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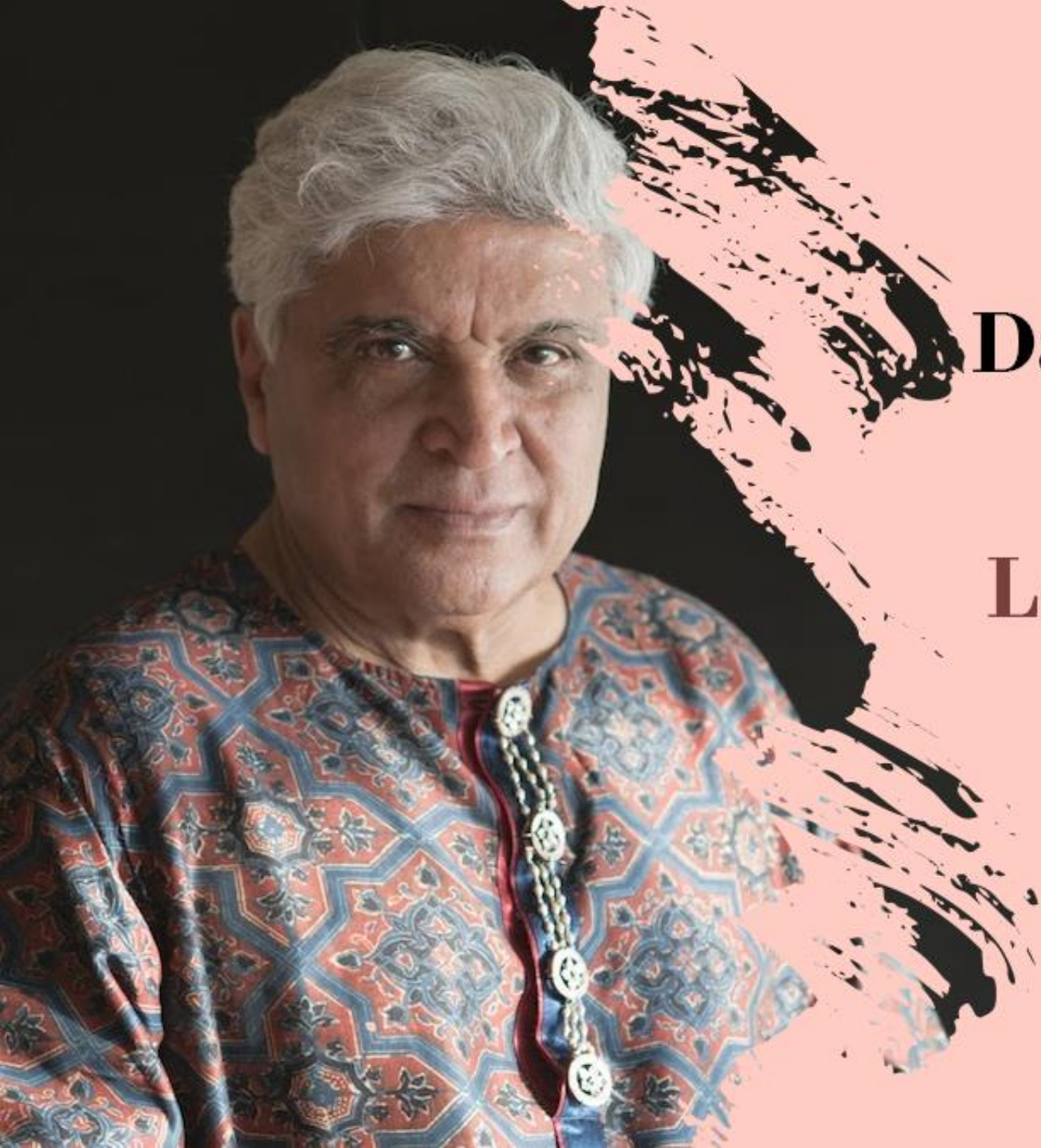
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**Dar hum ko bhi lagta hai
raste ke sannatte se
Lekin ek safar par ae dil
ab jaana to hoga**



Javed Akhtar

Data Leak

UNSTABLE GATEWAY
Two key RTI portals under 'maintenance'

NEWS » PAGE 5

Biden hits out at Trump in State of the Union address

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Bhutan PM Tobgay to visit India next week

NEWS » PAGE 9

WAVANAD COLLEGE CASE Wires, belts, and the death of a student

Post-mortem findings point to brutal assault

GROUND ZERO » PAGE 7

ROSHING FORM Rohit. Gill slam tons as India dominates

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Modi announces ₹100 cut in LPG refill price

The decision comes ahead of Lok Sabha elections; Congress calls it a 'poll gimmick'; this is the second cut in prices in six months; rates were slashed in Aug. ahead of Assembly polls in 5 States

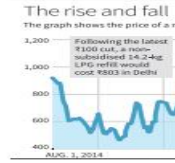
The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Weeks before the Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday announced a reduction in domestic LPG prices by ₹100 a cylinder.

"This will significantly ease the financial burden on millions of households across the country, especially benefiting our Nari Shakti. By making cooking gas more affordable, we also aim to support the well-being of families and ensure a healthier environment," Mr. Modi said on X, adding that the announcement was being made on the occasion of International Women's Day.

This is the second reduction in cooking gas prices in six months. Rates were cut by ₹200 per cylinder in late August ahead of the Assembly elections in five states, including Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

That revision brought down the price from a



14.2-kg cylinder to ₹903. With Friday's cut, an LPG cylinder will cost ₹803.

Congress charge Congress leader Sandeep Surwadekar called the announcement an "election gimmick".

"The Congress-UPA government used to buy LPG at the international price, which was 28% more than what West Bengal's ruling party, dubbed the reduction a "token cut" and a "cheap political stunt".

Mr. Surjewala said the UPA government bought LPG at ₹880.5 per cylinder but made it available to the public at ₹399-₹414, whereas today, the government buys it at ₹760 per cylinder, while an amount of ₹900 to ₹1,000 is charged from the people.

Nod for subsidy The Trinamool Congress, West Bengal's ruling party, dubbed the reduction a "token cut" and a "cheap political stunt".

Army officer abducted from home in Manipur, rescued in a few hours

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

Amid the ongoing ethnic conflict in Manipur, a serving Junior Commissioned Officer of the Indian Army, who was on Friday morning abducted from his home in Thoubal district, was rescued the same evening after an hours-long search operation launched by security forces in the State. *The Hindu* has learnt.

A source said that the JCO, Naib Subedar Komsam Kheda Singh, of Thoubal's Charangpat Manning Lethal, was on leave and was abducted from his residence in a vehicle around 9 a.m. on Friday, adding that the cause of the abduction was not yet known.

The officer was rescued around 6:30 p.m. and was taken to the Waikhoon police station near Kakching, another source told *The Hindu*. A Ministry of Defence spokesperson later confirmed the same in a post on X.

The Manipur Police is said to have begun its in-



Ever since the conflict, Army personnel posted for duty in the State have been met with resistance from civilian groups. (I-L PHOTO)

Throughout last year, the Kukh-Zo people have insisted on removing Manipur Police personnel from areas like Moreh, which are dominated by their people, accusing it of taking the side of the Meitei community in the conflict. Meanwhile, there have also been instances where Army personnel — specifically from units of the Assam Rifles — were routinely stopped from going into areas of conflict by women of the Meitei community. Meira Paibis; and of instances when the women were seen checking the Army personnel's IDs to identify their ethnicity.

INSIDE



Kejriwal launches AAP's Lok Sabha poll campaign

NEW DELHI Delhi CM and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Friday launched the party's election campaign in Delhi. The party is contesting on four of the city's seven Lok Sabha seats in alliance with the Congress. » PAGE 2

INS Jatayu to keep watch over Arabian Sea

MIRINCOY/KOCHI Radar, jettes, airfield and BrahMos missiles — the Indian Navy's newest base being established on Lakshadweep's Minicoy Island, *INS Jatayu*, will have all these and many more. "Jatayu will be the watch-keeper" for Bharat at the gateway of Arabian Sea, said Vice-Admiral Shekhar Mishra, former Indian Naval Commander. » PAGE 3

Centre tweaks PM rooftop solar scheme

NEW DELHI The Union government has tweaked the new ₹75,000 crore PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana (rooftop solar-free electricity scheme). From an initial plan to fully subsidise the installation of 1 kW-3 kW solar systems in one crore households, the scheme will now only contribute up to 60% of the costs. » PAGE 5

Expanding Israeli settlements in West Bank 'war crime': UN

GENEVA The UN human rights office says in a report published on Friday that the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem amount to a war crime. The report covers the one-year period from November 2, 2022, to October 31, 2023. » PAGE 11

I-T tribunal rejects Cong. appeal against ₹210-crore penalty

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Expressing disappointment over the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal's (ITAT) dismissal of the Congress party's appeal against the imposition of penalty for discrepancies in tax returns for previous years, the party on Friday said it was exploring all legal options and will move the High Court very soon.

The ITAT had on Friday dismissed the appeal of the Congress against the imposition of penalties of ₹210 crore by the Income Tax (IT) Department.

The party had moved the ITAT against the I-T Department's penalty over discrepancies in filing tax returns for 2018-19 but did not get relief. "We are exploring all legal options and will move the High Court very soon. The BJP government has deliberately chosen the timing of

this to coincide with the national election," Congress treasurer Ajay Maken told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Maken termed the I-T Department's action to take away funds from the party's accounts as "an attack on democracy" as it has come just ahead of the Lok Sabha election and has left the principal Opposition party without funds to contest. "If the principal Opposition party cannot contest in a single phase, how can one expect fair elections and will democracy be still alive?" asked the Congress treasurer.

He claimed that neither the BJP nor any national political party has, in the history of the country, paid income tax penalty.

Congress legal cell head Vivek Tankha said the ITAT has not followed its own precedents in this regard and the party will be approaching the High Court soon.

Centre warns against offers of jobs with Russian Army

Devesh K. Pandey
Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Offers for support jobs with the Russian Army made by unverified agents are "fraught with danger and risk to life", the External Affairs Ministry said on Friday, announcing that stern action has been initiated by the Central Bureau of Investigation against the agencies that contacted Indian nationals.

The CBI on Thursday searched 13 localities in Delhi, Thiruvananthapuram, Mumbai, Ambala, Chandigarh, Madurai, and Chennai.

Balancing act



Cadets perform a motorcycle stunt during the passing out parade at the Officers Training Academy in Chennai on Friday. B. VELANAKANNI RAJ

Assam jail chief held after seizure of devices from inmates

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The Assam Police arrested the superintendent of Dibrugarh Central Jail on Thursday night over the seizure of electronic gadgets from 10 inmates belonging to a radical pro-Khalistan outfit.

Amritpal Singh, the chief of Waris Punjab De, and nine of his associates have been booked under the National Security Act and lodged in the prison in eastern Assam since April last year.



Under scanners: Central Jail Superintendent Nipen Das after he was arrested under the National Security Act.

eration within the jail premises led to the seizure of the illegal items that included smartphones equipped with remote keypads, a spy camera, and

other communication devices. Subsequent inquiries yielded compelling evidence implicating the jail superintendent, he said.

Mr. Reddy said Das's complicity in the illegal acquisition of the electronic gadgets raised serious concerns about the maintenance of law and order and national security.

Hunger strike He also said the Sikh prisoners on hunger strike were under regular medical supervision and actions were being taken to address any health issues.

"The hunger strike was the peg for Gurbagat Singh Pannam, the U.S.-based leader of the pro-Khalistan Sikhs for Justice, to issue a death threat to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on March 1.

"... Amritpal Singh and his associates led a hunger strike in Dibrugarh jail. Order the shifting of Amritpal and his associates to Amritsar jail or face the consequences of the medical supervision and actions were being taken to address any health issues.

Rahul, Tharoor, Baghel in Cong. first list of candidates

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will seek re-election from the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat in Kerala in the upcoming election. He was one of the 30 candidates in the party's first list, released on Friday. Other

prominent names include former Union Health Minister Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel, to contest from Rajnandgaon; Congress Working Committee member and sitting MP Shashi Tharoor from Thiruvananthapuram.

FULL REPORT » PAGE 4

Modi announces ₹100 cut in LPG refill price

The decision comes ahead of Lok Sabha elections; Congress calls it a 'poll gimmick'; this is the second cut in prices in six months; rates were slashed in Aug. ahead of Assembly polls in 5 States

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

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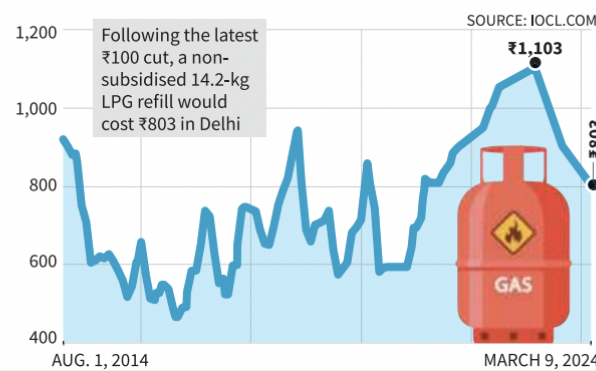
"This will significantly ease the financial burden on millions of households across the country, especially benefiting our *Nari Shakti*. By making cooking gas more affordable, we also aim to support the well-being of families and ensure a healthier environment," Mr. Modi said on X, adding that the announcement was being made on the occasion of International Women's Day.

This is the second reduction in cooking gas prices in six months. Rates were cut by ₹200 per cylinder in late August ahead of the Assembly elections in five States, including Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

That revision brought down the price from a

The rise and fall

The graph shows the price of a non-subsidised 14.2-kg LPG refill in Delhi



Hot commodity: This is the second reduction in cooking gas prices in six months. Rates were cut in late August ahead of the Assembly elections in five States.

nine-year high of ₹1,103 per 14.2-kg cylinder to ₹903. With Friday's cut, an LPG cylinder will cost ₹803.

Congress charge

Congress leader Randeep Surjewala called the announcement an "election gimmick".

"The Congress-UPA government used to buy LPG at the international price, which was 28% more than the current price, but gave it to people at less than half the price by giving huge subsidies," Mr. Surjewala

said in a post on X.

Mr. Surjewala said the UPA government bought LPG at ₹880.5 per cylinder but made it available to the public at ₹399-₹414, whereas today, the government buys it at ₹740 per cylinder, while an amount of ₹900 to ₹1,000 is charged from the people.

Nod for subsidy

The Trinamool Congress, West Bengal's ruling party, dubbed the reduction a "token cut" and a "cheap political stunt".

On Thursday, the Union Cabinet approved the continuation of the targeted subsidy of ₹300 per 14.2 kg cylinder for up to 12 refills per year for beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) during FY 2024-25. As on March 1, 2024, there were more than 10.27 crore PMUY beneficiaries.

The government will incur a total expenditure of ₹12,000 crore for 2024-25. The subsidy is credited directly to the bank accounts of eligible beneficiaries.

TABLE 1**PRICE BREAKUP IN DELHI (₹/LITRE)**

	Petrol	Diesel
Base price	56.32	57.94
Freight etc	0.20	0.22
Excise duty	27.90	21.80
Dealer commission (avg)	3.86	2.59
VAT	17.13	14.12
Retail price	105.41	96.67

CHART 1

■ Excise duty collected by Centre ■ Sales tax/VAT collected by states

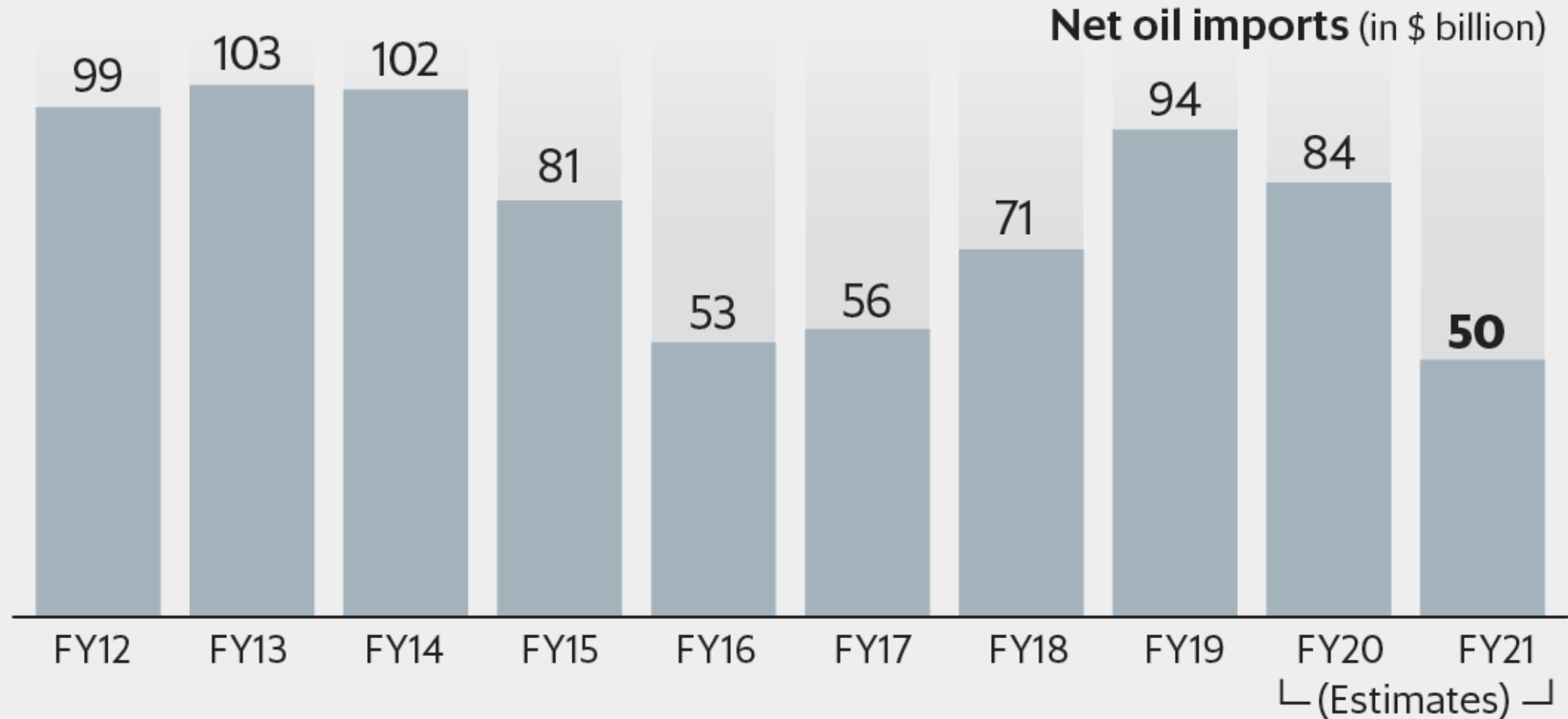
CENTRAL EXCISE & VAT/SALES TAX ON PETROLEUM PRODUCTS (₹ cr)

Dec-April 2021-22 (P) – Excise duty: ₹ 2,62,967 cr; Sales tax/VAT: ₹ 1,89,125 cr



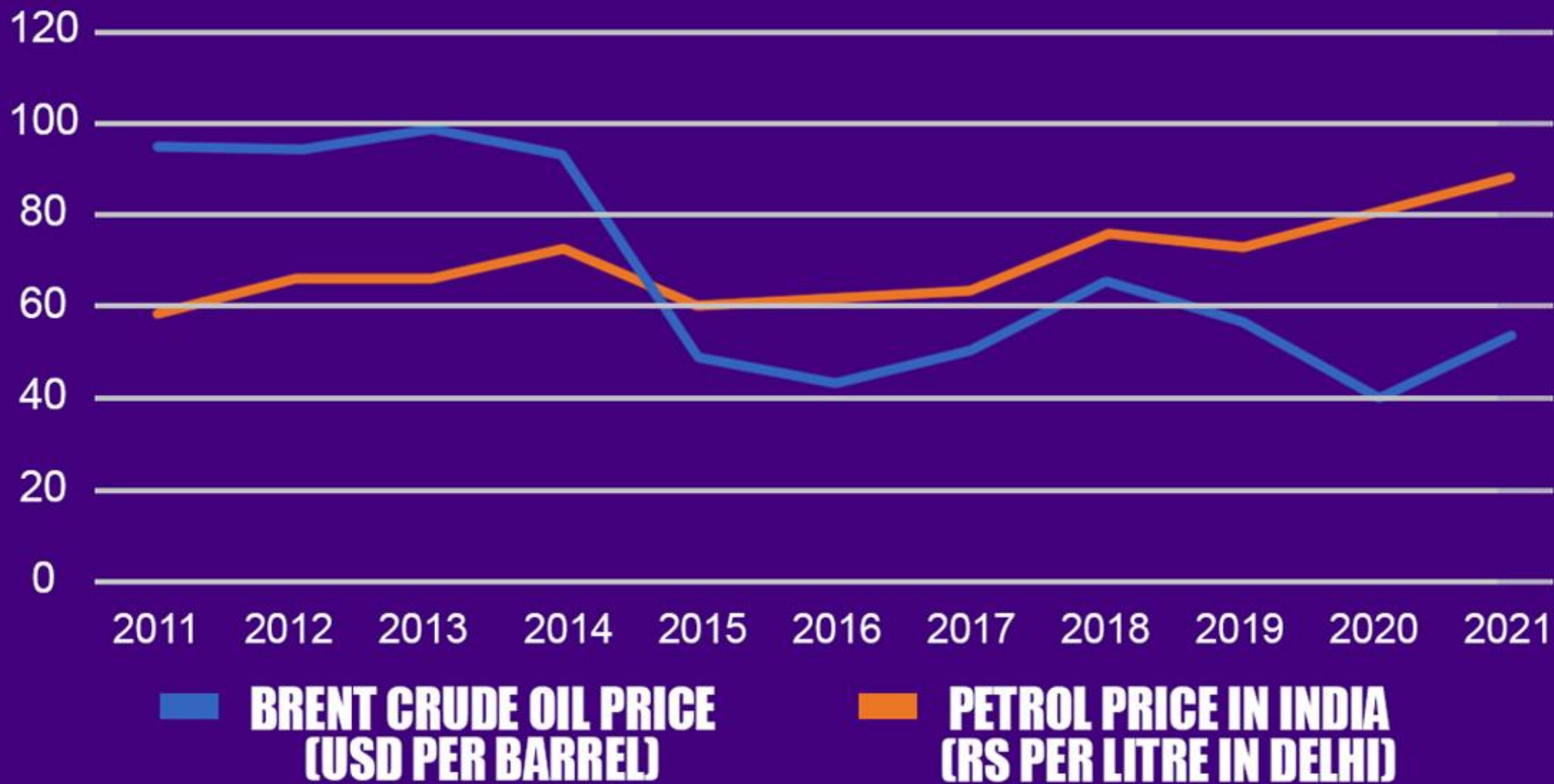
Crude bonanza

According to the sensitivity analysis of UBS, a \$10 per barrel drop in crude price reduces India's oil import bill and, hence, current account deficit by \$15 billion.



UBS estimates Brent crude average price at \$39 per barrel in FY21

Source: Bloomberg, CEIC, UBS



IN BRIEF



Can't live without teaching, want my job back: Saibaba

Former Delhi University professor G.N. Saibaba demanded that he be reinstated by the varsity and compensated for the lost years of service following his acquittal by the Bombay High Court in a Maoist links case. The Committee for the Defence and Release of Dr. Saibaba comprising academicians, lawyers and Left politicians demanded his reinstatement and compensation for all the six people who were released from jail after the court declared in its judgement that the prosecution failed to establish charges against them. Addressing a press meet in New Delhi, the 58-year-old said he can't live without teaching and wants to resume his job as a professor.

Officials asked to give proper meals, water to Sanjay Singh

A Delhi court has directed the authorities concerned to provide healthy and nutritious diet and bottled drinking water to AAP leader and Member of Parliament Sanjay Singh, arrested in an excise policy case, during his production in courts outside the national capital. Special Judge M.K. Nagpal passed the order on an application moved by Mr. Singh alleging he was not provided basic amenities like clean drinking water, proper diet and hygienic living conditions at places of his stay during production before courts outside Delhi.

U.P. STF arrests smuggler who reached Noida for wedding

Landing in Noida for a wedding did not turn out to be fun for a wanted liquor and drug trafficker, who was nabbed by the Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (STF) ahead of the function, officials said on Friday. Rinku Rath, aged around 50, is allegedly an inter-State smuggler and carried a reward of ₹50,000 on his arrest declared by the Banda Police, they said. Rath has allegedly been trafficking liquor and drugs from Haryana to parts of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and even to dry States like Bihar and Gujarat, according to the STF. He has also allegedly been involved in drug trafficking from Odisha and nearby areas to Delhi NCR, including Noida and Greater Noida, the agency said.

After two months, leopard captured in Dehradun

A man-eater leopard involved in several attacks on locals in the outskirts of the Uttarakhand capital was finally caged by a forest department team on Thursday. A hunt was on for the last two months to capture the leopard which had killed two children in Singli and Galjwadi areas earlier. Two special teams, constituted by the forest department, patrolled the Singli area of Raipur range in the district where the leopard was seen roosting, Mussoorie DFO Vaidhyan Kumar said. Twelve cages, 40 camera traps and four live cameras had been put up in the area to spot the leopard, he said. Villagers of the area who were living under fear of the big cat had a sigh of relief after news about the capture reached them.

Meghalaya's Byrnihat most polluted 'city' in India

The Hindu Bureau GUWAHATI

Meghalaya's Byrnihat, an industrial town on the border with Assam, was the most polluted 'city' in India during February, data released by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) said on Friday. The study, based on the monthly average of particulate matter (PM2.5, has put the spotlight on hazardous air pollution levels in urban centres across the states in the northeast, otherwise considered the greenest part of the country. According to the CREA report, Byrnihat recorded a monthly average PM2.5 concentration of 183 µg/m3, which was around 60 µg/m3 higher than in Bihar's Araria, the second-

Map showing the location of Byrnihat in Meghalaya. Source: Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. Released data on polluted cities in India. FILE PHOTO

Kejriwal launches AAP's Lok Sabha campaign for Delhi, hits out at Cere

Party's slogan aims to place Sarsad mein bhi Kejriwal; AAP chief says his party's MPs will become voice of city's people; BJP attacks AAP, says it could not even fight on all seats of Delhi on its own

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Friday launched his party's Lok Sabha Campaign in Delhi with the slogan 'Sarsad mein bhi Kejriwal, tabhse Dilli hogay aur khush hua' [Delhi will be more prosperous with Kejriwal in Parliament as well].

The AAP is contesting four of the city's seven Lok Sabha seats in alliance with the Congress, which will field candidates for three seats. Both parties, which did not contest the last two Lok Sabha elections in the national capital, are members of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc founded to take on the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

The Delhi CM, who was accompanied by his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant



Arvind Kejriwal, Bhagwant Mann and other leaders launching election campaign in New Delhi on Friday. SHASHI SHINHA/KSAPW

Mann, termed the seven BJP MPs of Delhi "voiceless" and promised to "become your voice. All our MPs, because of your voice". The BJP attacked AAP, saying, "A party that does not have the confidence to contest elections on all seats of the city on its own is dreaming of making Delhi a more prosperous".

'Common man' Mr. Kejriwal said members of the party had worked hard to make AAP, which was founded at Ramlila

Maidan nearly 12 years ago, a national party. It attacked the BJP-led Central government, accusing it of not doing enough for the development works planned by the Delhi government.

"People from the BJP and the L-G have tried to do good work but I try to do it in Delhi, Punjab, Goa, and Gujarat [where AAP is contesting general elections in Bihar and the Congress] will reject Kejriwal so outrightly that the AAP will lose its national party status," he said.

"Because the people of

Delhi elected an ordinary person as their CM, members of the BJP, including the L-G and those in the Central government, are seeking revenge," he added. The Punjab CM also appealed to the city's residents to vote for the AAP MPs in Delhi, saying the party does not engage in politics of hatred and divisions.

'Will reject AAP' Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said it was "astonishing" that AAP, which has so many MLAs in Delhi, "does not have the courage to conduct the upcoming general election in Delhi on its own".

"In the past decade, AAP has misled people and misused the status of a national party. But now the party is conducting the upcoming general election in Delhi, Punjab, Goa, and Gujarat [where AAP is contesting general elections in Bihar and the Congress] will reject Kejriwal so outrightly that the AAP will lose its national party status," he said.

ED raids premises linked to UP-based 'gangster' and his associates; documents seized

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has conducted searches at multiple locations in Uttar Pradesh's Kanpur and Mumbai in connection with an alleged extortion and land grabbing case involving a "gangster" who has also been accused of helping illegal Bangladeshi migrants obtain Aadhaar cards through forged documents.

The agency has taken action on the basis of several first information reports (FIR) registered by the Kanpur City Police under various provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, 1986, against the alleged "gangster" and his associates.

It is alleged that Mr. So-

He is accused of helping illegal Bangladeshi migrants obtain Aadhaar cards

lanki and his men indulged in extortion, land grabbing of both the private and the government land, including Nazrul property, by giving threat, using muscle power and political influence; and illegal construction for sale.

During the searches, the agency covered the premises of Irfan Solanki, his brother Rizwan Solanki, and his associate real estate builders Shaukar Ali and Haji Wasi of Kanpur.

According to the ED, its probe has revealed that

fake business entities had been set up to route the illegal money and to give colour to the tainted funds as legitimate businesses income, as alleged by Irfan Solanki and his brother have constructed and are living in a luxurious three-floor bungalow spread over more than 1,000 sq metres. The agency suspects that "proceeds of crime" were used to construct the house. It has estimated the property's value to be over ₹10 crore.

The search operation led to the seizure of ₹26 lakh in cash, digital devices, various documents in the form of handwritten dairies having description of illegal investments in partnership, land deals, and cash expenses amounting to ₹40 crore to ₹50 crore, besides meeting notes of investors to about ₹5 crore in a Mumbai-based property.

Fight for Dalit vote heats up in U.P. as BJP steps up outreach and SP, Cong. rake up case of atrocities

NEWS ANALYSIS Anil Kumar GHAZIABAD

The Bharatiya Janata Party's latest bid to reach out to Dalits in Uttar Pradesh came at a time when the State is simmering with Dalit anger over the killing of a Jatav teenager in police firing in Mirak area of Kanpur district. On Thursday, as the State reeled under the impact of the killing of one of the victims of the Hamirpur gang rape case allegedly ending his life, BJP national president J.P. Nadda addressed the party's Dalit Mahasammelan in Agra, the Dalit capital of Uttar Pradesh.

Dalit outreach initiatives in the Union and State Cabinets are on the stage. While Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath held similar meetings across the State in October 2023, the latest deliberation in Uttar Pradesh assumed a greater significance coming just ahead of the Lok Sabha election.

In 2019, the BJP won 15 of the 17 reserved seats in the State, which sends 90 members to the Lok Sabha. The BJP-led NDA government in the Babujan Samaj Party (BSP). However, recent events suggest that the figure of 21.1% of the Dalit share of the total vote is very much on the rise. The scheduled caste vote is broadly divided into two categories: Scheduled Caste (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). While the BJP is sure of winning the votes below the 10% mark, it is keen on reducing the BSP's vote share to single digits. The party secured around 19% of votes in 2019 and around 17% in 2022 in the State poll. BJP sources say it won't be easy, especially after the regional parties are saying the voting pattern of Dalits in the last year was unaffected after the Hathras episode of 2020, but the party has a lot more to do to handle. With the possibility of Mayawati re-



Narendra Modi being welcomed by Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma after he arrived in the State on Friday. PTI

PM Modi reaches Assam amid rising anti-CAA sentiments

The Hindu Bureau GUWAHATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached Assam's Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve on Friday evening amid rising sentiments against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

He will be the third Prime Minister after Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajiv Gandhi to visit the park. Mr. Modi arrived by a special aircraft at Salnubari

near Tezpur and took a chopper to Panbari in Goalpara district from where he undertook a 16 km roadshow to the Assam police guest house in Kaziranga's Kohora area.

Anti-CAA protest

The Prime Minister's visit was preceded by widespread anti-CAA protests by members of the All Assam Students' Union and the United Opposition Forum Assam (OUFA), a 16-party bloc headed by the Congress. The anti-CAA mood has been brewing across large parts of Assam since Home Minister Amit Shah said the fulfilment of the piece of legislation would be framed soon.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and BJP President J.P. Nadda at the Dalit Mahasammelan in Agra. ANI

revealing her cards only after the notification of the Lok Sabha poll and the Azad Saaz Party (ASP) making its presence felt in some pockets of western U.P., the BJP is eager to plug the holes in its Dalit-MBC (most backward classes) outreach.

It started with the recent Cabinet expansion in which the party's four new Ministers who took oath, two belong to the most backward category and one was a Jatav, the primary vote bank of the BSP. The move was aimed at taking the wind out of the Samajwadi Party's PDA - pichhede (backward classes or OBCs), Dalits and oppressed Jyot (minorities) - plank.

The other two sought to quell the growing apprehension over privatisation of government jobs and demand for caste census, which is finding traction on the ground after the PDA episode after the party in the State arrived at a seat-sharing formula with the Congress, the original go-to party for Dalits before the regional parties gained ground in the State.

At the same time, Nadda had to underscore that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was conferred the highest civilian honour when the BJP was supported by the National Front government. He also underlined how the dilution of Article 30 has paved the way for SC/ST reservation in the State. He also underlined how the dilution of Article 30 has paved the way for SC/ST reservation in the State. He also underlined how the dilution of Article 30 has paved the way for SC/ST reservation in the State. He also underlined how the dilution of Article 30 has paved the way for SC/ST reservation in the State.

Meghalaya's Byrnihat most polluted 'city' in India

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

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The study, based on the monthly average of (particulate matter) PM2.5, has put the spotlight on hazardous air pollution levels in urban centres across the States in the northeast, otherwise considered the greenest part of the country.

According to the CREA report, Byrnihat recorded a monthly average PM2.5 concentration of 183 µg/m³, which was around 60 µg/m³ higher than in Bihar's Araria, the second-



Rising pollution: Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air released data on polluted cities in India. FILE PHOTO

most polluted city in the country.

Hapur in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan's Hanumanagarh were the third and the fourth most polluted cities.

The PM2.5 levels in Byrnihat were also almost 1.8 times the PM2.5 concentration recorded for Delhi for the same period, which was the 14th most polluted city in India for February

2024.

The other urban centres in the northeast which made it to the list of 30 most polluted cities in India in February were Nalbari (5th), Agartala (12th), Guwahati (19th), and Naggaon (28th), highlighting the worsening pollution levels across the region.

Out of 11 cities with continuous ambient air quality

monitoring stations in the northeastern States, six recorded PM2.5 levels beyond the prescribed daily National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) by the Central Pollution Control Board.

Cleanest cities

Sivasagar, Silchar, Aizawl, and Imphal recorded monthly average PM2.5 concentrations below the NAAQS and were the cleanest cities in the region.

Sivasagar was the second cleanest city in India, followed by Silchar from the area at the 23rd spot.

The cleanest was Satna in Madhya Pradesh and the third cleanest was Vijayapura in Karnataka.

However, none of the cities complied with the WHO-safe guideline concentrations for PM2.5, the study said.

"The data emphasise the pressing need for significantly bolstering air quality monitoring in the northeastern States to track air pollution levels effectively," Sunil Dahiya, a South Asia analyst at CREA, said.

"These States, once renowned for their pristine environment, are now witnessing a concerning shift due to unregulated industrial operations, inadequate public transportation infrastructure, rampant construction lacking efficient pollution control measures, and other contributing factors," he said.

On the brighter side, there was a significant improvement in air quality in February with 36 cities falling into the 'good' category. This was 14 more than the 22 'good' urban centres in January.

Table 1. Recommended 2021 AQG levels compared to 2005 air quality guidelines

Pollutant	Averaging time	2005 AQGs	2021 AQG level
PM _{2.5} , µg/m ³	Annual	10	5
	24-hour ^a	25	15
PM ₁₀ , µg/m ³	Annual	20	15
	24-hour ^a	50	45
O ₃ , µg/m ³	Peak season ^b	–	60
	8-hour ^a	100	100
NO ₂ , µg/m ³	Annual	40	10
	24-hour ^a	–	25
SO ₂ , µg/m ³	24-hour ^a	20	40
CO, mg/m ³	24-hour ^a	–	4

REVISED AFTER 16 YEARS

WHO | Then & Now

Pollutant*	Average	2005*	2021*
PM2.5	Annual mean	10	5
	24-hour mean	25	15
PM10	Annual mean	20	15
	24-hour mean	50	45
O ₃	Peak season	NS**	60
	8-hour mean	100	100
NO ₂	Annual mean	40	10
	24-hour mean	NS**	25
SO ₂	24-hour mean	20	40
CO	24-hour mean	NS**	4

India's National
Ambient
Air Quality
Standards
(NAAQS)

Average

- Annual mean
- 24-hour mean

PM2.5

40 | 60

PM10

60 | 100

NO₂

40 | 80

SO₂

50 | 80

Average

(8 hour mean)

O₃ | 100; CO | 2

* micrograms per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$); **NS - Not Set; PM2.5 & PM10 - Particulate Matters; O₃ - Ozone; NO₂ - Nitrogen Dioxide; SO₂ - Sulfur Dioxide; CO - Carbon Monoxide



A private tanker supplying water in Bengaluru. The district administration has raised the prices for tank water. THE HINDU

Misuse of potable water to attract fine of ₹5,000 in Bengaluru

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In response to the water scarcity in Bengaluru and surrounding districts, the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewage Board (BWSSB) has issued an order prohibiting the use of potable water for non-essential purposes, including washing vehicles, gardening, and for entertainment purposes like water fountains. Additionally, malls and theatres have been instructed to limit water usage.

The BWSSB has introduced fines for violators, starting at ₹5,000 and escalating to ₹500 per day for subsequent violations. Furthermore, the board has established a dedicated call centre for citizens to report any misuse of water.

BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasath Manohar urged citizens to report violations,

and assured swift action by the board.

The order has raised several questions, including how the ban on misuse of potable water will be enforced. Sources in the BWSSB said while citizens are encouraged to report violations in their areas, assistant engineers will tour their jurisdictions to look for and book offenders.

The order has sparked some concern, especially among residents of independent houses that have no access to treated water. While large apartments have been mandated to install in-situ sewage treatment plants and have access to recycled water, there is no such facility in any independent house in Bengaluru.

The order comes a day after the Bengaluru Urban BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasath Manohar urged citizens to report violations,

Centre warns against offers of jobs with Russian Army

India is in talks with Moscow to bring back citizens duped into fighting in the Russia-Ukraine war; action being taken by the CBI against agents and visa consultancy firms who conned people

Devesh K. Pandey,
Kalol Bhattacharjee,
NEW DELHI

Offers for support jobs with the Russian Army made by unverified agents are "fraught with danger and risk to life", the External Affairs Ministry said on Friday, announcing that stern action has been initiated by the Central Bureau of Investigation against the agencies that conned Indian nationals into fighting for the Russian forces in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

"We have strongly taken up the matter with the Russian government for early discharge of such Indian nationals (who were duped by agents). Strong action has been initiated against agents and unscrupulous elements who recruited them on pretexts and false promises. The CBI yesterday busted a major human trafficking network by conducting searches in several cities and collecting incriminating evidence," said Rajnath Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs.

The CBI on Thursday searched 13 locations in Delhi, Thiruvananthapuram, Mumbai, Ambala,



Hemil Manguliyev, centre, from Gujarat was recruited by an agent as a helper but died fighting for Russia on the war front. THE HINDU

Chandigarh, Madurai, and Chennai.

The agency had come across 35 instances of people recruited by agents and lured by Indian nationals through social media channels like YouTube, etc. and also through their local contacts/agents for highly-paid jobs in Russia. The agency also identified Indian nationals were trained in combat roles and deployed at front bases in the Russia-Ukraine war zone against their wishes, thus, putting their lives in grave danger. It has been ascertained that some of the victims also got grievously injured in the war zone," the CBI said.

Upon reaching Russia, their passports were taken away by the agents there. "They were being trained in combat roles and provided with the Russian Army uniform and badges," the agency alleged.

Names in FIR Among those named in the First Information Report (FIR) are 24x7 RAS Overseas Foundation (Delhi) and its director Suyash Mukut; O.S.D Bros Travels & Visa Services (Mumbai) and its director Rakesh Pandey; Adventure Visa Services (Ambala, Chandigarh, Punjab) and its director Manjeet Singh; Baba Vlogs Overseas (Mumbai) and its director Rajesh Kumar; and its director Manjeet Singh; Baba Vlogs Overseas (Mumbai) and its director Rajesh Kumar; and its director Manjeet Singh.

The others include Sri-deviya (Madurai), Ramesh Kumar Palanisamy and Sathish Kumar (based in Russia) from Tamil Nadu; Tommy and Job from Thiruvananthapuram; Adventure Visa Services (Ambala) and Tariq Kamal Sharma (Chennai); and Anandhina, a resident of Russia; Mohamed Sufyan; Dawood Ahmad Darazgar and his wife Pooska from Maharashtra; and Moinuddin Chhippa (Rajasthan), who is currently in Russia.

No arrests have been made so far. "These traffickers have been operating as an organised network and were luring Indian nationals through social media channels like YouTube, etc. and also through their local contacts/agents for highly-paid jobs in Russia. The agency also identified Indian nationals were trained in combat roles and deployed at front bases in the Russia-Ukraine war zone against their wishes, thus, putting their lives in grave danger. It has been ascertained that some of the victims also got grievously injured in the war zone," the CBI said.

Delhi sub-inspector kicks people offering namaz, suspended

Sudha Murty
NEW DELHI

A Delhi policeman, who was seen kicking people offering Friday namaz on a road in north Delhi's Indraprastha area, has been suspended with immediate effect.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Manoj Kumar Meena said. An inquiry into the incident has also been initiated.

The suspension of sub-inspector Manoj Kumar Tomar followed a protest by local residents, condemnation by political leaders, and widespread outrage on social media, with many people demanding action against Mr. Tomar after the video of the incident went viral.

"Stepped on prayer mat" The incident took place around 2 p.m., during Friday prayers near the Indraprastha metro station at Makhi Masjid. A number of local residents used their mobile phones to shoot

footage of the policeman kicking and shoving people who had gathered on a section of the road to offer namaz. In the video, he can be seen stepping on a prayer mat used by the devotees, and shouting at the men to leave the area.

Joint Commissioner of Police (Central Range) Parag Mehta, during a press conference, said that the incident was "unacceptable" and that the police will take strict action against anyone who violates the law. He also mentioned that the police will be providing more security to the area to ensure the smooth conduct of Friday prayers.

Amid the tension, protesters blocked the roads, preventing vehicular movement. The incident took place just a few days ahead of the month of Ramadan.

In addition to *INS Jatayu*, new infrastructure and facilities were inaugurated at Karwar naval base in Karnataka by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday. They include two major piers and seven

residential towers comprising 320 houses for officers and civilian defence personnel as well as 149 single officers' accommodation.

"New radar facilities at Minicoy will augment surveillance and coastal batteries of extended range missiles with a range of around 450 km will give huge flexibility in responding to threats," officials in the know said.

"As we commission *INS Jatayu*, it is crucial to recognise the pressing need for heightened surveillance amid the prevailing geopolitical developments in the Arabian Sea," he said.

"*Jatayu* will be the 'watch-keeper' for Bharat at the gateway of Arabian Sea," said Vice-Admiral Shekhar Sinha, former Western Naval Commander, noting its proximity to the busy Nine Degree

Backed by BrahMos, Navy base on Minicoy Island to act as 'gatekeeper' in Arabian Sea

Dinakar Peri
MINICOY/KOCH

Radars, jetties, airfield and BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles — the Indian Navy's newest base being established on Minicoy Island in Lakshadweep, *INS Jatayu*, will have all these and many more.

The upgrade is part of a long-term capability development plan which officials and experts say will shore up India's security footprint on the islands located close to critical sea lanes of communication (SLOC).

This is especially significant as Chinese naval forays, which includes "research vessels", has seen massive expansion in the Indian Ocean region. It is also just a few hundred miles from the Maldives.

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Navy Chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar and Lakshadweep Administrator Praful Khodha Patel at the commissioning of *INS Jatayu*. PTI

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Aerial view of Minicoy Island, showing the new naval base and surrounding waters.

Channel, the approximately 200-crore contract between Minicoy and Kalpeni/Subeli Par Islands of Lakshadweep is situated at the tip of India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), it also serves as a deterrent against any future adversarial presence, making *Jatayu* a "formidable static aircraft carrier".

"Unleashing geopolitical canvas in the Indian Ocean and experts say will shore up India's security footprint on the islands located close to critical sea lanes of communication (SLOC).

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Indian diplomat met 'Afghan authorities' in Kabul, says govt.

Kalol Bhattacharjee,
NEW DELHI

A senior Indian diplomat has met with "Afghan authorities" in Kabul, the External Affairs Ministry confirmed on Friday.

The development came months after the Embassy of Afghanistan here, which was earlier run by officials with affiliation to the pro-Taliban government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, was shut down and the consular responsibilities were taken over by Afghan officials who are considered to be pro-Taliban.

"An Indian delegation led by Joint Secretary (PA), Ministry of External Affairs is on a visit to Afghanistan... During the visit, the delegation held meetings with members of the Afghan authorities. The delegation held discussions on India's humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan and also discussed the use of Chabahar port by Afghanistan," said a Ministry spokesman.

J.P. Singh, the official in-charge of Pakistan, India and Iran — PAI-related issues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in-charge, Amir Khan Muttaqi on Thursday. Mr. Singh had visited Kabul in 2022 as India had be-

Taliban Foreign Affairs in-charge Amir Khan Muttaqi, FILE PHOTO

Taliban Foreign Affairs in-charge Amir Khan Muttaqi, FILE PHOTO

gun making the first moves to reconnect with Afghanistan, after the violent overthrow of the Ashraf Ghani government in 2021. That visit was followed by renewed delivery of humanitarian assistance to the country.

On Thursday, Taliban's Foreign Secretary and spokesperson Abdul Qabar Balchi was the first to announce that Mr. Singh had met with "Foreign Minister".

"Mr. Muttaqi expressed gratitude for the recent Indian humanitarian and medical assistance to Afghanistan, stressing the resumption of projects including their diplomatic presence in Afghanistan and the provision of consular services to Afghans, particularly Afghan students and patients," Mr. Balchi said in a social media post.

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SC sends mixed signals as ED-States tussle becomes frequent

NEWS ANALYSIS
Kishanadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The past few months have seen the rise of Opposition parties fight tooth and nail the Directorate of Enforcement (DE) in the Supreme Court.

The frequency of cases has raised questions, both inside and outside the courtroom, as to whether the Central agency and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) are being used by the Union government to target political opponents and State officials ahead of the Lok Sabha election.

meanwhile, has sent mixed signals from multiple benches while dealing with these cases. While one Bench has called for a "neutral mechanism" to sift through cases to check if hidden political vendettas and one-upmanship exist at play between the Centre and States, another Bench led by Justice Bela Trivedi criticised the investigating agency, making it clear that States had no right to comply with the summons of the ED.

The Bench led by Justice Trivedi, while directing four District Collectors in Karnataka to issue the ED summons in the sand mining case, found the State's intervention to protect the officials both

"strange and unusual". Justice Trivedi even remarked that the Tamil Nadu government was making "an unnecessary issue out of nothing".

This came when the Madras High Court had recorded a *prima facie* finding that the agency had no jurisdiction to summon the officials. The High Court slammed up ED's summons as "just an attempt to investigate the possibility of identifying any proceeds of crime as a result of any investigation".

The Bench led by Justice Trivedi, while directing four District Collectors in Karnataka to issue the ED summons in the sand mining case, found the State's intervention to protect the officials both

parties are at the Centre and States, and keep intact the ability of punishing the guilty while preventing victimisation of the innocent.

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The States claim that the actions of the ED, often in pre-emptive cases, found the inter-State ramifications, especially when different

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Sudha Murty

Sudha Murty nominated to Rajya Sabha

The Hindu Bureau

BENGALURU

Philanthropist and author in Kannada and English Sudha Murty was nominated to the Rajya Sabha on Friday by President Droupadi Murmu.

Prime Minister Narendra in his post on X lauded the 73-year-old's contribution in diverse fields, saying that her presence in the Upper House was a "powerful testament to Nari Shakti (women power)".

Speaking to *The Hindu* over phone from Thailand where she is on a lecture tour, Ms. Murty said the nomination had come as a surprise and that she was particularly thrilled as it had come on the International Women's Day. "The nomination has come as a pleasant surprise, and I am doubly thrilled to be presented this honour on Women's Day," she said..

Ms. Murty, wife of Infosys co-founder N.R. Narayana Murthy, has authored several books.

She chaired the Infosys Foundation for over two decades, and through the foundation carried out several philanthropic activities. She is the recipient of the Padma Shri in 2006 and Padma Bhushan in 2023.

Ms. Murty was born in Shiggaon, in Karnataka, in 1950. A graduate in Computer Science engineering from the Indian Institute of Science, she was the first woman engineer at Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company.

Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha

Incumbent

Assumed office

8 March 2024

Nominated by [Draupadi Murmu](#)

Constituency [Nominated](#) (Social work & Education)

Personal details

Born [Sudha Kulkarni](#)
19 August 1950 (age 73)
[Shiggavi, Bombay State](#)
(present-day [Karnataka](#)), India

Spouse [N. R. Narayana Murty](#)

Children [Akshata Murty](#) and [Rohan Murty](#)

Relatives [Rishi Sunak](#) (son-in-law)

Alma mater

- [KLE Technological University](#),
- [Indian Institute of Science](#),
- [Cornell University](#)

Occupation Member of Parliament & Chairperson of [Infosys Foundation](#)
Children's writer

Awards [Padma Shri](#) (2006)
[Daana Chintamani Attimabbe Award](#) (2010)
[Padma Bhushan](#) (2023)

English

- *Wise and Otherwise (2002)*
- *Mahashweta (2002)*
- *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read and Other Stories (2004)*
- *The Old Man And His God (2006)*
- *Gently Falls The Bakula (2008)*
- *The Bird with Golden Wings (2009)*
- *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk (2012)*
- *Grandma's Bag of Stories (2012)*
- *House of Cards (2013)*
- *Dollar Bahu (2013)*
- *The Magic Drum and Other Favorite Stories (2013)*
- *The Mother I Never Knew (2014)*
- *Something Happened on the Way To Heavens (2014)*
- *The Magic of the Lost Temple (2015)*
- *The Serpent's Revenge (2016)*
- *Three Thousand Stitches (2017)*
- *The Man from the Egg (2017)*
- *Here, There, Everywhere (2018)*
- *The Upside Down King (2018)*
- *How The Sea Became Salty (2019)*
- *The Daughter From A Wishing Tree (2019)*
- *How The Onion got its layers (2020)*
- *Grandparents Bag of Stories (2020)*
- *The Gopi Diaries: Coming Home (2020)*
- *The Gopi Diaries: Finding Love (2021)*
- *The Sage With Two Horns (2021)*
- *The Gopi Diaries: Growing Up (2022)*
- *The magic of the lost story*

Backed by BrahMos, Navy base on Minicoy Island to act as 'gatekeeper' in Arabian Sea

Dinakar Peri
MINICOY/KOCHI

Radars, jetties, airfield and BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles – the Indian Navy's newest base being established on Minicoy Island in Lakshadweep, *INS Jatayu*, will have all these and many more.

The upgrade is part of a long-term capability development plan which officials and experts say will shore up India's security footprint on the islands located very close to critical Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC).

This is especially significant as Chinese naval footprint, which includes 'research vessels', has seen massive expansion in the Indian Ocean. Minicoy is also just a few hundred miles from the Maldives.

In addition to *INS Jatayu*, new infrastructure and facilities were inaugurated at Karwar naval base in Karnataka by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday. These include two major piers and seven



Navy Chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar and Lakshadweep Administrator Praful Khoda Patel at the commissioning of *INS Jatayu*. PTI

residential towers comprising 320 houses for officers and civilian defence personnel as well as 149 single officers' accommodation.

"New radar facilities at Minicoy will augment surveillance and coastal batteries of extended range BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles with a range of around 450 km will give huge flexibility in responding to threats," officials in the know said.

"As we commission [*INS*] *Jatayu*, it is crucial to recognise the pressing

need for heightened surveillance amidst the prevailing geopolitical developments," Navy Chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar said. "*INS Baaz* to the east in Andamans and now, *INS Jatayu* in the west at Minicoy, will serve as the eyes and ears of the Navy," he stated.

"*Jatayu* will be the 'watch-keeper' for Bharat at the gateway of Arabian Sea," said Vice-Admiral Shekhar Sinha, former Western Naval Commander, noting its proximity to the busy Nine Degree

Channel, the approximately 200-km wide area between Minicoy and Kalpeni/Suheli Par islands of Lakshadweep. Situated at the tip of India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), it also serves as a deterrent against any future adversarial presence, making *Jatayu* a "formidable static aircraft carrier".

"Unfolding geopolitical canvas in the Indian Ocean calls for fortification of Minicoy Island, a valuable asset. Apart from becoming a tourist paradise, Minicoy has potential of becoming a formidable gatekeeper of Arabian Sea," he told *The Hindu*.

There is already an ongoing effort for infrastructure augmentation by the Central government in coordination with Island Development Authority and NITI Aayog.

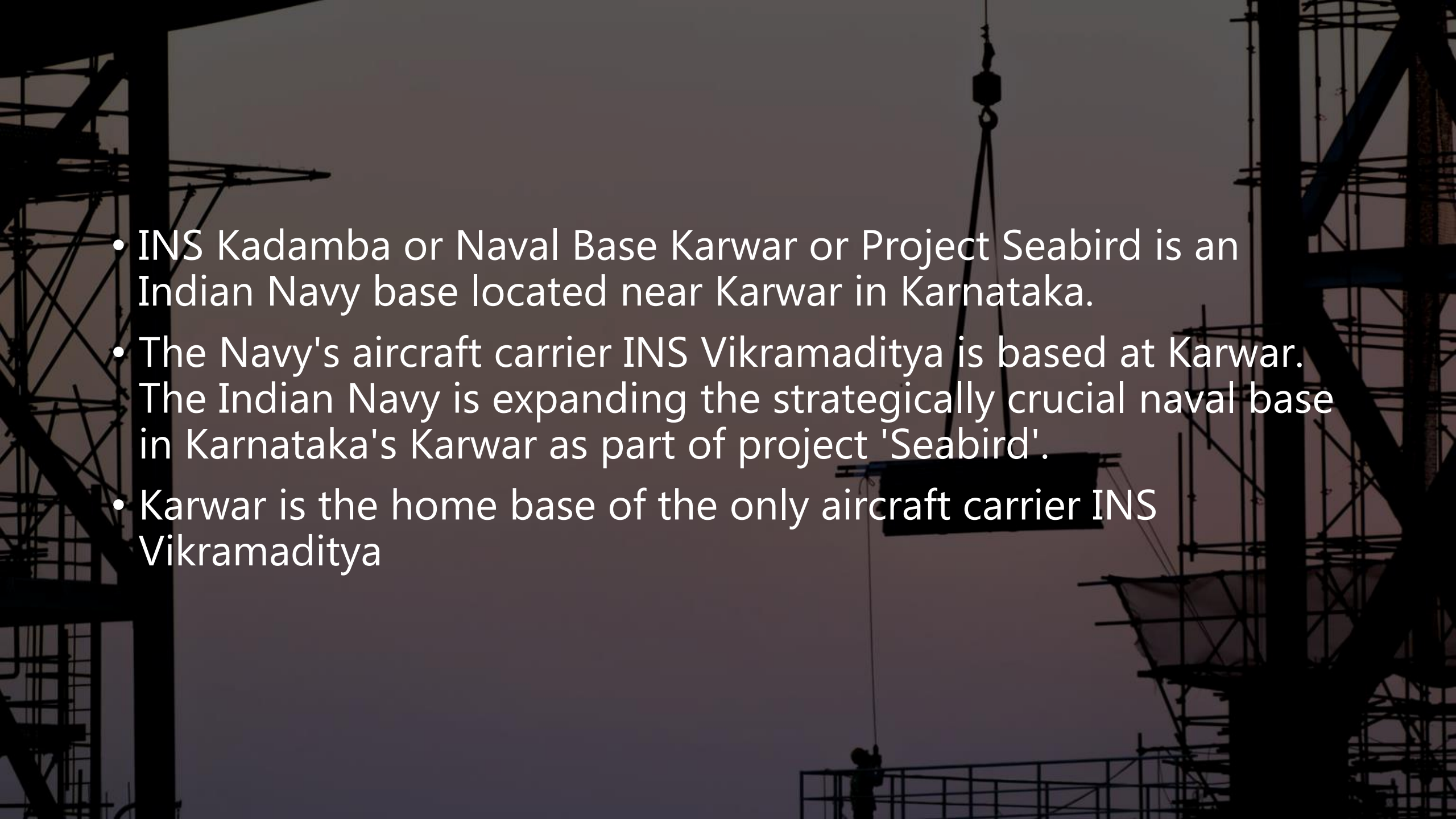
For instance, the NITI Aayog has joined hands with the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Airports Authority of India for expansion of Agatti Island airfield while Larsen & Tou-

bro has been given a ₹4,500-crore contract to expand the runway to 2,800 meters. For Minicoy, there is plan for the development of dual-use airfield which will have a longer runway making it capable of handling the Navy's P-8I long-range maritime patrol aircraft.

Karwar naval base

The Phase I construction of Karwar base under Project Seabird, which was completed in 2011, was designed to accommodate 10 ships. The Cabinet Committee on Security has since granted approval for Phase IIA of Project Seabird which will see the base expanded for berthing of 32 ships and submarines, along with 23 yardcraft and include piers, providing a berthing space of more than 6 km.

"The centrepiece of Phase IIA works is an iconic Covered Dry Berth, standing at a height of 75 metres, taller than the Qutub Minar in Delhi," according to the Navy.

- 
- INS Kadamba or Naval Base Karwar or Project Seabird is an Indian Navy base located near Karwar in Karnataka.
 - The Navy's aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya is based at Karwar. The Indian Navy is expanding the strategically crucial naval base in Karnataka's Karwar as part of project 'Seabird'.
 - Karwar is the home base of the only aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya

'India, four-nation EFTA bloc likely to ink FTA on March 10'

Amiti Sen

NEW DELHI

India and the four-nation European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which includes Switzerland, Finland, Norway and Liechtenstein, is likely to sign a long-negotiated free trade agreement on March 10, aimed at increasing trade and investment flows, job creation and economic growth, according to multiple sources.

The proposed India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) is expected to lead

Trade Ministers from some EFTA nations are also likely to be present for the signing of the TEPA

to investments worth \$100 billion from the four-country bloc into India over the next 15 years generating an estimated one million jobs, officials said. "The India-EFTA TEPA is expected to be signed on Sunday as government officials and industry representatives from all EFTA countries and India have been in-

formed accordingly," an industry official said.

Trade Ministers from some of the EFTA countries are also likely to be present for the signing of the TEPA, a representative of an EFTA country told *The Hindu businessline*.

This is the first FTA where India has got a commitment on investment and employment from partner nations, an official had said. The pact is also likely to bring down the huge trade deficit India has with the bloc, officials said.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)





TRADE DEALS: A STATUS CHECK

PACTS BEING PUSHED BEFORE THE POLLS

India-EFTA deal:

To be announced Sunday

India-Oman deal:

Legal scrubbing underway

India-UK: Reviewed by PMO



PACTS CONCLUDED

2022: India-UAE FTA

2022: India-Australia interim FTA

FTAs EXPECTED AFTER ELECTIONS

A comprehensive
India-Australia deal

India-EU deal: 7th round of talks ended last month



Modi sarkar ki Guarantee

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Tap water connections to 14 crore houses



Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat

BUSINESS AS USUAL
By UNNY



Ahead of Lok Sabha elections, ₹100 cut in LPG cylinder price

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Friday announced a cut of ₹100 per cylinder in cooking gas prices on the occasion of International Women's Day. The price reduction, which comes days before the likely announcement of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, is set to benefit nearly 33 crore households that use liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) as cooking fuel.

For over 10 crore poor households covered under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), the price would be in addition to the existing subsidy of ₹300 per cylinder.

Following the announcement, public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs) — Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation — are set to reduce LPG cylinder prices from Friday midnight. With this price reduction, the standard 14.2-kg domestic LPG cylinder would cost ₹803 in Delhi, ₹802.50 in Mumbai, ₹829 in Kolkata, and ₹818.50 in Chennai. The effective LPG cylinder price for PMUY consumers including the subsidy benefit would be ₹503 in Delhi, ₹502.50 in Mumbai, ₹529 in Kolkata, and ₹518.50 in Chennai.

The announcement came a day after the Union Cabinet approved the continuation of the PMUY's subsidy for the financial year 2024-25 (FY25) as well.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

PM AT CREATORS' AWARDS: CAN SEE TIME AHEAD OF TIME

CONG'S FIRST LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR LOK SABHA POLLS OUT

INDIA POISED TO SIGN TRADE AGREEMENT WITH EFTA

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

NITIN SHARMA
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 8

WHEN SUNNY SHARMA blew the whistle at London's Selhurst Park Stadium on Saturday, he will become the first person of South Asian origin to referee a match in the English Premier League. And in doing so, the 39-year-old will be carrying forward the family legacy.

Sunny's appointment to officiate the match between Crystal Palace and Luton Town was announced Tuesday by the Professional Game Match Officials Limited (PGMOL), which appoints referees for Premier League games.

CRACKDOWN IN 7 CITIES, INCLUDING MUMBAI, DELHI

CBI says travel agents used student visas to push Indians into Russia war

Have strongly taken up matter with Russian govt for early discharge: MEA

MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

ADMISSIONS TO relatively unknown private universities, fee discounts, visa extensions — these are some of the ways travel agents from across the country duped dozens of men into going to Russia and eventually being forced into the country's war with Ukraine, the Central Bureau of Investigation has found.

The agency made these revelations a day after conducting searches at around 15 places in seven cities — Delhi, Mumbai, Amnabala, Chandigarh, Madurai, Thiruvananthapuram and Chennai — and ascertaining that some agents at these locations, as well as those currently based in Russia, had allegedly duped Indian youths, primarily students.

The development comes against the backdrop of government residency. The government in these times need to be helping the benefit. It will give you permanent residency. Faisal Abdul Mutalib Khan is heard saying while walking on the streets of Saint Petersburg, in a video uploaded on YouTube in September 2023.

It is through this global talk that Khan is said to have lured or duped a large number of Indians, including 30-year-old Telangana resident Mohabummed Afshan, into working for the Russian Army in its ongoing war with Ukraine.

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Faisal Khan aka Baba Vlogs, who led several Indians to Russian frontlines

ZEEESHAN SHAIKH
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

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INDERLOK, NORTH DELHI

Delhi Police officer kicks men offering namaz, suspended

ARNABJIT SUR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

A DELHI Police Sub-Inspector, who was caught on camera kicking men offering namaz outside a mosque on a road in Delhi's Inderlok Friday afternoon, was suspended with immediate effect, police said.

The officer was identified as Sub-Inspector Manoj Kumar Tomar (35), in-charge of the Inderlok police post in north Delhi. The incident triggered tension and protests in the area. A purported video clip of the incident showed Tomar kicking and pushing some men offering namaz. In an apparent effort to remove them from the area. The

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BACK AT RAMESHWARAM CAFE

Guests attend the reopening ceremony of Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru on Friday, a week after a blast left 9 people injured. The cafe will open to public 6 am Saturday.

THE REOPENING of the cafe, which was destroyed in a blast on March 2, was held on Friday. The cafe, which was destroyed in a blast on March 2, was held on Friday. The cafe, which was destroyed in a blast on March 2, was held on Friday.

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UPI GOES LIVE IN NEPAL, FOLLOWING TIE-UP WITH NIPL

THE NPCI ON Friday announced that UPI is now live in Nepal. UPI users can scan QR codes to make payments to Nepalese merchants, an official statement said. This follows a tie-up between the National Payments Corporation of India International Payments (NIPL) and Nepal's Fonepay Payment Service in September last year.

UPI GOES GLOBAL

UPI Adoption and Use Case

UK
To enhance cross-border payments using UPI IDs

FRANCE
To allow UPI payments for students, tourists

NEPAL
P2P, P2M, and cross-border payments made operational

UAE
Cross-border UPI payments enabled

OMAN
To allow digital remittances using RuPay cards and UPI

BHUTAN
BHIM UPI QR-based payments enabled

MALAYSIA
To facilitate remittance to beneficiary banks in India via UPI

SINGAPORE
PayNow integrated with UPI for cross-border transactions

OTHER ASIAN COUNTRIES

UPI QR payments for countries like Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan

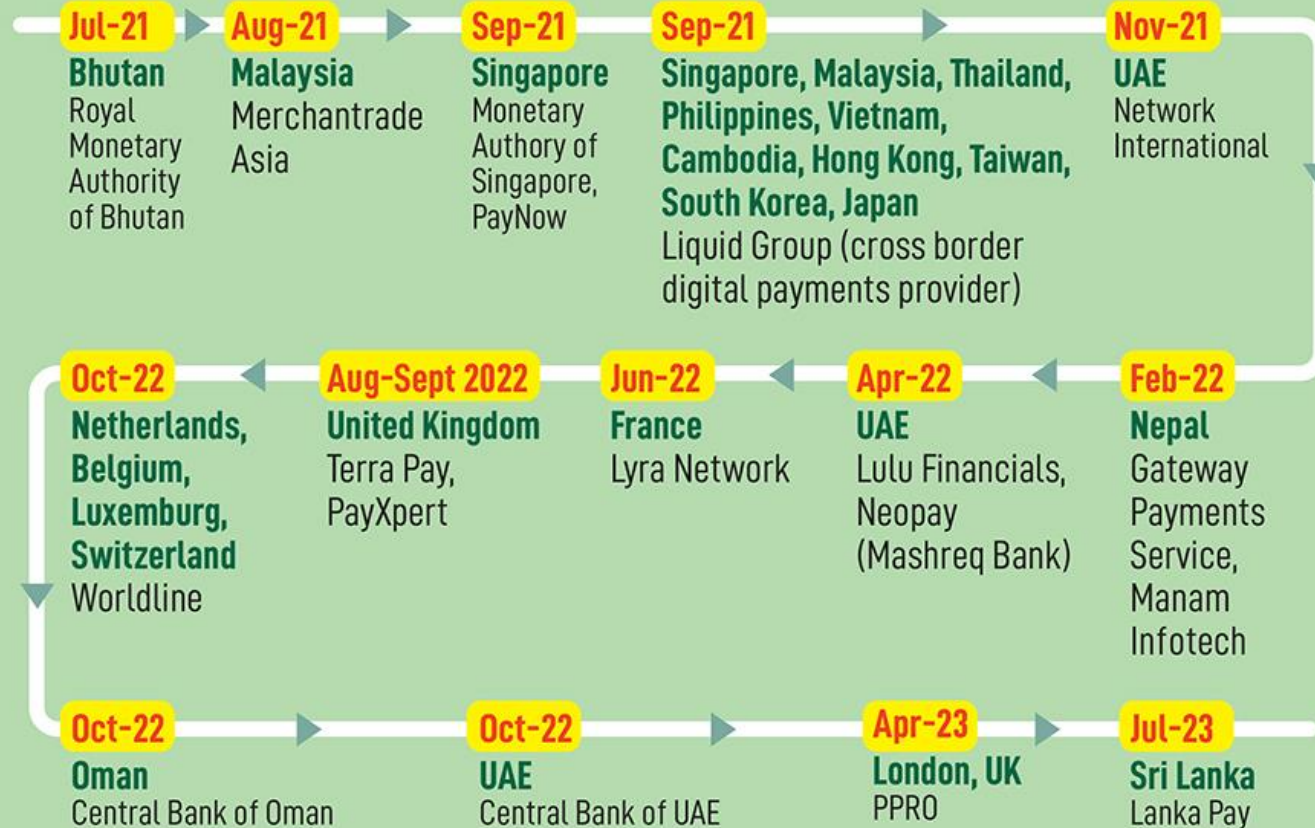
OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Indian payment channels to be enabled in Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Switzerland





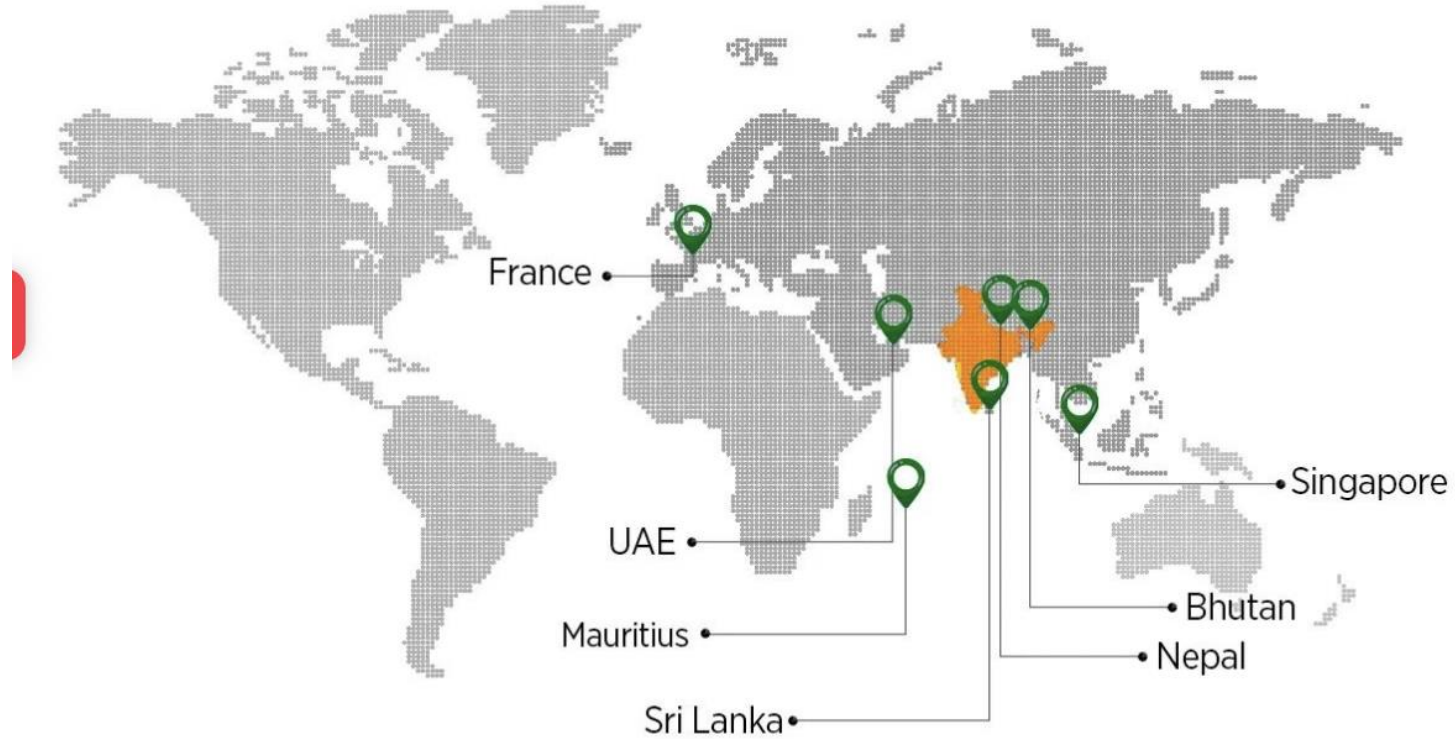
UPI goes global: Adoption in different countries



UPI Goes Global

UNIFIED PAYMENTS INTERFACE

UPI Services Now Reach Sri Lanka and Mauritius



THE BIG UPI NUMBERS

F.

Launched in 2016

9.41 billion
transactions
in May 2023

Rs 14.3 trillion
(in terms of value)
in May 2023

260 million
users

Merchant payments
likely to reach
\$1 trillion
by FY26

Available in more
than 10 countries



Kick-off to history: Sunny Singh first Indian-origin referee in EPL

NITIN SHARMA

Chandigarh, March 8

WHEN SUNNY SINGH Gill blows the whistle at London's Selhurst Park Stadium on Saturday, he will become the first person of South Asian origin to referee a match in the English Premier League (EPL). And in doing so, he will be carrying forward the family legacy.

Sunny's appointment to officiate the match between Crystal Palace and Luton Town was announced Tuesday by the Professional Game Match Officials Limited (PGMOL), which appoints referees for Premier League games.

While the game itself might not be a marquee clash for a majority of football followers beyond those of the two clubs, for the Gills, from Iver near London, it'll be a moment for generations.



(From left) Sunny Singh Gill with father Jarnail Singh Gill and brother Bhupinder Singh Gill.

PROFESSIONAL GAME MATCH OFFICIALS LIMITED

der. is also a referee. The siblings

When he was 15, Sunny did

stick with me because I knew it

FIR and General Diary



- The Supreme Court(SC) of India in the case Shailesh Kumar v. State of UP (now State of Uttarakhand) 2024 has clarified the legal position regarding the registration of First Information Reports (FIRs) and General Diary entries by the police.
- The apex court has held that information disclosing the commission of a cognisable offence needs to be recorded as an FIR in the designated FIR book, rather than being documented in the General Diary maintained by the Police under the Police Act, 1861.
- The court emphasised that a General Diary entry cannot precede the registration of an FIR unless a preliminary inquiry is deemed necessary.

Aspect	General Diary Entry	FIR
Purpose	Record complaints and incidents for administrative purposes or future reference	Register a cognisable offence for investigation
Nature of Offense	Both cognisable and non-cognisable	Only for cognizable offences
Documentation	Internal police record	For public record
Distribution	Copies are not provided to the complainant or Judicial Magistrate; sent to superior officers	Copies provided to the complainant, superior officers and Judicial Magistrate
Judicial Oversight	Magistrate may inspect General Diary upon request	Magistrate receives copies of FIR for oversight
Complainant's Signature Required	Not required	Required

• **With reference to India, consider the following statements: (2021)**

1. Judicial custody means an accused is in the custody of the concerned magistrate and such an accused is locked up in a police station, not in jail.

2. During judicial custody, the police officer in charge of the case is not allowed to interrogate the suspect without the approval of the court.

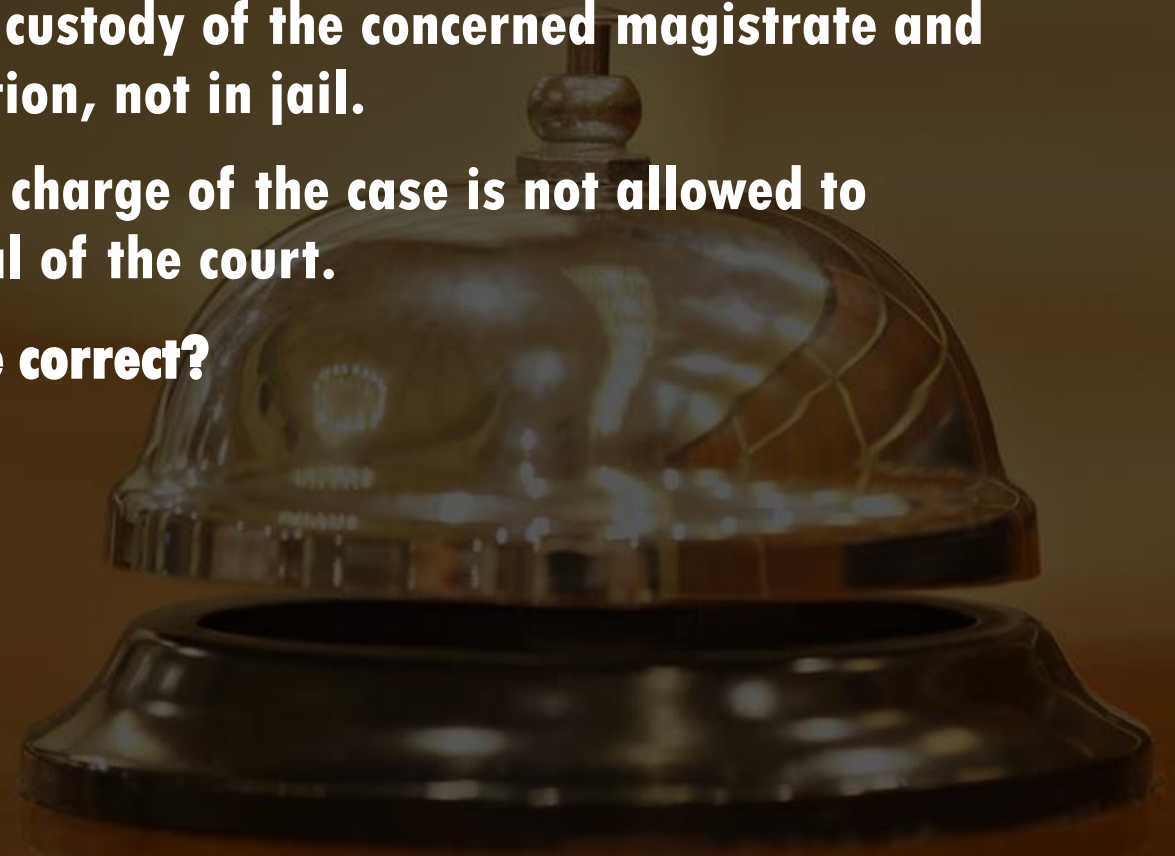
• **Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

• **(a) 1 only**

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2






Lineman Diwas

The Central Electricity Authority (CEA), Ministry of Power, pays tribute to the nation's power sector frontline workers on the fourth edition of Lineman Diwas (4th March 2024) in New Delhi.

Lineman Diwas celebrates the dedication and service of linemen and ground maintenance staff who ensure uninterrupted electricity distribution nationwide.

- 
- **The theme for Lineman Diwas 'Seva, Suraksha, Swabhiman' underscores the linemen's commitment, sacrifice, and contribution to society.**
 - **The event facilitated the exchange of safety best practices, showcasing safety equipment and tools, and screening videos to reinforce workplace safety protocols.**

Transforming the Power Sector in India



From power deficit to power surplus by addition of over **175 GW** of generation capacity in the past 9 years

4th globally in Renewable Energy Installed Capacity, with **43%** of its total installed capacity from renewables



2.86 crore houses connected with electricity under SAUBHAGYA

100% village electrification under DDUGJY



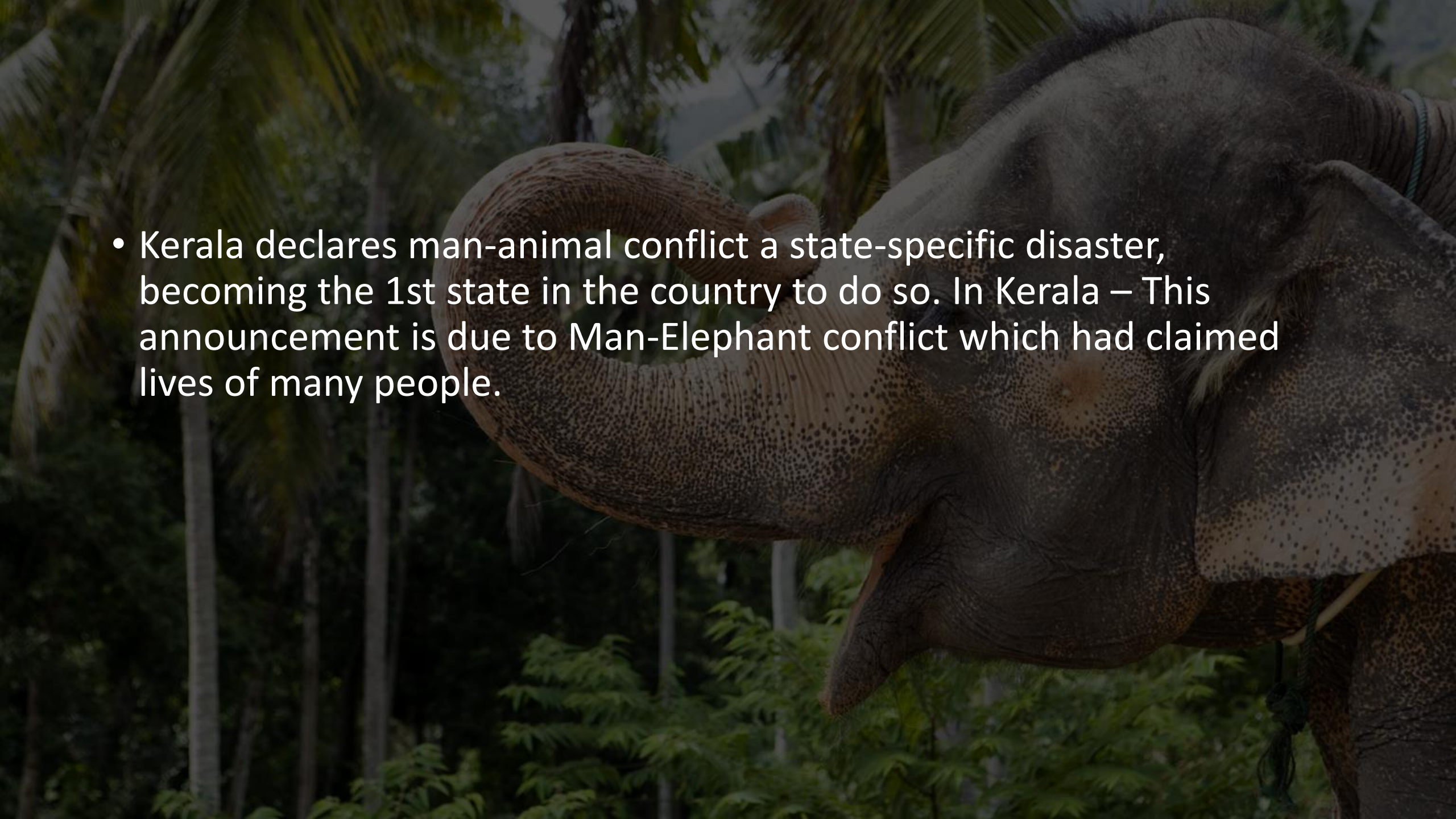
Procured price of LED bulbs decreased by almost **90%** between 2014 and 2019 under UJALA

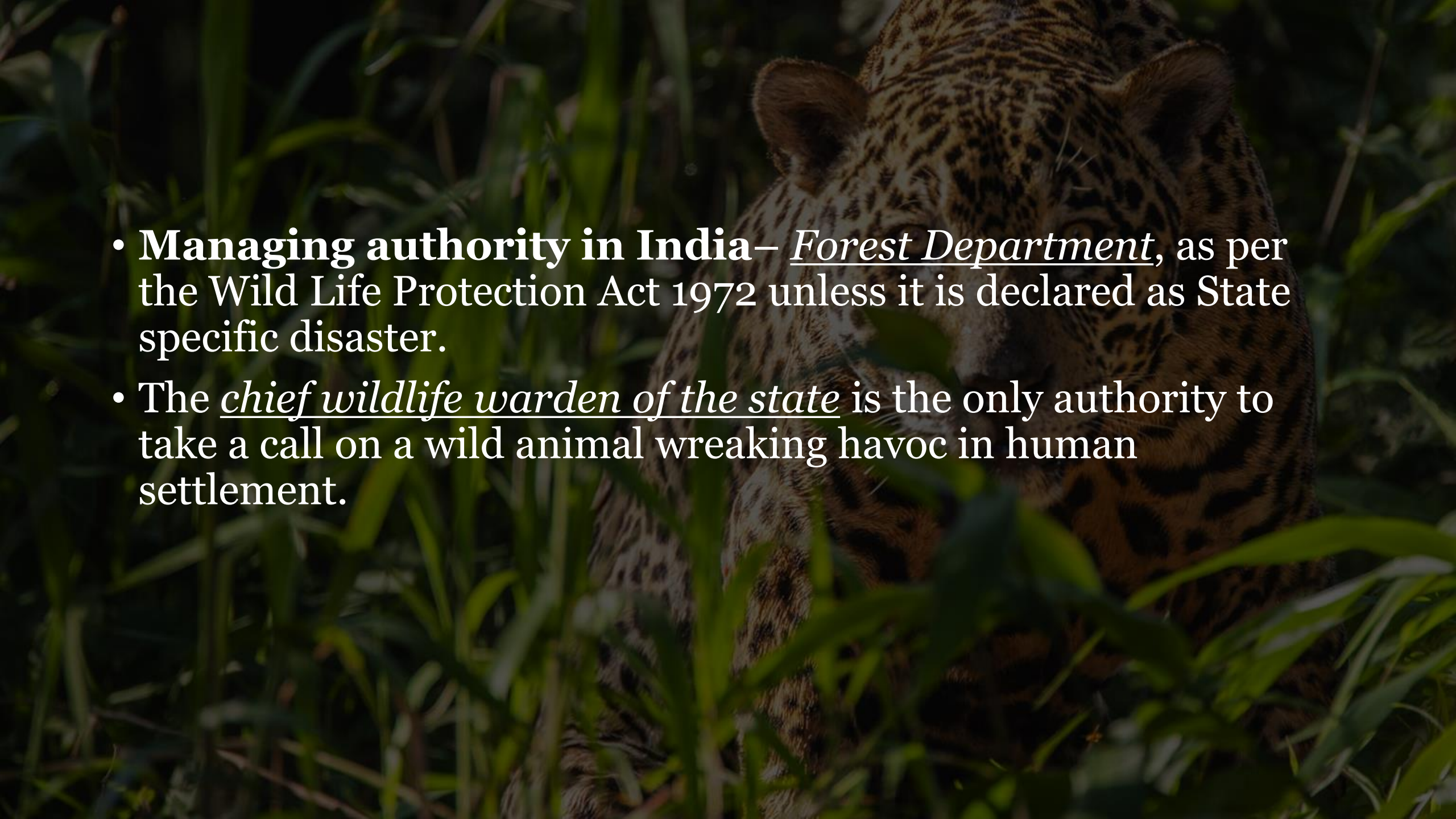
Distribution losses of DISCOMS reduced from **21.5%** to **16.5%** under RDSS

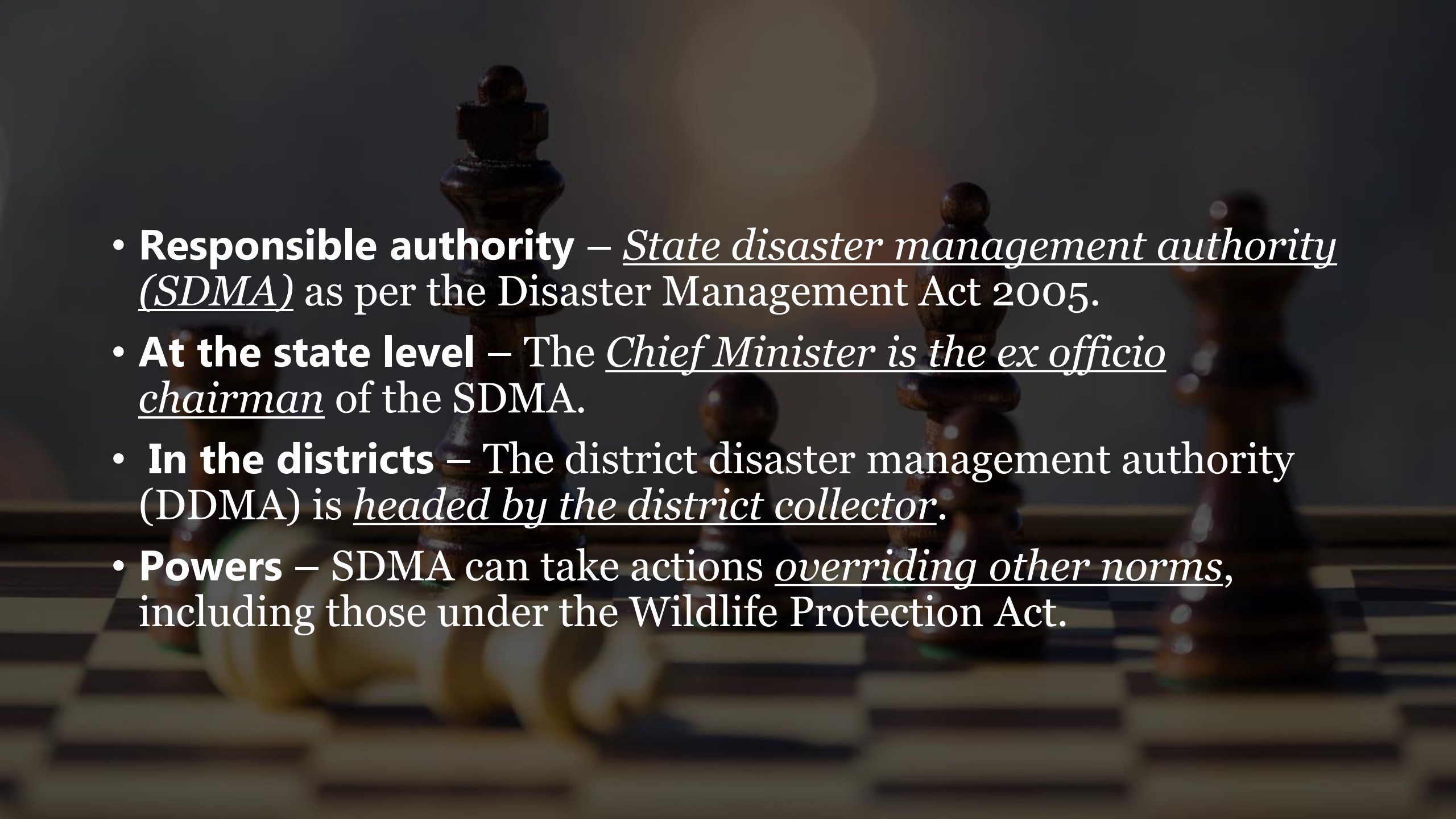



The background features a complex network diagram with nodes and edges, overlaid on a globe-like structure. The nodes are represented by small, colored circles in various colors including blue, green, purple, brown, and black. The edges are thin, dark lines connecting the nodes. The globe is depicted as a series of curved lines forming a spherical shape. The overall background is a dark gray color with scattered small black dots.

State Specific Disaster


- 
- Kerala declares man-animal conflict a state-specific disaster, becoming the 1st state in the country to do so. In Kerala – This announcement is due to Man-Elephant conflict which had claimed lives of many people.

- 
- A tiger is visible in the background, partially obscured by the text overlay. The tiger is looking towards the left of the frame. The background consists of tall grass and foliage, typical of a natural habitat.
- **Managing authority in India**– Forest Department, as per the Wild Life Protection Act 1972 unless it is declared as State specific disaster.
 - The chief wildlife warden of the state is the only authority to take a call on a wild animal wreaking havoc in human settlement.

- 
- **Responsible authority** – State disaster management authority (SDMA) as per the Disaster Management Act 2005.
 - **At the state level** – The Chief Minister is the ex officio chairman of the SDMA.
 - **In the districts** – The district disaster management authority (DDMA) is headed by the district collector.
 - **Powers** – SDMA can take actions overriding other norms, including those under the Wildlife Protection Act.



State specific Disasters	Declared State
Snakebite	Odisha
Lightning	Odisha, Kerala & Assam
Coastal Erosion	Kerala
Soil Piping	
Strong Wind	
Heat waves, Sunburn and Sunstroke	



CALL OF THE WILD

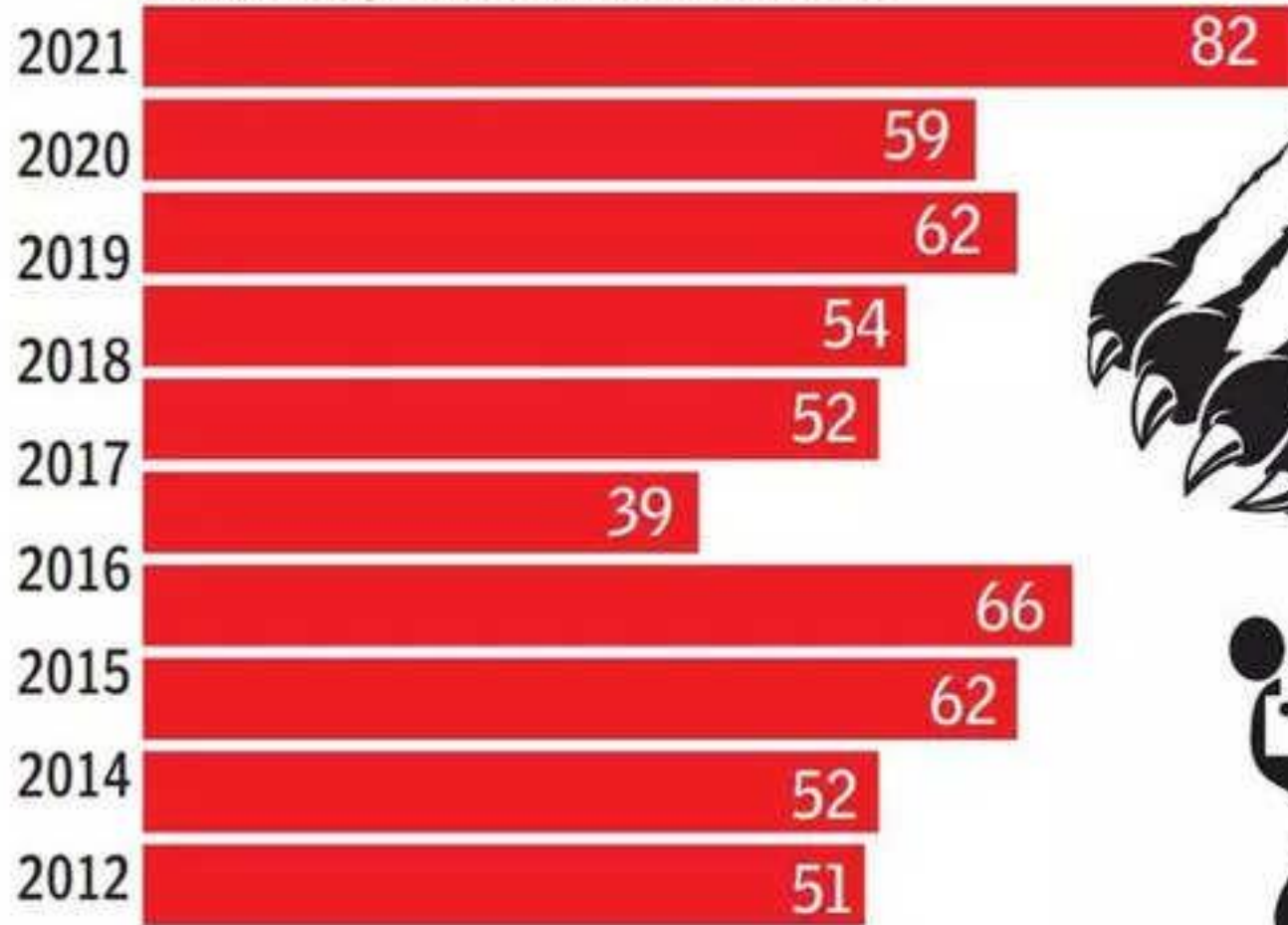


Year	Human kills	Injuries	Cattle kills	Crop damage
2017	53	686	5,961	37,971
2018	50	349	8,311	38,347
2019	36	299	9,258	37,971
2020	47	412	9,139	38,347
2021	83	553	10,317	56,402
2022	94	472	6,965	27,183



SPIKE IN DEATHS IN LAST 5 YEARS

Deaths by wild animal attacks



FATAL CROSSINGS



Numbers need perspective

H S Singh said that human-animal conflicts must be seen in the historical perspective. "According to the January 1907 issue of Indian Forester journal, India's oldest document of forestry and wildlife, 2,167 deaths were reported in the country in 1904 when India's human population was one-fifth of the present population," he said. "Of these deaths, 45 human deaths were caused by elephant attacks, 401 by leopard attacks, 786 by tiger attacks, 153 by wolf attacks, 88 by bear attacks, and 24 by hyena attacks." He added: "As many as 555 people had lost their lives in conflicts with other species." Singh said that if we compare today's situation with that of 1904, it will become evident that attacks by carnivorous animals have decreased while elephant attacks have increased manifold.



NATIONAL WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN (2017 GUIDELINES)

1 Conduct surveys to collect primary and secondary data on HWC (Human-Wildlife Conflict) at national, regional, and state levels



2 Ascertain population status and trends for various species involved in intensive conflict situations with people

3 Develop national and regional conflict-mitigation plans

4 Streamline the official procedure for payment of ex gratia relief to the victims of HWC

5 Offer quick and proper medical treatment and rehabilitation support to victims

Year	Deaths		Injuries		Compensation* (Rs)	
	State	Junagadh	State	Junagadh	State	Junagadh
2019-20	28	17	159	139	1.16 cr	71.6L
2018-19	19	8	136	69	67.52 L	33.5 L
2017-18	17	7	75	55	71.3 L	30.2 L
2016-17	19	9	113	74	73.1 L	35.7 L
2015-16	19	14	103	64	36.9 L	27.1 L
2014-15	20	7	180	78	34 L	11.9 L
2013-14	24	9	169	74	42.6 L	16.8 L
2012-13	15	11	133	71	26.8 L	18.3 L
2011-12	28	16	128	43	43.8 L	23.9 L
2010-11	16	8	114	51	23.1L	16.0 L
Total					5.35 cr	2.85 cr

PEOPLE-INDUCED PROBLEM

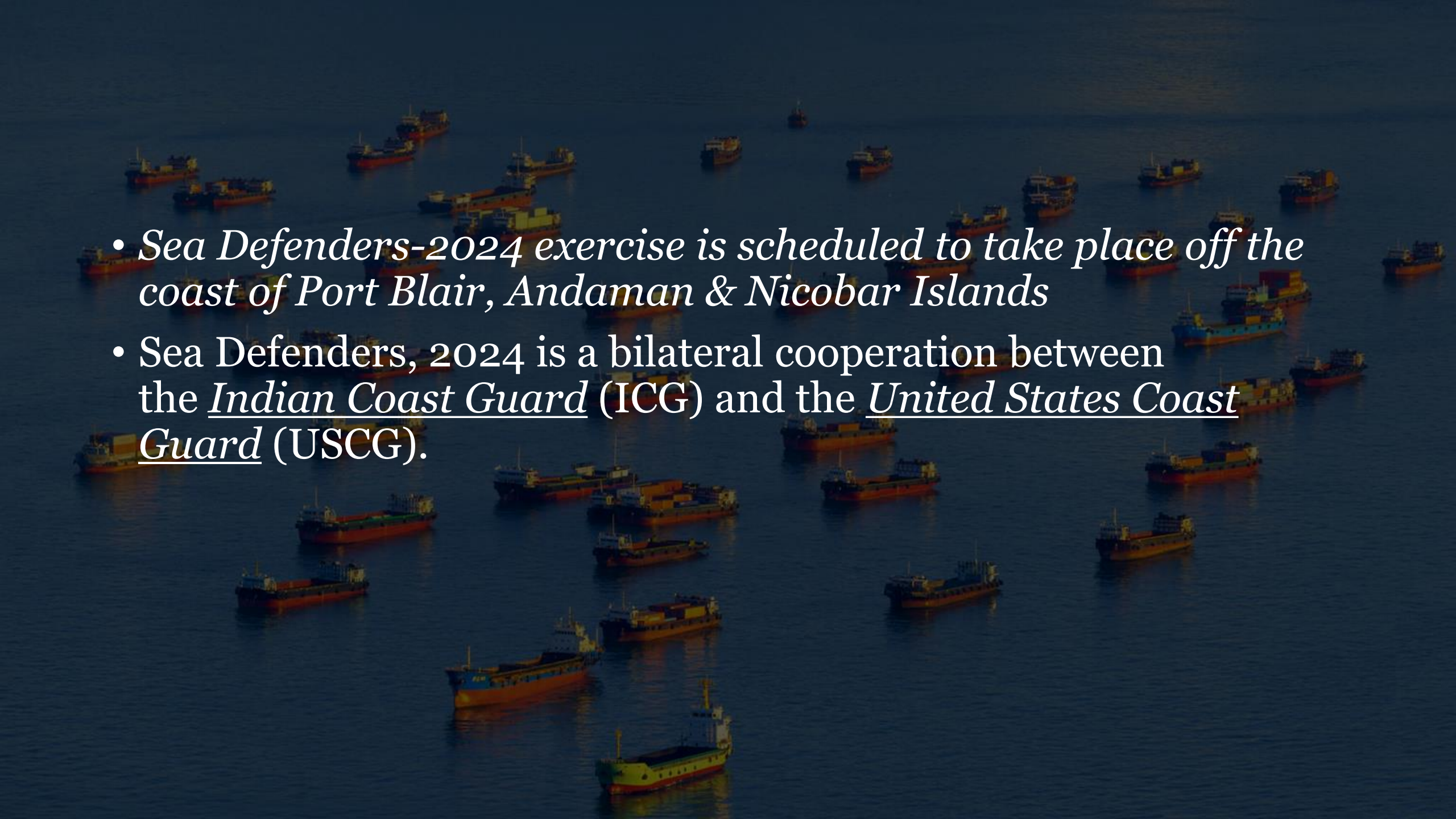
The Indian government's National Wildlife Action Plan 2017-2031 states: "It is important to understand that Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC) is largely a human-induced phenomenon, combined with species-specific behavioural ecology of animals and external environmental factors." Thus, all conflict-mitigation measures should be developed on the basic premise of meaningful engagement with and the participation of all primary stakeholders, especially local communities.

CATTLE INJURIES & DEATHS



“Sea Defend” Sea Defenders-2024”ers- 2024”



- 
- An aerial photograph showing a large number of ships, including cargo vessels and smaller boats, scattered across a vast expanse of water. The scene is captured during the golden hour, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a warm, orange glow over the water and the ships. The ships are of various sizes and colors, some with visible cargo containers on their decks. The overall atmosphere is serene and busy, suggesting a significant maritime operation or exercise.
- *Sea Defenders-2024 exercise is scheduled to take place off the coast of Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar Islands*
 - *Sea Defenders, 2024 is a bilateral cooperation between the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and the United States Coast Guard (USCG).*



Pritzker Architecture Prize

- *Japanese architect Riken Yamamoto was recently declared as the winner of the 2024 Pritzker Architecture Prize.*
- It is the highest *international award in the field of Architecture* and referred as the *“Architecture Nobel”*.
- It has been awarded *every year* since its founding in **1979**.
- **Instituted by** - Jay A Pritzker, the late founder of the Hyatt Hotels chain, and his wife Cindy

A blurred driverless metro train moving along a track at sunset, with city buildings and street lamps in the background.

Bengaluru's driverless metro train

- 
- The background image shows the interior of a modern metro train. It features blue seats, handrails, and a clean, well-lit environment. The train is moving, as indicated by the slight blur of the background.
- A Communications-Based Train Control (CBTC) system enabled driverless metro train is set to commission in *Bengaluru, Karnataka.*
 - **Communications-Based Train Control (CBTC)** is a modern system that uses radio communication to transfer timely & accurate train control information.

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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 wearing watches. The background is blurred, showing more people and a window. An orange horizontal bar is located in the top left corner.

Thank you
guys.
