

# Daily Current Affairs



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**BY BHUNESH SIR**  
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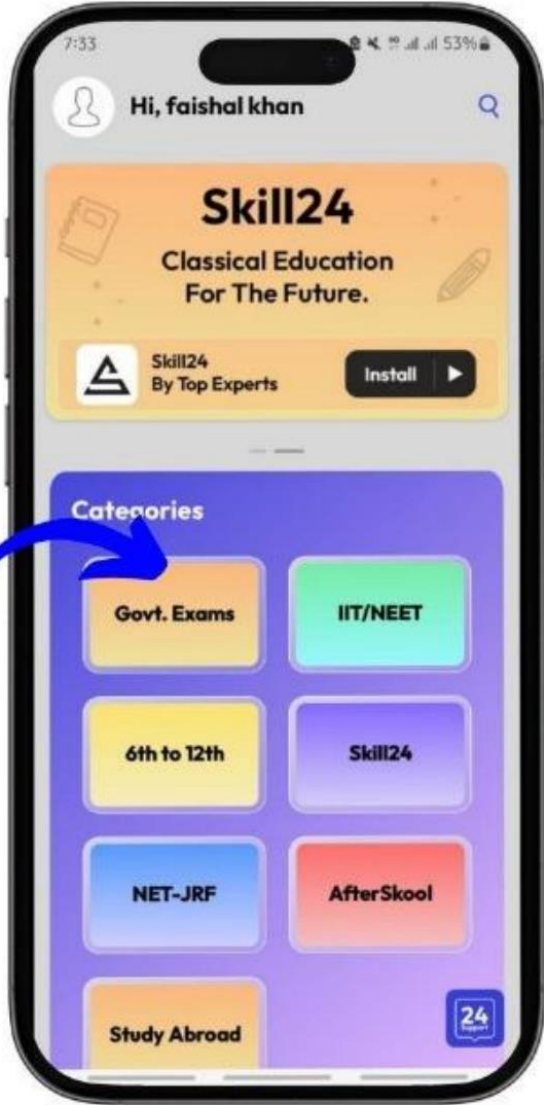
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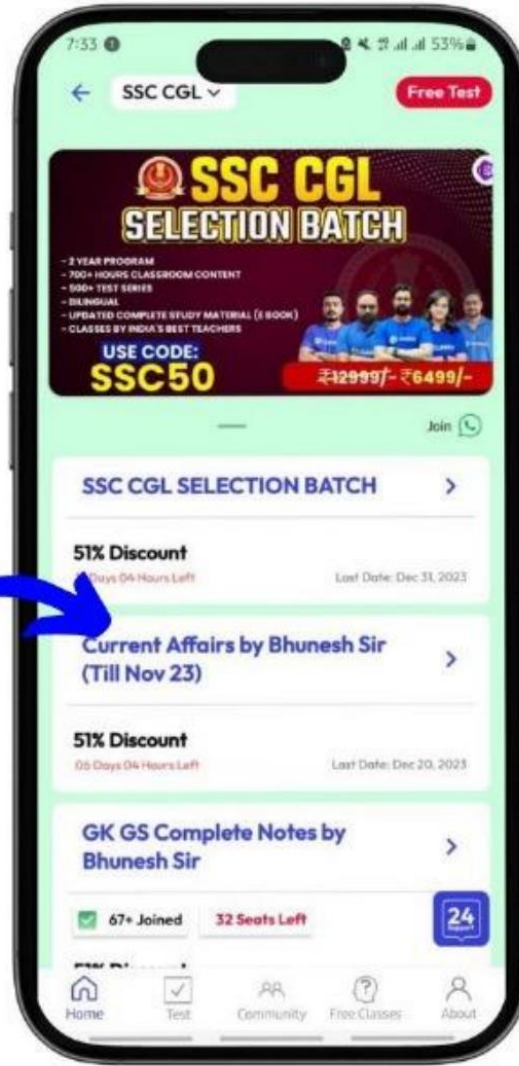
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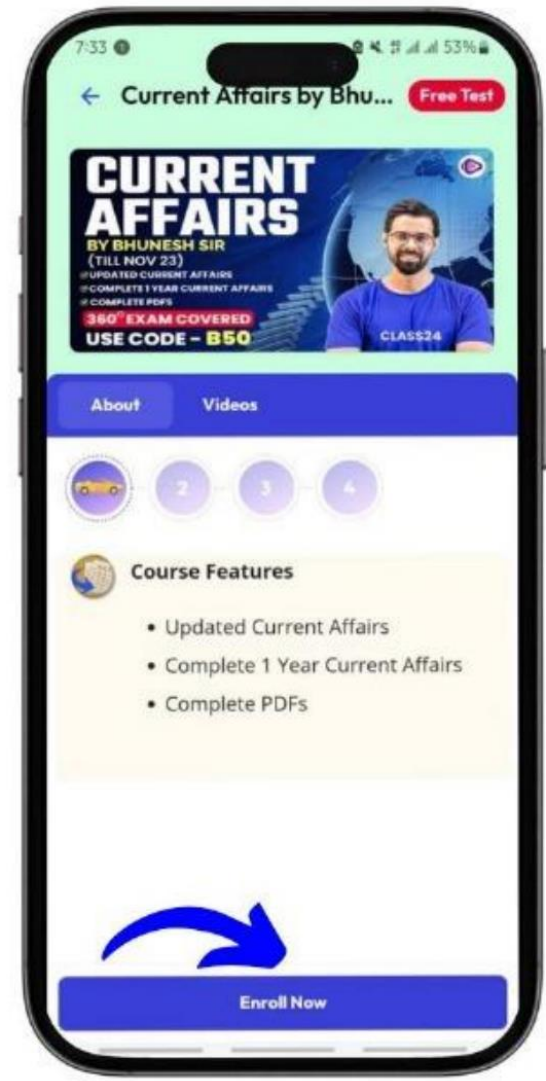
# Step-2



# Step-3



# Step-4





“Be yourself, everyone else is already taken.”

**OSCAR WILDE**

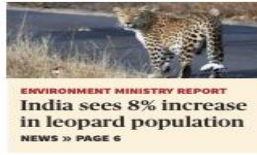




ED ATTACK CASE  
**Trinamool leader  
Sheikh Shahjahan held**  
NEWS » PAGE 4



**TROOPS IN UKRAINE  
Putin warns  
West of  
nuclear war**  
WORLD » PAGE 12



ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY REPORT  
**India sees 8% increase  
in leopard population**  
NEWS » PAGE 6



PARLEY  
**Should MSP  
be legalised?**  
Centre has asserted  
that a legal guarantee  
will not be possible  
OPINION » PAGE 9



**Fast and Furious**  
Scan the QR code or use the  
link for a video explaining  
the science and art behind  
the world-beating Indian  
pace attack  
thlink.in/PaceBowling



**INSIDE**  
**Fear of defeat is  
visible on Modi's  
face, says Stalin**

**CHENNAI**  
A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that it was time to drive the DMK out from Tamil Nadu, DMK president and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said that the PM had been repeatedly visiting Tamil Nadu, but the fear of defeat was visible on his face. » PAGE 2

**Manipur Police  
accuse radical  
outfit of extortion**  
**NEW DELHI**  
In the first official confirmation of the havoc being caused by a radical Maoist group, the Manipur Police on Thursday said that Arambai Thangal was engaged in many "anti-social activities", such as assaulting civilians, snatching vehicles and public and extortion from businessmen. » PAGE 4

**Indian technical  
team reaches  
the Maldives**  
**NEW DELHI**  
The Centre on Thursday confirmed that a team of Indian technical personnel have landed in the Maldives to replace military troops that have been operating aircraft there, indicating a compromise between India and the newly elected Maldives government. » PAGE 5

**Pak. swears in  
new members  
of Parliament**  
**ISLAMABAD**  
Pakistan's National Assembly swore in newly elected members on Thursday in a chaotic scene, as allies of jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan and members of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party protested the February 8 election which they claim was rigged. » PAGE 12

# 6 Congress rebel MLAs disqualified in Himachal

Speaker takes action against MLAs who had crossed-voted in favour of BJP in RS election

**Vikas Vasudeva Sandeep Phukan**  
CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI  
Amid the ongoing political turmoil in Himachal Pradesh, six Congress legislators, who had crossed-voted in favour of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha elections on February 27, were disqualified from the Assembly by Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania on Thursday.  
The ground for disqualification, however, was their absence from the Assembly when the State Budget and the Finance Bill were being put to vote, defying a party whip to vote in favour of the government.  
The disqualified MLAs were: Rajinder Rana, Sudhir Sharma, Inder Dutt Lakhanpal, Devinder Kumar Bhuttoo, Ravi Thakur and Chetanya Sharma. By evening, the information about their seats lying vacant was put up on the Assembly's website.  
Mr. Rana, a three-term MLA, said they would move the Supreme Court against the disqualification as many of his colleagues did not even get a proper notice from the Speaker's office.  
The motion for disqualification was moved by State Parliamentary Affairs Minister Harshwardhan.  
**Internal committee**  
A team of All India Congress Committee (AICC) observers — Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Bhupesh Baghel and D.K. Shivakumar — told the media in Shimla that Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu had taken responsibility for Abhishek Singhvi's defeat in the Rajya Sabha elections. Asserting that the Congress government would complete its term of five years, the AICC observers announced that a six-member coordination committee would be set up

Disqualification on the grounds of absence from Assembly when the State Budget was put to vote



**Political crisis:** Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Congress State president Pratibha Singh, and Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar in Shimla on Thursday. ANI

to sort out internal differences.  
Amid talk of leadership change because of growing complaints from MLAs against Mr. Sukhu's style of functioning, the Chief Minister on Thursday invited party legislators for a breakfast meeting at his official residence.  
"The Congress government is there and Mr. Sukhu is the Chief Minister. All

Disqualified MLAs to move SC; AICC team says the government will complete its term

Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Uttar Pradesh.  
The State was pushed into political turmoil on Tuesday, when Mr. Singhvi, the ruling Congress party's nominee for the State's sole Rajya Sabha seat, lost the election to the BJP's Harsh Mahajan after six Congress MLAs voted in favour of Mr. Mahajan, threatening the survival of their own government.  
Sensing the collapse of the government, the Congress high command rushed the three observers while party general secretary Priyanka Vadra also worked behind the scenes.  
Mr. Shivakumar said that the central observers had spoken to Mr. Sukhu, a State unit chief Pratibha Singh individually and all differences were ironed out. All the MLAs have assured and taken an oath to work together to save the party and the government," he said.  
However, many believe that the Congress has merely deferred its problems. If there is no stay on the disqualification by a court, under Section 151A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, the Election Commission is duty-bound to conduct by-polls to Assembly constituencies of Dharamshala, Lahul-Spiti, Sujanpur, Barsar, Kuflehar and Gagret within six months. "With the disqualification, the Congress government has put itself in an uncomfortable zone. Whenever the Assembly by-polls are held, which could be along with the Lok Sabha polls as well, the Congress would have to put its best foot forward to win the seats, which could become a difficult task amid the ongoing display of 'anti-socialism,'" said a party leader, who requested anonymity.

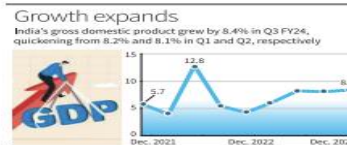
## Ready to rumble



**Latest addition:** The Navy's newly inducted MH 60R Seahawk multi-role helicopters seen at INS Garuda in Kochi on Thursday. The Navy is set to commission MH 60R, which is capable of firing torpedoes, missiles and Advance Precision Kill Weapon System rockets. The self-protection suite on the helicopter comprises chaff and infrared flares, which can be deployed automatically upon detection of threat. THULASI KAKKAT

## GDP growth estimate for current year raised to 7.6%

**Vikas Dhoot**  
NEW DELHI  
Making a flurry of revisions in the economy's growth estimates, the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday raised India's real GDP growth estimate for this year to 7.6% from the 7.3% projected last month. It also scaled down its 7.2% growth estimate for 2022-23 to 7% and raised its 2022-22 estimate from 9.1% to 9.7%.  
The Gross Value Added (GVA) in the economy is projected to rise 6.9% this year, with the NSO downgrading last year's GVA growth to 6.7% from 7%. GDP growth for the first two quarters of this year was raised to 8.2% and 8.1%, further rising to 8.4% for the October to December 2023 quarter (Q3).  
Economists expressed surprise that GVA growth in Q3 slid to just 6.5% from revised estimates of 8.2% and 7.7% in Q1 and Q2, respectively. Concerns also persisted about private consumption, which grew 3.5% in Q3 from 2.4% in Q2.  
The full-year growth estimate was downgraded to 3% from the 4.4% reckoned in early January.  
**Struggling farm sector**  
Farm sector GVA growth slipped into a 0.8% contraction in Q3, and the full year is now expected to record a mere 0.7% rise, compared with 4.7% in 2022-23. Chief Economic



## Core sector growth slows to 15-month low in Jan.

**Vikas Dhoot**  
NEW DELHI  
Output growth in core sectors fell to a 15-month low of 3.6% this January, driven by a contraction in fertilizer and refinery production along with

base effects from 2023 when the core sectors had grown 9.7% in the same month. However, absolute overall output levels were at a 10-month high.  
**FULL REPORT**  
» PAGE 14

## 104 killed as Israeli forces attack aid spot in Gaza

**Agence France-Presse**  
GAZA STRIP  
At least 104 people were killed in Gaza on Thursday when Israeli forces in Gaza opened fire on Palestinians scrambling for food aid at the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory said.  
The Israeli military said a "stampede" occurred when thousands of Gazans surrounded a convoy of 30 aid trucks, leading to dozens of deaths and injuries.

za City in which more than 750 others were wounded. A witness in Gaza City said the violence unfolded when thousands of people desperate for food rushed toward aid trucks at the city's western Nabulsi roundabout.  
"Trucks full of aid came too close to some army tanks that were in the area and the crowd, thousands of people, just stormed the trucks," the witness said, declining to be named for fear of reprisals.  
UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said he was "appalled at the reported killing and injury of hundreds of people during a transfer of aid supplies" and warned "life is draining

and Hamas militants could be just days away. U.S. President Joe Biden said that a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was now unlikely to happen by Monday — the timeline that he had predicted earlier this week.  
UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said he was "appalled at the reported killing and injury of hundreds of people during a transfer of aid supplies" and warned "life is draining



Displaced Palestinian children wait to receive free food at a tent





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# Deal done

India and the U.S. concluded agreements for the purchase of 24 MH-60R Seahawk and six AH-64E attack helicopters

The six Apaches and associated equipment will cost about **\$800 million**

## MH-60R SEAHAWK HELICOPTERS

- The procurement is through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) route of the U.S. government and is worth **\$2.12 bn**
- MH-60R is the mainstay of the U.S. Navy's Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) capability
- These helicopters are being procured as replacement for 15 Sea King Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) helicopters de-inducted in 1991 and one Sea King 42B MRH lost in an accident. The current MRHs in service, Sea King 42Bs, were inducted in the 1980s and are in need of replacement
- They are capable of carrying out anti-ship, anti-submarine, electronic warfare, net-centric over-the-horizon offensive and defensive roles



## APACHE

- These will be operated by the Army and deployed with its strike Corps in the western sector
- In September 2015, India contracted 22 AH-64E attack helicopters at a cost of **₹13,951.57 crore** for the IAF and the entire fleet will be in service in 2020
- In August 2017, the government approved the procurement of six Apaches under the optional clause for the Army
- On June 12, 2018, the Defence Security Cooperation Agency notified the U.S. Congress of the possible sale to India
- Apache is a heavy attack helicopter and the most advanced craft currently in service globally
- India is the 16th nation to select the Apache and the AH-64E is its most advanced variant, Boeing said
- The Apache is the most advanced multi-role heavy attack helicopter in the world





# MH-60R

## SEAHAWK

PLUTUS  
IAS



### Design and Capabilities:

- Derived from Sikorsky's S-70B Seahawk, built by Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation (now part of Lockheed Martin).
- Advanced sensors include AN/APY-9 radar, sonobuoys, acoustic sensors, ESM, and RWR for surveillance and threat detection.
- Armed with Hellfire missiles, Mark 54 torpedoes, and precision-guided rockets for anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare.


### Multi-Mission Capabilities:

- Versatile platform designed for ASW, ASuW, search and rescue (SAR), and ISR missions.
- Conducts anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, search and rescue, medical evacuation, and maritime surveillance.





- **Features:**

- **This helicopter is operated by a crew of 4 in anti-submarine warfare role and crew of 5 in anti-surface warfare role. It can also accommodate additional passengers.**
  - **It carries advanced airborne active sonar, multi-mode search radar and nose-mounted forward-looking infrared (FLIR) turret.**
  - **The helicopter has an integrated self-defense system.**
  - **Maximum Speed: 267 km/h**
  - **Range: 454 km**
- 

# First technical team from India arrives in Maldives

External Affairs Ministry confirms that the group will replace military troops operating advanced light helicopters and other aircraft for the country, marking a climbdown on New Delhi's stance

Sahasini Haider  
NEW DELHI

The government confirmed on Thursday that a team of Indian technical personnel have landed in Maldives to replace military troops that have been operating aircraft there. The development indicates a compromise between the Narendra Modi government and the recently elected government led by President Mohamed Muizzu on the contentious issue of Indian troops stationed in the archipelago that had become the target of the "India Out" campaign run by the opposition.

"The first team of technical personnel to operate the advanced light helicopter at Gan has reached Maldives. It will replace the existing personnel that were until now operating this platform. So, that is where we are," said Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Randeep Jaiswal in response to questions about the move, that was first announced by the Maldives government on Wednesday. Mr. Jaiswal did not indicate where the troops being replaced in the first batch of a total 88 Indian military personnel understood to be stationed in the Maldives.

The confirmation also marks a major climbdown by New Delhi that had ear-



Rough weather: The advanced light helicopter that India provided to the Maldives for operations. FILE PHOTO

lier refused to withdraw the troops, including in 2018 when former President Abdulla Yameen had demanded the removal of Indian military personnel on several occasions, even refusing to extend their visas. After Mr. Yameen was defeated in elections by President Ibrahim Solih, the issue had subsided, but was revived as a campaign plank by Mr. Muizzu, who won elections in November 2023 and made the removal of Indian military personnel a "priority".

**Ahead of 'deadline'**  
The announcement on the first batch of replacements comes ahead of the March 10 "deadline" that the Maldives government had reportedly given India after PM Modi met with President Muizzu in early December, and the leaders

set up a high-level "core group" to discuss the issue. While the Maldivian government repeatedly said that the decision to replace troops with civilian technical personnel had been taken, New Delhi had been tight-lipped on the matter, saying only that the two sides were seeking "workable" and "mutually acceptable" solutions.

On February 4, however, Mr. Muizzu surprised many by announcing to the Maldivian Majlis or parliament that a deal had indeed been struck.

"As per the most recent discussions, military personnel on one of the three aviation platforms will be recalled before March 10, 2024. The military personnel on the remaining two platforms will also be recalled by May 10, 2024," Mr. Muizzu had said. Sub-

sequently, the Ministry had said that the troops would be replaced by "competent technical personnel", but refused to comment on whether they would be civilian or military.

The differences over the issue of stationed troops had led to other acrimonious exchanges between the two countries in January, and Maldives had skipped a key security conference in Mauritius, for the Colombo Security Dialogue, and downgraded its presence at the Indian Ocean Conference in Perth. With the first step towards resolving the contentious issue seemingly taken, India and Maldives indicated that they were restoring progress in some of their other areas of strategic cooperation.

On Sunday, India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives completed the latest round of biennial trilateral maritime exercises called "Dosti-16" held between their coast guard services. Speaking at the inauguration of the exercises, where Bangladesh participated as an observer, Maldivian Defence Minister Mohamed Chassan Maumoon said that the Muizzu government "places the highest priority on ensuring that close relations, peace and stability is maintained between Maldives and neighbouring nations".

# Attacks on BSF personnel by criminals may be raised during Bangladesh talks

Vijaya Singh  
NEW DELHI

India is expected to raise the issue of violent attacks against Border Security Force (BSF) personnel perpetrated by criminals along the eastern border in a meeting with Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) scheduled in Dhaka next week.



The vigil: Border Security Force personnel on patrol near the India-Bangladesh border in Agartala, Tripura. FILE PHOTO

At the next round of bi-annual Director-General (DG) talks between the BSF and BGB, the Indian delegation is also likely to raise the incidents of "leeches, snake bite" and entry of Bangladesh nationals through illegal means. Smuggling of arms, narcotics and gold is likely to be on the agenda. The Indian delegation will be led by BSF DG Nitin Agarwal.

According to data available with *The Hindu*, since 2018, as many as 204 BSF personnel deployed along the Bangladesh border have been injured by miscreants.

"The criminals, who also include their Indian accomplices, use firearms, country-made bombs, sharp-edged weapons and also use stones and bamboo logs to attack the personnel in the situation. 40 BSF personnel were injured. Since the last round of talks in August 2023, 60 such cases of attacks against BSF and civilians along the eastern border," a senior government official said.

India adopted a non-lethal weapon policy in 2011 after Felani Khaturin, a 15-year-old girl from Bangladesh, was shot dead by the BSF while she was entering India along the Cooch Behar border in West Bengal. Photographs of the teenager's body that remained hanging on the barb wire fence for several hours before being brought down created a huge public outcry in Bangladesh.

BSF officials say that they often came under violent attack by cattle smugglers active along the border and the non-lethal weapon policy was an impediment to their operational capabilities.

The BSF personnel use regular weapons as and when the situation demands but the proportion of non-lethal weapons is much smaller. Many BSF units along the border suggest that 2023 saw the least number of firing instances by BSF com-

pared to the last six years. In 2023, while 287 rounds of ammunition were fired from regular weapons, those by non-lethal weapons which include stun grenades, chili grenade, pump action guns and blank fires stood at 2,024 rounds.

**The guidelines**  
According to the Joint Indo-Bangladesh Guidelines for Border Authorities, 1975, it is the duty of the border guarding forces on both sides to prevent the entry of armed civilians up to 150 yards on either side.

The BGB delegation will be apprised that since the last round of talks with BGB officials in May 2023, as many as 262 incidents of breach of fence have been reported. Since 2017, a total of 3,090 such incidents have been reported.

Since 2018, as many as 17,637 Bangladeshi nationals were intercepted by the BSF along the eastern border while 3,342 individuals were caught in 2023.

# '20 Indians sought help to return from battlefield'

Kalpal Bhattacharjee  
NEW DELHI

India on Thursday for the first time categorically stated that "around 20" Indians had reached out to its embassy in Moscow seeking help in returning home. The External Affairs Ministry's official spokesperson, Randeep Jaiswal, said India was in contact with Russia to bring back the Indian nationals from the zone where Russian and Ukrainian forces are clashing.

"We have an understanding that 20-odd people are needed. We are trying our level best for their early discharge. We have issued letters to the consulates, which you saw. We have also told people not to venture in the war zone if caught into situations which are difficult," Mr. Jaiswal said.

The Ministry had earlier stated that all such cases concerning Indian workers stuck in the war zone near the Ukrainian border had been taken up with the Russian authorities and that, as a result, several had been released. But on Thursday, Mr. Jaiswal gave the numbers of Indians who are still caught in the difficult situation. "We are in regular touch with Russian authorities both here in New Delhi and also in Moscow," he said.

*The Hindu* had carried a report that at least three Indians had been taken to a fight as "army security helpers" for the Russian side.

# Cabinet nod for ₹24,420-cr. subsidy for P&K fertilizers

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved the nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) rates for the upcoming kharif season for Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizers and the scheme of three more fertilizer subsidies under the NBS scheme.

The Centre said tentative budgetary requirements for the scheme would be about ₹24,420 crore.

The subsidy on nitrogen has been fixed at ₹47.02 per kilogram, phosphatic (P) at ₹28.72 per kg (₹20.89 per kg in 2023 rabi season), potassic (K) at ₹2.38 per kg, and sulphur (S) at ₹1.89 per kg. The subsidy on nitrogen, potassic, and sulphur was the same in the 2023 rabi season too.

The government said in a release that the decision would ensure the availability of fertilizers to farmers at subsidised, affordable and reasonable prices and rationalisation of subsidy on P&K fertilizers in view of recent trends in the international prices of fertilizers and inputs.

"Inclusion of three new grades in NBS will support in promoting balanced soil health and offer alternatives to the farmers to choose fertilizers fortified with micro-nutrients as per the soil requirement," the release added.

Mr. Thakur said with this subsidy, DAP which is sold currently at ₹1,350 per

## On the draw



# Top court dismisses Vedanta plea to reopen copper plant in Thoothukudi

Krishnadas Rajagopal  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed an appeal by Vedanta Sterlite to reopen its Thoothukudi plant. Anything else would have opened the public's right to health over sheer industry gains.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud upheld a Madras High Court decision of August 2020.

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"Inclusion of three new grades in NBS will support in promoting balanced soil health and offer alternatives to the farmers to choose fertilizers fortified with micro-nutrients as per the soil requirement," the release added.

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A three-judge Bench headed by C.J. D.Y. Chandrachud upheld a Madras High Court decision of August 2020. FILE PHOTO

no other option but to bring the curtain down on the Thoothukudi plant. Anything else would have opened the public's right to health over sheer obliviousness of their plain duty to the public, the court noted.

Chief Justice Chandrachud noted, were the principles of sustainable development, public trust, and finally, that a polluter should pay.

# LS polls: DMK allots two seats each to CPI, CPI(M); Cong. seeks higher share

The Hindu Bureau  
CHENNAI

The DMK on Thursday finalised seat-sharing with the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) for the upcoming Lok Sabha election, and allotted two seats each to the parties.

However, the constituencies are to be decided later. The decision was arrived at during a meeting between the Left parties at

the DMK's head office. An agreement was signed between DMK president and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and State secretary of the CPI(M) and the CPI - K. Bakakrishna and K. Mutharasan to allot the seats.

In the 2019 general election too, both the Left parties had contested two seats as part of the DMK alliance.

Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) president K. Selvarathnaghal said that he

hoped that the DMK would allot more seats this time to the national party.

**'Strong ties'**  
He was responding to seat-sharing queries by mediapersons at Saibayamurthi Bhavan here. He said that the ties between the DMK and the Congress were strong, and Mr. Stalin and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi were like brothers. "We are holding talks and trying to find a decision (on seat-sharing)," he said.

Asked whether he had given at least nine, plus one, seats like in 2019, Mr. Selvarathnaghal said "I have hope that they [the DMK] will give more than that."

On whether talks were on discreetly, he said that the talks were transparent. Pointing out the cooperation between the parties was finished on 10 March for the 2019 Lok Sabha election, he said there were no left over issues. "The same for this election.

# Cabinet okays ₹75,000-crore 'free electricity' solar scheme

Jacob Koshy  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet approved a ₹75,021-crore package for the "PM-Surya Bhumi Mission under the High Cost Free Electricity scheme) to promote rooftop solar installations in India.

The scheme envisages providing 600 units of "free electricity" every month to one crore households. However, it was not immediately clear how the scheme officially unveiled on Thursday would result in free electricity to one crore households.

The Centre will fund, an accompanying press statement from the Union Power Ministry says. 50% of the cost for installing 2 kW

systems, ₹60,000 for 2 kW systems and ₹78,000 for 3 kW systems or higher," a press statement from the Ministry noted.

**Applying for subsidy**  
As a next step, households will apply for subsidy through a Central portal and be able to select a suitable vendor for installing a rooftop solar system. The national portal will assist the households in their decision-making process by providing relevant information such as appropriate system sizes, benefits calculator, vendor rating, etc.

For the remaining costs, households will be able to "access collateral-free low-interest loan products at around 7% at present for

Singh, had explained the financing of the scheme differently in an interaction with reporters as reported by *The Hindu*, on February 3. He had said that public utilities and the Ministry, would be reaching out to "eligible" households and installing rooftop solar systems for free.

**Repaying loans**  
The PSU, or its affiliated agency, would be responsible for taking out a loan to finance the component not funded by the Central subsidy. This loan would be repaid to the bank by consumers. The power produced back to the grid.

In his interaction, he said that "60% of the cost



# Cabinet okays ₹75,000-crore 'free electricity' solar scheme

**Jacob Koshy**

NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet approved a ₹75,021-crore package for the 'PM-Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana' (PM Free Electricity scheme) to promote rooftop solar (RTS) installations in India.

The scheme envisages providing 300 units of "free electricity" every month to one crore households. However, it was not immediately clear how the scheme officially unveiled on Thursday would result in free electricity to one crore households.

The Centre will fund, an accompanying press statement from the Union Power Ministry says, 60% of the cost for installing 2 kW (kilowatt) systems and 40% of the cost for systems of 2-3 kW capacity.

Systems of higher wattage will not be eligible for central subsidy.

"At current benchmark prices, this will mean ₹30,000 subsidy for 1 kW

systems, ₹60,000 for 2 kW systems and ₹78,000 for 3 kW systems or higher," a press statement from the Ministry noted.

## Applying for subsidy

As a next step, households will apply for subsidy through a Central portal and be able to select a suitable vendor for installing a rooftop solar system. The national portal will assist the households in their decision-making process by providing relevant information such as appropriate system sizes, benefits calculator, vendor rating, etc.

For the remaining costs, households will be able to "access collateral-free low-interest loan products of around 7% at present for installation of residential RTS systems up to 3 kW," the release noted. This implies that minus the Central subsidy, the rest of the installation expenses have to be borne by the aspirant consumer.

Power Minister R.K.

Singh, had explained the financing of the scheme differently in an interaction with reporters, as reported by *The Hindu*, on February 3. He had said that public sector units, affiliated to the Ministry, would be reaching out to "eligible" households and install the rooftop solar systems for free.

## Repaying loans

The PSU, or its affiliated agency, would be responsible for taking out a loan to finance the component not funded by the Central subsidy. This loan would be repaid to the bank by consumers selling surplus power produced back to the grid.

In his interaction, he said that "60% of the cost of installation will be subsidised by the Centre. For the rest, [a Central] public sector unit will take a loan [from a bank] and will repay from the cost of electricity [used by the household] over and above the 300 units."

## ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY

Solar system is a photovoltaic system in which electricity generating panels are installed on the roof of any residential, commercial, institutional or industrial building

## HOW MUCH AREA IS REQUIRED?

A rooftop solar plant generally requires around 100 square feet shadow free area per kilowatt

## IS THERE ANY GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY?

Subsidy of 30% is being given by the central government. Those interested to install solar plants can avail the subsidy from the ministry of new and renewal energy (MNRE) through CREST. The subsidy is released to the applicant after commissioning of the project and receipt from the MNRE based on the rates of different categories



## THE COST OF INSTALLATION

Chandigarh Renewal Energy, Science and Technology Promotion Society (CREST) has fixed rates at which residents can get solar plants from empanelled agencies

Category (in kWp)	Rate per kWp
1-5	₹60,000
5-10	₹59,000
10-20	₹58,000
20-50	₹55,000
50-100	₹52,000

## IS FINANCE OPTION AVAILABLE?

Banks do provide loan for solar plant installations. The loan will cover up to 80% of the project cost at a fixed rate of interest for a 5-year tenure

## HOW MUCH ENERGY IS GENERATED?

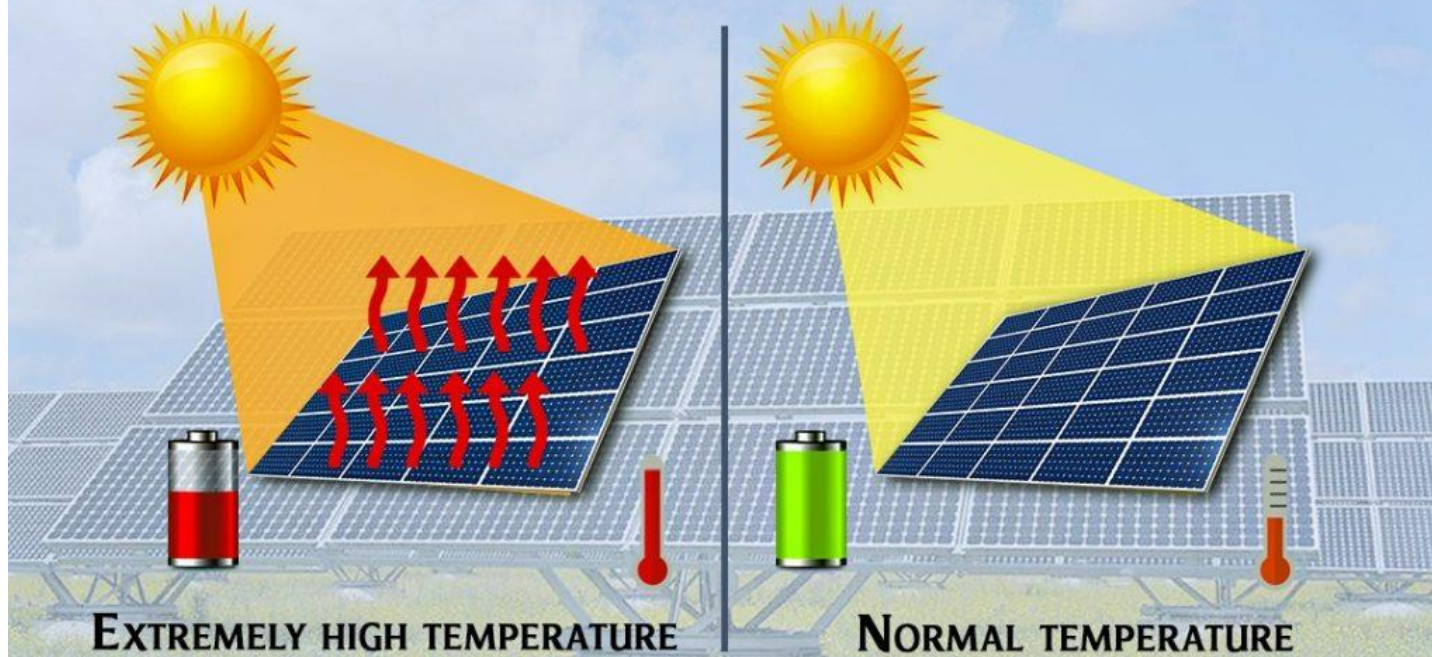
1 kW system can generate upto 4.5 kWh per day depending upon the location and maintenance of the plant

## WHAT IS THE LIFE OF THE SYSTEM?

The life span of a solar panel is around 40 years but the manufacturers give a warranty for a period of 25 years

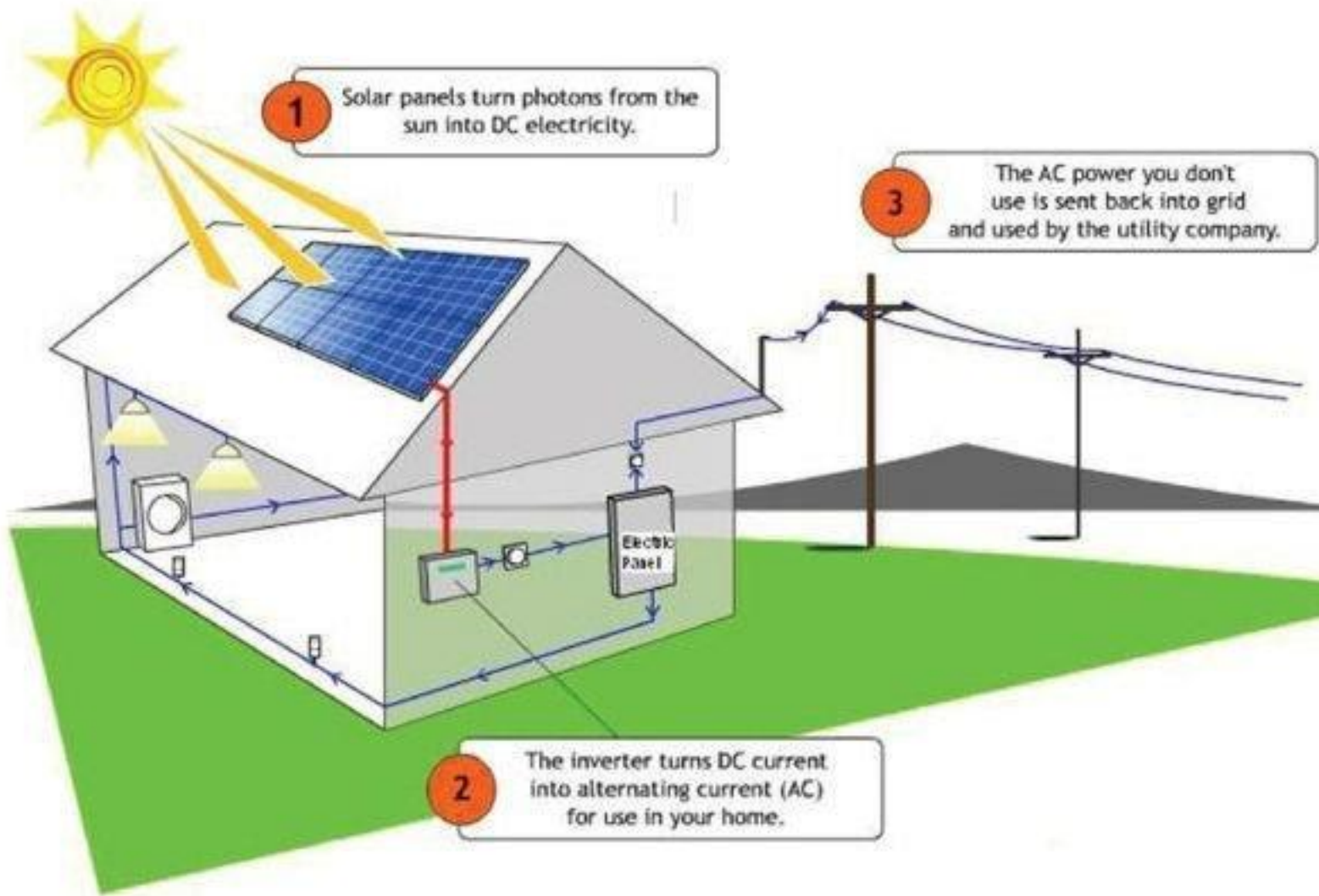


**MYTH:**  
**UNDER EXTREMELY HOT TEMPERATURE,**  
**PV CELLS CAN PRODUCE MORE ELECTRICITY.**



**FACT:**  
**PV CELLS USE SUNLIGHT AND NOT HEAT TO CONVERT INTO ELECTRICITY.**  
**SO CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, HIGHER TEMPERATURES**  
**ACTUALLY LOWER THE EFFICIENCY OF PV CELLS**

**Get free consultation, for your energy or electricity saving needs today!**  
Call us on +91 98703 93898/58/94/95 | or mail at [sales@solarsmiths.com](mailto:sales@solarsmiths.com)





## IN BRIEF



## ₹30-lakh penalty on Air India over passenger's death: DGCA

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), has imposed a penalty of ₹30 lakh on Air India for the death of an 80-year-old passenger from a cardiac arrest after a delay in providing him a wheelchair at the Mumbai airport, earlier this month. The DGCA said that the airline failed to conform to its rules on the carriage of persons with disability. Air India also didn't inform the regulator "about any action taken by the airline against the erring employee(s) and the airline also failed to submit any corrective actions taken to prevent the recurrence of such incidents".

## Railways removes loco pilot from service for 'negligence'

The Northern Railways has removed from service the loco pilot of a freight train which ran about 70 km on its own from Jammu's Kathua to Punjab's Unchi Bassi, saying his "negligence" could have resulted in a "major incident" causing loss of lives. A notice was issued by the senior divisional mechanical engineer. The loco pilot, Sandeep Kumar, "failed to fulfil his duties, adopted a shortcut and used improper engine stalling procedures which led to it rolling down along with 53 wagons in the Firozpur Division, the notice stated. "It also brought a bad name to the safety image of Indian Railway as a whole and Northern Railway in particular", it added.

## Don't segregate prisoners on basis of caste, religion: govt.

S. Vijay Kumar  
CHENNAI

The Union government has taken a serious view of some States discriminating against prisoners on the basis of their caste and religion and assigning them work accordingly. Saying that it was unconstitutional, the Union Home Ministry wrote to the Chief Secretaries of all States and Union Territories urging them to ensure that their Jail Manuals did not contain any discriminatory provisions.

The Constitution of India prohibited any kind of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, and place of birth. The Model Prison Manual, 2016, prepared by the Ministry and circulated to all States and Union Territories in May 2016, explicitly prohibited caste- and religion-based discrimination of prisoners in the management of the kitchen or cooking of food on a

caste or religious basis. "The manual also provides that any special treatment to a group of prisoners belonging to a particular caste or religion is strictly prohibited. It further provides that no classification of prisoners shall be allowed on grounds of socio-economic status, caste or class... In case any such provision exists, immediate steps must be taken to amend/remove the discriminatory provision from the Manual/Act. It is reiterated that there should be no caste-based assignment of duties or work in the prisons," the Ministry said.

**Healthcare provisions**  
Stating that the medical care of prisoners was one of the significant concerns of prison management, the Ministry said it had been sending advisories from time to time to ensure that due importance was given to the physical and mental well-being of inmates.

## India's leopard population rises to 13,874; M.P. on top

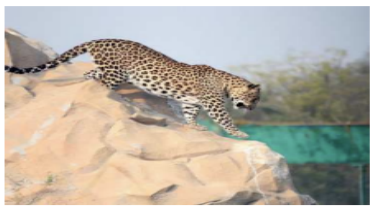
Forest surveyors cover nearly 6.5 lakh km looking for carnivore signs across 20 States; man-animal conflict is likely the reason for decline in the big cat population by 22% in Uttarakhand, says report

Jacob Koshy  
NEW DELHI

India's leopard numbers rose by 8% from 12,852 in 2018 to 13,874 in 2022, according to a report made public by the Environment Ministry on Thursday.

While the highest number of leopards were reported in Madhya Pradesh (3,907), only three other States reported over 1,000 animals each — Maharashtra (1,585), Karnataka (1,879) and Tamil Nadu (1,070). While Uttarakhand reported a 22% decline in the big cat numbers — reportedly due to poaching and man-animal conflict, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal saw a collective 150% increase in animals.

The survey covered 20 States of India, and focused on about 70% of the animals' expected habitat, which are India's tiger reserves and protected forest areas. Unlike tigers, which are largely confined to forest reserves, leopards are far more adaptable and tend to be found in signif-



On the prowl: Leopards are very adaptable and tend to be found in significant numbers in villages and sometimes, even in cities. ANI

icant numbers, in villages and sometimes, even in cities. They are also known to roam on cattle and may be involved in conflict, resulting in higher mortality.

**Habitat conservation**  
"About a third of the leopards are within protected areas. When we conserve tiger reserves, we also conserve leopard habitat," said Qamar Qureshi of the Wildlife Institute of India and one of the authors of the

report. The analysis — coordinated by the Wildlife Institute of India — only looked at forest areas where a similar survey was done in 2018. The Shivalka hills and the Gangetic plains recorded 3.4% yearly decline, while Central India and the Eastern Ghats, the Western Ghats and the hills of the north-east and the Brahmaputra flood plains recorded growth of 1.5%, 1%, and 1.3% per annum respec-

tively. "The population in the last four years is stable, which also indicates the growth is minimal and in comparison to tigers, leopard population is likely getting impacted by people in multiple use areas," the report added.

Leopard numbers have declined in Ramanagar forest division (Uttarakhand), where tiger numbers have shown a very steep growth in the past four years. About 65% of the leopard population is present outside protected areas in the Shivalka landscape. In Uttar Pradesh, both leopard and tiger numbers have increased, the report noted.

Forest surveyors travel 6.41,449 km for carnivore signs and prey abundance in 2022. The surveyors were deployed at 32,803 locations, resulting in 30,881 photographs.

The sharp rise in numbers reported out of the northeastern States were the result of a "sampling artefact", said Dr. Qureshi, meaning that previous years saw very little of a systematic survey and fewer cameras installed.

## Armed forces likely to get non-functional upgrade benefit

Dinakar Perri  
NEW DELHI

In a move to address one of the core anomalies of the Services with their civil counterparts in the government, the Centre has decided to grant non-functional upgrade (NFU) benefit over which a legal battle has been going on for some time.

"The government has taken a decision to inform the court in the next hearing that the armed forces will also be given NFU," an official source said. NFU entitles all officers of a batch who are not promoted to draw the salary and grade pay that the seniormost officer of their batch would get after a certain period. The Sixth Pay Commission had granted NFU to most officers of Organisation Group 'A' services but not the military. However, the Seventh Pay Commission (SPC) gave a

## Lieutenant-Colonels will get arrears of up to ₹16 lakh and Colonels around ₹5 lakh to ₹10 lakh

mixed verdict on it and the issue was referred to the anomalies committee following strong objections from the three Services.

Once granted, the biggest beneficiaries of NFU would be officers in the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Lieutenant-Colonels who don't get empanelled to the next rank remain in the same pay bracket and their numbers are large due to the steep hierarchy, one official said, adding that NFU would be a morale booster. Post implementation, Lieutenant-Colonels are likely to get arrears of up to ₹16 lakh and Colonels around ₹8 lakh to ₹10 lakh, the source said.

## Lancet study shows obesity rates going up across world

Ramya Kannan  
CHENNAI

Obesity rates among children and adolescents worldwide increased four times since 1990 to 16.5% while obesity rates among adults have more than doubled, a new study published in *The Lancet* has revealed.

The total number of children, adolescents and adults worldwide living with obesity surpassed one billion. In total, 159 million children and adolescents, and 879 million adults were obese in 2022.

**Form of malnutrition**  
Along with the declining prevalence of people who are underweight since 1990, obesity has become the most common form of malnutrition in most countries, said the paper that analysed global data estimates.

The study was conducted by the NCD Risk Factor Collaboration (NCD-RisC),



Fatal fall: The pick-up van that overturned in an accident at the Shajapur area of Dindori district on Thursday, April 1, 2023.

## 14 killed as pick-up van falls into valley in Madhya Pradesh

The Hindu Bureau

Fourteen people were killed and more than 20 injured when an overloaded pick-up van overturned and fell into a valley in Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh on Thursday. Eight women and a 16-year-old boy were among the deceased.

The incident took place around 2 a.m. when the passengers were returning from a function in Mandla district. The driver lost control of the vehicle and it fell into the valley.

Minister Sampatya Ukey said the victims hailed from the tribal community. "The Chief Minister has given directions for a high-level inquiry into the acci-

dent," she told presspersons.

Dindori Superintendent of Police Akhil Patel said the driver and owner of the vehicle had been arrested. A case has been registered under Section 304 (II) of the IPC, he said, adding that the vehicle's fitness certificate and insurance had expired in 2022.

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over the incident. The Prime Minister's Office announced an assistance of ₹2 lakh to the kin of each of the deceased and ₹50,000 for the injured.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav also announced an assistance of ₹4 lakh to the kin of each of the deceased.



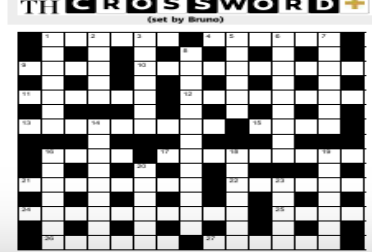
Obesity has become the most common form of malnutrition in most countries. GETTY IMAGES

the study in India. V. Mohan, Arjana Ranjit and Guha Pradeep, who were also instrumental in the countrywide INDIAB study, were co-authors.

**Coexisting conditions**  
Dr. Mohan said that in India, both obesity and underweight continue to co-exist. "We have also seen, in the past few years, a study that both abdominal obesity and generalised obesity are increasing in the population, with of course variations in rural areas."

In collaboration with the World Health Organization, over 1,500 researchers in more than 190 countries analysed weight and height measurements of over 220 million people aged five years or older. They reportedly looked at body mass index (BMI) to understand how obesity and underweight have changed worldwide from 1990 to 2022. Representatives from the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation were among the co-authors of

## THE CROSSWORD 14111



- To solve this puzzle online, get access to our crossword site, at <https://qrgo.page.link/JR7R>
- Rodent's crazy appearance - going backwards (6)
  - Start of April through end of August, setter's on flight (8)
  - Cold foxy number captivated white boxer (9)
  - Star lacking entrance to path (4)
  - Pestled kernel for eagle (4)
  - Cream pie starting to decompose after setting - enjoy the pleasure right now (6,4)
  - Dispatching delivery with turn - covered hip and glanced from the top (8)
  - Condition to withdraw from horror and hostility (6)
  - Owens vehicle? (20)
  - Sierder object broke off at the end (4)
  - Animal grabbing a rodent's head and another body part (6)
  - Law diplomat? 100 for \$1000! (6)
- Down**
- Lifebuoy's mostly made with green energy (7)
  - Remote cycling path (8)
  - Asian-American devotee goes to India to obtain good husband (7)
  - Overturned evidence used to arrest, often hang, native (6)
  - Black art - crowd regularly went crazy for a way to predict the future? (5,4)
  - Female bird holding up plant for female bird (7)
  - Increase in temperature of volatile star with a halogen- iodine...

## SUDOKU

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

Solution to previous puzzle: 6 9 4 5 1 8 7 2 3 / 2 2 1 7 4 0 2 6 9

## FAITH

## Tattvas underlying avatars

The Vedic observation "ajayamAno bahudha viAyate" shows us that Lord Narayana takes many avatars. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna: *bahuni mae vyaritANI jannANI*, meaning that He has taken many births. Thus, apart from the well-known 10 avatars, the Lord took many more avatars. In each, His glory shone more and more.

He became like a well polished ruby, said M.A. Venkatarishnan in a discourse. So His greatness becomes more evident because of His avatars.

When we are born, we tend to sink lower and lower, because of our thoughts and deeds. The merit of shining through successive births, belongs solely to Him.

In the Gita, Krishna says: *janna karma cha me dhyam Eva yo veti tattvata, tyaktva dEham punar janna naiti mAnkit sojyura*.

In this verse, Krishna says that His avatars and His deeds in those avatars are unique and flawless. He who understands the tattva of His avatars will never be reborn. In other words, he who understands avatara tattva

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PANTHERA PARDUS FUSCA

# INDIAN LEOPARD

Highly adaptable big cat can live close to humans

**POPULATION**  
around 7,910  
(2014 census in  
surveyed areas);  
thought to be around  
12,000-14,000  
across India

**WEIGHT**  
50-77 kg (males);  
29-34 kg (females)

**GEOGRAPHIC RANGE**  
Indian subcontinent (all states), Nepal,  
Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan,  
Myanmar, China

**HABITAT**  
Forest, shrubland,  
savanna, grassland,  
rocky areas,  
mountains, desert



Coats have black rosettes

Each coat pattern  
is unique and makes  
individuals identifiable

Large head, powerful jaws

Have an easily recognisable  
sawing/rasping call



## EAT

- True carnivores that are excellent ambush predators
- Feed on anything they can overpower, from mid-size ungulates, to domestic livestock, dogs, birds, and rodents



## ACTIVITY

- Mostly solitary, nocturnal creatures, also seen at dusk and dawn in forests. Entirely nocturnal close to human presence
- Territorial.
- Leopard densities can reach 5 animals per 100 sq km in densely populated human landscapes like western India



## BLACK PANTHER

- Dark morphs or black leopards, often called black panthers, are the same species, but with recessive melanistic genes
- Spots are hidden under the dark coat



## CUBS

- Females usually give birth to two cubs after a gestation period of 90-105 days
- Only the female cares for the cubs, who remain with the mother for about 1.5-2 years



## AGILE CAT

- Excellent at climbing trees
- Can run down a tree head-first
- Can carry large prey up a tree to protect it from other carnivores including tigers and wild dogs

## THREATS

- A TRAFFIC study reports that between 2001-2010 at least **2 leopards were killed each week** for the illegal wildlife trade in India
- Population has declined by **75-90%** in the last two centuries
- **Poisoning** and retaliatory killing
- **Poaching** for pelts and body parts.
- Become **roadkill** when roads and highways run through forests
- Conflict with **livestock herders**
- **Hunting**

PROTECTION STATUS:  
**VULNERABLE** on the IUCN Red List



A PAWS-ITIVE TREND!  
-INDIA'S-

# LEOPARD POPULATION REACHES NEW HEIGHTS



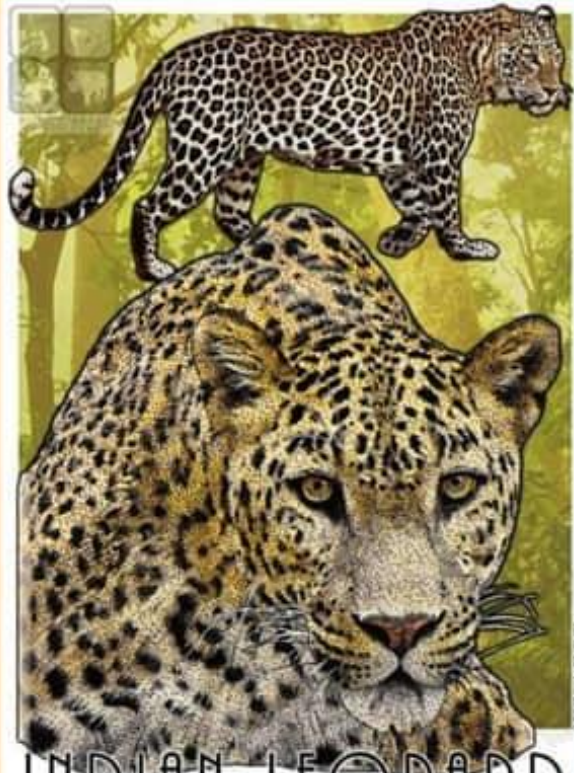
Leopard Population

\*Represents population of 70% of leopard habitat



# INDIAN LEOPARD

## INDIAN LEOPARD



INDIAN LEOPARD

### NEWS

As part of global tiger census, Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is set to release report on leopard sightings by month-end.

### ABOUT CENSUS

Last census on India's leopards conducted in 2014 which estimated cat's population b/w 12,000 and 14,000.

While quadrennial tiger survey is centrepiece of WII and environment ministry-coordinated undertaking, exercise also estimates population of other animals by relying on camera trap images

### Scientific Name

*Panthera pardus*

### Habitat

In India, found in all forest types, ONLY exception being desert and mangroves of Sundarbans

### ABOUT

Schedule 1 of Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972

### STATUS

Appendix I of CITES

Vulnerable on IUCN Red List

# Lancet study shows obesity rates going up across world

**Ramya Kannan**

CHENNAI

Obesity rates among children and adolescents worldwide increased four times from 1990 to 2022, while obesity rates among adults have more than doubled, a new study published in *The Lancet* has revealed.

The total number of children, adolescents and adults worldwide living with obesity has surpassed one billion. In total, 159 million children and adolescents, and 879 million adults were obese in 2022.

## Form of malnutrition

Along with the declining prevalence of people who are underweight since 1990, obesity has become the most common form of malnutrition in most countries, said the paper that analysed global data estimates.

The study was conducted by the NCD Risk Factor Collaboration (NCD-RisC),



Obesity has become the most common form of malnutrition in most countries. GETTY IMAGES

in collaboration with the World Health Organization. Over 1,500 researchers in more than 190 countries analysed weight and height measurements of over 220 million people aged five years or older. They reportedly looked at body mass index (BMI) to understand how obesity and underweight have changed worldwide from 1990 to 2022.

Representatives from the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation were among the co-authors of

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## Coexisting conditions

Dr. Mohan said that in India, both obesity and underweight continue to coexist. “We have also seen, as part of the INdiab study that both abdominal obesity and generalised obesity are increasing in the population, with of course variations in rural areas.”

As per *The Lancet* paper, in India, the obesity rate increased from 0.1% in 1990 to 3.1% in 2022 for girls, and 0.1% to 3.9%, for boys.

In the prevalence of obesity category for girls and boys, India ranked 174th highest in the world in 2022. Among adults, the change was starker: in women, the obesity rate increased from 1.2% in 1990 to 9.8% in 2022 and in men from 0.5% to 5.4%.

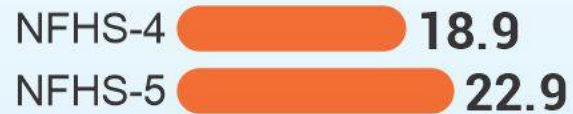


# Obesity & Overweight

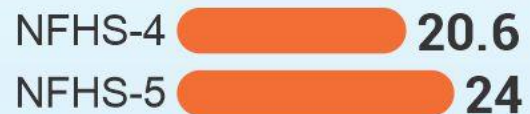
According to the World Health Organization (WHO), overweight is a BMI  $\geq 25$ ; and obesity is a BMI  $\geq 30$ .

## % of Overweight Indians:

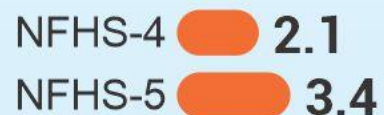
### Men:



### Women:

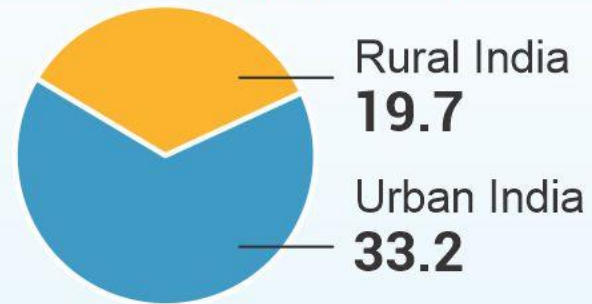


### Children below 5 years of Age



\*NFHS-4(2015-16) and  
NFHS-5(2019-21)

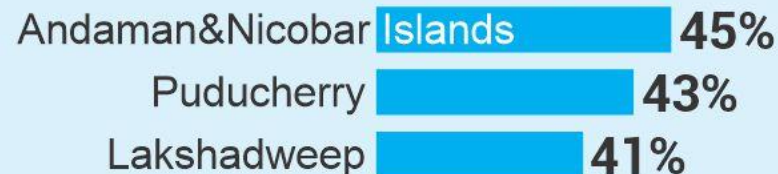
## % of obese population (NFHS-5):



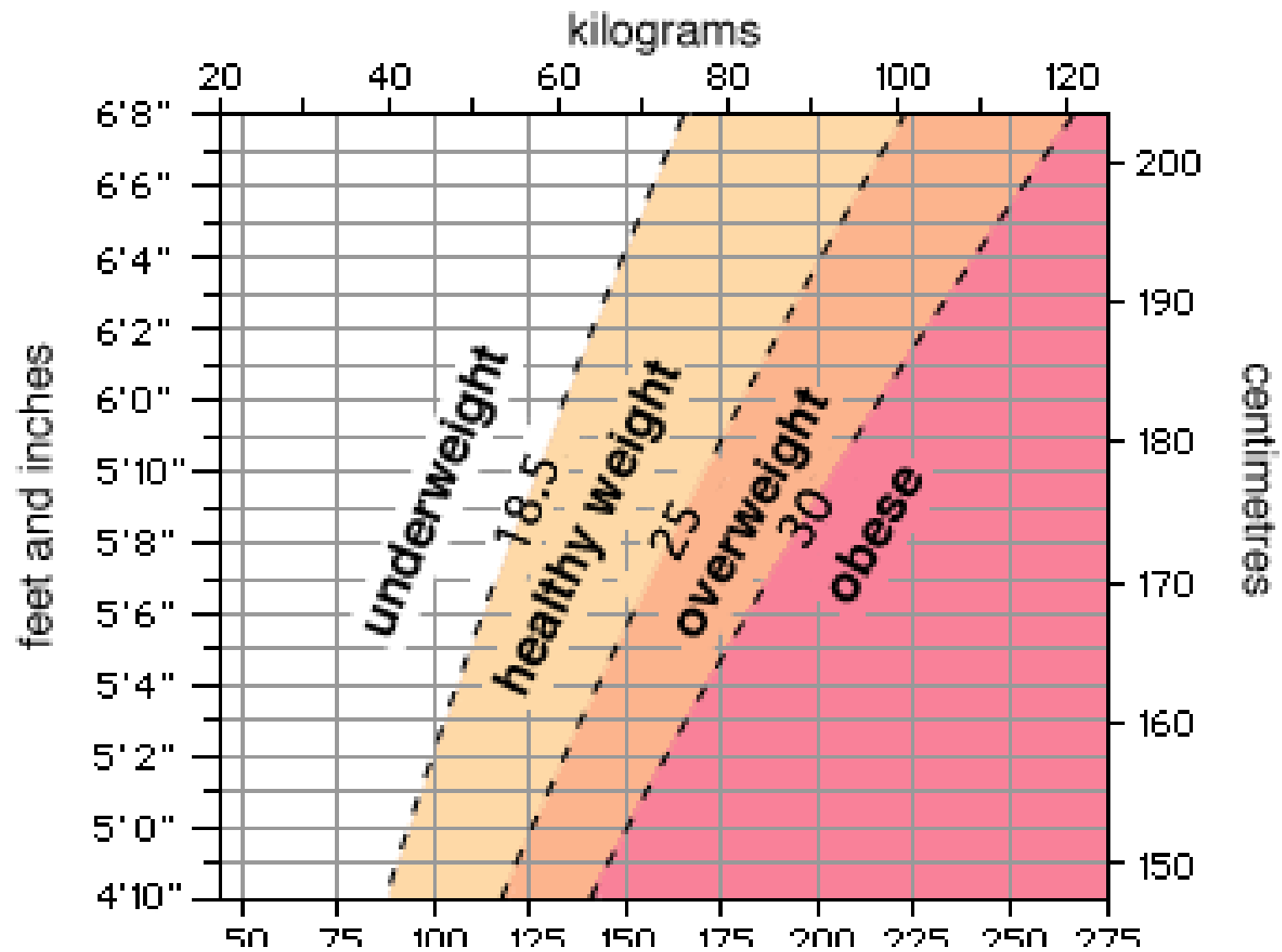
## State/UT with high % of overweight/obese females:



## State/UT with high % of overweight/obese men:



# Body Mass Index (BMI) for adults





## Overweight and Obesity

- Overweight and obesity are defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that may impair health.
- **Body mass index (BMI)** is a simple index of weight-for-height that is commonly used to classify overweight and obesity in adults. It is defined as a person's weight in kilograms divided by the square of his height in meters (kg/m<sup>2</sup>).
- For adults, WHO defines overweight and obesity as follows:
  - **overweight** is a BMI greater than or equal to 25; and
  - **obesity** is a BMI greater than or equal to 30.



## Steps by other states

- In May 2023, **Assam Police** said it will start offering voluntary retirement to all obese personnel (those having BMI of 30+) if they fail to reduce their weights by November 2023.
- In 2018, the **Karnataka State Reserve Police** told its personnel to slim down or potentially lose their jobs. The decision was made after over a 100 policemen died in just over a year in the state due to lifestyle-related diseases, linked to obesity.
- In 2012, **Andhra Pradesh** introduced extensive physical training for its police officers, after reports showed that nearly 40 per cent of the force was overweight.





JERUSALEM

Iran launches imaging satellite 'Pars-1' into orbit from Russia



Iran announced on Thursday the launch of a remote sensing and imaging satellite into orbit from Russia, state media reported. The launch of 'Pars-1' with the Russian Soyuz 2.1b launcher was broadcast live by state media in Iran. It was launched 'from Russia's Vostochny launch base', according to the IRNA news agency. AFP

JERUSALEM

Israel Minister says ultra-Orthodox Jews should join military service



Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant has called for members of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community to be enrolled in military service as the Gaza war rages on. "We must all bear the burden," Mr. Gallant said, addressing what has long been a divisive political issue in a country with mandatory military service for most citizens. AFP

TEXAS

Largest recorded wildfire in State history scorches Texas Panhandle



A wildfire spreading across the Texas Panhandle became the largest in State history on Thursday, growing to nearly 1,700 square miles of scorched ranchlands and destroyed homes. The fire's explosive growth slowed as snow fell and winds and temperatures dipped, but it was still untamed and threatening more death. AP

WASHINGTON

Biden administration will probe Chinese-made 'smart cars'



Citing potential national security risks, the Biden administration says it will investigate Chinese-made "smart cars" that can gather sensitive information about Americans driving them. The probe could lead to new regulations aimed at preventing China from using sophisticated technology in electric cars. AFP

West's support to Ukraine fraught with global nuclear war risk: Putin

Ahead of next month's poll, Russian President vows to fulfil Moscow's goals in Ukraine; he casts Western leaders as irresponsible; tells them to keep in mind that his country also has weapons 'that can strike targets on their territory'

Associated Press MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed on Thursday to fulfil Moscow's goals in Ukraine and sternly warned the West against deeper involvement in the fighting, saying such a move is fraught with the risk of a global nuclear conflict.



Strict warning: Ukrainian servicemen prepare a 115 howitzer to fire towards Russian troops near Bakhmut. REUTERS

Mr. Putin's blunt warning came in a state-of-the-art address ahead of next month's election he's all but certain to win, underlining his readiness to raise the stakes in the tug-of-war with the West to protect the Russian gains in Ukraine. In an apparent reference to French President Emmanuel Macron's statement earlier this week that the future deployment of Western ground troops to Ukraine should not be "ruled out", Mr. Putin warned that it would lead to "tragic" consequences for the countries who decide to do that. Mr. Putin noted that

while accusing Russia of plans to attack NATO allies in Europe, Western allies were "selecting targets for striking our territory" and "talking about the possibility of sending a NATO contingent to Ukraine." "We remember the fate of those who sent their troop contingents to the territory of our country," the Russian leader said in an apparent allusion to the failed invasions by Napoleon and Hitler. "Now the

consequences for the potential invaders will be far more tragic." In a two-hour speech before an audience of lawmakers and top officials, Mr. Putin cast Western leaders as reckless and irresponsible and declared that the West should keep in mind that "we also have the weapons that can strike targets on their territory, and what they are now suggesting and scaring the world with, all that

raises the real threat of a nuclear conflict that will mean the destruction of our civilisation." "Full readiness" The strong statement followed earlier warnings from Mr. Putin, who has issued frequent reminders of Russia's nuclear might since he sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022 as he sought to discourage the West from expanding its military support for Kyiv.

Mr. Putin emphasized that Russia's nuclear forces are in "full readiness," saying that the military has deployed potent new weapons, some of them tested on the battlefield in Ukraine. The Kremlin leader said they include the new Sarmat heavy intercontinental ballistic missile that has entered service with Russian nuclear forces, along with the Burevestnik atomic-powered cruise missile and the Poseidon atomic-powered, nuclear-armed drone, which are completing their tests.

In his speech that focused heavily on economic and social issues ahead of the March 15 to 17 presidential vote, Mr. Putin argued that Russia was "defending its sovereignty and security and protecting our compatriots" in Ukraine, charging that the Russian forces have the upper hand in the fighting. He reaffirmed his claim that the West was bent on destroying Russia, saying "they need a dependent, waning, dying space in the place of Russia so that they can do whatever they want." The Russian leader honoured the troops fallen in Ukraine with a moment of silence, and said that military veterans should form the core of the country's new elite, inviting them to join a training program for senior civil servants.

Mr. Putin has repeatedly said that he sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022 to protect Russian interests and prevent Ukraine from posing a major security threat to Russia by joining NATO.

Agence France-Presse MADRID

Spain's top court said on Thursday it was opening an investigation into Catalan separatist leader Carles Puigdemont on "terrorism" charges over protests linked to Catalonia's failed 2017 independence bid. The Supreme Court said it had decided "to investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute" Mr. Puigdemont "for terrorism offences in relation to the Democratic Tsunami



Carles Puigdemont

Democratic Tsunami is a secretive Catalan group that spearheaded a string of protests after Spain jailed 13 pro-independence leaders, two years after they botched bid to separate the rich northeastern region from Spain. Led by Mr. Puigdemont, who was Catalan regional leader at the time, the failed independence bid cost Spain's worst political crisis in decades. Although Mr. Puigdemont fled Spain to avoid prosecution, his fellow

tion or part of it". There was "evidence pointing to Carles Puigdemont's participation in the events under investigation", it added, citing his involvement in the group's creation "to subvert law and order and to seriously destabilise democratic institutions". The court's decision will complicate life for Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, whose minority left-wing government relies on Puigdemont's hardline separatist JxCat party for parliamentary support. Spain's government is currently in the process of drawing up an amnesty law that was demanded by Puigdemont's party in exchange for crucial parliamentary support in a November vote to reappoint Sanchez as premier.

The draft law, which was shot down by lawmakers in late January, is currently being reformulated but will essentially offer an amnesty to those systems by the justice system over the failed independence bid, notably Mr. Puigdemont. In its decision, the court referred to the crime of "street terrorism". The aim, it said, was to "undermine law and order, to seriously breach the peace, to cause serious harm to the functioning of an international organisation or to cause a sense of terror within the popula-

Silent advocacy



Protestors with cloths covering their mouths, hold a banner which reads 'Freedom of conscience' during a silent pro-life demonstration in Paris as the Senate started debates for inclusion of abortion in the constitution. AFP

Pakistan parliament swears in new members as Imran's allies protest

Associated Press ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's National Assembly swore in newly elected members on Thursday in a chaotic scene, as allies of jailed former Premier Imran Khan protested what they claim was a rigged election. Lawmakers from Mr. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party repeatedly chanted "Vote-theft!" Shehbaz Sharif, who's expected to form the government, entered the lower house of parliament with his brother Nawaz Sharif. Both men are former Pre-

MI lawmakers say they will continue their campaign against vote rigging in an outside parliament.

Outgoing National Assembly speaker Raja Pervez Ashraf administered the oath to incoming legislators at noon. The house echoed with chants of "Long Live Sharif!" when the brothers signed the register after the formation of the government. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the young chairman of the Pakistan People's Party and a key Sharif ally, was met

with similar chants. The new government will face challenges including a surge in militant attacks and shortages of energy, as well as an ailing economy that will force Pakistan to seek another bailout from the International Monetary Fund. Nationwide rallies Lawmakers from Mr. Khan's PTI told reporters that they will continue their campaign against the rigging in the elections in and outside parliament. "Yes, the election has been rigged," said Gohar Ali Khan, the current head of PTI.

The PTI has called for nationwide rallies on Saturday. The party claims it results were changed in dozens of constituencies to prevent it from winning a majority, a charge the Election Commission of Pakistan denies. After the February 8 elections, observers from the Commonwealth praised election officials for holding the vote despite multiple militant attacks, but the U.S. State Department said that the vote was held under restrictions of freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

Britain descending into 'mob rule' amid protests against Israel-Hamas war, warns Prime Minister

Associated Press LONDON

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said Britain is descending into "mob rule" because of the pressures created by

behaviour" that's intended to "shout down free debate and stop elected representatives doing their jobs." "There is a growing consensus that mob rule is replacing democratic rule,"

rule "wildly exaggerates the issue and risks delegitimising the rights of peaceful protesters." Mass protests have drawn hundreds of thousands of people to central

abducted roughly 250, in the October 7 attack. The protests have been overwhelmingly peaceful, though there have been dozens of arrests over signs and chants allegedly sup-

ported to have been among those on pro-peace-fire marches. Divisions over the conflict have convulsed British politics, with some lawmakers saying they fear for their safety after receiving

Agence France-Presse LONDON

The United States and Britain on Wednesday criticised the Hong Kong government over a proposed

Beijing imposed a national security law to punish four major crimes - secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces - with sentences ranging up to life in prison.

"We are particularly concerned by Hong Kong authorities' proposal to adopt broad definitions of 'state secrets' and 'external interference' that could be used to elim-

U.K., U.S. slam Hong Kong's proposed new security law

**TEHRAN**

## Iran launches imaging satellite 'Pars-I' into orbit from Russia



REUTERS

Iran announced on Thursday the launch of a remote sensing and imaging satellite into orbit from Russia, state media reported. The launch of 'Pars-I' with the Russian Soyuz-2.1b launcher was broadcast live by state media in Iran. It was launched "from Russia's Vostochny launch base", according to the IRNA news agency. AFP



# Tata to build India's first fab as Cabinet approves ₹1.25 lakh cr. of chip facilities

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved three semiconductor proposals totalling ₹1,25,600 crore, and to be located at Dholera and Sanand in Gujarat, and Morigaon in Assam.

The Dholera and Morigaon facilities would be built by Tata Electronics Pvt. Ltd. and Tata Semiconductor Assembly and Test Pvt. Ltd. The former would be India's first full-fledged fabrication unit with capacity to produce 50,000 'wafer starts' – the initial form of silicon chips – per month.

The announcement marks a milestone in India's efforts to kick-start a



Ashwini Vaishnaw

semiconductor ecosystem as while most of the current investments through government subsidies and Productivity-Linked Incentive schemes have only yielded less sophisticated packaging plants that rely on raw and intermediate material from other sources, fabrication is a more fundamental, expensive

and technologically extensive domain. The move also reflects growing pressures on global electronics supply chains to diversify away from China.

## **Tech from Taiwan**

Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC) of Taiwan would be the technology partner for the fab unit, while the technology partners for the assembly and testing unit in Morigaon had been kept confidential at their request, Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw said.

The Dholera unit would make "high performance compute chips with 28 nanometre technology," and

also produce chips for power management, which Mr. Vaishnaw said accounted for a large part of semiconductor demand. Both facilities would cater to domestic demand and also export chips, the Minister added.

Construction would start within 100 days, he said, adding that the work would hopefully be completed well before the standard 5-year timeline for such facilities. Micron's chip assembly facility, announced last year, would be completed by December, Mr. Vaishnaw added.

The facilities announced on Thursday will create 20,000 direct jobs and 60,000 indirect jobs, the IT Ministry estimates.





## Modi Sarkar Ki Guarantee

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Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat

### KEY DECISIONS BY UNION CABINET ON THE DAY NSO RELEASES GROWTH DATA

## GDP growth accelerates to 8.4% in Q3, estimate for FY24 pegged at 7.6%

Shows strength of Indian economy, its potential, our efforts will continue: PM

ANCHAL MAGAZINE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 29

INDIA'S GROSS Domestic Product (GDP) growth surged to a six-quarter high of 8.4% in October-December, pushing up

the growth rate for 2023-24 to 7.6% as against the earlier estimate of 7.3%. Data for third quarter GDP and second advance estimates for 2023-24 released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday showed. Even as agricultural growth is

expected to remain subdued at 0.7%, FY24 GDP is seen gaining from a low base effect, and an over 8% growth in manufacturing, mining and financial services. In the third quarter of the current financial year, among sectors, manufacturing posted the highest growth rate in double digits at 11.6%, while the construction sector grew 9.5%. Agriculture

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Not even the wickedest FM can tweak state tax share: Sitharaman

'Govt agencies will go after every fellow who has got black money'

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 29

THE TAX devolution share of states is decided by the Finance Commission and no Finance Minister, not even the 'wickedest' one, can tweak it in favour of one state or the other, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said



FM Sitharaman at the Adda in Bengaluru. Anil Chakravorty

at the Express Adda organised by The Indian Express in Bengaluru Wednesday. She also said more than domestic factors, external



factors are a cause of worry for the economy. "The Central government has

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Big leap for chip mission: 3 plants, Rs 1.26 lakh crore investment get Govt nod

Tata plans India's first semiconductor fabrication plant with Taiwan partner

SOUMYARENDRA BARIK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 29

THE UNION Cabinet on Thursday approved three chip related projects worth about Rs 1.26 lakh crore, including what could be India's first semiconductor fabrication plant, which will be set up by the Tata Group along with a Taiwanese technology partner.

The Tata Group will set up the foundry in partnership with Taiwan-based Powerchip (PSMC) at an estimated cost of Rs 91,000 crore in Gujarat's Dholera. The plant will have a capacity to produce 300 crore chips every year, which will cater to industries like high performance computing, electric vehicles, defence and consumer electronics, among other things. The construction of the facility will begin in less than 100 days, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said.

PSMC is a major entity in the chip manufacturing space, and ranks among the top ten semiconductor companies in terms of global revenues. The Indian Express had first reported that the Tata Group was looking to set up a fabrication plant in the country.



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw addresses a press conference on the Cabinet decisions. Anil Mehta

Typically, a new fabrication plant — from the date of completion of construction — takes about 4-5 years to produce the first batch of chips. In a briefing, Vaishnaw said that time could be reduced in the case of TSMC since the land has already been identified and construction will begin soon.

The approvals are a major fillip to India's semiconductor ambitions. As geopolitical tensions shape the global narrative, the Indian government has identified electronics manufacturing as a key economic growth driver, with chip manufacturing at the heart of these plans.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## First fab plant can help plug in to global value chain

SOUMYARENDRA BARIK & ANIL SASI  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 29

AS THE UNION Cabinet approved a slew of semiconductor related projects totalling investments of about Rs 1.26 lakh crore, the real breakthrough was the Tata Group's semiconductor fabrication plant in partnership with Taiwan's PSMC due to its strategic importance.

This plant is proposed to be developed as a pure-play foundry that rolls out semiconductor wafers for a number of industries, including high-performance computing, display drivers and microcontrollers (MCU). The land has already been identified and construction is set to begin in about three months.

The jump While still a blueprint, this marks a big leap for India's

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



### TECHNICAL EXPERT GROUP

## Delhi cricket's steep slide: Association sits on report that flagged what's wrong

Madan Lal, Valson, Lamba report indicts DDCA on selection; chief Rohan Jaitley says he wasn't asked, never got report



The Arun Jaitley Stadium is the homeground of DDCA. File

NIHAL KOSHIE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 29

THE DELHI District Cricket Association (DDCA) has a "compromised and conflicted" selection process that bypasses the chief selector and is marked by "rampant interference" of its officials.

This is the key point flagged in a scathing indictment by DDCA's Technical Expert Group (TEG) in the wake of Delhi's dismal showing last season. The group, chosen by DDCA, includes

two 1983 World Cup winners Madan Lal and Sunil Valson and first-class player Vinay Lamba, was set up before the start of the 2022-23 season.

Delhi had finished sixth in Group B in last season's Ranji Trophy and failed to qualify for the knockouts this season too.

The TEG report, submitted last March, is part of a police complaint filed in December 2023 at the IP Estate Police Station by one Awadesh Sharma, that names top DDCA officials, accusing them of mismanagement

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

### RAJASTHAN SCHOOL AT CENTRE OF ROW

## A play and an interfaith elopement: What led to suspension of 3 teachers over conversion claims



The government school in Kota's Khajuri Odpar. Hamza Khan

HAMZA KHAN  
SANGOD (KOTA), FEBRUARY 29

ON REPUBLIC Day, at a government senior secondary school in Rajasthan's Kota district, a girl student personifying Bharat Mata took centre-stage in a play. One by one, a Hindu, a Muslim, a Sikh and a Christian character attempted to mould her into their identity, before beginning to fight over her.

Watchful citizens, also played by students, thwarted their attempts, with the play ending with the "religions" uniting and the Tricolour being waved.

"It was a sarva dharma sadbhav natak, and as teachers, it is our responsibility to try and send a good message to the community, one of unity," said Kamlesh Bairowa, principal of the Government Senior Secondary

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Trinamool Congress leader Shahjahan Sheikh being produced at the Basirhat court in North 24 Parganas, West Bengal, on Thursday. The party suspended him for six years. PTI

## TMC strongman Shahjahan Sheikh, on the run for 55 days, finally held

SWEETY KUMARI  
KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 29

TRINAMOOL CONGRESS (TMC) strongman Shahjahan Sheikh, who had been on the run for 55 days, was arrested by West Bengal Police on Thursday in connection with an attack in

January on Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials who had gone to conduct searches at his house in Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district.

Hours after his arrest, the TMC suspended him for six years. Sheikh was taken into custody a day after the Calcutta High Court said that he could be ar-

rested by the CBI, the ED or the West Bengal Police. When Sheikh's lawyer approached the High Court after the arrest on Thursday to seek urgent hearing of a bail plea, the court refused to grant it and said it had "no sympathy" for the TMC leader. It asked his lawyer to appear before

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Cong staves off crisis in Himachal for now, 6 rebels disqualified



Himachal CM Sulkhinder Singh Sukhu and state party president Pratibha Singh in Shimla on Thursday. ANI

SAURABH PARASHAR & MANUJ GO  
SHIMLA, NEW DELHI, FEB 29

THE CRISIS that gripped the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh following cross-voting by six of its MLAs in the Rajya Sabha election on Tuesday seems to have blown over.

All six MLAs were disqualified

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

### PAGE 1 ANCHOR

## India's young sitting on rising obesity curve, shows Lancet study

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS  
PUNE, FEBRUARY 29

INDIA COULD be facing an obesity epidemic, with alarm bells

than three per cent prevalence among children and teens, an increase of over three percentage points since 1990.

Obesity is also a concern among adults, with female obesity prevalence increasing

presents a risk to health. A body mass index (BMI) over 25 is considered overweight and over 30 is obese. The new study reveals that 44 million women and 26 million men aged above 20 in India were found to be over-

### THE OBESITY NUMBERS

	India		World	
	1990	2022	1990	2022
Men	1.1	2.6	6.7	37.4

abesity among teens. Dr Guha Pradeepa, co-author of the study and Head, Department of Research Operations and Diabetes Complications at the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation,

we have now moved towards a diet that is high in energy but low in nutrients — refined carbohydrates, high fat, meat products, and processed foods. In addition, a range of behavioural factors could also have a poten-

vergent peaks show that India has a double burden of both thinness and obesity, which remains a significant health challenge in the country. Complications of the study, senior author and Professor of Imperial



# BAIL AND RELATED PROVISIONS IN INDIA



*“The issue of bail is one of liberty, justice, public safety, and burden of the public treasury, all of which insist that a developed jurisprudence of bail is integral to a socially sensitised judicial process.”*

*–Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer*

## Constitutional Provision for Arrest - Article 22:

Grants protection to individuals arrested or detained, with detention classified into two **types**:

- ➔ **Punitive detention:** To punish a person for an offence committed by him after trial and conviction in a court
- ➔ **Preventive detention:** Detention of a person without trial and conviction by a court

**Criminal Procedure Code, 1973:** Doesn't define bail, but defines bailable and non-bailable offences:

Type of Offence	Bailable	Non-Bailable
■ <b>Defined under CrPC as:</b>	An offence mentioned in Schedule 1, or An offence made bailable by any other law	Any offence other than bailable
■ <b>Power to Grant Bail</b>	Bail as a right	Court/Police discretion based on the facts



## Types of Bails in India

- **Regular Bail:** Court's order to release person under arrest in police custody
- **Interim Bail:** Court grants temporary relief until application for Anticipatory Bail or Regular Bail is decided
- **Anticipatory Bail:** Bail granted preemptively to prevent arrest
- **Default Bail:** When police fail to complete investigation within specified period
- **Medical Bail:** Solely on medical grounds

## Cancellation of Bail - Certain Grounds

- Misuses his liberty by indulging in criminal activity
- Interferes with course of investigation
- Tampering of evidence
- Threatens witnesses, etc

## Bail vs Parole vs Probation

Bail	Parole	Probation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ <b>Temporary release</b> of defendant awaiting trial or appeal, secured by deposit to guarantee their appearance in court</li></ul>	<p>When person <b>gets some time off from jail</b> sentence, for instance, to fulfil some requirements</p>	<p><b>Suspension of sentence</b> of an offender, allowing to stay in community under supervision of an officer</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ <b>Granted by Judge</b></li></ul>	<p>By Parole Board</p>	<p>By Judge</p>



Delhi > Chandigarh > Bengaluru > Hyderabad > Mumbai > New Delhi > Vishakhapatnam > Thiruvananthapuram > Kochi > Kavaratti > Mangaluru > Tiruchirappalli > Kolkata > Guwahati > Dispur > Imphal > Agartala > Itanagar > Lucknow > Patna

**SAHDESHKHALI VIOLENCE**  
PM questions silence of INDIA bloc leaders  
NEWS > PAGE 4

**CALL FOR PROBE**  
Gaza massacre sparks outrage  
WORLD > PAGE 11

**\$3.99-BILLION DEAL**  
U.S. drone sales to India progress to next stage  
NEWS > PAGE 4

**BENGALURU'S WATER WOES**  
The parched IT capital of India  
City's water crisis may worsen as long, hot summer is expected  
GROUND ZERO > PAGE 7

**GRAND WINNERS**  
Paltan defeat Steelers for PKL-10 title  
SPORT > PAGE 13

**INSIDE**

**Rajya Sabha MP, team meet rebel army in Myanmar**

**NEW DELHI**  
Weeks after a township of Myanmar near the Indian border was captured by the rebel Arakan Army, an Indian delegation led by Rajya Sabha member K. Vanlalavena on Thursday met with the Arakan Army inside Myanmar and held talks. > PAGE 3

**India to establish alliance to protect big cats**

**NEW DELHI**  
The Union Environment Ministry plans to set up and coordinate an international Big Cat Alliance. The Cabinet approved the proposal on Thursday. So far, 16 countries have given their written consent to be part of the alliance. > PAGE 3

**Thousands attend Navalny's burial in Moscow**

**MOSCOW**  
Thousands of people bade farewell on Friday to Alexei Navalny at his funeral in Moscow. Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's fiercest critic, died two weeks back in a penal colony. His supporters said several churches refused to hold the funeral. > PAGE 13

**46 killed in shopping mall fire in Dhaka**

**DHAKA**  
A six-storey shopping mall that caught fire in Dhaka had no fire exits, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said on Friday, as the death toll rose to 46. The fire started late on Thursday in a restaurant in the Green Cozy Cottage Shopping Mall. > PAGE 13

# Blast at Bengaluru restaurant leaves 10 injured

All injured out of danger from the low intensity blast; Chief Minister confirms the use of an IED

**The Hindu Bureau**  
**BENGALURU**  
Ten people were injured in a low-intensity bomb blast at the Rameshwaram Cafe, a popular restaurant in Brookfield in Bengaluru, on Friday afternoon. All the injured are said to be out of danger. Police said the blast had been caused by an improvised Explosive Device (IED), which seemed to have been left at the restaurant by a customer. The blast occurred during the busy lunch hour, shocking customers and others in the vicinity with an ear-shattering explosion, followed by smoke engulfing the area. The quick-service eatery had over 200 patrons when the blast occurred, sources said. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah confirmed that an IED had been used in the blast.

**Timer device**  
Senior police officials said an explosive material, yet to be identified, was packed with nuts and bolts in a bag with a timer device, which has been recovered. The IED went off exactly at 12.55.32, as the CCTV footage shows. The footage also shows another explosion, five seconds later. However, police said that a single IED had been planted there. Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, who visited the spot, said a man aged around 30 years came to the restaurant at around noon, and left the bag near the hand wash area. It exploded nearly an hour later. The police are now analysing CCTV footage to identify the accused. "There is no need to panic. Bengaluru is a safe city. Our police will crack the case soon," he assured. A senior official said that it was a low-intensity blast. "Though the bag was packed with projectiles, the kind of injuries that victims suffered indicates that it was a low-intensity blast," he said. This is the first IED explosion in the city in nearly a decade. The last such blast in the city, using an IED, occurred on Church Street, in the city's central business district, on December 28, 2014.

**'Result of appeasement'**  
The BJP said the blast was a result of the "appeasement politics" practised by the Congress government in the State, even as senior police officials said that there were no leads so far on any group being responsible for the blast. The CM and his Deputy have said that the incident is being thoroughly probed and should not be politicised. Ruing out earlier speculations of a fire accident, Divya Raghavendra, managing director and founder of The Rameshwaram Cafe, told *The Hindu* that

Probe is on and incident should not be politicised, says deputy CM while assuring safety of the city

**Heard explosion, saw smoke, say eyewitnesses**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
**BENGALURU**  
"I was outside the restaurant a little after 1 p.m., I heard a loud explosion inside. I saw smoke and fire near the hand wash area staff members and customers had said that someone came and left a bag below the hand wash area. Started in 2021, The Rameshwaram Cafe has four branches across the city and is known to be bustling with people. Of the 10 injured, Swarnamba Narayanappa, 49, an accountant in an IT firm, suffered nearly 40% burn injuries and is being treated at the Brookfield Hospital. The institute's medical director, Pradheep Kumar said Ms. Narayanappa was out of danger but will need plastic surgery. "She has suffered cut injuries on the right side of her body and her ear drum is damaged due to the loud explosion. There are no rip-off injuries, indicating it was a low intensity explosion," he said.

## Set to shine



Clay craft: Potters prepare earthen lamps for sale ahead of the Maha Shivaratri festival, in Bhubaneswar on Friday. ANI

## Google delists several apps after row over platform fee

**Aroon Deep**  
**NEW DELHI**  
Tech major Google on Friday delisted certain matrimonial and dating apps, including Bharat Matrimony, Truly Madly and Quack Quack, and two streaming services, Halaji Telefilms' ALETT and the audio platform Kuku FM. The move comes after the Supreme Court declined to provide the companies behind these apps interim relief in their battle against the search giant's platform fees for in-app payments on Google Play. The company's mobile app marketplace for the Android operating system.

## GST collections up 12.54% in February

**Top collection**  
India's GST gross revenues surpassed ₹1.68 lakh crore in February, achieving the fourth highest monthly tax collections. GRAPH SHOWS GST REVENUE IN ₹ LAKH CRORE

Month	GST Revenue (₹ Lakh Crore)
March 2019	~1.5
July 2021	~1.6
Feb. 2024	~1.68

India's gross revenues from the Goods and Services Tax (GST) grew at a three-month high pace of 12.54% in February to cross ₹1.68 lakh crore, marking the fourth-highest monthly collections from the tax. February's GST revenue growth reflected the third highest uptick in 2023-24 and lifted the total collections so far this year to ₹18.4 lakh crore, 11.7% above the same period last year. The gross GST kitty of ₹1,68,337 crore in February was 3.3% lower than January's updated collection of ₹1,74,106 crore, the second-highest tally since GST was launched in July 2017. February's GST revenue growth reflected the third highest uptick in 2023-24 and lifted the total collections so far this year to ₹18.4 lakh crore, 11.7% above the same period last year. The gross GST kitty of ₹1,68,337 crore in February was 3.3% lower than January's updated collection of ₹1,74,106 crore, the second-highest tally since GST was launched in July 2017. February's GST revenue growth reflected the third highest uptick in 2023-24 and lifted the total collections so far this year to ₹18.4 lakh crore, 11.7% above the same period last year. The gross GST kitty of ₹1,68,337 crore in February was 3.3% lower than January's updated collection of ₹1,74,106 crore, the second-highest tally since GST was launched in July 2017.

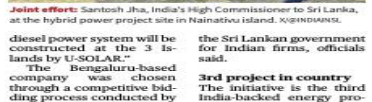
# China out, Bengaluru-based company inks pact with Sri Lanka energy body to build hybrid power project

**Meera Srinivasan**  
**COLOMBO**  
Three years after objecting to a Chinese energy project in northern Sri Lanka, barely 50 km off Tamil Nadu's coast, India is set to implement a hybrid power project in three islands off India's peninsula with a \$11-million grant. The Sri Lanka Sustainable Energy Authority, the Government of Sri Lanka, and Indian company U-Soar Clean Energy Solutions on Friday signed the contract for building 'Hybrid Renewable Energy Systems' in Delft or Nedunthevu, Nainativu and Anarathivu islands off India's peninsula in the island's north.

"The project, which is aimed at addressing the energy needs of the people of the three islands, is being executed through grant assistance from the Government of India. The hybrid project combines various forms of energy including both solar and wind, towards optimising capacities," the Indian High Commission in Colombo said in a press release. In a post on social media platform 'X' thanking the Government of India, Sri Lanka's Power and Energy Minister Kanchana Wijetunga said, "The project with 530 kw Wind power, 1,700 kw Solar power, 2,400 kw Battery power and 2,500 kw of stand by diesel power system will be constructed at the 3 islands by U-SOAR." The Bengaluru-based company was chosen through a competitive bidding process conducted by

ject coming up in Sri Lanka's north and east. The National Thermal Power Corporation is spearheading a solar venture in the eastern Sampur town, while the Adani Group is setting up renewable energy projects in the three islands. The company was chosen through a competitive bid backed by the Asian Development Bank. Concerned by the prospect of a Chinese project very close to India's southern coastline, New Delhi offered to implement the same project with a grant instead of a loan, and Sri Lanka took it up. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in March 2022 during External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Sri Lanka. China's displeasure at the turn of events is no secret. The Chinese Ambassador in Colombo voiced rare criticism of Sri Lanka's authorities for suspending the original projects for "unknown reasons" and sending out the "wrong message" to potential investors. Meanwhile, Sino Soar Hybrid Technology, whose prospectus was suspended in Sri Lanka in December 2021, signed a deal to implement a similar project in the Maldives.

**Quicker growth**  
Revenues grew faster than the national average in 12 States, including the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir (23%), Assam (25%), Maharashtra (21%), as well as Kerala and Delhi (up 16% each). February's gross GST intake included ₹31,785 crore of Central GST (CGST), ₹39,615 crore of State GST (SGST) and ₹84,098 crore of Integrated GST (IGST). The Government reported ₹58,593 crore was collected on imported goods. The Finance Ministry asserted, noting that collections from domestic transactions rose 13.9%, while goods imports delivered an 8.5% rise in revenues. After refunds, the Ministry pegged last month's GST collection at ₹151 lakh crore, 13.6% over February 2023 collections. Overall net GST revenues this year have grown at a sharper pace of 13% than gross revenues, and



Joint effort: Santosh Jha, India's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, at the hybrid power project site in Nainativu island. X/INDIANNS



# India to establish alliance to protect big cats

NEW DELHI

The Union Environment Ministry plans to set up and coordinate an International Big Cat Alliance. The Cabinet approved the proposal on Thursday. So far, 16 countries have given their written consent to be part of the alliance. » **PAGE 3**

# India to establish international alliance to protect big cats

**Jacob Koshy**  
NEW DELHI

The Union Environment Ministry plans to set up and coordinate an International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA), along the lines of the International Solar Alliance, an India-headquartered initiative to promote solar installations globally. The Union Cabinet approved the proposal on Thursday.

“India’s global leadership in tiger conservation has been recognised. The IBCA, which will be headquartered in India and to which India has already committed ₹150 crore [for five years], will lead initiatives to disseminate good practices in conserving big cats,” Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav said on Friday.

Globally, the ‘big cats’ include the tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, puma, jaguar, and cheetah.

## 16 nations

There is currently a gap in many ‘big cat’ countries in availing resources, and in the optimal use of practices and processes. There is



So far, as many as 16 countries have given their written consent to be part of the IBCA. AFP

no international body addressing the conservation challenges of big cats across their range of habitats. The pioneering and long-standing tiger and other big cat conservation good practices which have been evolved in India may be replicated in many other range countries, Mr. Yadav said.

So far, 16 countries have given their written consent to be part of the IBCA. There are 96 countries that harbour ‘big cats’ and the alliance is also open to other countries, conservation organisations, scientific organisations, businesses, and corporates interested in supporting ‘big cats’.

The advantages of membership, an accompanying document noted, are a central common repository for technical know-how and a corpus of funds. The alliance will strengthen existing species-specific inter-governmental platforms, networks, and transnational initiatives on conservation and protection. Frontline staff in member-countries will be trained in eliciting local support for big-cat conservation, and research and development in wildlife monitoring. Communities living near forests will be trained in developing eco-tourism and livelihood opportunities.





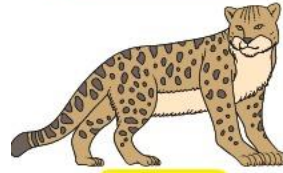
Tiger



Lion

# International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)

**Context:** Context: India has proposed to launch a **mega global alliance to protect big cats** and assured support over five years with guaranteed funding of \$100 million (over Rs 800 crore)



Leopard



Snow Leopard



Jaguar



Puma



Cheetah

## About International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)

	Description
<b>Purpose</b>	Protection and conservation of the <b>7 major big cats</b> - tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, puma, jaguar and cheetah
<b>Member countries</b>	<b>97 range countries</b> and other interested nations and organs.
<b>Activities</b>	Advocacy, partnerships, knowledge portal, capacity building, eco-tourism, expert groups and finance tapping
<b>Governance structure</b>	General Assembly, Council, and Secretariat
<b>Funding</b>	\$100 million grant assistance by India for the first 5 years; later through membership fees, contributions from bilateral and multilateral institutions, and the private sector
<b>Previous initiatives</b>	India had in 2019 called for an <b>Alliance of Global Leaders to curb poaching and illegal wildlife trade in Asia.</b>
<b>Importance of saving the tiger</b>	India is the only country in the world to <b>have 5 big cats in wild</b> (all except pumas and Jaguars). Big cats are <b>umbrella and flagship species</b> whose loss can set off a <b>“trophic cascade,”</b> (prey populations may explode, resulting in overgrazing and degrading the health of the landscape). India is home to <b>75% of global tigers.</b>

## PM questions silence of INDIA bloc leaders on Sandeshkhali

Modi says Opposition leaders have closed their eyes, mouth, and ears; accuses Trinamool of betraying the women of Sandeshkhali; he urges people to teach the party a lesson in LS election

Shiv Sahay Singh  
KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday targeted the Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal over the developments at Sandeshkhali, where a Trinamool leader and his supporters have been accused of sexually abusing women, attacking Enforcement Directorate officials, and grabbing land in the area.

Mr. Modi asked why the leaders of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) were silent on the issue. The Trinamool is a member of the Opposition bloc. "All the big leaders of the INDIA alliance have closed their eyes, mouth, and ears on Sandeshkhali like the three monkeys of Gandhiji. They held meetings together at Patna, Bengaluru, and Mumbai but the leaders of the Left and Congress sought no answers from the Chief Minister and the government and the Congress would not even spare a sight



Face to face: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee calls on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in Kolkata on Friday, AMI

for the women at Sandeshkhali." Mr. Modi said at a public meeting at Arambagh in Hooghly district. He also accused Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge of allegedly saying that "such things happen in Bengal".

"The whole country is sad and angry after seeing what Trinamool has done to the sisters of Sandeshkhali. They should be ashamed of what they have done at Sandeshkhali," Mr. Modi said.

Referring to Sheikh Shahjahan, prime accused in the Sandeshkhali incident who was on the run

for two months, Mr. Modi said: "There must have been someone who was trying to protect him. Will you forgive such a Trinamool? We have to reply to every hurt with votes," Mr. Modi said.

He said the West Bengal ruling party had become arrogant because it felt that it had the support of a particular vote bank. "On this occasion, Muslim women and children will throw away the Trinamool," he said. He added the Trinamool had introduced a "new model of corruption in West Bengal, which the party has institutionalised with the active protection of the administration".

## Bengal CM meets Modi, terms it a 'courtesy call'

Shiv Sahay Singh  
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Raj Bhavan in Kolkata and said the meeting was less about politics and that they had engaged in a chat.

The Prime Minister is on a two-day visit to the State.

The leaders met amidst heightened political tension in the State over the Sandeshkhali incident. Speaking to mediapersons outside Raj Bhavan, the Chief Minister said, "It was a courtesy call. Since I could not go to KCCG (Kolkata Golf Club) to receive the Prime Minister, I came here." She also added that since election has not been announced, she can call on the Prime Minister.

## Himachal remains on the boil as Congress Minister visits Delhi

Vikas Vasudeva  
CHANDIGARH

A day after the Congress' central observers asserted that "all is well" within the party's Himachal Pradesh unit, it appears the crisis could be far from over with Cabinet Minister Vikramaditya Singh on Friday rushing to New Delhi, seeking a dialogue with the party "high command".

"Get act together" Mr. Vikramaditya's move came even as Pratibha Singh, the State Congress chief and his mother, indicated that the Congress needs to get its act together ahead of the Lok Sabha election in May.

The political turmoil in Himachal Pradesh started when six Congress legislators, I came here." She also added that since election has not been announced, she can call on the Prime Minister.

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Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania.

After the cross-voting, Mr. Vikramaditya announced his resignation, bringing the leadership tussle in the State Congress unit to the fore.

On Thursday, the party asserted that differences had been resolved and the government would complete its tenure. However, a day after the assurances, a meeting of Mr. Vikramaditya with some of the disqualified Congress MLAs in Haryana's Panchkula at a private hotel on Friday was being keenly watched. The presence of Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, a party adviser Tarun Bhandari with Mr. Vikramaditya too raised the stakes.

Mr. Vikramaditya later went to Delhi, where he was expected to meet the party's central leadership.

In Shimla, Ms. Singh acknowledged that at the moment, the BJP is better placed than the Congress in terms of poll preparedness. She also sought support for the six disqualified Congress MLAs, 27. They would have been hurt.

## IN BRIEF



### Centre, Gujarat just, failed the youth, says Congress president

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday expressed his concern over the "high suicide rate in Gujarat", and questioned the "defeating" silence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In a statement, Mr. Kharge said the data presented in Gujarat Assembly showed that 25,000 people died by suicide in the past three years, with 500 of them being students. The Congress chief alleged that the BJP-ruled State and the Centre had failed to create new job opportunities for youths, and the data presents a "grim picture of a populace grappling with despair".

### Supreme Court rejects plea to 'digitally monitor' MPs, MLAs

The Supreme Court on Friday disagreed with a petitioner's view that Members of Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies should be "digitally monitored" to prevent instances of corruption and horse trading. Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said lawmakers were not "convicted felons" who needed watching 24x7 as they may flee from justice. Surendra, the petitioner did not want microchips on legislators to keep track of their every movement. "There is also something called tortoise. They have families," Chief Justice Chandrachud told petitioner S.N. Kamdar.

### Released after 5 years in jail, Kashmiri journalist held again

Kashmiri journalist Asif Sultan, who was released earlier this week, has reportedly been re-arrested by Jammu and Kashmir Police in a separate case in Srinagar. The J&K police have neither denied nor confirmed the move to re-arrest him. A former assistant editor of the magazine *Kashmir Narrator*, Mr. Sultan had only reached home on Friday after his release from the Nagaur jail in Uttar Pradesh, people close to him said. Mr. Sultan had been released from the U.P. jail 78 days after the J&K High Court quashed his detention under Public Safety Act, which permits detention without trial for up to two years.

### President's honours for two IAF fighter squadrons

The first Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) squadron of the Indian Air Force, No. 45 'Flying Daggers', along with the No. 221 Squadron 'Valiants' which were awarded the President's Standard. The 11 Base Repair Depot (BRD) and 509 Signal Unit will be presented President's Colours by President Droupadi Murmu at Hindon Air Force station on March 8. After the war, the squadron was wound down in 2002.

## Don't make appeal on basis of caste, religion, EC tells parties

Sheeparna Chakrabarty  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha election, the Election Commission (EC) has directed political parties, especially star campaigners, to maintain decorum while campaigning and refrain from making appeals on the basis of caste or communal politics or make false statements, which can mislead voters.

In an advisory issued to all political parties on Friday, the EC cited previous examples of such indirect violations using known methodologies to avoid strictures under the model code of conduct (MCC), and conveyed that "stern action" would be taken against direct or indirect MCC violations.

The advisory comes days before the schedule for elections to the Lok



The Election Commission also asked parties not to make false statements to mislead voters.

Sabha and four State Assemblies is expected. The MCC comes into effect with the announcement of the poll dates.

The EC said in the advisory that political parties, candidates and star campaigners should not make any appeal on the basis of caste or communal feelings of the electors. No activity, which may aggravate existing differences, create mutual hatred or cause tension between dif-

ferent castes or communities, religious and linguistic groups, should be attempted.

"The political parties and leaders shall not make false statements and utterances without factual basis aimed at misleading the voters. Criticism of other parties or their workers on the basis of unverified allegations or on distortions shall be avoided," the advisory further said.

"No personal attacks" It said that no aspect of the private life, not connected with public activities, of the leaders or workers of other parties is to be criticised.

Low-level personal attacks to insult the rivals shall not be made. It also warned the parties against giving advertisements masquerading as news items in the media.

## U.S. drone sales to India progress to the next stage

Sriram Lakshman  
WASHINGTON DC

The possible sale of 31 MQ-9B high altitude long endurance armed unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) from U.S. company General Atomics to India progressed to the next stage after a 30-day congressional notification period concluded on Friday.

The deal, pegged at an estimated \$3.99 billion, was announced in June last year during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's State visit to Washington DC.

"The next step after the conclusion of Congressional review is for the parties to agree upon and sign a Letter of Offer and Acceptance," a U.S. State Department official told *The Hindu*. The procurement decisions and timelines were now with the Govern-



Eye in the sky: The United States approved the sale of armed drones to India at an estimated cost of \$3.99 billion.

ment of India, according to the official. With general elections looming in India, it is possible that the next steps will be hectic until May, when the poll results are expected.

The sale had run into difficulties in January, in the U.S. Congress, before the formal notification period began over allegations that Indian government agents were involved in a plot to kill Khalistan sepa-

ratist Gurbaj Singh Panjura, a US citizen, on American soil.

The head of the powerful Senate Intelligence Committee, Senator Ben Cardin, gave his approval for the deal to progress after receiving assurances from the Joe Biden-led administration that India would probe the alleged plot and cooperate with the U.S. in its own investigation.

## NBDSA raps 3 news channels for violating Code of Ethics

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA) has directed three TV channels to remove videos of certain programmes on communal issues as they violated the Code of Ethics and other guidelines. The action has also been imposed on two of them.

The second matter involved four programmes broadcast by *News18 India* in November 2022 on the issues of the Shradddha Walker murder case and alleged 'love jihad'. Taking cognisance, the NBDSA decided to admonish the broadcaster, particularly the anchors, and imposed the guidelines. The action has also been imposed on two of them.

The first matter involved a programme broadcast by *Times Now* on May 31, 2023. The NBDSA had received a complaint alleging a violation of the Code of Ethics and other guidelines. The NBDSA imposed a fine of ₹1 lakh on the broadcaster and also directed it to remove the video from its website, YouTube, and its hyperlinks within seven days.

The RTI application was filed by Kailash Chandra Moondra. He had also sought a copy of the trust deed, which was filed with the applications for the above-mentioned purposes. The judgment was delivered by the single-judge Bench of Justice Subramanian on February 28, which said that it is open to the petitioner to approach the appropriate authority under the Income Tax Act (Section 80GZ) (b) of the Income Tax Act for its donations.

## Will invest ₹75,000 cr. in M.P., says Adani Group

Meenal Malpani  
BHOPAL

The Adani Group will invest about ₹75,000 crore in Madhya Pradesh, including ₹5,000 crore in building the Mahakal Expressway between Ujjain and Bhopal. Pranav Adani, its Managing Director (Agro, Oil and Gas) and Director of Adani Enterprises, said on Friday. Mr. Adani made the announcement on the first day of a two-day investors summit in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Regional Industry Conclave 2024", in Ujjain in the presence of Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav. Mr. Adani said that investment in the State would be made in various sectors, including roads, natural resources, cement, food processing, logistics and agri-logistics, defence manufacturing, thermal power, and renewable energy.

## Delhi HC sets aside CIC order on Ram Temple trust

Jahira Mishra  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has set aside an order issued by the Central Information Commission (CIC) that directed the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) to provide information related to tax exemptions/ deductions sought by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Trust and Kshetra Trust, which manages the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Trust and Kshetra Trust was set up by the Union government in February 2022 to share the complete details of the Ram Mandir, following the orders of the Supreme Court. The trust, which has 15 members, collected about ₹3,500 crore in donations since its establishment. The temple trust disclosed that it had received donations of up to ₹25 crore since January 22, when the temple was con-

secrated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Following a query under the Right to Information Act (RTI Act), the CIC directed the CBDT in November 2022 to share the complete details of applications filed by the Ram Temple Trust for getting exemptions/ deductions under Section 80GZ (b) of the Income Tax Act for its donations.

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## Kamal Haasan keen on contesting on torch symbol: MNM

The Hindu Bureau  
CHENNAI

The suspense over which Parliamentary constituency Makkal Nadhi Maam (MNM) founder Kamal Haasan will choose to contest from continues, even as a number of options, including Coimbatore, have been mooted by party sources.

Mr. Haasan, last year, had expressed his wish to contest from the Coimbatore constituency. While the DMK has reportedly asked the Tamil Nadu Congress to accommodate Mr. Haasan within their quota of seats and let him contest on the Congress' "Hand" symbol, MNM sources insist that Mr. Haasan would prefer to contest on the "Battery Torch" symbol as he did during the last Assembly election.

The second-rung leaders of the MNM say that



Kamal Haasan

they are not aware of the seat-sharing arrangement. Through it, Mr. Haasan to contest on the 'Hand' symbol and not on the 'Battery Torch' symbol, adding that he was unlikely to make any contest. Political analysts, however, pointed out that it might be easier for the torch symbol, as he did during the last Assembly election.

The second-rung leaders of the MNM say that



# U.S. drone sales to India progress to the next stage

**Sriram Lakshman**

WASHINGTON DC

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**Eye in the sky:** The United States approved the sale of armed drones to India at an estimated cost of \$3.99 billion. FILE PHOTO

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The head of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Ben Cardin, gave his approval for the deal to progress after receiving assurances from the Joe Biden-led administration that India would probe the alleged plot and cooperate with the U.S. in its own investigation.

# MQ-9B

Predator Drones



Max Gross Takeoff Weight: **5,670 kg**

Fuel Capacity: **2,721 kg**

Payload Capacity: **2,177 kg across 9 hardpoints (8 wing, 1 centerline)**



## Crew:

**Two pilots in ground control stations**



## Weapons

**Laser guided missiles**

**Anti-tank missiles**

**Anti-ship missiles**



## Missions

- **Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief**
- **Search and Rescue**
- **Law Enforcement**
- **Border Enforcement**
- **Defensive Counter Air**
- **Airborne Early Warning**

## Missions

- **Electronic Warfare**
- **Anti-Surface Warfare**
- **Anti-Submarine Warfare**
- **Airborne Mine Counter Measures**
- **Long-Range Strategic ISR**
- **Over-the-Horizon Targeting**







**IN BRIEF**

**India to see warmer summer as El Nino conditions continue**

India is likely to experience a warmer summer this year with El Nino conditions predicted to continue at least until May, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday. More heatwave days than normal are predicted over most of the peninsula. In Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and north interior Karnataka — and many parts of Madhya and Odisha, it said. The country is likely to record above-normal rainfall in March. India is likely to see above-normal maximum and minimum temperatures in most parts of the country in the March to May period, IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mollapatra said.

**ED freezes ₹580.78 crore assets in betting app case**

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has frozen assets worth ₹580.78 crore in connection with the "Mahadev Online Book" app case, according to searches at multiple locations. The total value of seized/frozen assets in the case now stands at ₹1,296.05 crore. The fresh round of searches were carried out in Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Gurugram, Indore and Raipur. According to the agency, Hari Shankar Tibrewal from Kolkata has partnered with the promoters of Mahadev Online Book. "Security holdings worth ₹580.78 crore in the name of the entities beneficially owned by Hari Shankar Tibrewal have been frozen by the ED," said the agency.

**SC to hear petition by Uddhav camp on March 7**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
 NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court will hear an appeal filed by the Shiv Sena Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray (UBT) party challenging the decision of the Maharashtra Assembly Speaker to disqualify disqualification petitions against Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's camp while declaring them the "real" Shiv Sena. Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on Friday indicated that the appeal will be heard on March 7. Meanwhile, lawyers for both sides sought an early hearing. On an earlier occasion, Mr. Salve informed the court about an identical petition filed by the UBT camp in the Bombay High Court. He had questioned how the UBT could agitate an identical cause in two courts at the same time.

**Google removes matrimony, streaming apps over fee row**

The company's long conflict with Indian developers over in-app payment fees enters new chapter with many apps booted out after the Supreme Court declined the developers' interim relief

**Aroon Deep**  
 NEW DELHI

Each major Google on Friday delisted certain matrimony and dating apps, including Bharat Matrimony, Tuff Muddy, and Quack, and two streaming services, Balaji Telefilms' AITF and the audio platform Kuku FM, after the Supreme Court declined to provide the companies behind these apps interim relief in their battle against the platform fees for in-app payments on Google Play, the company's mobile app marketplace for the Android operating system. The development is likely to come as a shock to the firms, concerned that they offer a rare segment of digital services where Indian consumers are willing to spend money for entertainment and companionship. Bharat Matrimony says it has a market cap of over ₹2,300 crore. The app's founder Murgugavel Janakiram was quoted by the news outlet TechCrunch as saying that this was a "dark day" for the internet in India and that the company would



**New requirements:** Google requires apps to pay a platform fee that could range from 11-30%, REUTERS

explore legal options. Kuku FM cofounder Vinit Kumar Meena said in a statement that Google was behaving like a "monopoly," and that the search giant was "on [a] hunt to collect rent" from developers. QuackQuack founder Ravi Mittal said in a statement that the company would comply with Google's rules to get back on the marketplace. "Unfortunately, we will have to comply with Google's current policies as there is no alternative or immediate remedy," Mittal told *The Hindu*. "This shows the control Google has over the app

economy in a growing country like India." In a statement, Google said that only a small number of firms have to pay any fees over 15% on payments users made in-app and that the companies that it was acting on had a long window of opportunity to come to an agreement. The company's Google requires digital services to pay a platform fee that could range from 11-30%, depending on what payment method is used, and the size of the app's user base. Disney Hotstar and exam prep service Testbook, for whom the interim relief granted by the Supreme

**Corporate tax cuts bring in investments, jobs, says Sitharaman**

**Vikas Dhot**  
 NEW DELHI

The government's decision to slash corporate tax rates in late 2019 was a well-considered move to attract investments that has made a lot of difference, and a major transition is under way in the industry-labour relationship. Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Friday. She was replying to a query on the efficacy of corporate tax cuts and the production linked incentive schemes, some of which may be fuelling capital-intensive investments that create fewer jobs, during an interaction with students at the Jawaharlal Nehru University. Noting that India had a very high level of taxation for companies, the Minister said that the government had a view to bring in more investments, which would create jobs and trigger a "virtuous cycle" in the economy. Many countries were "contemplating" such tax structure changes to attract investments at the time, she said, stressing that greenfield as well as brownfield investments are now happening. "There are newer industries coming," she said.

and ensure additional capacities are coming in areas that are going to be job-creators. If there is a perception that it may not have resulted in as many jobs as was in the olden days of investments, it is also because... even as we took this decision, we were aware the industrial revolution called for a new setting in. Web 3.0 was coming in, which is now talked about as AI and GenAI." "Upskilling must" "The matter of fact is that industry, particularly in manufacturing, is going through a huge transition, a reset. And when resets happen, the labour force is also catching up with skills required to meet with that reset. So there will be requirement of labour... that is why the government has ramped up skilling and upskilling [for] people who get into industry," she said. "The industry, she said, is turning towards a different level now, as it has adopted robotics and digitised the operations. "There is a transition and reset happening between industry and labour. If we are looking at only the old-fashioned or old steel... there are newer industries coming," she said.

**Ahead of Ambani wedding bash, Jamnagar airport gets international tag for 10 days**

**Jagriti Chandra**  
 NEW DELHI

The Jamnagar airport has been declared an international airport for 10 days as the Maharashtra Assembly Speaker to disqualification petitions against Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's camp while declaring them the "real" Shiv Sena. Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on Friday indicated that the appeal will be heard on March 7. Meanwhile, lawyers for both sides sought an early hearing. On an earlier occasion, Mr. Salve informed the court about an identical petition filed by the UBT camp in the Bombay High Court. He had questioned how the UBT could agitate an identical cause in two courts at the same time.

have pressed in resources to set up a Custom, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) facility at the airport. Jamnagar is a defence airport where commercial flights are allowed; the Airports Authority of India (AAI) has erected a passenger terminal building for the purpose. However, for security, the Air Force has permitted access to its sensitive "technical" area as well. "Up to three aircraft are being accommodated at a given time," said an airport official on the condition of anonymity. "The civilian area of the airport can accommodate six small aircraft such as Falcon-200s or three big ones such as the Airbus A320. On Friday, a total of 140 aircraft movements (arrival and departures)

were expected, up from the usual six movements the airport witnesses, the official said. In preparation for the massive inflow of guests, the AAI has also expanded the size of its passenger building from 475 sq m to 900 sq m, allowing it to accommodate nearly 360 passengers during peak hours as compared to 180 earlier. "Expansion work was planned much earlier but was expedited for the occasion," the official said. The airport has also enhanced manpower in "every vertical". Thirty-five housekeeping staff have been added to the existing strength of 16; the State government has also doubled the deployment of security personnel from 35 to 70; ground handling agencies have raised the strength of their staff from 65 to 125.

**Elephants take dead calves to be buried in untrodden paths: study**

**Rahul Karmakar**  
 GUWAHATI

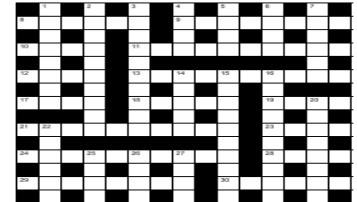
Elephants in the eastern Himalayan floodplains bury their calves in a "legs upright" position, a new study has found. Through long-term observation, the researchers also found that elephant herds tend to avoid the paths where the carcasses were buried and take parallel routes. "We aimed to understand the peri-mortem strategy and post-mortem behaviour of the Asian elephants," the official said. The carcasses were carried by trunks and legs for a distance before being buried in a "legs upright" position. Researchers said in the study published in the latest issue of the *Journal of Great Lakes Research*. Rampant environmental changes and forest destruction push Asian ele-

**Strong bond:** Elephants taking the carcass of an elephant calf for burial. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

phants (*Elephas maximus*) and their African counterparts (*Loxodonta africana*) are human species to fulfil their dietary and ecological requirements, leading to "novel" elephant behaviours in shared spaces. While elephant calf burial is mentioned in African literature, it has hardly been documented in the Asian context. Parvay Kaswan, an Indian Forest Service officer posted in Alipurduar of West Bengal and Akashdeep Roy of the

weighing 160 kg was three or four months old while the oldest was about 12 months and weighed 350 kg — suggested the elephants dragged them to a distance to be buried at preferred locations. The location of these irrigation drains of the tea estates was not far from the plants are born too, elephants said. "The 'strange' positioning of each carcass with the legs upright could be because in the forest members of a herd needed a place to rest and the calf delicately in the trench. This strategic behaviour also reflects the care and affection of the herd member(s) towards the deceased. The behaviour suggests that in a situation of space crunch, the herd member(s) prioritise the head for the burial before the feet," the study said.

**THE CROSSWORD 14112**  
 (set by Vidwan)



- Across**  
 8 Not a real way out for an argumentative guy (6)  
 9 Indian state, partly holy with almost every disorder (8)  
 10 State of love, partly joyful, leads to nothing (4)  
 11 Appear, support and spoil without slightest of validity (4)  
 12 One small piece of land, middle of sea (4)

- To solve this puzzle online, get access to our crossword site. <https://www.puzzlelink.in/>
- 13 Prime, not the first, place for Congress in Rajasthan, say (10)  
 14 Oddly prose is starting to metamorphose verse (4)  
 15 Kingdom of infinite bounty (5)  
 16 Part inside ammunition (4)  
 17 Marriage broker initially upset someone like Patek Phillipe (10)  
 18 Trembled after avoiding small punch (6)  
 19 Inability to move lower body or balance with a slightest of pressure on leg in action basically (10)  
 20 Got a new robe (4)  
 21 This is wants and longings basically sorted (4,4)  
 22 Stan's tree (6)  
**Down**  
 1 A computer man's brief moment of masculinity (8)  
 2 Redo my chip arrayed under the skin (10)  
 3 Keen? Please turn over small weight to find a puzzle (10)  
 4 English plundered our money (4)  
 5 An Asian model mostly has one (4)  
 6 I am good model for soccerers (4)  
 7 Caddy that also makes a design on skin (6)  
 14 Prepare king for some kind of exercise (5)  
 15 Hot season seasoning reportedly for full-bodied roll (10)  
 16 Gout hit? Deal with determination (5,2,3)  
 20 Strong old colour (4,4)  
 22 A California Company Plant (6)  
 23 Painful part of each year (4)  
 24 Resting place of ex-Prime Minister, not the first (4)  
 27 Secret agents' hidden backside entrance (4)

**SUDOKU**

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

**Solution to previous puzzle**

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

**Solution to yesterday's Sudoku**

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

**DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★**

**FAITH**

**The message from Rama**

Dasaratha asks Sumantra to recount all that happened after he drove the chariot taking Rama, Lakshmana and Sita from Ayodhya to the forest. Sumantra conveys Rama's message to the royal family, said Navalpakkam Vasudevachariar in a discourse. "Rama wanted me to convey His respects to His father. He wanted His mother Kaushalya to know that He was safe. She is the wife of Dasaratha, an Agnihotri. Thus, she must be as his son, and not cry over Rama's absence. She must not harbour negative feelings against the other wives of Dasaratha," says Sumantra. Rama's message to Bharara is that, as the future king, he must act in accordance with stipulated rules. He must obey his father and treat all the royal mothers alike. As for Lakshmana, Sumantra says the prince was very angry. He had asked what wrong Rama had done to deserve exile. Was it right to exile Rama, to please Kaikeyi? It was a decision taken without due thought. What would be the reaction of people to Dasaratha's decision to banish Rama from the kingdom, Lakshmana had wondered. The whole world would be against Dasaratha's decision, and having earned the displeasure of the whole world could be king? Lakshmana had declared that he could no longer consider Dasaratha as his father. Rama was everything to him — brother, king, relative and father. Sita had had no words to utter. She had just shed tears, Sumantra says.



# Google removes matrimony, streaming apps over fee row

The company's long conflict with Indian developers over in-app payment fees enters new chapter with many apps booted out after the Supreme Court declined the developers' interim relief

**Aroon Deep**  
NEW DELHI

**T**ech major Google on Friday delisted certain matrimonial and dating apps, including Bharat Matrimony, Truly Madly, and Quack Quack, and two streaming services, Balaji Telefilms's ALTT and the audio platform Kuku FM, after the Supreme Court declined to provide the companies behind these apps interim relief in their battle against the platform fees for in-app payments on Google Play, the company's mobile app marketplace for the Android operating system.

The development is likely to come as a shock to the firms concerned, which offer a rare segment of digital services where Indian consumers are willing to spend money for entertainment and companionship.

Bharat Matrimony says it has a market cap of over ₹2,300 crore.

The app's founder Murugavel Janakiraman was quoted by the news outlet TechCrunch as saying that this was a "dark day" for the Internet in India and that the company would



**New requirements:** Google requires apps to pay a platform fee that could range from 11-30%. REUTERS

explore legal options.

Kuku FM cofounder Vinod Kumar Meena said in a statement that Google was behaving like a 'monopoly,' and that the search giant was "on [a] hunt to collect rent" from developers.

QuackQuack founder Ravi Mittal said in a statement that the company would comply with Google's rules to get back on the marketplace.

"Unfortunately, we will have to comply with Google's current policies as there is no alternative or immediate remedy," Mr. Mittal told *The Hindu*. "This shows the control Google has over the app

economy in a growing country like India."

In a statement, Google said that only a small number of firms have to pay any fees over 15% on payments users made in-app and that the companies that it was acting on had a long window of opportunity to comply with its rules.

Google requires digital services to pay a platform fee that could range from 11-30%, depending on what payment method is used, and the size of the app's user base.

Disney+ Hotstar and exam prep service Testbook, for whom the interim relief granted by the Supreme

Court came later, and is still valid, have not yet been delisted.

"Today, we have over 200,000 Indian developers using Google Play who adhere to our policies ... however, for an extended period of time, 10 companies, including many well-established ones, have chosen to not pay for the immense value they receive on Google Play by securing interim protections from the court," Google said in a statement.

"After giving these developers more than three years to prepare, including three weeks after the Supreme Court's order, we are taking necessary steps to ensure our policies are applied consistently across the ecosystem, as we do for any form of policy violation globally," the company added.

Many of these developers coalesced around a rival app store effort by the Walmart-owned payments company PhonePe last month, where Sameer Nigam, the firm's CEO, boasted that no app would be required to pay platform fees and that the app marketplace would find other ways of monetising itself.

IN BRIEF



RBI appoints S. Ravindran as TMB's part-time chairman

The Reserve Bank has appointed Tamilnad Mercantile Bank Ltd.'s independent director S. Ravindran as part-time chairman of the bank from February 29 till August 2, 2024.

NMDC iron ore output, sales race past 40 million tonnes

State-owned NMDC reported 40.24 million tonne iron ore production and 40.48 MT sales for the 11 months ended February.

Dr. Reddy's, its unit named in antitrust complaint in the US

Dr. Reddy's Laboratories and a step down subsidiary have been named defendants in an antitrust complaint related to cancer drug Revlimid in the US.

CG Power to set up Gujarat chip unit for ₹7600 crore

The Hindu Bureau CHENNAI

CG Power and Industrial Solutions Ltd (CGI) said it would invest ₹7,600 crore over five years in a joint venture with Japan's Renesas Electronics and Thailand's Stars Microelectronics to build and operate an outsourced semiconductor assembly and test (OSAT) facility in India.

Automakers register robust sales in Feb. on strong SUV demand

Press Trust of India HYDERABAD

Leading automakers Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai and Tata Motors on Friday reported robust sales for February as demand for sports utility vehicles continued to remain strong.

Undersea cable disruptions expose India's crucial telecom vulnerability

Aroon Desai NEW DELHI

In the past week, three undersea cables connecting India to global telecom networks — Asia-Africa-Europe-1, Europe-India-Gateway, and Tata Global Network — have been damaged as a possible result of targeted attacks, forcing telecom operators such as Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio and Tata Communications to route traffic to other cable systems.

While Bharti and Jio declined to comment, Tata said in a statement it was "keeping a close watch on the situation and [had] initiated immediate and appropriate remedial actions".

FIU imposes ₹5.49 cr. fine on Paytm bank for PMLA lapses

The payments bank arm was found to be in breach of KYC, anti-money laundering and terrorism financing norms, letting some entities route their illegal activities' proceeds through its accounts

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Financial Intelligence Unit-India has fined Paytm Payments Bank Ltd. (PPBL) ₹5.49 crore for violations of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, after finding substantial proof of money generated from illegal activity being routed through accounts held by entities with the bank.



In breach: The FIU said it found substantial proof of money generated from illegal activity being routed through PPBL.

The FIU-IND had initiated a review of PPBL's operations after receiving "specific information"

Sensex, Nifty surge almost 2% on 'better' GDP data

The Hindu Bureau MUMBAI

Key benchmark stock indices surged almost 2% higher the better-than-expected third-quarter (Q3) Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth data.

Paytm decides to cut ties with beleaguered banking arm PPBL

The Hindu Bureau MUMBAI

As part of a process to cut dependencies, One 97 Communications Ltd. (Paytm) and Paytm Payments Bank Ltd. (PPBL), mutually agreed to end various inter-company agreements, Paytm said in a filing to the stock exchanges.

₹2,000 notes worth about ₹8.470 cr. still in circulation

The Hindu Bureau MUMBAI

More than 9 months since the Reserve Bank of India announced the withdrawal of the ₹2,000 banknotes, about ₹8.470 crore worth of ₹2,000 banknotes are still in circulation as on February 29, as per the RBI.

India's manufacturing PMI inched up to 56.9 in February

The Hindu Bureau

India's manufacturing sector continued its recovery in February from an 18-month low in December, with production levels and sales rising at the fastest pace in five months, as per the seasonally-adjusted IHSIS India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI).

A reading of over 50 on the PMI, which rose from 56.5 in January to 56.9 last month, indicates an expansion in activity. New export orders grew at the highest pace in 21 months, but employment levels changed little as firms felt existing staff strengths were enough to cope with the workload.

"The upturn in manufacturing output was the strongest seen in five months and led by the capital goods category... [Hovewer] capacity pressures at goods producers in India remained mild [and] the uptick was softer than that registered in January, a statement noted.

Output price increases slowed down to their joint-weakest since March 2023, while input costs rose only fractionally at the weakest rate since July 2020.

LIC pays Govt. ₹2,441-crore in interim dividend

The Hindu Bureau MUMBAI

The Life Insurance Corporation of India on Friday paid an interim dividend of more than ₹2,441 crore to its shareholders.

At WTO meet, members still bicker over farm sops

Amli Sen NEW DELHI

WTO members struggled to frown differences in crucial areas such as agriculture, fisheries and the e-commerce moratorium at the on-going 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi which went into extra time on Friday.

SEBI's concerns mto unit with small, mid-cap fund flows

Suresh P. Iyengar MUMBAI

Inflows into small-cap funds have surged by a whopping 92% in the first quarter of this year, as ₹37,360 crore against ₹22,103 crore logged in the whole of FY23.

Adanis plan ₹75,000-cr. investment in MP

Janaki Krishnan MUMBAI

The Adani Group plans to invest ₹75,000 crore in Madhya Pradesh across sectors such as power generation, cement and cement providing direct and indirect employment to about 15,000 people.

Small-cap funds expand

While the inflows and retention rates have been relatively strong, the number of new investors has declined as the portfolio of small-cap funds was up by 78 to 506

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

Table with 3 columns: Index, Value, % Change. Includes Sensex, Nifty, and BSE Mid-Cap.

50 STOCKS

Table with 4 columns: Stock Name, Price, % Change, Volume. Lists various stocks like Adani Group, Tata Steel, etc.

EXCHANGE RATES

Table with 3 columns: Currency, Rate, % Change. Lists USD, EUR, GBP, etc.



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**In breach:** The FIU said it found substantial proof of money generated from illegal activity being routed through PPBL. REUTERS

from law enforcement agencies about a few entities and their network of businesses engaging in "a

number of illegal acts, including organising and facilitating online gambling", the FIU said in a statement

on Friday about the order issued on March 1.

"Further, the money generated from these illegal operations, i.e. proceeds of crime were routed and channelled through bank accounts maintained by these entities with" PPBL, it said. "Based on the voluminous material available... the charges against Paytm were substantiated," the FIU said.

"The penalty pertains to issues within a business segment that was discontinued two years ago," a PPBL spokesperson said.





### Deeply shocked: India on killing of over 100 Gazans during aid delivery

SHUBHAJITROY  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

A DVY after more than 100 people were killed and over 700 injured when Israeli troops fired on Palestinians trying to push food off an aid convoy in Gaza, India said on Friday. "I am deeply shocked at the loss of lives," it said.

This is a significant statement from New Delhi, especially at a time when Israel's ongoing military offensive in Gaza has drawn criticism from many in the international community.

The Ministry of External Affairs, in a statement, said, "We are deeply shocked at the loss of lives in northern Gaza yesterday during delivery of humanitarian assistance."

"Such loss of civilian lives and the larger humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be a cause for extreme concern," it said.

"We reiterate our call for safe and timely delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance," the MEA said. It did not condemn or name Israel.

India has been calling for de-escalation of the conflict and for creating conditions for talks towards a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine issue.

### THE WORLD



### CHORUS FOR PROBE INTO ISRAELI FIRING

### NBDSA SLAPS FINE ON 3 CHANNELS

### Take down shows that spread hate: Regulator to Aaj Tak, News18 India, Times Now Navbharat

DIVYAA  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

THE NBDSAs Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA) has ordered television news channels News18 India, Times Now Navbharat and Aaj Tak to take down videos of several shows aired in the last two years for spreading hatred and communal disharmony by "violating the code of ethics and broadcasting standards and the specific guidelines covering reporting on racial and religious harmony". It also imposed fines on the broadcasters in some cases.

In its meeting held on February 28, the regulatory body set up by TV news broadcast...

### PAGE 1 ANCHOR

**GOPAL KATESHIYA**  
MALIA (JUNAGADH), MARCH 1

AS SOON as she cut the local journalist's call, Alpa Kardan, 37, switched on the TV. A UK court had sentenced Indian-origin couple, Arti Dhir, 59, and her husband Kavaljitsinh Rajpada, 35, to 33 years each in jail on January 30, 2024, for exporting drugs to Australia. With this news, Alpa, a resident of Malia village in Gujarat's Junagadh district,

## Modi Sarkar Ki Guarantee

### India to become world's third largest economy

### India improves from 11th to 5th place in 10 years

### NIA TEAM JOINS POLICE IN INVESTIGATING INCIDENT

## Lunch-hour blast at Bengaluru restaurant leaves nine injured



A videogram of the explosion at Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru, Friday. (PTI)

### CCTV shows man left bag; IT employee among injured, in ICU with 40% burns

JOHNSON T A  
KIRAN PARASHAR & SANATH KRASAD  
BENGALURU, MARCH 1

A SUSPECTED improvised explosive device (IED) went off at a popular restaurant in Bengaluru's Whitefield area Friday afternoon, injuring nine persons — mostly customers having lunch. A man carrying a bag partially concealed with a mask and cap is being treated as a suspect, police sources told The Indian Express.

The blast occurred in the dining area of Rameshwaram Cafe, a popular chain of vegetarian restaurant, whom employees were having lunch.

Karnataka DGP Alok Mohan, who visited the blast site, said, "It would be premature to speculate on the cause of the blast without a report from the Forensic Science Laboratory."

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, however, indicated the blast was caused by an IED. "I have spoken with a suspect, police sources told The Indian Express. He brought a bag to the restaurant. He brought a totem and had food. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

### Man wearing cap, mask a suspect; IED like one used in Mangaluru, 2022

JOHNSON T A  
BENGALURU, MARCH 1

A MAN wearing a cap, glasses and a mask, captured by CCTV cameras at Rameshwaram Cafe around an hour before a blast occurred 12.56 pm on Friday, has emerged as a key suspect, police sources said.

Nine persons suffered injuries in the blast which was marked by a loud sound, fire and smoke but was restricted to the area where the bag was placed. A 45-year-old woman suffered nearly 40 per cent injuries and is in ICU while others suffered minor injuries.

Continued on page 2

### GRASIM CONSOLIDATES GAIN

### How curbs on a key input for textiles helped one industry, and hurt several small players

AGGAM WALLIA  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

IN LESS than a year since India enforced a strict quality control order (QCO) in April on viscose staple fibre (VSF), a key raw material in the textiles supply chain, its imports dropped 65 per cent, helped Aditya Birla Group-owned Grasim Industries consolidate its market share to 95 per cent from 90 per cent, and has started hurting the operations of small and medium sized spinning mills since it restricted access to cheaper raw material imports.

AQCO is a non-tariff trade barrier that bars manufacturers, importers, and distributors from storing or selling a product without a licence from BIS that certifies specific quality standards bearing met. Grasim Industries, the largest VSF producer, had about 18 months before the QCO, lobbied

the Ministry of Textiles complaining of substantial imports from Indonesia and China. Since the QCO was imposed, midstream VSF buyers like small- and medium-sized spinning mills have repeatedly raised concerns with the textiles ministry that such orders have held them back from cheaper VSF, which otherwise, helped them competitively export to the US and other. For MSME mills, these challenges come at a critical time as the textiles industry is reeling from a prolonged period of economic distress since it restricted imports, and could export raw material via cheaper routes.

Grasim is delaying the production of certain specially VSF variants not available in the domestic market and engaging in unfair trade practices.

Continued on page 2



### PM attacks Mamata: Shielded Sandeshkhali accused... for every wound, reply with vote

Questions silence of INDIA bloc, says BJP pressure led to arrests

SANTANU CHOWDHURY  
ARAMBAGH (WB), MARCH 1

MOUNTING A scathing attack on the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government in West Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that people across the country were "sad" and "enraged" over the atrocities against women in Sandeshkhali by local TMC leaders.

Accusing the TMC government of making "all sorts of attempts to protect" its accused leaders, Modi, addressing a public meeting at Arambagh in Hooghly district, also questioned the silence of the Opposition BJP.

He said, "The entire country is watching the current situation in Bengal and the conduct of the PM."

The Prime Minister targeted Banerjee for her recent arrest on Friday after the arrest of TMC strongman Shuhajhan Sheikh, accused of sexual abuse and land-grabbing in Sandeshkhali — a small island in the Sunderban delta — along with his aides.

Sheikh had been on the run for 55 days after his supporters attacked a police station in Sandeshkhali on January 25 as part of their protest into the ration distribution case.

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Continued on page 2

### Week before Singhvi fiasco, Cong had idea of what was coming

MANOJ CG  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

THE DEFEAT of Abhishek Maru Singhvi in Rajya Sabha election in Himachal Pradesh may have come as a huge embarrassment to the Congress but the central leadership and Singhvi himself had prior information that a handful of MLAs who were up for re-election were set to vote with Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu were restive and could cross over.

As the Congress looks back at what went wrong in Himachal to make sense of the fiasco, the picture that is emerging is of miscalculation and over-confidence.

Although the BJP's decision to field Harsh Mahajan, a former Congress leader, was a clear sig-

nal that it was trying to tap in the discontent in the Congress ranks, he staged with Alpa since he travel papers were not ready. I February 2017, before he could even set foot in the UK, trip was killed. What went wrong?

The chargesheet says that couple had allegedly planned to name their adopted son as "Lokanath Dhir", but nothing of her marital status. Though Gop was now officially Arti's adoptive son, he staged with Alpa since he travel papers were not ready. I February 2017, before he could even set foot in the UK, trip was killed. What went wrong?

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## Adopted son, murder for insurance: Gujarat wants UK couple extradited

hoped the two would get justice one day.

A conspiracy allegedly hatched by the couple had cut short the lives of Alpa's husband Harshukh Kardan, 47, and her younger brother Gopal Sevak, 11, in February 2017.

All efforts so far to extradite the couple to India for the murder trial have failed.

Arti Dhir, 59, and Kavaljitsinh Rajpada, 35, were sentenced for 33 years each by a UK court on January 30. (Source: nationstravelagency.gov.uk)



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promised to take good care of Gopal. That's why we agreed to the adoption."

Maheshwari's statement to the police says Kavaljitsinh left for London in 2008 to do his MBA and finally got married in London in 2012. A Nairobi-born British citizen with roots in Punjab around 2012-13.

Maheshwari's statement, a part of the chargesheet filed in a Junagadh court, says the couple visited her home in Junagadh on July 23, 2015. The document mentions Arti as "Arti

his son had told him about Arti's decision to adopt a child. Around 2014, Maheshwari, then the manager at a cooperative bank's Malia branch, learnt about Alpa's sibling situation. Harshukh too frequented his bank branch for work.

Things moved fast after that. A serious court declared Alpa and Harshukh as Gopal's legal guardians, following which they got a private adoption deed registered on July 23, 2015. The document mentions Arti as "Arti

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# Development of Agaléga and India's vision for its maritime neighbourhood

## EXPERT EXPLAINS



BISWAJIT DASGUPTA

ON THURSDAY, Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Pravin Jugnauth jointly inaugurated an airstrip and the St James Jetty on North Agaléga Island in the Indian Ocean.

Agaléga — a group of two islands with a total area of 26 sq km and a native population of about 300 people — lies approximately 650 nautical miles (1,050 km) north of Mauritius, and belongs to the island nation.

The development of the Agaléga Islands is in the socio-economic and national security interest of Mauritius, and also aligns with India's maritime vision.

### Why is Agaléga important to Mauritius?

The islands, a dependency of Mauritius, were not developed for many years. Situated two days' steaming distance away,

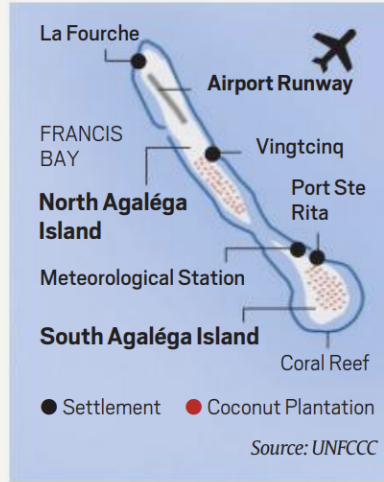
the sustainability and well-being of the islands' inhabitants presented a challenge, as even the most basic needs required referral to Mauritius. The near absence of an official government or security presence was a serious vulnerability.

This vulnerability could be converted to strength by developing the islands and creating facilities that could operate ships and aircraft. Building a jetty and an airstrip was therefore considered imperative by the government of Mauritius. They chose India as their preferred development partner.

### Why did Mauritians choose India?

Ties between India and Mauritius go back to 1948, 20 years before the country's independence from Britain. Seventy per cent of the inhabitants of Mauritius are of Indian origin, and the two countries share deep historical, social, and cultural bonds.

The consistent feature in the history of bilateral relations has been friendship and trust at all levels — the political leadership, the diplomatic and military communities, as well as between the peoples of the two countries. The development of these strategically located islands required trust more than any-



thing else. India was the obvious choice.

Deliberations took place from the end of the first decade of this century onward. Considering the sensitivities in Mauritius over issues of sovereignty and security, both sides progressed with utmost caution, and every concern was appropriately addressed before the project got off the ground.

### How will the development of Agaléga help Mauritius?

The benefits are so obvious and substantial that it appears odd that it took so long to begin the process of developing Agaléga.

For the people of the islands, the two-day passage (if a ship was available) will be cut to less than an hour's flight. The development of associated infrastructure will create employment for the local population and improve their overall well-being. The government of Mauritius may improve and expand these facilities in the future. The tourism potential of the islands could be tapped as well.

The new jetty and airstrip will enable a larger and more credible government presence on the islands, and the stationing or forward deployment of ships of the Mauritius Coast Guard. It will be possible to better monitor and police the vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that extends 200 nautical miles outward from these islands.

### What is in it for India?

The goodwill and trust between the two countries will be further enhanced. India will welcome opportunities to further develop these islands in collaboration with

Mauritius as the latter deems appropriate.

The joint development of Agaléga underscores India's commitment to the vision of Security And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), and its willingness to assist smaller maritime nations in building capacity and developing capability.

It will indicate to other maritime neighbours that India is a benign and friendly country that respects the sovereignty of independent nations. India would like to emerge as the preferred development and security partner in the Indian Ocean Region.

### Will India assist Mauritius in enhancing its maritime security?

Yes, if requested by Mauritius. India has never forced its security apparatus upon any country; all military and maritime cooperation with its partners has been through established mechanisms of political, diplomatic, and military dialogue.

In pursuance of the vision of SAGAR, India will provide material and technical support to the maritime security apparatus of Mauritius, offer information exchange mechanisms, and conduct joint maritime security exercises and patrols, as mutually agreed.

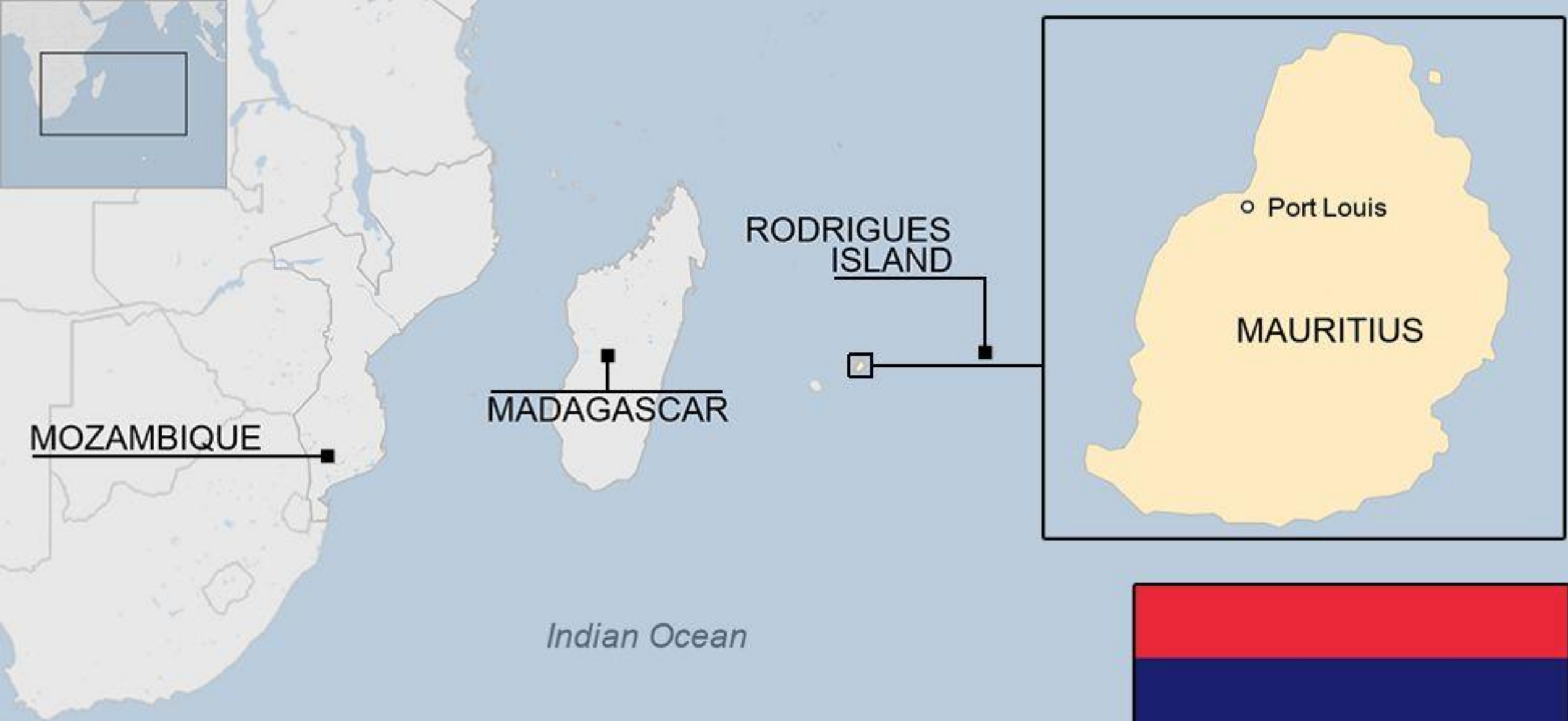
Visits by Indian military assets and joint deployments, if considered, would be in consonance with diplomatic mechanisms.

### Will Agaléga be an Indian military base?

No. India understands the importance of sovereignty, and the sensitivities of smaller nations when they interact with larger ones. India has always played by the rules — even when it has suffered on account of its respect for international law, and by trusting other countries that have resorted to deceit.

India does not believe in economic colonisation of smaller countries by luring them into debt traps. It has demonstrated that its methods of aiding smaller neighbours is more trustworthy and humane, even if somewhat inefficient. India's reputation as a democratic nation that believes in peaceful coexistence is unimpeachable, and it can be expected to never violate the sovereignty or offend the sensitivities of a trusted and friendly nation like Mauritius.

*Vice Admiral Biswajit Dasgupta (Retd) is a former Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Naval Command, Indian Navy*







<b>Language spoken at home (2022)</b> <sup>[3]</sup>	90.0% <a href="#">Mauritian Creole</a> 5.1% <a href="#">Bhojpuri</a> 4.4% <a href="#">French</a> 0.6% <a href="#">English</a>
<b>Ethnic groups</b>	67% <a href="#">Indian</a> 28% <a href="#">Creoles</a> 3% <a href="#">Chinese</a> 2% <a href="#">French</a> <sup>[4]</sup>
<b>Religion (2011)</b> <sup>[4][5]</sup>	48.54% <a href="#">Hinduism</a> 32.71% <a href="#">Christianity</a> 17.30% <a href="#">Islam</a> 1.45% <a href="#">Others / None</a>
<b>Demonym(s)</b>	<a href="#">Mauritian</a>
<b>Government</b>	<a href="#">Unitary parliamentary republic</a>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">President</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Vice President</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Prime Minister</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Speaker of the National Assembly</a></li> </ul>	<a href="#">Prithvirajsing Roopun</a> <a href="#">Eddy Boissézon</a> <a href="#">Pravind Jugnauth</a> <a href="#">Sooroojdev Phokeer</a>
<b>Legislature</b>	<a href="#">National Assembly</a>
<b>Independence</b> from the <a href="#">United Kingdom</a>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Constitution of Mauritius</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Republic</a></li> </ul>	12 March 1968 12 March 1992
<b>Area</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Total</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Water (%)</a></li> </ul>	2,040 km <sup>2</sup> (790 sq mi) ( <a href="#">169th</a> ) 0.07

<b>Area</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Total</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Water (%)</a></li> </ul>	2,040 km <sup>2</sup> (790 sq mi) ( <a href="#">169th</a> ) 0.07
<b>Population</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">2019 estimate</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">2011 census</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Density</a></li> </ul>	1,265,475 <sup>[6]</sup> ( <a href="#">158th</a> ) 1,235,260 <sup>[7][8][3]</sup> 618.24/km <sup>2</sup> (1,601.2/sq mi) ( <a href="#">21st</a> )
<b>GDP (PPP)</b>	2023 estimate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Total</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Per capita</a></li> </ul>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> \$37.012 billion <sup>[9]</sup> ( <a href="#">139th</a> ) <span style="color: green;">▲</span> \$29,349 <sup>[9]</sup> ( <a href="#">61st</a> )
<b>GDP (nominal)</b>	2023 estimate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Total</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Per capita</a></li> </ul>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> \$14.819 billion <sup>[9]</sup> ( <a href="#">143th</a> ) <span style="color: green;">▲</span> \$11,751 <sup>[9]</sup> ( <a href="#">73rd</a> )
<b>Gini (2017)</b>	36.8 <sup>[10]</sup> <a href="#">medium</a>
<b>HDI (2021)</b>	<span style="color: green;">▲</span> 0.802 <sup>[11]</sup> <a href="#">very high</a> · <a href="#">63rd</a>
<b>Currency</b>	<a href="#">Mauritian rupee (MUR)</a>



# Google DeepMind's Genie

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- **Recently, Google DeepMind has introduced Genie AI (Artificial Intelligence), a new model that can generate interactive video games from just a text or image prompt.**
  - **Google DeepMind is a British-American AI research laboratory that is a subsidiary of Google. DeepMind is based in London and has research centres in Canada, France, Germany, and the US.**
  -



**Generative Interactive Environments (Genie)** is a foundation world model that is trained on videos sourced from the Internet.

- The model can “generate an endless variety of **playable (action-controllable) worlds** from synthetic images, photographs, and even sketches”.

It is the first generative interactive environment that has been trained in an unsupervised **manner from unlabelled internet videos.**

- **Significance for India:**

- **As per NASSCOM data, the overall AI employment in India is estimated at about 416,000 professionals.**
- **The growth rate for the sector is estimated at about 20-25%. Further, AI is expected to contribute an additional USD 957 billion to India's economy, by 2035.**

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# SWAYAM Plus Platform

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Recently SWAYAM Plus Platform was inaugurated by the Union Minister of Education and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship in New Delhi.

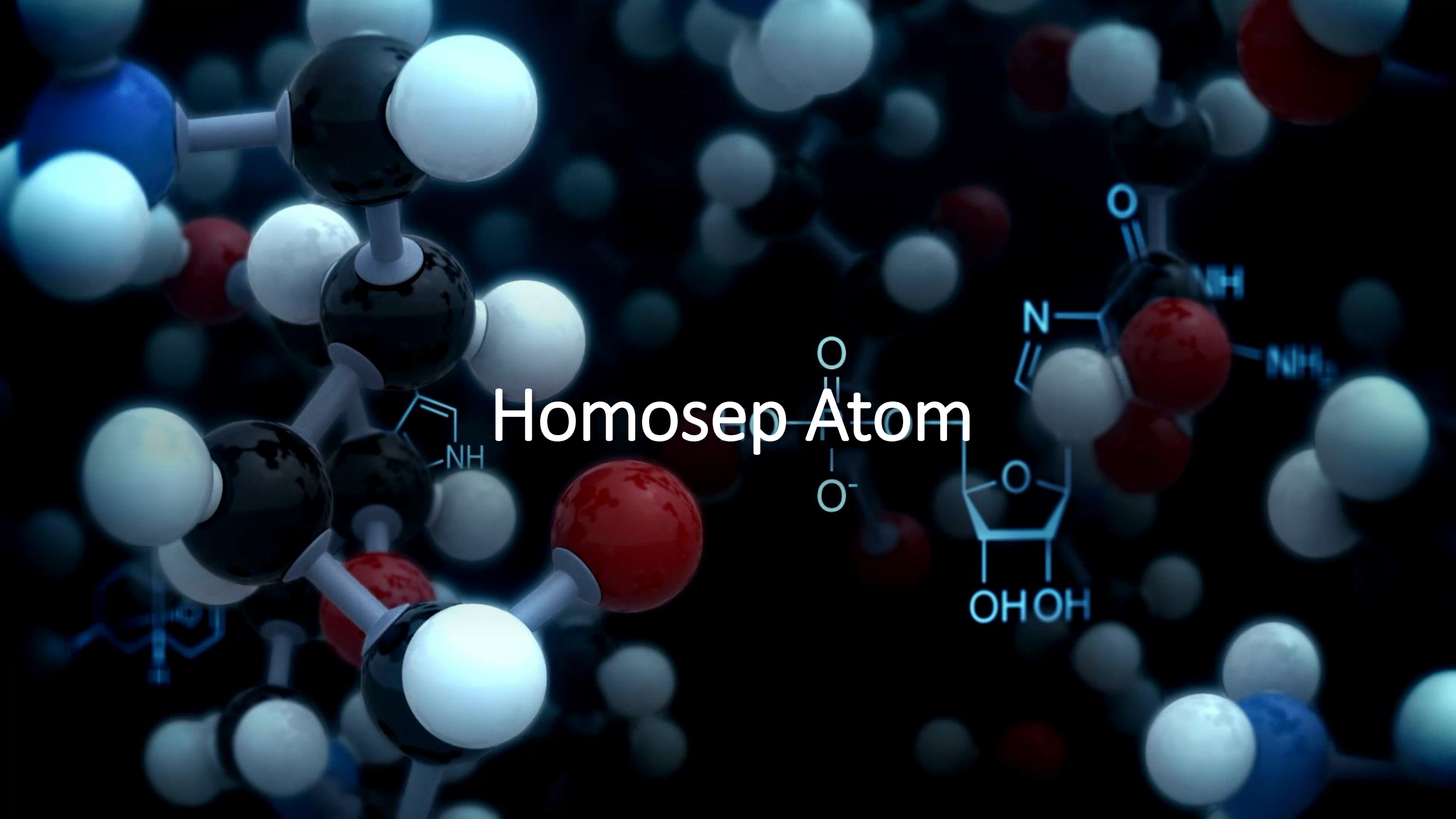


SWAYAM, the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform providing educational opportunities for a vast number of learners, was launched by the Ministry of Education in 2017.



- 
- Aligned with NEP 2020, SWAYAM Plus now offers industry-relevant courses to boost employability, with features like multilingual content, AI guidance, credit recognition, and pathways to employment, developed in collaboration with companies like L&T, Microsoft, CISCO, and others.
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# Homosep Atom





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Homosep Atom, developed by the startup named Solinas, is India's first septic tank/manhole cleaning robot, is revolutionising sanitation efforts nationwide, replacing manual scavenging with a comprehensive robotic solution, bolstering the Swachh Bharat Campaign.

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It streamlines sewer cleaning with multifunctional capabilities, curbing costs and fostering robotic sanitation while mitigating blockages in congested areas.

A pink awareness ribbon is positioned on the left side of the image, forming a loop. The ribbon is made of a textured fabric and has a white thread along its edges. The background is a solid, light blue color. The text "World Rare Diseases Day" is centered over the ribbon and the background.

World Rare Diseases Day



**Rare Diseases Day** is observed on the **last day of February**. The theme for Rare Disease Day 2024 is **“Share your colours.”**



**What are Rare Diseases?**



A rare disease is often a lifelong disease or disorder with a **prevalence of 1 or less, per 1000 population.**

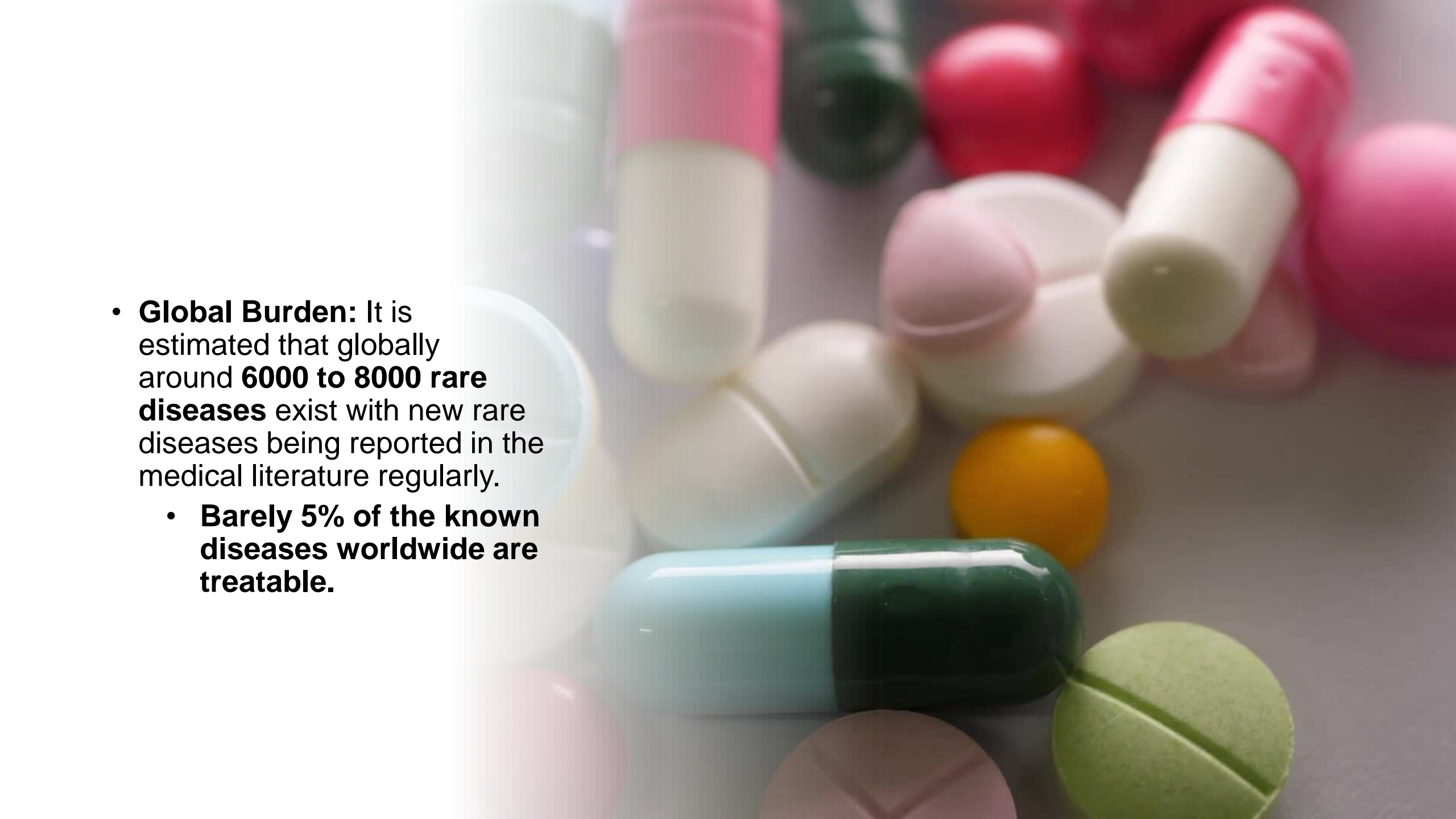


Considering the population of India the suggested threshold for India for a disease to be defined as rare is **1 in 10,000**.

About half of the rare diseases **affect children** while the remaining manifest in adulthood.

Rare diseases include **rare cancers, autoimmune diseases, congenital malformations, and infectious diseases amongst others**.



- 
- A close-up photograph of various pharmaceuticals, including capsules and tablets in shades of pink, white, green, orange, and blue, scattered on a light-colored surface. The focus is sharp on the pills in the foreground, while others in the background are blurred.
- **Global Burden:** It is estimated that globally around **6000 to 8000 rare diseases** exist with new rare diseases being reported in the medical literature regularly.
    - **Barely 5% of the known diseases worldwide are treatable.**

- **Do You Know?**

- The first Rare Disease Day was celebrated in **2008 on 29 February**, a ‘rare’ date that happens only **once every four years**.
- Ever since then, Rare Disease Day has taken place on the **last day of February**, a month known for having a ‘rare’ number of days.



## Rare Diseases in India

India accounts for **one-third** of the global rare disease incidence, with over **450 identified diseases**.

These range from widely known ones such as Spinal Muscular Atrophy and Gaucher's disease to lesser-known ones such as Mucopolysaccharidosis type 1 and Whipple's disease.


Though India lacks a standard definition for rare diseases, a rough estimate suggests that about **8 crore-10 crore Indians** suffer from one rare disease or another; **over 75% are children**.



An aerial photograph of the ancient Inca city of Machu Picchu in Peru. The image shows the extensive stone ruins, including terraced agricultural fields and various buildings, set against a backdrop of lush green mountains. A prominent, jagged mountain peak, Huayna Picchu, rises sharply in the background, partially shrouded in mist. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, creating a dramatic and atmospheric scene. The word "Peru" is overlaid in white text in the center of the image.

Peru



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- Peru Declared Health Emergency Amidst Dengue Surge.
    - Peru has been experiencing high temperatures and heavy rains since 2023 due to the El Nino weather pattern, which has warmed the seas off the country's coast and helped mosquito populations grow


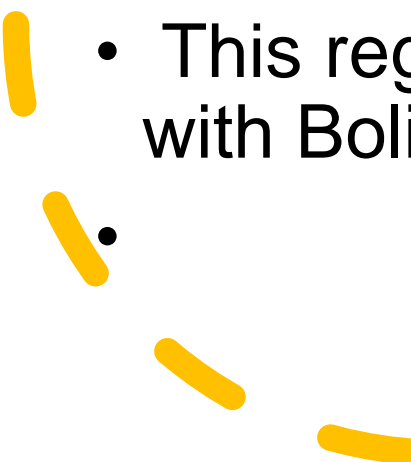
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- **About Peru**
- The capital-**Lima**
- Peru is located on the western side of **South America**
- It shares its borders with five countries:







- 
- **Ecuador** and **Colombia** to the north, **Brazil** to the east, **Bolivia** to the southeast, and **Chile** to the south.
  - Its western border lies along the **Pacific Ocean**.
  - It includes the towering peaks of the Andes Mountains, among them Huascarán, the highest peak in Peru,
  - This region is also home to Lake Titicaca, which Peru shares with Bolivia. Known as the world's highest navigable lake,
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Melanochlamys  
Droupadi



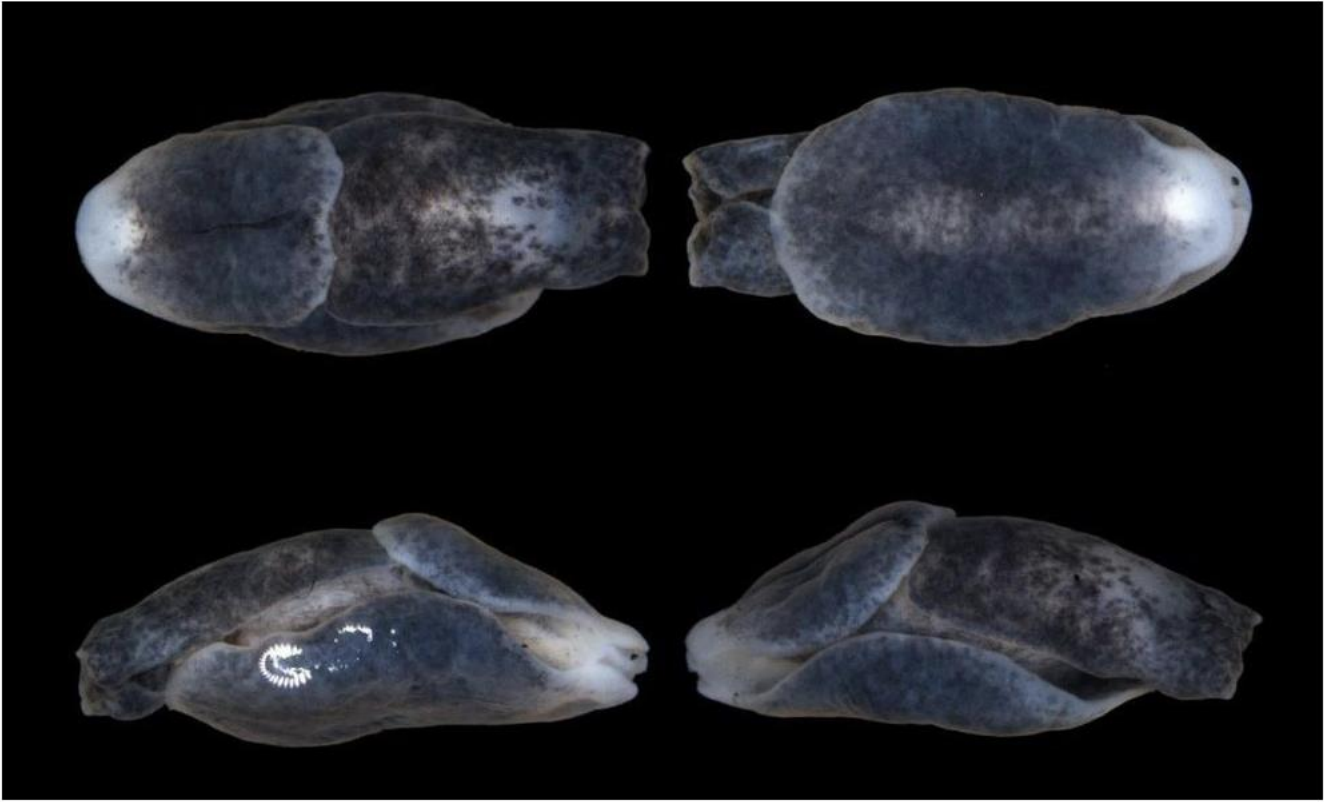
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- The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has named a new marine species of head-shield sea slug with ruby red spot which was discovered along the coasts of West Bengal and Odisha, after President Droupadi Murmu, named *Melanochlamys droupadi*.
  - Species of the genus *Melanochlamys* are characterised morphologically by a short, blunt and cylindrical body and a smooth dorsal surface with two dorsal equal or unequal shields, named the anterior cephalic and posterior shield.
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The species is small, brownish-black, with a ruby red spot at the hind end, and is a hermaphrodite.

Reproduction of the species is observed between **November and January**.

Melanochlamys droupadi **secrete transparent mucus, shielding them from sand grains** while crawling beneath smooth sand, making its body rarely visible.










# Juice Jacking



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- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued a warning against charging mobile phones using public ports.
  - **About the Juice Jacking**
  - It is a **type of cyberattack** where hackers tamper with **public USB charging ports**, infecting them with **malware** or making hardware changes that allow them **to steal data from devices** connected to them.
- 

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- Most attacks target **both Android and iOS mobile devices**, with older devices being particularly vulnerable due to their outdated software.
  - **The Threat:**
  - When users connect their devices to compromised USB ports, hackers use the connection to hack into mobile devices and **steal personal data** like email, SMS, and saved passwords **or deliver malware** by gaining access to the phones.

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# International Intellectual Property Index



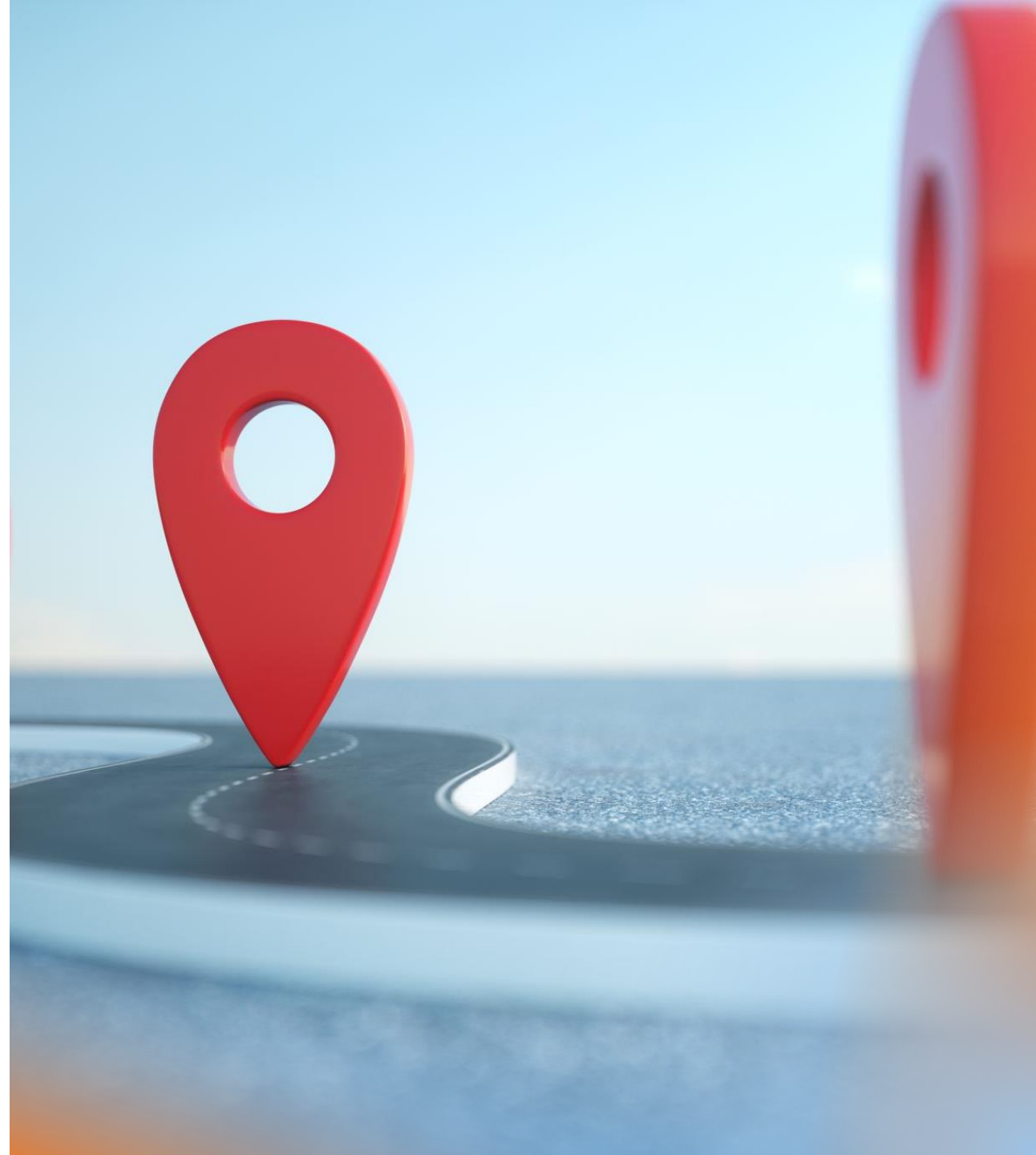
Recently, the US Chamber of Commerce released its 12th edition of its International Intellectual Property Index.

### **About the International Intellectual Property Index:**

It is a comprehensive assessment of the world's intellectual property frameworks, published annually by the **U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Innovation Policy Center**.

It evaluates the IP framework of the **world's top 55 economies using 50 unique criteria**.



- **Purpose:**
- It serves as a roadmap for economies seeking to strengthen their **innovation and creativity ecosystems** through more effective IP standards.
- It reveals **trends in global IP protection** and shows economies how to improve **IP-driven innovation and creativity.**
- 



- **Key Findings:**
- The IP Index found that 20 economies significantly improved their IP frameworks.
- The **United States emerged at the top** of the list, **followed by the United Kingdom and France.**
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- However, eight economies, including Ecuador, declined in rankings due to weak IP enforcement.
  - India ranked **42 out of the 55 countries**, with an overall score of 38.64%.
    - It represents a **significant improvement** from previous years, demonstrating India's efforts to strengthen its IP framework.
- 

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A group of people are clapping in a dimly lit room. The focus is on the hands and forearms of several individuals, with some in the foreground and others blurred in the background. The lighting is soft and moody, creating a sense of appreciation and celebration. An orange horizontal bar is located in the top left corner of the image.

Thank you  
guys.

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