cents), 796/3 (27 Cents) & 807 (5 Acres 86 Cents) under Ayan Kollankondam No. 1 Village, Rajapalayam Taluk, Rajapalayam Sub-Registration District, Virudhunagar District, Virudhunagar Regn. District in the name of Mis United Blue Metals under the Sale Deed No.1748/2018 dated 25-05-2018. **Boundaries:** North: Property in Sy.No.793, 808 & 846; South: Property in Sy.No.797, 805 & 806; East: Property in Sy.No.793 & 797; West: Property in Sy.No.805, 810 & 811.

PROPERTY - 2: All that part and parcel of the land, crusher and granite quarry unit admeasuring 3 Acres 53.80 Cents comprised in Sy.No.845/2 (1 Acre 83 Cents), 859/3 (60.50 Cents), 860/2 (22 Cents), 861/4 (6.59 Cents), 859/2 & 860/2B (15.51 Cents), under Ayan Kollankondam No. 1 Village, Rajapalayam Taluk, Rajapalayam Sub-Registration District, Virudhunagar District, Virudhunagar Regn. District in the name of Mis United Blue Metals under the Sale Deed No.1950/2018 dated 09-06-2018. **Boundaries:** Sy.No.845/2: North: Property in Sy.No.846 & 858; South: Property in Sy.No.845/1; East: Property in Sy.No.846; West: Property in Sy.No.858 & 859. Sy.No.859/3: North: Property in Sy.No.860 South: Property in Sy.No.845; East: Property in Sy.No.858; West: Property in Sy.No.859/2; Sy.No.860/2C: North: Property in Sy.No.860/1 & 661; South: Property in Sy.No.859; East: Property in Sy.No.858; West: Property in Sy.No.860/2B; Sy.No.861/4: North: East Ayan Common Pathway; South:Property of Srividhya & Perumal; East: Property of Saraswathi Ammal; West:North-South Common Pathway and Property of Srividhya. Sy.No.859/2 & 860/2B: North: Cart Road; South: Property of Smt. Aruvathurai & others; East: Property of Sangamuthi & Pauplandian; West: Property of Alagumalai.

Reserve Price: Rs.477.75 Lakhs Earnest Money Deposit (EMD): Rs. 47.78 Lakhs

Date & Time of e-Auction Sale: 20<sup>th</sup> March 2025 between 11:00 AM to 05:00 P.M.  
(Incremental value of Rs. 10 Thousands with unlimited auto extensions of 10 minutes each, if required)  
Last Date of Submission of Tender: 19<sup>th</sup> March 2025

For detailed terms and condition of the sale, please refer to the link provided in websites/web portal:  
(i) <https://baanknet.com> (ii) <https://ucobank.com>

Date: 10-02-2025, Place: Kollam (Sd/-) Chief Manager & Authorised Officer, UCO Bank.



INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Rammath Goenka

## BIREN'S EXIT ONLY FIRST STEP TOWARDS HEALING MANIPUR

FORGET double-engine governance—for a year and a half, it seemed Manipur was running on one sputtering engine and a prayer: Biren Singh had lost the confidence of a large section of his constituents and some of his own ministers even before the Congress announced its intent to table a no-confidence motion in the assembly this week. Singh's inability to douse the violence came under a harsher light last week when the Supreme Court ordered forensic analysis of audio recordings that allegedly show him stoking the flames. So when Singh resigned as chief minister on Sunday, there was a sigh of relief all around. But it was only the first step back towards normalcy in the strife-torn state.

Before taking the next few steps, we must not fall back on the excuse that this is just a fresh chapter in an old conflict. There are many long-running feuds between northeastern tribes who peacefully cohabit today. Dissatisfaction over a community's reservation status—which apparently triggered the violence in May 2023—is not unique to this region. Similar angst bothers the Jats in the north and Marathas in the west, though those cauldrons have been kept below boiling point. The Meiteis' demand for revoking scheduled tribe status for Kukis is *schadenfreude*, given they have twice rejected the status for themselves.

The Centre's aim of bringing order to the state was clear when former Union home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla was appointed governor last month after two appointees who had been in the seat for only two years in all. While the constitutional mechanics of forming a new government or imposing president's rule are being worked out, some larger steps towards lasting peace are clear. The tens of thousands of displaced families should not only be allowed to safely go back, but their post-traumatic stress and children's learning setbacks must also be addressed. While clamping down on the region's flourishing drugs trade, which community elders have complained about, clarity must be provided on why suspected kingpin Lhukhosei Zou was acquitted in 2020. The road through the mountain of institutional apathy that the warring sides allege will be tortuous. But we need to start on it right now by creating a permanent forum for talks, at times of peace as well as conflict.

## PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO CURB TUSKER TROUBLE

WITH four deaths in 48 hours, attacks by wild elephants are not showing any signs of abating in Kerala. Three people were trampled to death in a span of 24 hours between Monday and Tuesday; the body of another victim, a tribal youth, was found on Wednesday. A total of eight persons have died in the state from similar attacks over the last month; the total since 2016 stands at 169. Alarmed by the increasing conflicts, the state government in 2024 had declared human-wildlife conflict a state-specific disaster so that swift action plans can be put together. But a solution does not seem close at the moment.

The primary reason for escalating human-wildlife conflict in the state is the degradation of forests. Almost 30 percent of this densely-populated state is covered by forests. The sharp increase in human population and resultant rise in anthropogenic pressures on forest areas have made man-animal conflicts almost inevitable. Habitat fragmentation, growing settlements along wildlife corridors, rising ecotourism and changing cropping patterns on the forests' fringes add to the main cause. Climate change is also said to be a reason for increasing animal attacks during summers.

The foremost priority should be to prevent wild animals from entering agricultural fields and human habitations, for which the forest department should strengthen patrolling in the conflict hotspots. The department's plan to form primary response teams by recruiting local volunteers to alert people about the presence of wild animals in conflict-prone areas must be implemented at the earliest. The shrinking water bodies and drying grasslands inside forests must be checked and replenished. There are 840 human settlements inside the state's forests; the government can consider taking over the land in such enclosures and rehabilitating the forest dwellers elsewhere. Monitoring of animal movements using drones and inter-state coordination will also go a long way, as this is not Kerala's problem alone. The demand for clear vistas on either side of solar fencing along forest borders, culling of animals whose numbers have shot up and translocation of problematic wild animals must also be looked at. Equally important is improving the quality of the forests themselves, which would keep the animals in their natural habitat. A pragmatic and integrated approach is required for effectively dealing the issue of man-animal conflict.

### QUICK TAKE

#### RAISE AWARENESS ON GBS

WITH 192 reported cases and eight deaths in Mumbai and Pune, Guillain-Barré syndrome, an autoimmune disorder in which the body's immune system mistakenly attacks its own peripheral nerves, is worrying health administrators in the state and elsewhere. Though there are many gaps in understanding how the disease spreads, an Indian study last decade showed that four in five patients had had prior infections and one in three had tested positive for campylobacter, a food-borne pathogen. Before it sets off a wider panic, the states must increase their vigil in the outbreak areas and the central government should inform people about the disease's early warning signs and long-term effects.

WHAT do Indian prime ministers and US presidents talk about when they have summit meetings, which have become regular only in the last 25 of the 77 years since independence? Quite often, they lean on each other's shoulders to share experiences because it is quite lonely at the top for those holding high offices.

Barack Obama and Narendra Modi easily broke ice at their first meeting in the residential East Wing of the White House in September 2014, contrary to expectations among aides on both sides. They did this by effortlessly finding common ground as leaders of their respective countries who had stepped into high offices as rank outsiders in their capitals. Modi had never held any elected public office in New Delhi until he became prime minister. Obama was only a first-time senator who had not even completed his term when he was elected president.

There was a time when American presidents were condescending and talked down to Indian prime ministers. When Indira Gandhi and Ronald Reagan met for the first time in Cancun in 1981, the president spent most of their 45-minute meeting lecturing the prime minister with a memorable closing line: "India must pull itself up by its bootstraps to survive." Jan-ki Ganju, a family friend and the Indian embassy's one-man lobbyist in Washington for some 30 years, who was with Indira Gandhi, was surprised that she listened to Reagan in silence. When the president finished, her reply was just one crushing sentence: "Mr President, in order for us to pull ourselves up by bootstraps, first we must have boots." End of meeting.

A quarter century later, the roles had been completely reversed. When Manmohan Singh went to Washington on a farewell visit for George W Bush, the president was a deeply troubled man. The global economic meltdown in 2008 had blemished Bush's legacy. It had already been tainted by his ill-conceived war against Iraq and a disastrous attempt to recreate this cradle of civilisation in America's image. As was typical of him, Singh gave Bush a lesson in economics without being patronising. After the prime minister left the White House, their spokesperson said at an informal gaggle that Bush had told Singh he felt comforted and at peace after their conversation. Obama expressed similar feelings to Singh at their lunch in New Delhi in 2010.

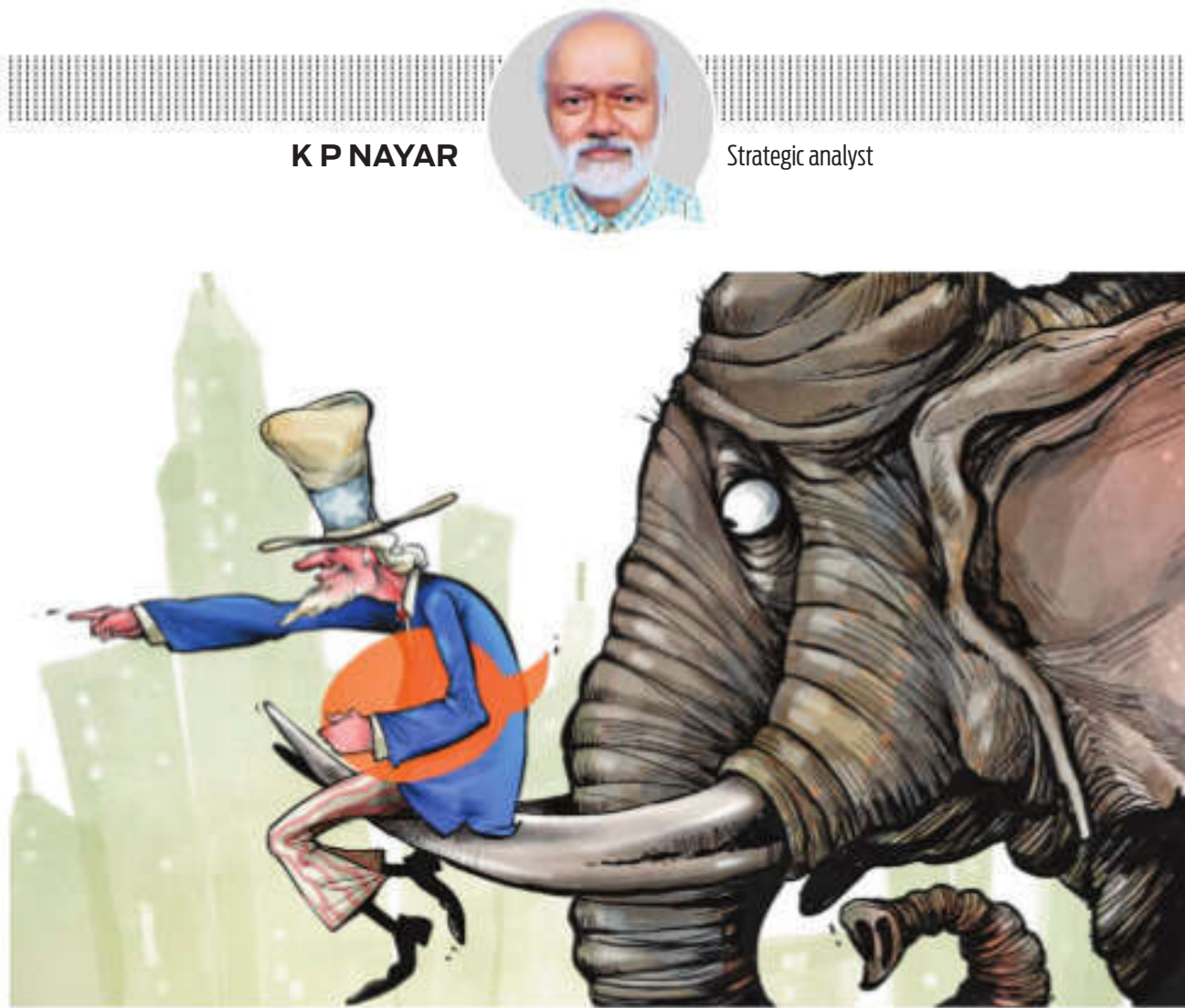
It would be a mistake to be judgemental about Modi's ongoing meetings with

Trump is yet to fill some key posts that have a bearing on India-US relations. For now, the two sides are talking at higher levels to reset the course

## WHEN THE PRIME MINISTER GOES TO WASHINGTON

K P NAYAR

Strategic analyst



SOURAV ROY

Donald Trump solely based on the popular caricatures of the new White House occupant. Taranjit Singh Sandhu, who was the ambassador in Washington during Trump's visit to India in 2020, is on record that the incumbent president absorbs his talking points and retains the essence of briefings by his aides. When Sandhu presented his credentials to Trump and again called on him to discuss his visit to India, the ambassador found the president intimately aware of Modi's home state of Gujarat, even about the world's biggest cricket stadium named after the prime minister.

The crucial difference between then and now is that today, there are few people in the White House and the state department who are capable or authorised

to prepare Trump for dealing with India while Modi is in Washington.

The senior director of the National Security Council (NSC) dealing with India and the assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia normally brief the US president ahead of a visit like Modi's. The ambassador in New Delhi also reaches Washington in time for it. Trump has not nominated an ambassador to India after Eric Garcetti, a Democrat, left the post when Joe Biden failed to win a second term.

Till the time of writing this, Trump has not appointed a new NSC director to deal with India. In the absence of a new assistant secretary of state, career diplomat Eric Meyer is the 'senior bureau official' for South Asia. This is his second job at

## THE URGENT NEED FOR A NATIONAL SKILL CENSUS

INDIA'S demographic transition will see it emerge as the most populous nation in the working age group by 2030. However, while the overall unemployment rate is only 4.1 percent, youth unemployment remains a serious issue at above 12 percent. The situation is further enervated by the low share of 4.7 percent of the total workforce having been trained. A National Skill Census might help fill this gap.

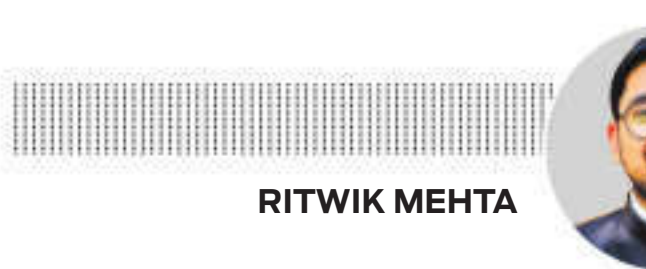
While caste-based census issues have taken most of the political discourse, Karnataka 2023, along with Haryana and Maharashtra 2024, have found their voters focusing more on jobs, development and safety. The MSME is rising to challenges with schemes like Approaches for MSME Development 2024 and a new executive development programme aimed at reducing the skill gap. The India Skills Report 2024 emphasises how skill will determine global competitiveness and inclusive growth, especially with AI steering the future of work in the MSME sector.

As of 2020, the Uttar Pradesh government mapped skills within the migrant worker population of about 2.35 million, identifying a skills matrix to facilitate fit job placements for those returning home. The survey incorporated the mapping of 94 categories of labourers to match workers with MSME organisations. In such amicable terms with major industry bodies like the Indian Industry Association and the Confederation of Indian Industry, jobs were promised for about 11.5 lakh workers, with 2.5 lakh by the real estate sector and 7 lakh provided by other sectors.

In May 2021, the Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement was signed by India and the UK to facilitate legal movement of students and professionals. By 2024, co-operation was focused on scaffolding skills. An important initiative was connecting India's National Career Service portal with the UK job platform.

India and the UAE launched a pilot project to align India's skill development programmes with UAE's job requirements. The NSDC partnered with the UAE's Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization to standardise qualifications.

In October 2024, the Andhra Pradesh government initiated India's first-ever skill census, which began in the Mangalagiri constituency and Thullur mandal. The initiative was aimed at analysing skill sets across 1,63,421 families to promote employ-



RITWIK MEHTA

Political strategist and founder of Niti Tantra, a youth-led policy think tank

ment opportunities and bridge gaps between industry and workforce skills. The data gathering efforts were led by some 675 enumerators with an app called Naipunyam, targeting individuals aged 18-40. What hampered the pilot run of the app was data collection. To gather the information, the enumerators were supposed to make candidates login with authentication through OTP, but many candidates refused to cooperate and provide their



India's demographic dividend is a fleeting opportunity that must be used in time. A few states like Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have attempted a skill census, but the scale and complexity of a national skill census demand a concerted effort involving key stakeholders

OTPs to the enumerators, thereby slowing down the process.

Looking at these cases, we have been able to identify some main issues we face:

1. Existing skill mapping systems often rely on outdated or static data, limiting their ability to adapt to rapidly changing market demands.
2. Limited involvement of industries in designing skill training programmes results in a mismatch between training outcomes and market requirements.
3. States like Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have made progress, but many regions lack adequate infrastructure for skilling programmes.
4. Most initiatives fail to monitor the long-term impact of skilling efforts on em-

ployability and career progression. 5. Women, people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups face barriers to accessing skill development programmes.

The scale and complexity of a national skill census demand a concerted effort involving key stakeholders. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), NITI Aayog and state skill development missions must spearhead this initiative, supported by industry associations. Educational institutions, vocational training centers, and international organisations like UNESCO and the World Bank can provide technical expertise and funding.

To ensure its success, the census must be executed over three years at an estimated cost of ₹3,000-5,000 crore.

A Skill India Commission must be established under the MSDE to oversee the census, which should be conducted biennially. A robust survey structure incorporating demographic data, skill categories, and employment trends is crucial.

Develop a digital platform akin to Singapore's SkillsFuture portal, incorporating AI for real-time analytics, multilingual support, and offline accessibility to cater to rural populations. A phased rollout across states and Union Territories will ensure manageability and adaptability.

Collaborate with industries to design skilling programmes that address market demands, taking cues from Australia's Job Outlook tool to match skills with labour market trends. Establish an independent monitoring body for real-time progress tracking and impact assessments.

India's demographic dividend is not a perpetual boon—it is a fleeting opportunity. Without urgent and decisive action, the country risks squandering its potential, perpetuating cycles of unemployment and underemployment. A national skill census is not just a policy option, it is an economic and moral imperative.

The time to act is now. Policymakers, industries, and civil society must rally together to ensure India's youth are not merely participants in the workforce but architects of a prosperous future.

(Views are personal)

In order to be a successful negotiator as a diplomat, you have to be able to put yourself in the other person's shoes

Madeleine Albright

the moment—the first being as *chargé d'affaires ad interim* at the US embassy in Norway, which is his priority. Meyer was rushed to Washington on 'temporary duty' by new Secretary of State Marco Rubio on January 20, probably because Rubio saw in Meyer's bio-data a stint many years ago as a senior adviser in the state department's South Asia bureau.

Ahead of Modi's arrival in Washington, Meyer would have lacked institutional support within the state department. The critical post of deputy assistant secretary for India is vacant; so are the positions of several others who keep the bureau well-oiled and functioning.

In the commerce department, which provides significant inputs on trade tariffs, not a single senior employee has been confirmed by the Senate. Operationally, the most important commerce post for India's interests would be the combined one of assistant secretary for global markets and director general of the US and Foreign Commercial Service; two successive appointees to the job in the recent past have been Indian Americans. Trump has not even found a nominee for assistant secretary for Indo-Pacific security in the department of defence.

It is pertinent to ask if these mid-level officials have any relevance when External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has been dealing with National Security Adviser Michael Waltz since December and has met Rubio twice. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh spoke to his Pentagon counterpart a few days ago. Vitality, they are the ones who chart the India policy that trickles up the political ladder; they can put up roadblocks, too. The political leadership often does not have the time or inclination to challenge them. And, typically, they are not sheep.

In the coming days and weeks, both sides will window-dress the Modi-Trump meeting as the resurrection of their personal chemistry and the starting point of a great relationship for the next four years, concessions by New Delhi to incentivise Trump notwithstanding. Both sides will also repackage Biden's important bilateral initiatives to paint them in Trump's image. Setbacks, if any, will be given a softer face.

This is not to rule out better India-US relations; but the meat in the relationship will take time to cook. If only because, right now, Trump has bigger priorities than India, which cannot make America great or rich, as his favourite slogan demands from the rest of the world.

(Views are personal)

(kpnayar@gmail.com)

### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

#### Kejriwal's downfall

Ref: *The banalisation of Kejriwal and Aam Aadmi Party* (Feb 12). The author only talks about how the BJP brought about the downfall of former Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal without getting into any details of Kejriwal not delivering most of the things he promised in two terms. Kejriwal brought about his own downfall because of arrogance.

Giri T, email

#### Street performances

Ref: *Live in your cities, mark areas for performers* (Feb 12). Street performances can really bring life to a city and give artists a space to showcase their talent. Places like London and Paris have dedicated spots for performers, making it easier for them to thrive. But in India, unclear rules often push artists into a grey area.

Vaanya M, Bengaluru

#### Terror trend

Ref: *Captain among 2 killed in J&K IED blast* (Feb 12). It is apparent that after the assembly elections in J&K, there is a growing trend of terror activities in the region. The new alliance of terror groups is worrying and would place a heavy burden on our security forces.

K R Venkata Narasimhan, Madurai

#### Using Sanskrit

DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran trying to create trouble about interpreting Lok Sabha's proceedings in Sanskrit is confusing. Sanskrit is one of the Indian languages. If he doesn't understand or like it, he can keep quiet. There are people who love it. One feels Maran is wasting taxpayers' money by creating issues out of non-issues in parliament.

S Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

#### Open-source research

Ref: *Let's build global AI framework to enhance trust: PM* (Feb 12). PM Narendra Modi said some valuable points in his speech at the summit on artificial intelligence in France. As he rightly opined, the research should be open-source and every country should have free access to the developments. At the same time, it should be totally free from bias.

DVG Sankara Rao, Vizianagaram

#### Delaying inevitable

Ref: *Central rule buzz as no consensus yet on new CM* (Feb 12). The BJP seems to be struggling to find a new CM candidate to succeed Biren Singh in Manipur. Even if the BJP chooses a candidate, the situation in Manipur may not change as people have enough experience to know how BJP's rule would be. There is thus no point in delaying the president's rule in the state.

D Sethuraman, Chennai



# PM recalls Savarkar's escape bid in Marseille

India-France relations touched new heights as Modi & Macron hold discussions on-board the presidential aircraft

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's sixth visit to France was as high on optics as it was on the wide-ranging engagements he held during his jam-packed two-day trip. To begin with, Modi's visit followed a series of unique reciprocal gestures, with the leaders serving as chief guests at each other's national days in the recent years. President Macron visited India as the chief guest for the 75th Republic Day on January 26 last year, while Prime Minister Modi had visited France as the guest of honour during Bastille Day celebrations in July 2023.

Following the AI summit which Macron co-chaired with Modi, the bilateral part of the visit began with the two leaders jointly addressing the India-France CEOs' Forum, which brought together leading businesses from sectors such as aerospace, defense, innovation, energy, infrastructure, agro-processing and consumer goods. Modi, at the meet, encouraged French companies to explore new opportunities, particularly in defense, civil nuclear, insurance, and advanced manufacturing.

After the forum, the two leaders travelled together to Marseille in the French presidential aircraft, which is rare. This is "emblematic not only of the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron during the inauguration of the Indian Consulate in Marseille, France, Wednesday | PTI

## INDIA, FRANCE DISCUSS VETO POWER IN UNSC

India and France expressed a commitment to strengthen discussions on the regulation of the veto power within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in cases involving mass atrocities. France has long advocated for the veto to be withheld when atrocities are occurring or are imminent, proposing a voluntary "code of conduct" among the Permanent members to prevent its use in such situations. The statement highlighted France's continued support for India's permanent membership on the UNSC, further emphasizing the importance of collective action in addressing global challenges. The two leaders also agreed to enhance their collaboration on both global and regional fronts, strengthening engagement through multilateral initiatives and institutions. "France reiterated its firm support for India's permanent membership of the UNSC. The two leaders agreed to strengthen conversations on regulation of use of the veto in case of mass atrocities," the joint statement said.

deep personal trust between the two leaders, but also of the remarkable confidence that they have in each other, and that really characterises the relationship as well." Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said.

The Prime Minister and the President held discussions on-board the aircraft. "You could say that India-France relations touched new heights, literally," Misri said.

The discussions on various issues continued aboard the aircraft and continued upon landing in Marseille, where the two leaders were joined by their larger delegations. These talks extended into a dinner hosted by President Macron in honour of Prime Minister Modi.

"These discussions covered the entire gamut of our deep and diverse strategic partnership. The two leaders reviewed progress in the areas of defense, in the area of space, civil nuclear cooperation, and in the areas of health, as well as people-to-people cooperation between the two sides," Misri said.

The Prime Minister began his programme with a visit to the Mazargues War Cemetery on Wednesday, where he was joined by President Macron to honour the Indian soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the First and Second World Wars.

In a post on X, Modi wrote, "Landed in Marseille. In India's

quest for freedom, this city holds special significance. It was here that the great Veer Savarkar attempted a courageous escape. I also want to thank the people of Marseille and the French activists of that time who demanded that he not be handed over to British custody. The bravery of Veer Savarkar continues to inspire generations!"

In another significant gesture, the two leaders jointly inaugurated the new Indian Consulate General in Marseille, a move that had been announced by the Prime Minister during his visit to Paris in July 2023.

"I can't recall too many consulates that have been jointly inaugurated by a President and the Prime Minister, so this was a really, really special occasion, and it speaks to, once again, the kind of friendship, the sense of comfort, and the sentiments that are shared by the two leaders and our two peoples," Misri said. Then the two leaders visited the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor Facility, ITER, in Cadarache, together.

The experimental campaign at ITER is vital for advancing fusion science and paving the way for the fusion power plants of the future. And breaking away from protocol, President Macron was the airport to see off Prime Minister Modi.

# Waqf Bill: House panel report to be tabled in LS today

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

THE Joint Committee on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, will table the final report in the Lok Sabha on Thursday. Though the Bill was scheduled to be tabled in the Lower House on February 3, it was removed from the revised list later.

According to the 'List of Business' of the Lok Sabha secretariat, the committee's chairman Jagdambika Pal, along with BJP MP Sanjay Jaiswal, will lay on the table the record of evidence given before the Joint Committee of Parliament (JCP).

The final report of the JCP on Waqf Bill was presented to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on January 30, after the panel adopted the draft report and the amended revised bill on January 29. While it approved 14 amendments proposed by the ruling NDA members, all amendments by the Opposition MPs were rejected. However, the Opposition leaders submitted their dissent notes on the report.

Some of the Opposition members alleged that parts of their dissent note on the Waqf Bill

were redacted by the chairman without their consent. Congress MP Syed Naseer Hussain and AIMIM MP Asaduddin Owaisi raised similar concerns.

However, Jagdambika Pal defended the deletion saying that the report carried all the objections on the clauses of the bill, but personal abuses can't be part of the report. "The JCP final report is 482 pages and the dissent notes of the Opposition runs into 281 pages. How many more pages do they require?"

According to rules of procedures of the committee, unparliamentary/derogatory remarks over the functioning of the panel cannot be part of the report," he said.

However, Naseer Hussain said that the members, despite having been rushed through, had circulated detailed dissent notes along with introductory paragraphs and conclusions. "These notes had to be considered as a whole and if any part thereof was not being included in the report, the member concerned ought to have been informed. Not even a word from the dissent note could be omitted at the whims and fancies of the Secretariat."

# SC to hear pleas over CEC appointment on Feb 19

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Wednesday fixed February 19 to hear a batch of pleas against the appointment of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners under the 2023 law, saying if anything happens in the interregnum, the consequences are bound to follow.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh was told by advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for NGO Association for Democratic Reforms, that earlier the pleas were scheduled to be heard on Wednesday but now they have been listed for February 19.

Bhushan said the urgency in the matter is that CEV Rajiv Kumar is scheduled to superannuate on February 18 and the government may appoint the new CEC under the 2023 law, which is under challenge.

The bench said, "We are fixing the matter for hearing on February 19. If anything happens in the interregnum, consequences are bound to follow."

Bhushan said the apex court registry has informed them that as Justice Kant was unwell, the matters were posted for hearing on February 19. Justice Kant said now all the matters will be taken up for

**ALSO IN TOP COURT**

**Can't overlook right to life of accused: SC**

A two-judge bench on Wednesday said the right to life and liberty under Article 21 couldn't be overlooked only because a person faced criminal charges as it quashed a case against three persons under the stringent UP Gangsters Act. The bench said the cases against persons booked under UP Gangsters Act, 1986 couldn't be run-of-the-mill but serious.

**'Unified pension scheme notified'**

Attorney general R Venkataraman and solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, informed the court on Wednesday that it recently notified the Unified Pension Scheme, which might address the concerns of judicial officers. The matter relates to the applicability of the New Pension Scheme to officers of the district judiciary.

hearing on February 19. On February 3, the top court while fixing the matter for Wednesday, said it will decide the issue on merit and finally.

Bhushan had earlier submitted that the 2023 verdict held that the ECs have to be selected for appointment by an independent panel comprising the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and Chief Justice of India.

"They have brought an Act by which they have removed the chief justice and brought in another minister, making the commissioners' appointment only at the pleasure of the government. You need to have an

independent committee to appoint the election commissioners," Bhushan had said.

Advocate Varun Thakur, appearing for Congress' Jaya Thakur, had earlier submitted that they had moved the application seeking a direction to the Centre that the CEC appointment should be made as per the March 2, 2023 verdict of the Constitution bench.

On March 15, 2024, the top court refused to stay the appointments of new ECs under a 2023 law which excluded the CJI from the selection panel and deferred hearing on of pleas challenging the appointments.

# Homeopathy commission chief told to step down

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the chairperson of the National Commission for Homeopathy, Dr Anil Khurana, to step down from his post, after noting that the appointment was not in accordance with law.

Setting aside a Karnataka High Court order, a two-judge SC bench comprising Justices Dipankar Datta and Manmohan, directed Dr Khurana to leave the office in a week.

"The respondent (Dr Khurana) shall step down from the office of the chairperson from a week from today to enable him to complete his assignment, however without taking any policy decision involved with finances. Fresh process shall be initiated for appointment of the office of chairperson expeditiously," the bench said.

The SC passed the order after hearing a plea filed by Dr Amargouda L Patil challenging Dr Khurana's appointment.

# EC: 54 in '51 to 743 in 2024, number of political parties sees 15-fold jump

MUKESH RANJAN @ New Delhi

THERE has been a 15-fold increase in number of political parties (from 54 in 1951-52 to 743 in 2024) contesting in general elections and five times increase in the number contesting candidates from 1,874 in 1951-52 to 8,360 in 2024, revealed the data released by the Election Commission on Tuesday.

In a statement, the poll panel said, "In the first General Election of 1951, there were only 1.96 lakh polling stations, but by 2024, this number had surged to 10.53 lakh polling stations, a testament to the commission's relentless efforts to ensure that no voter is left behind."

It went on to add that the electorate base has grown exponentially, as in the first Lok Sabha elections, the number of electors stood at 17.32 crore, whereas, in 2024, the electorate swelled to over 97 crores.

As per the EC data, the 2024 General Election saw more than 64.6 crore electors exercising their right to vote, which marked a significant increase in voter participation.

"The voter turnout in 1951-52 was just 45.7%, but by 2024, this had risen to above 66%, making

it the third consecutive General Election where voter participation exceeded 65%. The political landscape has also seen a remarkable growth. In 1951-52, only 53 political parties participated in the elections, while more than 740 political parties contested in 2024," the election commission said.

The number of candidates contesting the elections in 2024 stood at an "astounding 8,360, with 7,190 candidates forfeiting their deposits".

Maharashtra emerged as the state with the highest number of contesting candidates, fielding 1,121 candidates, while Ladakh and Nagaland saw the lowest, with only three candidates each. This disparity highlights the contrasting political engagement across regions, with densely populated states seeing higher competition.

The EC data also highlighted that in the 2024 elections, out of the total 543 elected candidates, 74 were women. This marked a steady progress toward gender inclusivity in Indian politics. West Bengal led the way with the highest number (11) of female candidates. Uttar Pradesh elected the highest number of male candidates, at 73 out of 80.

GENERAL ELECTIONS SO FAR			
Year of GE	Total electors (Crore)	Parties	Candidates
1951-52	17.32	53	1,874
1957	19.36	15	1,519
1962	21.63	27	1,985
1967	25.02	25	2,369
1971	27.41	53	2,784
1977	32.11	34	2,439
1980	35.62	36	4,629
1984-85	40.03	35	5,492
1989	49.89	113	6,160
1991-92	51.15	145	8,749
1996	59.25	209	13,952
1998	60.58	176	4,750
1999	61.95	169	4,648
2004	67.14	230	5,435
2009	71.69	363	8,070
2014	83.40	464	8,251
2019	91.19	673	8,054
2024	97.97	743	8,360

# 80K killed due to extreme weather events in 1993-2022 period: Study

JITENDRA CHOUBEY @ New Delhi

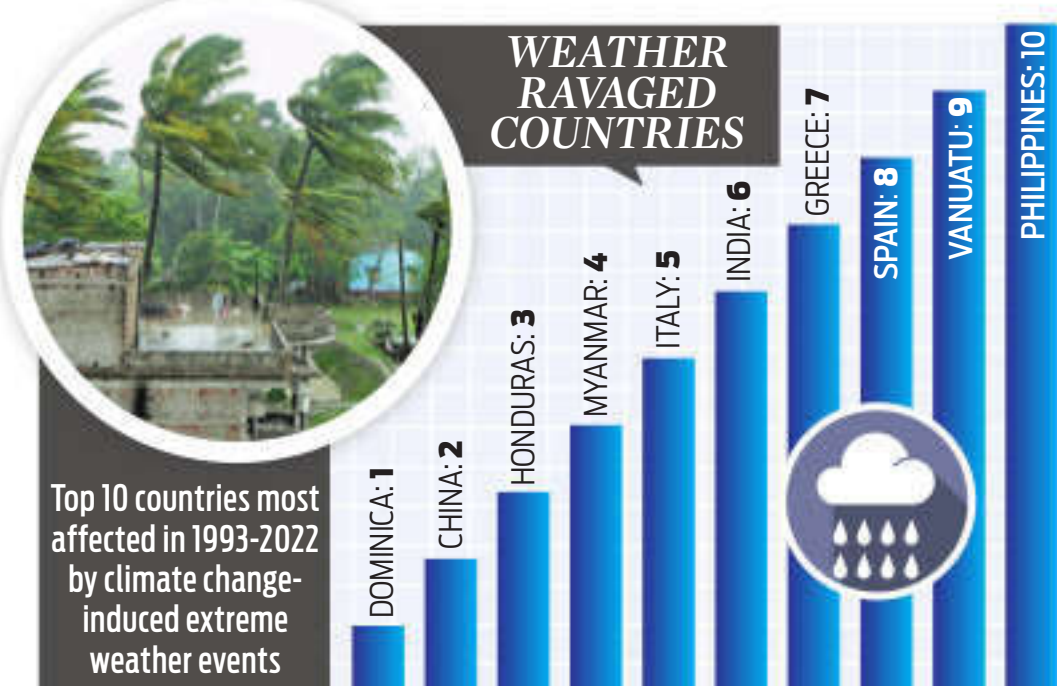
INDIA registered at least 80,000 fatalities in the past three decades, causing losses of nearly \$180 billion (inflation-adjusted) between 1993 and 2023 due to climate change-induced extreme weather events, a study says.

The study by Climate Risk Index (CRI) 2025, published on Wednesday by the environmental organization Germanwatch, shows that over the last 30 years, Global South countries have been particularly affected by the impacts of extreme weather events.

India ranked 6th and experienced over 10% of total global fatalities and 4.2% of global economic loss due to extreme weather events.

The study states that India is one of the top countries at continuous risk of natural disasters. "For instance, climate change has made devastating early heat in India 30 times more likely," it says.

"India experienced more than 400 extreme weather events in the past three decades, causing losses of nearly \$180



billion (inflation-adjusted) and at least 80,000 fatalities. Moreover, 4.6 crore were affected overall due to extreme weather events," the report says.

The CRI report underscores India's diverse climate risks and their varied impacts, including loss of lives and displaced migration. It states that India has faced increasingly frequent extreme weather events, including floods, heat waves, cyclones, and drought. Floods and landslides displaced

millions and damaged agriculture, and cyclones devastated coastal areas.

It has pointed 1998 Gujarat and 1999 Odisha cyclones, Cyclones Hudhud and Amphan in 2014 and 2020, the 1993 floods in northern India, the Uttarakhand floods of 2013, and severe floods in 2019. "Moreover, recurring and unusually intense heat waves, all with temperatures around 50°C, claimed many lives in 1998, 2002, 2003, and 2015," the report says.

# Buy air tickets from panchayats soon, says Shah

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

UNION Minister of Home Affairs and Cooperation Amit Shah said on Wednesday that each panchayat in the country will have a primary agricultural cooperative society (PACS).

"Currently, PACS are involved in booking railway tickets, and the Ministry of Cooperation is working to enable PACS to sell airline tickets as well," he said while presiding over the first meeting of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee of the Ministry of Cooperation on 'Initiatives to Strengthen Cooperative Societies'.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi once remarked that "people wearing 'hawai chappals' would travel by flight", and moving towards this vision, the NDA government is working to ensure that air tickets are accessible even in the remotest corners of the country's every panchayat.

Shah stressed that enterprises associated with India's cooperative sector would now compete with corporate entities, fulfilling the PM's vision of 'Sahkar Se Samridhi' (prosperity through cooperation). "The government is committed to ensur-

BOOSTING COOPERATIVE SECTOR

They now function as Common Service Centres, Jan Aushadhi Kendras, and offer other services within panchayats

As per the National Cooperative Database Portal, India has 1,01,524 functional PACS

MAHARASHTRA HAS THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF PACS AT 21,060, FOLLOWED BY GUJARAT (10,193), BIHAR (8,484), RAJASTHAN (8,187), UTTAR PRADESH (7,178) AND KARNATAKA (6,001)

PACS are now linked to over 20 different activities

Steps have been taken for the computerisation of PACS

Soon, PACS will also be able to sell airline tickets

ing the cooperative sector enjoys the same opportunities as the corporate sector," he said.

"The Ministry of Cooperation, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, the Reserve Bank of India, and the Income Tax Department, has taken steps to create a unified tax structure for both corporate and cooperative sectors," he added.

He noted that the government's first task after the creation of the Ministry of Cooperation was to compile a database of PACS in partner-

ship with state governments, with the aim of establishing 2 lakh PACS in the next five years. "Now, the work to develop the national cooperative database is nearly complete, and information on cooperative societies across the country is available at the click of a button," he said.

PACS are currently linked to over 20 different activities and functioning as Common Service Centres, Jan Aushadhi Kendras, and offering other services within panchayats.

According to the data on the

National Cooperative Database portal, the country has 1,01,524 functional PACS. Maharashtra leads with the highest number of PACS at 21,060, followed by Gujarat with 10,193, Bihar with 8,484, Rajasthan with 8,187, Uttar Pradesh with 7,178, and Karnataka with 6,001.

Highlighting the importance of trained manpower in the cooperative sector, Shah said his ministry has introduced a bill for the establishment of the Tribhuvan Sahkari University and "it will be passed by Parliament soon."

**GBS DEATH**  
A 53-year-old man has died of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) at a hospital in Mumbai, the first fatality here due to the nerve disorder, officials said on Wednesday. He was admitted to another civic-run hospital on January 23.

**4 HELD**  
FOR SMUGGLING BID IN SOUTH BENGAL

INDIA	Max	Min	Mumbai	Max	Min
Ahmedabad	42	27	35	29	
Bhopal	43	28	32	28	
Jaipur	41	30	41	27	
Amritsar	40	23	42	27	
Chennai	39	30	34	28	
Kolkata	36	26	23	18	
Srinagar	18	08	42	23	

**IED BLAST:** Left home in J'khand after attending a family wedding ■ Preparations made in J&K's Samba

# Capt Bakshi was to be married with service doctor in Army on April 5...



Army personnel pay tribute to soldiers Captain Karamjit Singh and Naik Mukesh Singh Manhas who were killed in an IED blast near LoC in Jammu | PPT

**MUKESH RANJAN** @ Ranchi

CAPTAIN Karamjit Singh Bakshi, who was killed in an IED blast near the LoC on Tuesday, was to get married on April 5. According to family members, after attending a marriage in the family and overseeing the preparations of his marriage at Hazaribagh during a week-long holiday, he had left for Jammu and Kashmir on January 24 to join duty.

Captain Bakshi was martyred near the Line of Control in the Akhnoor sector of J&K on Tuesday. The blast claimed Naik Mukesh Singh Manhas and injured a soldier.

Captain Bakshi's family runs a restaurant business in Hazaribagh. The tragic news was given to his father Ajendra Singh by the Indian Army. Captain Bakshi's body reached Ranchi Airport on Wednesday and was taken to Hazaribagh for last rites. At the time his father was informed about his son's death, Ajendra was at a wedding with his wife. Captain Karamjit was the eldest of Ajendra's two children. His sister who is currently studying.

"My son had a passion to join the army since childhood and was to get married on April 5 with a doctor serving in the Indian Army," Ajendra said.

Other family members said that Captain Bakshi completed his studies in Guwahati and joined the army in 2023. "Captain Karamjit Singh Bakshi had come home on a week-long leave on January 16 and attended a family wedding, besides overseeing the preparations for his own wedding, scheduled on April 5," a family member said.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Wednesday condoled the death of Captain Karamjit Singh Bakshi and an army jawan in an IED blast in J&K. "Received the sad news of the martyrdom of Captain Karamjit Singh Bakshi from Jharkhand and another army jawan during a search operation in Akhnoor, Jammu. May Marang Buru grant peace to the souls of the martyred soldiers and give strength to the bereaved families to bear this difficult time of grief," Soren posted on X.

State BJP chief Babul Marandi said, "Deeply saddened by the news of martyrdom of army jawan Captain Karamjit Singh Bakshi, son of Hazaribagh, in an IED blast in Akhnoor Sector."

**My son had a passion to join the army since childhood and was to be married on April 5 with a doctor serving in the Indian Army**  
Ajendra Singh, Karamjit's father

### Family runs restaurant

Bakshi's family runs a restaurant business in Hazaribagh. The tragic news was given to his father Ajendra Singh by the Indian Army. Captain Bakshi's body reached Ranchi Airport on Wednesday and was taken to Hazaribagh for last rites.

# ... Engaged on Jan 28, he was to marry on April 18

**FAYAZ WANI** @ Srinagar

NAIK Mukesh Singh Manhas, who was killed in an IED blast near Line of Control (LoC) in J&K's Akhnoor sector on Tuesday, had returned to army unit on January 28 after his home for engagement. He was to get married on April 18.

Preparation was in full swing for the wedding. The refurbishing and white washing was going on in Naik's home in Kamila village in Utterbehi area of border district of Samba in J&K, when his family received the news about his injury at 6 pm on Tuesday. "We were informed by the army that he was injured in the blast. Half an hour later told us that he had succumbed to injuries," one of his relatives said.

He said some function was taking place at his home and all the relatives were either present or on their way to attend the function when the sad news of his death came. Naik is survived by his parents and three siblings, including two sisters and a younger brother, who is also in the army.

Mukesh's father Chagatar Singh, a retired Sub Inspector of Police, said, "We were preparing for his marriage. We had a function in the home yesterday and all relatives were here. He was at home for 10-15 days for the engagement ceremony. He had returned back to rejoin his duty at his unit on January 28."

"My son had joined the Army at a very young age to serve the country," said Chagatar while being comforted by his relatives to have patience.

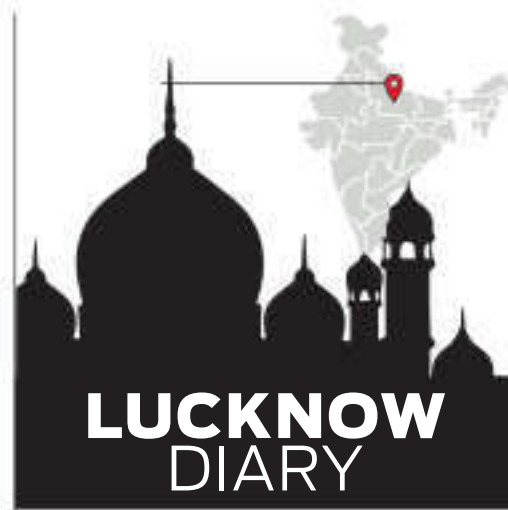
People gathered at the Mukesh's home to express solidarity with the bereaved family and participated in the last rites of the deceased. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Navin Sachdeva, GoC White Knight Corps (also known as 16 Corps) laid a wreath to pay homage to Captain Karamjit Singh Bakshi and Naik Mukesh Singh Manhas, who were killed in IED blast near the LoC in Akhnoor sector yesterday. "Their sacrifice will never be forgotten," he said.

### Marriage preparation

Mukesh's father Chagatar Singh, a retired Sub Inspector said, "We were preparing for his marriage. We had a function in the home yesterday and all relatives were here. He was at home for 10-15 days for the engagement ceremony."

### Tearful adieu

L-G Navin Sachdeva, GoC White Knight Corps also paid homage. Manhas was given a tearful adieu as thousands of mourners turned up at his funeral.



## LUCKNOW DIARY

**NAMITA BAJPAI**

Our correspondent in Uttar Pradesh

namita.bajpai@newindianexpress.com

### AMU official booked over 'beef biryani'

After a notice to serve 'beef biryani' for Sunday lunch at a students' hostel in Aligarh Muslim University surfaced over social media, triggering a row, two students and the provost of the institution were booked over charges of hurting religious sentiments. Students Mohammed Faizullah and Mujaim Ahmad Bhatti, and provost Fasih Raghib Gauhar were named in the FIR. A notice pinned on a hostel board, citing authority order, said 'beef biryani' would replace the usual chicken biryani for Sunday. Protest erupted on campus, with AMU administration rushing to attribute the 'miscommunication' to a typing error.



# Patra meets Guv again to break Manipur deadlock

**PRASANTA MAZUMDAR** @ Guwahati

THREE days on since N Biren Singh resigned as Manipur Chief Minister but BJP has not named his successor yet, intensifying speculation about the imposition of President's rule in the state.

BJP's Northeast in-charge Sambit Patra met Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Wednesday. It was his third visit to the Raj Bhavan in four days.

Patra met several MLAs for the third straight day. BJP's Karam Shyam claimed that there was no constitutional crisis in the state. "I don't know about President's rule. I think that the problem will be solved by the Centre with the help of the legislators. There is no constitutional crisis in Manipur," the MLA said.

When asked if the name of the new chief minister will be announced by Wednesday, he said, "I don't believe it."

Another MLA said, "The Assembly will be kept in suspended animation. The government will be formed when some sort of normalcy returns. We are mentally prepared for it."

Former Manipur Speaker



and Congress MLA Thokchom Lokeshwar wondered if Patra was in the state to resolve the political crisis or for some other reasons. He lamented that the state government did not convene a session of the Assembly, thereby leaving people in the dark on many pertinent issues.

There is a perception that the BJP would resolve the political crisis in the state following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's return from abroad.

The All Manipur United Clubs organisation said the Centre was free to take any decision as deemed fit to resolve the Manipur political crisis but it must not hurt the state's territorial integrity. The organisation warned that it would not sit idle if there was a threat to the territorial integrity.

# Pranab's son returns to Cong after TMC stint

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** @ Kolkata

FORMER President Pranab Mukherjee's son Abhijit Mukherjee rejoined the Congress on Wednesday after a four-year stint with the Trinamool Congress.

Abhijit, who had left the Congress in 2021, described his return as "home coming." Asked whether the move was politically correct given the Congress's electoral decline in the Assembly, he said, "There is no alternative to the grand old party in the country's politics. Only the Congress takes along all people irrespective of their caste, creed and religion."

State Congress chief Subhankar Sarkar said, "This will give a boost to the state unit. We want people who align themselves with the ideology of Rahul Gandhi to join our party."

Mukherjee had won a by-election to the Jangipur Lok Sabha constituency in 2012 on a Congress ticket after his father became the President. Abhijit's return to Congress comes weeks after his sister, Sharmistha, criticised the Congress, saying the party demanded a memorial space for former PM Manmohan Singh while failing to convene a CWC meeting to condole her father's death.

# Didi govt presents ₹3.9L cr poll Budget, hikes 4% DA

State GDP records 6.8% growth, more than national avg; Minister

**SULAGNA SENGUPTA** @ Kolkata

THE West Bengal government on Wednesday announced a 4% increase in dearness allowance (DA) for its employees from April 1 in the budget presented by state finance minister Chandrima Bhattacharya.

The state budget for 2025-26, pegged at ₹3.89 lakh crore, puts a major focus on social welfare, rural growth and infrastructure. The government has allocated funds for rural connectivity, river erosion control, and agrarian support.

Opposition parties claimed that DA was hiked keeping an eye on Assembly elections due in 2026. Bhattacharya said, "With this 4 per cent increase in DA, we are reaffirming our commitment to the welfare of our employees." The hike would bring the total DA to 18 per cent for employees, providing them relief amid rising inflation. The total DA for employees and pensioners in the state will now stand at 42 per cent of their basic pay or pension.

Bhattacharya said West Bengal's Gross State Domestic Product had grown by 6.8 per cent in 2024-25 against the country's overall growth rate of 6.37



### FOCUS ON RURAL INFRA, WELFARE

**₹3.89L CR**  
Budget was presented by West Bengal gov for 2025-26 with a major focus on social welfare

**4%**  
DA hike for state govt employees from April 1, bringing the total DA to 18%

• **₹1,500 crore** allocated for improvement of rural roads to boost connectivity and economic activity in remote areas

• **₹200 crore** earmarked to address river erosion issue and give relief to vulnerable riverine communities

• **₹500 crore** okayed for construction of 4.75-km bridge over the Ganga at Gangasagar for smooth access for pilgrims

• **16 lakh** new houses to be built under 'Banglar Bari' project for which **₹9,600 crore** has been allocated

per cent. She emphasised that the state's economy has shown "resilience" across all three sectors—agriculture, industry, and services—surpassing national figures.

"The industrial sector registered a growth of 7.3 per cent, higher than India's 6.2 per cent, while agriculture and allied sectors grew by 4.2 per cent, compared to India's 3.8 per cent. The services sector registered a growth rate of 7.8 per

cent, surpassing India's 7.2 per cent," said Bhattacharya.

West Bengal's unemployment rate was only 4.14 per cent as of January 2025 against the national rate at 7.93 per cent, Bhattacharya said, crediting this to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's "focus on job-centric growth". "92 lakh people had been lifted out of poverty by 2021, and now the figure stands at 1.72 crore," the finance minister said.

# Rape survivor can terminate pregnancy, says HC

**NAMITA BAJPAI** @ Lucknow

THE Allahabad High Court has ruled that a victim of sexual assault has the legal right to terminate her pregnancy medically, emphasising that forcing her into motherhood would violate her dignity and fundamental rights.

A two-judge bench comprising Justices Mahesh Chandra Tripathi and Prashant Kumar made the observation while hearing the petition of a 17-year-old rape survivor seeking medical termination of her pregnancy.

Citing Section 3(2) of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, the court stated, "In the case of sexual assault, denying a woman the right to say no to medical termination of pregnancy and fastening her with the responsibility of motherhood would amount to denying her human right to live with dignity, as she has a right in relation to her body, which includes saying 'Yes' or 'No' to being a mother."

The petitioner had allegedly been lured by the accused to elope with him. Following a



complaint by her father, she was found and subsequently underwent medical examination for acute stomach pain, where it was revealed that she was three months and fifteen days pregnant.

Her counsel argued that she had been raped multiple times and that an investigation had been requested before the sessions court. Since she was now 19 weeks pregnant, the petition stated that the pregnancy was causing her mental anguish and was detrimental to her well-being. It was also pleaded that, as a minor, she did not want the responsibility of bearing a child.

Referring to Rule 3B of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Rules, 2003 (as amended

in 2021), the court noted that the law permits termination of pregnancy up to 24 weeks for survivors of sexual assault, rape, or incest, as well as for minors. Citing previous Supreme Court and Delhi High Court rulings in similar cases, the bench observed, "To force the victim to give birth to the child of a man who sexually assaulted her would result in unexplainable miseries."

The court in its order, directed the authorities concerned to conduct the medical examination of the petitioner on the same day by a three-member medical committee. The court ultimately granted the petitioner the choice to proceed with the termination if she so wished.

# Row over Bihar panchayat diktat on rape survivor

**RAMASHANKAR** @ Patna

A village panchayat in Bihar's Saharsa district asked the family members of a 14-year rape survivor to settle the matter after receiving ₹1.11 lakh as compensation from the accused.

When the accused's family refused to pay the compensation for the girl's marriage, SP Saharsa Himanshu Kumar asked the SHO of Mahishi police station to lodge a complaint against the accused.

The victim's mother told the police that the incident took place on January 5, when her daughter went to a nearby field to attend the call of nature. The accused held her captive, took her to a house and raped her.

The panchayat members held a meeting and decided to pay ₹1.11 lakh as compensation to the victim's family. The accused agreed, however, a month passed but no action was taken.

# Passport cannot be denied to person on brother's terrorism link, rules HC

**FAYAZ WANI** @ Srinagar

THE Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh High Court has said that a passport cannot be denied to a person merely for the involvement of his brother in militancy activities. It also held that a person's activities should form the basis for issuance of passport. The High Court order has been welcomed by the political parties.

A bench of Justice M A Chowdhary, while allowing petition of one Muhammad Amir Malik R/o Ramban, directed J&K's Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) CID to re-submit the report uninfluenced by conduct or activities of the brother and Malik's father to Regional Passport Officer (RPO) within four weeks.

Malik, a diploma holder in Engineering, had applied for a passport in 2021 to go abroad in search of a job. However, the CID had not cleared his passport verification. After being denied passport, Malik moved the HC and the court sought a report from ADGP CID.



ADGP CID stated that petitioner's brother, Mohammad Ayaz Malik alias Abu Musa, was a HM militant and was killed in an encounter with security forces in 2011 and his father is enlisted as OGW in the records.

"Since brother of petitioner was affiliated with HM and his father is an OGW, the possibility of applicant coming under duress, influence or extraneous

pressure of anti-Indian terrorist, separatist and secessionist outfits of elements of hostile foreign agencies has been assessed to be of very high probability and after consideration, the case of the petitioner for issuance of passport has been disposed of 'not recommended'."

The court, however, overruled the observation and held that petitioner cannot be deprived of his fundamental right guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India by rejecting his passport verification merely because his brother was a militant and his father is an OGW.

PDP chief and former J&K Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti said the HC decision of not denying a passport to an individual for merely being related to a militant was a step in the right direction.

### Diploma holder applied for passport in 2021

Malik, a diploma holder in Engineering, had applied for a passport in 2021 to go abroad in search of a job. However, the CID had not cleared his passport verification. After being denied passport, Malik moved the HC and the court sought a report from ADGP CID.

SISSI MAY SKIP US IF GAZAN RELOCATION TALKS ON AGENDA

MOSCOW

EGYPT'S President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi will not travel to Washington for talks at the White House if the agenda includes US President Donald Trump's plan to displace Palestinians from Gaza...



Marco Rubio, Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, Abdullah II

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump on Tuesday doubled down on his idea of exiling Palestinians and placing a rebuilt Gaza under "US authority" but faced pushback from visiting Jordanian King Abdullah II.

countries could "work" with Trump on his shock proposal. The Jordanian monarch appeared to offer a sweetener to Trump...

"One of the things that we can do right away is take 2,000 children, cancer children who are in a very ill state. That is possible," Abdullah said.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Israel could not allow Hamas to use a ceasefire in Gaza to rearm, appearing to back a potential resumption of fighting by Israeli forces as a three-week-old truce and hostage release deal teetered on the precipice of collapse.

Two shot dead in Gaza for flying a drone

JERUSALEM

The Israeli military said on Wednesday it struck two people in the southern Gaza Strip who were flying a drone, which was allegedly observed entering Gaza from Israel after past attempts to use drones to smuggle in weapons.



This picture taken from the Israeli side of the border shows an army tank stationed on a hill overlooking northern Gaza on Tuesday | AFP

Jan. 19, said Munir al-Bursh, director general of the Health Ministry, on Tuesday. The Israeli military says it has fired upon people who approach its forces or enter certain areas in alleged violation of the truce.

The ceasefire faces a major test as Hamas has threatened to delay the next release of hostages scheduled for Saturday, accusing Israel of violating the ceasefire agreement by firing on people and by not allowing the stipulated amounts of tents, shelters and other vital aid to enter the territory.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with the support of President Donald Trump, has warned that Israel would resume fighting if hostages are not freed on Saturday. Trump has threatened that "all hell" will break out if the hostages are not released.

Don Trump readies reciprocal tariffs on trade partners

WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT Donald Trump is taking additional action to upset the world trade system, with plans to sign an order as soon as Wednesday that would require that US tariffs on imports match the tax rates charged by other countries.

disruptions. For all of Trump's talk, the impact will likely depend on the details of the tariffs and how other nations respond. A reciprocal tariffs order could amount to a substantial tax hike to be shouldered largely by US consumers and businesses as the Census Bureau reported that the country had total imports of \$4.1 trillion last year.



"It's time to be reciprocal," Trump told reporters earlier this week. "You'll be hearing that word a lot. Reciprocal. If they charge us, we charge them."

The president had suggested that the order would come on Tuesday or Wednesday.

But when Tuesday passed without the tariffs being officially announced, Trump was asked if he would sign the order on Wednesday and Trump answered: "We'll see what happens."

As Trump has unleashed a series of tariffs after being in power for less than a month, he has fully taken ownership of the path of the U.S. economy. It's a bet that his economic ideas can eventually deliver meaningful results for voters, even if by Trump's own admission the import taxes could involve some financial pain in the form of inflation and economic

The tariffs could set off retaliatory measures by trading partners that could roll growth around the globe and reset where the United States stands with allies and rivals alike.

By signing the order, Trump would fulfill his long-standing pledge to raise taxes on most imported goods, a clear break with his recent White House predecessors who saw tariffs as either targeted tools to use strategically or barriers worth lowering.

But should job gains never materialise and should inflation stay high, it's an easy line of attack for Democratic lawmakers.

EXPRESS READ

UK tightens citizenship rules for illegal migrants

London: The United Kingdom government has tightened rules around British citizenship applications to block migrants arriving illegally on small boats across the English Channel or crossing the border by road or other illegal means.

Manila files criminal complaints against VP

Manila: Philippine government investigators filed criminal complaints, including sedition, against Vice President Sara Duterte on Wednesday over her public threat to have the president assassinated if she herself was killed in an escalating political storm.

GREATER CHENNAI CORPORATION BUS ROUTE ROADS DEPARTMENT

E.OPEN-TENDER NOTICE BRR.C.No. B4/4801/2024-1. Tender are invited by the Superintending Engineer / Bus Route Roads Department for the following works as per details furnished below:

CAPITAL REGION URBAN TRANSPORT Govt of Odisha

NOTICE INVITING REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL BID IDENTIFICATION No. 238 /G.M (Engg./CRUT/2024-25. The General Manager (Engg.), CRUT, Bhubaneswar on behalf of Managing Director, CRUT invites Request For Proposal in DOUBLE COVER SYSTEM for "Construction of Electric Bus Depot at Madipada, Sambalpur, Odisha on Turnkey basis (Design & execution)" from the class of eligible contractors as mentioned in column-5 (five) registered with the State Governments and Contractors of equivalent Grades / Class Registered with Central Government / MES / Railways for execution of Civil Works to be received on online mode as per the details below.

Table with 7 columns: Sl. No., Name of work, Cost of RFP document, Period of Completion, Bid Security, Eligible Class of Contractor, Last date of online receipt of bids.

CHOLAMANDALAM INVESTMENT AND FINANCE COMPANY LIMITED. E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES. Account No. and Name of borrower, Date & Amount as per Demands, Descriptions of the Property / Properties, Reserve Price / EMD / Bid Increment Amount.

EQUITAS SMALL FINANCE BANK LTD (FORMERLY KNOWN AS EQUITAS FINANCE LTD)

POSSESSION NOTICE (U.S. Rule 8 (1) - for immovable property). Whereas the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of M/s. Equitas Small Finance Bank Limited, under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with [Rule 3] of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued a Demand Notice calling upon the below mentioned Borrowers to repay the total outstanding amount mentioned in the notice being within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

Table with 2 columns: Name of the Borrower(s) / Guarantor(s), Description of Secured Asset (Immovable Property). Includes details for Mrs. Bakkiyaseelvi, Mrs. Chitra, and Mr. Murugan.

Government of Odisha Information & Public Relations Department Lok Sampark Bhawan, Bhubaneswar

Selection of Agency for Digitization, Restoration, Development & Implementation of Enterprise Archival Solution of Legacy Photos (Old & New Formats), Audio (Old & New Formats), Film Content (Old & New Formats) and Video (Old & New Formats).

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# New I-T bill: Simpler, shorter, crisper

Bill, likely to be tabled on Thursday, has no change in rate structures, capital gains tax rules

DIPAK MONDAL @ New Delhi

THE new Income Tax Bill is more about consolidation of scattered tax provisions, simplification and elimination of redundant laws than about rate structural changes. The Bill, which is likely to be tabled on Thursday, has no changes in the rate structures, nor are there any changes in the capital gains tax rules.

Contrary to speculations, the old tax regime has not been abolished, and will continue to operate alongside the new regime. The new tax regime has been put in chapter XIII of the Bill under the head -- Determination of tax in special cases.

Most of the rate changes announced in the budget have been incorporated in the bill.

The new bill is crisper and shorter with 622 pages as compared to 823 pages earlier. The Income Tax Act, 1961 with 298 sections and 14 schedules has now been recouped into 536 sections over 23 chapters with 16 schedules. The number of proviso and explanations has been substantially reduced and the



references to rules and other sections have been curtailed, making the law easier to comprehend.

Under the new proposed law, incomes not forming part of total income have now been moved to schedules to simplify the statute. Deductions from salaries such as standard deduction, gratuity, leave encashment etc, have now been tabulated at one place, instead of being scattered over different sections and rules. All the deductions have been put under chapter VIII from Clause 123 to clause 154.

Various provisions have been summarised in tabular format such as TDS provisions, presumptive taxation rates, assessment time limits etc. The bill has a separate clause (Clause 194) which provides for taxation of earnings from online games, and transfer of virtual digital assets.

It introduces the concept of 'tax year' to replace assessment and financial year, thus eliminating the chances of confusion. A tax year would comprise 12 months from April-March of relevant financial year. The language of the law has been sim-

plified. For instance, the term 'notwithstanding' has been replaced with 'irrespective of anything' at many places.

Giving an example of how the new bill eliminates cross-references, Amit Maheshwari, tax partner, AKM Global, points out that clauses from the other laws such as 'wealth tax' has been incorporated clearly in the code as compared to earlier referencing which was making the interpretation complex.

The new Bill has increased the compliance and reporting mechanisms. Clause 509 requires detailed reporting of crypto transactions, clause 510 mandates Annual Information Statements (AIS) for better taxpayer transparency and clause 511 enforces international tax reporting for cross-border transactions.

As per Rajat Mohan, senior partner, AMRG Associates, the bill grants CBDT greater procedural powers to frame schemes and rules, similar to GST. The new proposed law bars civil courts from interfering in tax matters, ensuring direct tax administration authority.

# January retail inflation eases to five-month low of 4.31%

ARSHAD KHAN @ New Delhi

SUPPORTED by softening food prices, retail inflation eased to 4.31% in January 2025, down from 5.22% in December 2024, as per data released by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation on Wednesday.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) fell 91 basis points compared to December 2024, which represents the lowest YoY inflation since August 2024. In December, food inflation stood at 8.39%. Headline and food inflation in the rural sector fell to 4.64% (provisional) in January 2025, as against 5.76% in December 2024. Urban inflation saw a sharp fall from 4.58% in December to 3.87% (provisional) in January.

Vegetable inflation continued to ease, falling to 11.3% in January from 26.6% in December. "Vegetable inflation has been a significant contributor to overall CPI inflation in recent months, averaging 27% since



IIP declines to 3-month low of 3.2% in December

NEW DELHI: Industrial production growth slowed down to a 3-month low of 3.2% in December 2024 from 5% in the previous month (Nov 2024), government data showed. This fall is attributed to weaker manufacturing growth of 3% in December as against 5.5% in November. The government has revised the November IIP figure to 5% from the provisional estimate of 5.2% released in January. ENS

January 2024. In fact, excluding vegetables, CPI inflation averaged 3.6% since January 2024, well below the RBI's target of 4%," said Rajani Sinha, Chief Economist at CareEdge.

Deflation in spices and a fall in inflation for pulses, eggs, and cereals contributed to the overall reduction in food inflation. Sinha said robust Kharif output, coupled with progress in rabi sowing, has improved the outlook for food inflation.

Economists believe easing inflation will leave consumers

with higher disposable income, boosting demand and production activity. The latest inflation figures may provide the RBI with room for 25 bps rate cut in either April or June 2025 meetings, provided external factors remain favourable.

"CPI inflation fell sharper than we expected to a five-month low of 4.3% in Jan 2025, led by food items, vindicating the unanimous rate cut by the MPC last week," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist and head of research & outreach at ICRA.

# Reserve Bank lifts curbs on Kotak Bank as lender takes measures to address issues

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ Mumbai

THE Reserve Bank on Wednesday lifted the curbs imposed on the fourth-largest private sector lender Kotak Mahindra Bank after 10 months for failing to improve its IT infrastructure despite repeated warnings for nearly two years.

On April 24, 2024, the Reserve Bank had imposed certain business restrictions on Kotak Bank and ordered it to cease and desist from onboarding new customers through its online and mobile banking channels, and issuing fresh credit cards. It was also asked to appoint an external auditor to check the health of its IT infra.

The central bank, in a statement, said that the bank initiated remedial measures to address the supervisory concerns and submitted compliances to the Reserve Bank. The bank also commissioned an external audit, with prior approval of RBI, to validate the compliances. "Now, having satisfied itself based on the submissions, and remedial measures undertaken by the bank, the Reserve Bank, has decided to lift the aforementioned restrictions," it said.

The bank management at the successive earnings calls has said the restrictions imposed on it have seen its business taking deep cuts to the tune of tens of hundreds of crores without



clearly disclosing the actual losses.

The bank used to onboard a lot of customers through its low-cost online banking model and also sell many other products through the same, including credit cards, small loans, and many savings products.

We welcome the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) decision to lift the business restrictions on Kotak Mahindra Bank. This decision follows the Bank's successful implementation of remedial measures and compliance validation through an external audit. We will continue to work closely with the Reserve Bank of India to shortly resume digital onboarding of new customers and issuing fresh credit cards," said a spokesperson, Kotak Mahindra Bank.

# SIP inflows down by ₹59 crore to ₹26,400 crore in January

BENN KOCHUVEEDAN @ Mumbai

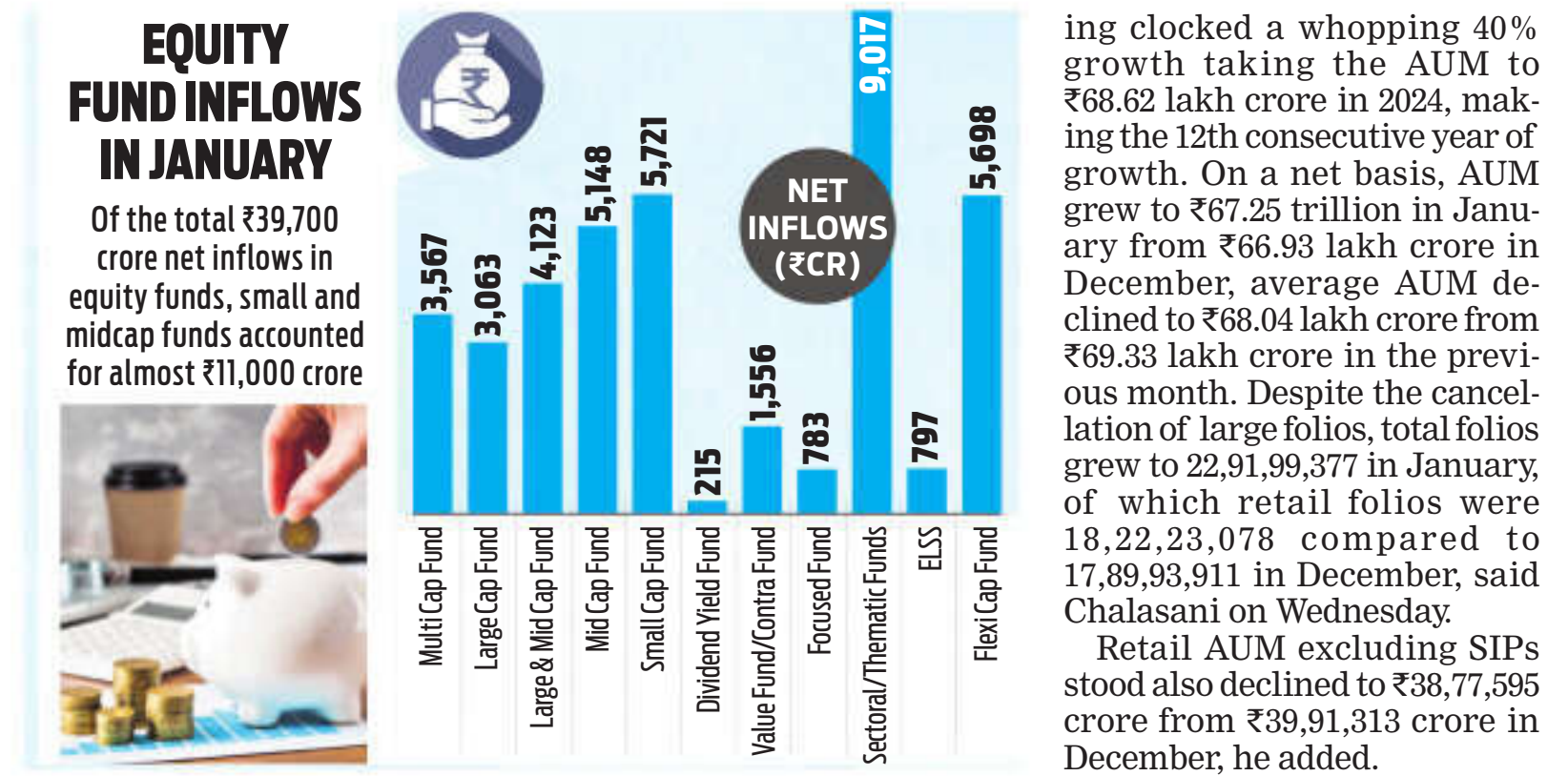
FOR the first time in many years, the incremental inflows into the systematic investments plans (SIPs) saw a marginal decline of ₹59 crore to ₹26,400 crore in January month-on-month basis after more than 25 lakh SIP folios were cancelled by stock exchanges.

The total assets managed by the mutual funds industry was at ₹67.25 lakh crore in January, a decline from ₹68.62 lakh crore in December, however, in a year-on-year basis industry saw a 27.5% growth. This is in spite of the fact that equity inflows continued to gain for record 47th month of incre-

mental inflows even though equity benchmarks declined 130 bps in the month.

Industry lobby Amfi chief executive Venkat Chalasani said the folios declined by nearly 25 lakh as the exchanges had to cancel inactive folios to reconcile the numbers after Sebi mandated them to cancel those folios which have been inactive for three months continuously from April 2024. Accordingly, the number of new SIPs registered in January 2025 stood at 56,18,831 and the SIP AUM is rose to ₹13,19,852.65 crore in January from across 10,26,88,854 SIP accounts.

The industry began the new year on a robust note, after hav-



ing clocked a whopping 40% growth taking the AUM to ₹68.62 lakh crore in 2024, making the 12th consecutive year of growth. On a net basis, AUM grew to ₹67.25 trillion in January from ₹66.93 lakh crore in December; average AUM declined to ₹68.04 lakh crore from ₹69.33 lakh crore in the previous month. Despite the cancellation of large folios, total folios grew to 22,91,99,377 in January, of which retail folios were 18,22,23,078 compared to 17,89,93,911 in December, said Chalasani on Wednesday.

Retail AUM excluding SIPs stood also declined to ₹38,77,595 crore from ₹39,91,313 crore in December, he added.

# Smallcap stocks take a beating as market crashes

ARSHAD KHAN @ New Delhi

AS the market fell, highly volatile smallcap and midcap stocks have taken a beating. After delivering exceptional returns over the past three years, investors are now selling these stocks amid valuation concerns and broader market weakness.

Nearly three dozen stocks in the Nifty Smallcap 100 index have fallen by 40% or more from their 52-week highs as of Wednesday's session. Within this group, more than 10 stocks, including Chennai Petroleum Corporation, IRCON, and ZEEL, have declined by 50% or more from their 52-week highs. In the Nifty Midcap 100 index, nearly half of the stocks have declined by over 30% from their one-

STOCKS	FALL FROM 52-WEEK HIGH
Chennai Petroleum Corp	61%
Sterling and Wilson	65%
Titagarh Rail Systems	55%
JWL	56%
Zee	52%

year highs and 20 stocks down by more than 40%. Notable names like Cochin Shipyard, Idea, and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals have each fallen by over 50%.

While benchmark Nifty50 index has dropped by 3% so far in

2025, the Smallcap index has fallen by 14.5%, and the Midcap index has declined by 11%. "Investors are severely punishing companies that report lower-than-expected earnings. These companies are not demonstrating the necessary earnings and revenue growth, indicating they are not fundamentally solid investments," said Anand K Rathi, co-founder of MIRA Money.

Rathi said as liquidity tightens and investor caution grows, corrections in these stock categories, mainly smallcaps, are likely. "If you hold shares in a company that is underperforming or showing lower-than-anticipated earnings growth, I believe it may be time to exit those positions. Historically, we have seen corrections of 50-55%

in years like 2018, 2019, and 2020, and we could see a similar situation now," he stated.

Vivek Sharma, VP & investments head at Estee Advisors, said smallcaps are inherently risky and should be approached with caution. He noted that while the Nifty Smallcap 100 has delivered a 14.34% CAGR since its inception, a respectable return by any measure, these gains have been highly uneven.

"For example, from 2004 to its peak in 2008, the index surged nearly six-fold, reaching the 6,000 level. It took until the end of 2020 — more than a decade — for the index to surpass this level again and continue its ascent towards 20,000 before the recent correction brought it down to 16,000," Sharma explained.

# Ashok Leyland Q3 net profit rises 34.63% to ₹819.67 crore

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

COMMERCIAL vehicle maker Ashok Leyland Ltd on Wednesday reported a 34.63% increase in consolidated net profit at ₹819.67 crore in the third quarter of the current financial year, riding on strong sales growth in overseas markets.

The company had reported a net profit of ₹608.85 crore in the same quarter last fiscal, Ashok Leyland Ltd said in a regulatory filing. Revenue from operations in the quarter stood at ₹11,995.21 crore compared to ₹11,065.63 crore in the corresponding period a year ago, it added. Total expenses in Q3FY25 were higher at ₹10,937.89 crore as compared to ₹10,155.07 crore, the company said. Ashok Leyland said this was the company's strongest-ever Q3 with revenue and profit rising to an all-time high for a third quarter.

Ashok Leyland Chairman Dheeraj Hinduja said, "The steady progress we are making in profitability is backed by products that deliver superior performance coupled with robust customer engagement." Sales in international markets are showing strong growth, and the company expects this momentum to accelerate with the launch of new products, he added.

The company said it achieved export volume of 4,151 units in Q3FY25 against 3,128 units in the same period last year, a growth of 33%.



# 100 Years of Electric Traction in Railways: SER celebrates with seminar

On 3rd February 2025, South Eastern Railway (SER) hosted a seminar at its headquarters in Kolkata to celebrate 100 years of Electric Traction in Indian Railways. This event was part of the nationwide celebrations, which included various activities such as quiz competitions, technical seminars, sports events, and more, across all divisions of SER. The seminar was attended by the General Manager of SER, PHODS, HODs, and senior officers from SER. It reflected on the transformative journey of electric traction, beginning with India's first electric-powered train journey on 3rd February 1925, between CSMT and Kurla in Mumbai. A special presentation highlighted key milestones of electric traction over the last 100 years.



# Business & Beyond



## Hitendra Malhotra, member ops & biz development, Railway Board visited SER headquarters

Hitendra Malhotra, Member Operations & Business Development, Railway Board visited South Eastern Railway (SER) Headquarters, Garden Reach on 30.01.2025 and held a high-level meeting with Anil Kumar Mishra, General manager, South Eastern Railway. Soumitra Majumdar, Additional General Manager and other Principal Head of the Departments of SER were also present during the meeting. Malhotra also held a review meeting of Operating and Commercial Departments of South Eastern Railway on 30.01.2025.

# NALCO profit up 3-fold, revenue rises by 39%

Bhubaneswar: National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO), Navratna PSU, under Ministry of Mines, Govt. of India and country's leading manufacturer and exporter of alumina and aluminium, has registered a three-fold increase in the net profit for Q3FY25. Net profit stood at ₹1,583 crore as against ₹488 crore in the corresponding quarter of last year. NALCO has reported a total income of ₹4,761 crore in Q3 FY25 as against ₹3,398 crore in Q3FY24. Net profit and revenue from operations for the 9 months ended December 2024 was at ₹3,246 crore and ₹11,520 crore respectively, as against the corresponding figures of Rs.1,044 crore and ₹9,570 crore of the previous fiscal.



# Natural gas demand to see 60% rise by 2030

RAKESH KUMAR @ New Delhi

THE country's natural gas demand is projected to grow by nearly 60% by 2030, reaching 103 billion cubic meters (bcm) annually, according to a report by the Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA).

The report, titled India Gas Market Report: Outlook to 2030, released by the IEA on Wednesday at the third edition of India Energy Week 2025, also recommended that India should fully deregulate the pricing of domestic natural gas, unbundle marketing and transportation businesses, and focus on enhancing gas-related infrastructure and ensuring gas supply security, among other measures.

"India's gas market is entering a new phase of growth, supported by significant infrastructure development and clear policy direction," said Keisuke Sadamori, IEA director of energy markets and security. "The prospect of higher gas

demand in India coincides with an expected wave of new global LNG supply. However, it will require careful planning and market coordination to ensure supply security and to help gas to compete in a price-sensitive market," Sadamori said.

The report underscores that LNG imports are projected to more than double between 2023 and 2030, reaching 65 bcm per year. This surge is driven by demand growth and a slower increase in domestic production. As per the IEA, India's natural gas demand rose by over 10% in both 2023 and 2024, a trend fueled by rapid infrastructure development, a recovery in domestic output, and anticipated easing of global gas market conditions.

While domestic gas output, which met 50% of demand in 2023, is likely to gradually rise to just under 38 bcm by 2030 (about 8% higher than 2023 levels), the limited growth in domestic supply will require LNG imports to more than double.



Steve Smith-led Australia will be without their frontline pace attack at the Champions Trophy after fast bowler Mitchell Starc withdrew from the tournament citing personal reasons. They have been forced to make several changes due to injuries to captain Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, and Mitchell Marsh, along with Marcus Stoinis' retirement.

# CLEAN SWEEP YET QUESTIONS REMAIN

Even as India beat England 3-0, the chopping & changing make one wonder about their backroom planning

SWAROOP SWAMINATHAN  
@ Ahmedabad

THE team's original No. 4 making runs as an opener (Shubman Gill). The team's reserve No. 4 becoming the enforcer in the middle-overs (Shreyas Iyer). The team's first XIth hour replacement potentially taking the new ball (Harshit Rana). A player in the original 15 likely to start on the bench (Arshdeep Singh). The team's second XIth hour replacement potentially figuring in the first choice XI (Varun Chakravarthy). The team's original opener watching the Champions Trophy on TV (Yashasvi Jaiswal). The team's first-choice non-travelling pacer deemed not worthy of taking the new ball (Mohammed Siraj). A pacer fresh from a long-term injury entrusted with the task of picking new-ball wickets (Mohammed Shami). Five spinners... FIVE. Zero left-handers in the top four, the only top-order at the Champions Trophy with such a skewed squad construction...  
...forget the fact that India did manage to sweep the series against England. Their muddled planning and XIth hour replace-

ments for the Champions Trophy has shown a team management caught in two minds. They have actively pivoted from one strategy to a totally different one inside a month. When they initially named the side for the CT in January, they plumped for Jaiswal's attributes as an opener even though he had never played in the format. One Shreyas innings — admittedly a match-shifting one — changed Jaiswal's role from opening the batting to water-carrier to now not even making the airport. You can make a case for saying the right decision was reached but that's the kind of reactive decision-making teams generally avoid.  
If Gautam Gambhir, Rohit Sharma and Co. wanted a left-right combination at the selection meeting, one innings shouldn't have been able to change that mindset. Or were they already flip-flopping over their decision to pick Jaiswal? "We picked Jaiswal on the basis of what he has shown in the last few months despite not playing ODI cricket," Rohit had said when the preliminary CT squad was announced. "He has been picked on potential and some-



India's squad construction and team selection has not been consistent | SPORTZPICS

times you have to do that... you try and make the best team to win games in different situations." If Jaiswal was picked on "potential", "what he has shown in the last few months" and on a "feeling of him being in the best team", him being dropped feels like a kneejerk reaction. At best. It's clear that the team management doesn't rate Arshdeep the ODI bowler as much as they rate his skills in the shortest format. But they picked the left-arm bowler because of his death-overs nuance. "If Bumrah is not there, we wanted Arshdeep to do it," Rohit added in the same press

conference in January. So why was the 26-year-old sat on the bench in the first two ODIs if the role for him was to ape Bumrah's in case of the latter's unavailability? Considering the original plan was to leave Harshit behind, why has he enjoyed more gametime than the left-arm? On a good batting surface at Ahmedabad on Wednesday, Shreyas once again displayed his prowess as a boundary-hitter through the middle overs. Since the beginning of 2023, he strikes at 114.68 (best for a No. 4) and hits a four or a six once every 7.3 deliveries,

putting him in the elite bracket. Yet, only Virat Kohli's swollen knee in the series opener kept the incumbent in his rightful place, a happy accident if ever there was one. "You know what you want me to say," he had said when asked about Jaiswal potentially starting ahead of him in Nagpur. "But I'm going to keep it low-key and cherish this moment, the victory today."  
It's true. Wins by a margin of four wickets and 68 balls (Nagpur), four wickets and 33 balls (Cuttack) and 142 runs (Ahmedabad) over by and large a first-choice England set-up is worthy of praise. Their performances in all three games have been clinical, a degree of ruthless professionalism one usually tends to associate with champion teams. Apart from the start of England's batting in all three games, India have lorded over their opponents in all three primary skillsets.  
Performance wise, Sharma & Co. couldn't have asked for a better tune-up to the Champions Trophy. Yet, their planning and squad construction has left room for more questions than answers.

# Dream run: Old pals Nizar & Azhar help Kerala enter semis

FIROZ MIRZA @ Chennai

WHEN Jammu and Kashmir left-arm spinner Abid Mush-taq dismissed Aditya Sarwate in the 84th over, Kerala, with only four wickets remaining, had to see off more than 40 overs to draw their Ranji Trophy quarterfinal tie in Pune on Wednesday. The equation was clear. Thanks to their one-run first innings lead, Kerala needed a draw while J&K had to secure a win to progress to the semifinals.  
It was then the 30-year-old Mohammed Azharuddeen joined Salman Nizar, 27, in the middle. A long partnership was the need of the hour and who else was better suited for the job than the duo of Azharuddeen and Nizar, whose long association dates back to 2011 when they first met at the now defunct KCA Elite Academy in Kochi.  
The two grinded out for more than 42 overs to deny their opponents an outright win and help Kerala into their only second semifinal of the premier domestic tournament. In the process, Nizar (44 off 162 balls) and Azhar (118-ball 67) also stitched together an unbroken 115-run partnership for the seventh wicket. The last time Kerala played in a Ranji semifinal was in 2018-19 when they lost the match to the eventual champions Vidarbha. Bijumon N, who was in-charge of the Elite Academy in 2011, never had an iota of doubt on the potential of his wards — Nizar and Azhar — and says it's good to see them becoming saviours of the state team after so many years. "Azhar joined Kottayam academy while Salman was selected for Kochi in 2009. In 2011, they came together to be a part of the Elite Academy in its inaugural year in Kochi. We had a talented bunch of budding cricketers then and I am really proud to see them representing the state and also helping the team to enter the semifinal," Bijumon, who has now joined Coaching Beyond in Odisha, said.  
Nizar and Azhar made their Ranji debut in 2015 though a season apart but the latter leaped ahead with blitzkrieg



Kerala players celebrate after entering the semifinal of Ranji Trophy | KCA

knocks in T20s that eventually landed him an IPL contract. The duo blew hot and cold in first-class cricket but managed to stay in contention even 10 years later with useful contributions, even though it was sporadic. However, the ongoing Ranji season has turned out to be a breakthrough for Nizar as he first slammed his maiden first-class century against Bihar in the league stage before hitting an unbeaten 112 and adding 81 runs with Basil Thampi (15) for the 10th wicket against J&K to give his side a single-run lead which proved decisive in the end. "I have always felt Nizar didn't get enough opportunities in the past. This season he not only got the opportunities he deserved but he also made full use of them. He is an all-format player and even led Kerala in the Vijay Hazare Trophy. If given an opportunity, he can prove to be an utility player in the IPL as well," added Bijumon.  
Nizar was adjudged Player of the Match for his two unbeaten knocks. "We believed in ourselves and took it (partnership) through the blocks of 10 runs each. J&K bowlers made our task tough. It was a similar approach we had adopted in the first innings," said Nizar after the match.  
Hopefully, the partnership continues to prosper when Kerala take on Gujarat in the first semifinal scheduled to be held in Ahmedabad from February 17 to 21.

**Brief scores:** J&K 280 & 399/9 decl drew with Kerala 281 & 295/6 in 126 overs (Salman Nizar 44 n.o., Mohammed Azharuddeen 67 n.o., Sachin Baby 48, Akshay Chandran 48; Sahil Lotra 2/50). **Semifinal line-up (Feb 17-21):** Kerala vs Gujarat, Ahmedabad; Vidarbha vs Mumbai, Nagpur

# Bold-play concert: Gill symphony enralls thousands in Ahmedabad

SWAROOP SWAMINATHAN  
@ Ahmedabad

BY all accounts, the Coldplay concert at the Narendra Modi Stadium in the last week of January was box office. With the British band playing some of their greatest hits — Fix You, Yellow and Viva la Vida — the more than one lakh who had turned up from all India went back with a smile plastered on their faces. That Jasprit Bumrah made an unannounced appearance sometime during the show only added to the vibes.  
On Wednesday, some three weeks after Chris Martin had got the stadium grooving, it was the turn of Shubman Gill to produce a boundary-hitting masterclass in front of fans who are used to seeing the opener bat like this on a regular basis (he skippers the Gujarat franchise



Shubman Gill celebrates his century as India beat England 3-0 | AP

in the Indian Premier League).  
By the time he was done, he produced a timely reminder as to why the 50-over format is his meat and drink. In the process, he also showed his employers why they were initially wrong to pencil him in the middle-order not only for the series against England but also for the

upcoming Champions Trophy in Dubai (as per the original plan, Yashasvi Jaiswal was going to be Rohit Sharma's partner up top). On a day of abundant sunshine, Gill, 25, displayed why his batting is best suited to the needs of this format. He identified a potential problem, took his time to troubleshoot before using the tools at his disposal. The end result? One of the very few batters to have scored 100s across all three formats in a single ground.  
When Gill walked out with Rohit Sharma 30 minutes after Jos Buttler had called correctly — the England captain was conscious of the dew in these parts at this time of the year — the swing on offer was plenty. With Mark Wood and Saqib Mahmood challenging both edges on a periodical basis (some of the deliveries were 140kph leg-breaks), both bat-

ters had to adapt on the fly. Rohit soon perished but Gill had seen enough. He started walking down the track to negate the movement on offer. Those first few overs weren't as fluent as he was 11 off 18 (2x4). The rest (101 off 84)? Woof.  
The thing with Gill's batting is even when he's not at his best, he finds the boundary with alarming regularity. Since the beginning of 2023, he's second in the list for most fours (222), runs (1900) and the only regular opener to average 60+ while striking at over 100. That right there is the complete package in this format; a consistent opener who scores a chunk of his runs in boundaries (in the time period in question, he has made 60% of his 1900 runs in hits to or above the fence). It's this sort of robotic consistency the hosts were willing to overlook when they were contemplating giving a debut to Jaiswal two weeks before the Champions Trophy.  
While his consistency may be robotic, there was nothing tedious about his mostly hedonistic 102-ball 112 (14x4, 3x6). It was aesthetically pleasing, like watching one of your favourite movies after lunch. You know

most of the lines, you have seen it multiple times before but it's still arresting.  
There was the touch late cut between keeper and short third man. There was the pull. There was the forceful cut to deep point. He even came down the wicket to both drive as well as loft the pacers. The only thing missing was his signature — the very unique short-arm jab between mid-wicket and mid-off the quicker bowlers — but it would be churlish to complain on a day like today.  
Coldplay's Fix You is a song about grief. While a regular bilateral match cannot be compared to that tearful November night in 2023, Gill's century on India's return to the stadium for the first time since the World Cup final could have a similar effect.

**BRIEF SCORES:** India 356 in 50 ovs (Shubman Gill 112, Virat Kohli 52, Shreyas Iyer 78, Adil Rashid 4/64) **bt** England 214 in 34.2 ovs (Tom Banton 38; Arshdeep Singh 2/33, Harshit Rana 2/31, Axar Patel 2/22).

## EXPRESS READ

### Manu 2nd in nat'l trials, Swapnil triumphs

NEW DELHI: Double Olympic medalist Manu Bhaker finished second in women's 25m pistol in her return to competitive shooting after Paris Olympics as Rhythm Sangwan emerged winner in the event on Day 5 of the Rifle/Pistol National Selection Trials (Group A) here. Swapnil Kusale and Arya Rajesh Borse won the men's 50m rifle 3 positions (3P) T1 and the women's 10m air rifle T2 events at Dr Karni Singh Shooting range (DKSSR) here.

### FA Cup: Forest beat Exeter on penalties

EXETER: Nottingham Forest survived a huge scare to beat 10-man Exeter on penalties after a 2-2 draw, setting up an all-Premier League FA Cup clash against Ipswich. Chris Wood, Morgan Gibbs-White and Elliot Anderson all scored from the spot before Neco Williams wrapped up a marathon tie with the final kick of the contest at 23:03 GMT. Josh Magennis and Tony Yrogane were on target, but Matz Sels saved Reece Cole's poor penalty.

### Indian shuttlers post big victory over Macau

QINGDAO (CHINA): India beat Macau 5-0 in their opening group D tie of the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championship here on Wednesday. With this outcome, India are now assured of a quarterfinal berth. They will next face Korea in their second and final group tie on Thursday. The mixed doubles pair of Sathish Kumar Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath won the first tie to set the tone. Lakshya Sen and Malvika Bansod sealed the deal.

# MOC meet: Pruning TOPS list core issue

INDRANEEL DAS @ Chennai

FINALLY, the Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) had a more intense meeting on Tuesday. The newly constituted MOC had its first meeting that was seen more as an orientation in early January but on Tuesday seemed to be intense where important decisions had been taken. The focus was LA 2028 and as pointed out by this newspaper, they are already six months late. The Paris Olympics got over in August.  
Some of the agendas of the MOC meeting were to "finalise TOPS Core and Development groups; performance review timeline; processes of hiring coaches and support staff and emphasis on hiring of Olympic world level athletes as coaches; payment of OPA to TOPS athletes, etc". Since the end of the Olympics and modest performance of India, eyes were on the weeding out process of the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) athletes in both Core and Development group. At the time of Paris, the list included a total of 179 athletes including 59 para-athletes. Among the 120 Core Olympic athletes, 32 track and field athletes and 26 shooters were on the list. The MOC and the TOPS had been considering athletes' request on a case-to-case basis. TOPS is sports ministry's flagship programme to assist country's top athletes.  
The TOPS list is expected to be trimmed and if sources are to be believed it could be around 50 athletes each in Olympic sports. As pointed out, TOPS needs to take a hard decision on non-per-

formers. The Development group too might see new names though the numbers will remain more than Core group. Creating a healthy bench strength is what the officials are looking at. In all likelihood there could be at least two or three top squash players' names in Core group as the sport is considered as medal hopes in the LA 2028.  
This list was being re-assessed and redrawn after the new TOPS Chief Executive Officer (CEO) NS Johal assumed office in December, close to five months after the Olympics. The TOPS had been working on evaluation mechanism as well. According to some MOC members, who attended the meeting, one of the primary topics of discussion as expected was TOPS athletes' assessment. It is understood that there was a proposal to evaluate athletes on a six monthly basis. However, the members felt this would be a very short period for some sport. Though most agreed that some kind of mechanism should be in place to assess them constantly but for weeding out or promotion a year would be more appropriate. As of now that period was two years. What should be the criteria too need to be seen. Like pointed out by this daily, TOPS needs to take a fresh look into its systems and processes. In the last Olympic cycle, this programme seemed to have gone into overdrive to fund athletes. There were occasions when it looked like players controlling TOPS rather than TOPS monitoring their performances.  
Full story: newindianexpress.com

# Real late show exposes City's decline

AGENCIES @ Manchester

REAL Madrid once again twisted the knife into Pep Guardiola's Manchester City to compound a troubled season for the English champions and leave them on the brink of an early Champions League exit. Twice City led at the Etihad as Erling Haaland finally came to the party against the Spanish giants with his first two goals in five games against Madrid.  
But the Norwegian's goals cannot paper over the glaring cracks for City this season. Madrid had been wasteful for 85 minutes and would have headed home cursing their finishing but for a late flourish. Brahim Diaz netted against this former club just seconds



Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham (R) rejoices with teammates | AP

after coming off the bench before Jude Bellingham, on his return to England, tapped home the winner in stoppage time after another City defensive calamity. City have now conceded eight goals in the final 15 minutes of their last five Champions League games. Late goals have also been a

problem for Guardiola in the Premier League, where City sit a distant 15 points behind leaders Liverpool. Despite winning just three of their eight previous Champions League games this season, City sneaked into the play-off round on the final night of the league phase. However, they paid the price for finishing 22nd in the 36-team table by being paired with the 15-time European champions.  
The clubs are facing off for the fourth consecutive season in the Champions League. Madrid came out on top in two of the previous three ties, but on each occasion their trip to the Etihad was a chastening one.  
This time it was a different story, long before the late twist in the tale.

# FC Goa sink Mumbai City

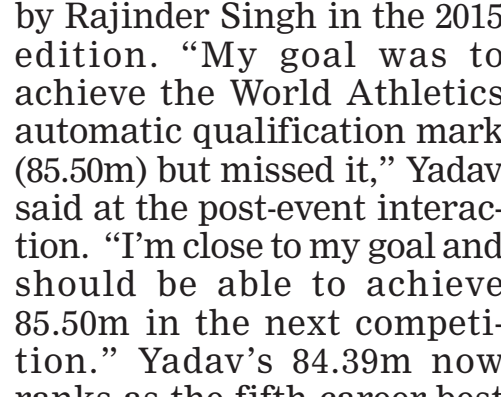
ENS @ Chennai

IKER Guarrotxena scored a first-half double as FC Goa recorded a 3-1 win over Mumbai City FC in the Indian Super League at the Mumbai Football Arena in Mumbai on Wednesday. The three points is a big welcome for Goa, who are currently placed second in the standings. With 39 points from 20 games, they are now seven points behind leaders Mohun Bagan. Guarrotxena opened the scoring with a brilliant individual effort in the 24th minute. He shuffled across several defenders just outside the box and unleashed a shot beyond the reach of Mumbai's Phurba Lachemba.

# Day of records as Yadav claims javelin gold

AGENCIES @ Dehradun

JAVELIN thrower Sachin Yadav of Uttar Pradesh, 18-year-old high jumper Pooja Singh (85.50m) but missed it," Yadav said at the post-event interaction. "I'm close to my goal and should be able to achieve 85.50m in the next competition." Yadav's 84.39m now ranks as the fifth career-best throw by an Indian after Chopra (89.94m), Jena (87.54m), Shivpal Singh (86.23m) and Davinder Singh Kang (84.57m).  
Uttar Pradesh swept the medals with Rohit Yadav winning the silver with a performance of 80.47m while state-mate Vikash Sharma took home the bronze with 79.33m



Javelin thrower Sachin Yadav

Daughter of a mason from Fatehabad district of Haryana, Pooja cleared 1.84m to defend the women's high jump gold she had won in the 2023 edition, bettering the earlier Games record of 1.83m set by Swapna Barman of West Bengal in the 2022 edition. Gobika

K of Tamil Nadu won the silver after clearing 1.79m while Abhinaya Shetty (1.77m) of Karnataka took home the bronze. Barwal won the men's 5000m in a time of 13 minute and 45.93 seconds, bettering the earlier Games record of 13:50.05 set by G Lakshmanan of Odisha in the 2015 edition.  
**Other Results:** Men's 400m hurdles: Ruchit Mori (Gujarat) - 50.97 seconds; Hardeep Kumar (Punjab) - 51.02 seconds; Rohan Kamble (Maharashtra) 51.77 seconds. Women's shot put: Jasmine Kaur (Punjab) - 15.97m; Vidhi (Uttar Pradesh) 15.46m. Sriшти Vlg (Delhi) - 15.46m. Women's 5000m: Ankita Dhyani (Uttarakhand) - 15:56.03; Sanjivani Jadhav (Maharashtra) - 15:59.12; Poonam Sonune (Maharashtra) - 16:53.52. 4x400m Mixed Relay: Kerala (3:25.35); Maharashtra (3:25.66); Punjab (3:26.35).

We explore Kuruba culture, tribal settlements and culinary delicacies of Kabini — Asia's largest tiger reserve!

SRUSHTI KULKARNI

**L**AST week, we took a short yet profoundly enlightening trip to Kabini, a destination often recognised for its proximity to the Nagarhole and Bandipur Tiger Reserves. However, in the span of just three days, we discovered that this region is far more than just a wildlife enthusiast's paradise. Thanks to our stay at Evolve Back Kabini, we experienced a guided visit — called Spirit of Kabini — complete with personal interactions with locals of the kuruba community near the resort who have a unique culture and lifestyle.

The River Kabini (and Kapila), has several small tribal hamlets on its banks, home to communities that were once deeply embedded within the forests. These villages, predominantly occupied by the Jenu Kurubas and Betta Kurubas, are communities that once lived deep within the forests but were later relocated when the area was designated as a protected sanctuary. The Jenu Kurubas, whose name translates to 'honey-gatherers' and the Betta Kurubas, an ancient hunting clan, have long been regarded as the caretakers of Kabini. Their intimate knowledge of the land and its resources is unparalleled and despite leaving behind their traditional occupations of hunting and honey extraction, they have turned to agriculture, cultivating staple crops like *ragi*, *jowar* and metre beans, alongside modern additions like chia seeds and tapioca.

Beyond the tribal settlements, Kabini's landscape offers its own surprises. Among them is the striking seasonal bloom of the *gliricidia sepium*, an often-overlooked tree that erupts in vivid pink and lilac blossoms. Lining the otherwise earthy, ochre-hued trails, these blossoms announce the arrival of summer in a terrain otherwise dominated by dry deciduous forests. Their presence transforms the roads into a breathtaking corridor of colour, reminiscent of Japan's famed cherry blossoms yet rooted in a distinctly Indian wilderness.

Another floral marvel that captured our attention was the Flame of the Forest and its twin, the Red Silk Cotton Tree, both revered for their medicinal properties. During the scorching summer months, as the supply of fresh grass dwindles, elephants, birds and monkeys seek out the nutrient-rich seeds hidden in their pods. But the fauna is not the only thing to benefit — travellers and wine sommeliers may be intrigued to learn that the indigenous communities use these very seeds to prepare a potent, traditional wine with an unexpected kick.

Our curiosity towards the tribes' culinary traditions further led us to discover that *Kaadu Balekai* or wild raw banana fruit that, once dried, has its insides extracted, powdered and cooked as an alternative to rice. It can also be roasted and consumed like corn, offering a unique flavour profile that has sustained these communities for generations. Another note-worthy snack to try is the *masala* sweet potato, which is baked diced into cubes and dressed with honey and lemon juice before salt and spices are sprinkled over them. We prefer it all mashed together and paired with a cup of a *Jaggery Kaapi* (black coffee) seasoned with ginger and pepper that is sure to cure a sore throat or cold in one drink.

The tribes' cultural traditions are equally fascinating. Each settlement houses a *chaudi*, a communal meeting hall, where decisions on marriages and societal matters are overseen by the village head. Among the Jenu Kuruba, a pre-wedding ritual requires the couple to spend seven days in the forest, surviving entirely on their own before receiving approval to wed — a testament to their deep-rooted resilience and connection to nature. This ritual stands as a significant contrast to the customs of the Betta Kuruba community who prefer a simple match-making, illustrating the rich diversity within Kabini's indigenous cultures.

As we wandered through these settlements, along forest thickets and the drying riverbanks, we encountered something truly extraordinary — *Veerakallu*, ancient hero stones carved during the Chola period. These relics, partially buried under layers of time and soil, whisper stories of valour, biodiversity and history often overlooked in mainstream narratives. While these artefacts have been left behind by kingdoms which no longer rule the region, the humbling mud houses with thatch roofs are simple architectural marvels that remain a constant here. Even though they need to be rebuilt every year and maintained regularly by smearing cow dung, the kurubas feel more one with nature staying in these painstakingly high-maintenance houses that are not only cool from within but also provide shelter to insects and snakes.

One cannot speak of Kabini without acknowledging its role in the larger conservation narrative of India. Once the exclusive hunting grounds of the Maharajas of Mysuru, it has since evolved into one of the most significant protected areas in the country. With efforts to balance conservation with the lives of its indigenous communities, Kabini stands as an example of the ongoing negotiations between nature, tradition and modernity.



Traditional mud house



Kurubas



Honey comb



Sweet potato & Jaggery kaapi

Stay at Evolve Back Kuruba Safari Lodge, Kabini. ₹35,000 onwards.

BEYOND THE TIGER!



Gliricidia sepium



Veera Kallu



Chia fields



Top initiatives shaping India's travel landscape in 2025

With improved accessibility and innovative destination development, India's tourism sector is set for a dynamic transformation...



EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NDIAS tourism sector is set for a significant boost in 2025, with the Union Budget allocating ₹20,000 crore for the Integrated *Development of Tourism Circuits*. This investment is primarily directed towards *Swadesh Darshan 2.0*, a revamped version of the existing scheme aimed at enhancing theme-based tourist circuits across the country. The focus is on sustainable and responsible tourism, ensuring that destinations are developed with an eco-conscious approach while preserving their cultural heritage.

The *Swadesh Darshan* scheme, launched in 2014-15, was designed to develop theme-based tourist circuits such as Buddhist, Himalayan, Desert, Tribal and Coastal circuits. Under *Swadesh Darshan 2.0*, the government is moving beyond traditional infrastructure development by incorporating eco-friendly tourism models that align with international sustainability goals.

The *Ministry of Tourism* has identified 50 major destinations for focused development under a 'challenge mode' approach, where states will compete to present the best tourism development plans. Special emphasis will be placed on religious tourism, particularly locations linked to Lord Buddha, aligning with India's plans to attract Buddhist tourists from Southeast Asia. Plans include smart tourist facilities, digital kiosks and environment-friendly accommodations.

A major thrust of this year's tourism strategy is improving accessibil-

ity to lesser-known destinations through an expanded version of the *UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) Scheme*. The regional connectivity scheme has been a game-changer in making air travel affordable for Indians and in 2025, it will further facilitate tourism by developing helipads and small airports in remote and hilly locations that will benefit from increased air connectivity, with a focus on states like Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and the northeast. Additional regional flights will connect smaller cities to major tourist hubs, making travel easier for domestic and international visitors.

Apart from *Swadesh Darshan* and *UDAN*, several other tourism-related initiatives are expected to drive growth. *Dekho Apna Desh Campaign*, for example, encourages domestic travel by offering incentives for citizens to explore India's cultural and natural diversity.

The *PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive) Scheme*: Focuses on pilgrimage rejuvenation and spiritual tourism by enhancing facilities at key religious sites. The government will actively market Indian destinations globally, particularly in G20 and BRICS nations, to attract high-spending international travellers.

The government's approach combines infrastructure development, sustainability and enhanced connectivity for improved tourism.

TRAVEL DIARY

Have you downloaded the new Indian railways app yet?



**S**waRail — Centre for Railway Information Systems — is a newly launched comprehensive app developed by Indian Railways, designed to consolidate all public-facing services into a single, user-friendly platform. By integrating multiple functionalities into one app, this new platform simplifies the travel experience with a seamless single sign-on (SSO) system.

Sanjay Gandhi National Park to start leopard safari



**S**et in a 30-hectare enclosure designed to resemble the leopards' natural habitat, this new leopard safari located in Borivali gives visitors a chance to spot 17 leopards, including cubs that have been rehabilitated up close. The park, being developed at an estimated cost of INR 5 crores, not only boosts wildlife tourism but also protects rescued big cats.

Mumbai Eye might be a reality soon!

After a decade of delays, the BMC is now actively scouting potential locations in the city to bring the vision to life...

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

**T**HE City of Dreams will join the iconic league of destinations boasting giant ferris wheels that have become cultural and architectural landmarks worldwide. Mumbai is all set to welcome the much-anticipated Mumbai Eye, a colossal observation wheel inspired by global counterparts such as the London Eye, Ain Dubai and the Singapore Flyer. Recently revived by the *Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC)* as part of its Budget 2025-26, the project aims to bolster tourism

and provide panoramic views of the city, much like its renowned international equivalents.

The idea of a giant ferris wheel in Mumbai has been in the works for over a decade. Initially proposed in 2011 by the *Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC)*, the project faced multiple roadblocks, from environmental concerns to logistical challenges, leading to its shelving. In 2023, the *Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA)* revisited the concept, suggesting the *Bandra Reclamation promenade* as a potential site. However, local opposition citing traffic congestion and infrastructural strain put the project on hold once again. Now, with a renewed perspective, the *BMC* is actively scouting locations to

bring the vision to life. The London Eye, standing at 135 metres on the banks of the River Thames, has drawn millions of visitors since its inauguration in 2000, offering breathtaking views of Big Ben, St Paul's Cathedral and beyond. Ain Dubai, the tallest observation wheel in the world at 250 metres, offers a 360-degree view of the city's skyline, including the Burj Al Arab and Palm Jumeirah. Meanwhile, the Singapore Flyer, at 165 metres, has provided tourists with unrivalled vistas of Marina Bay Sands, F1 Track and the Singapore River since 2008.

As Mumbai prepares to introduce its own towering spectacle, the city looks forward to witnessing Mumbai Eye become an iconic addition to India's financial and fashion capital.

