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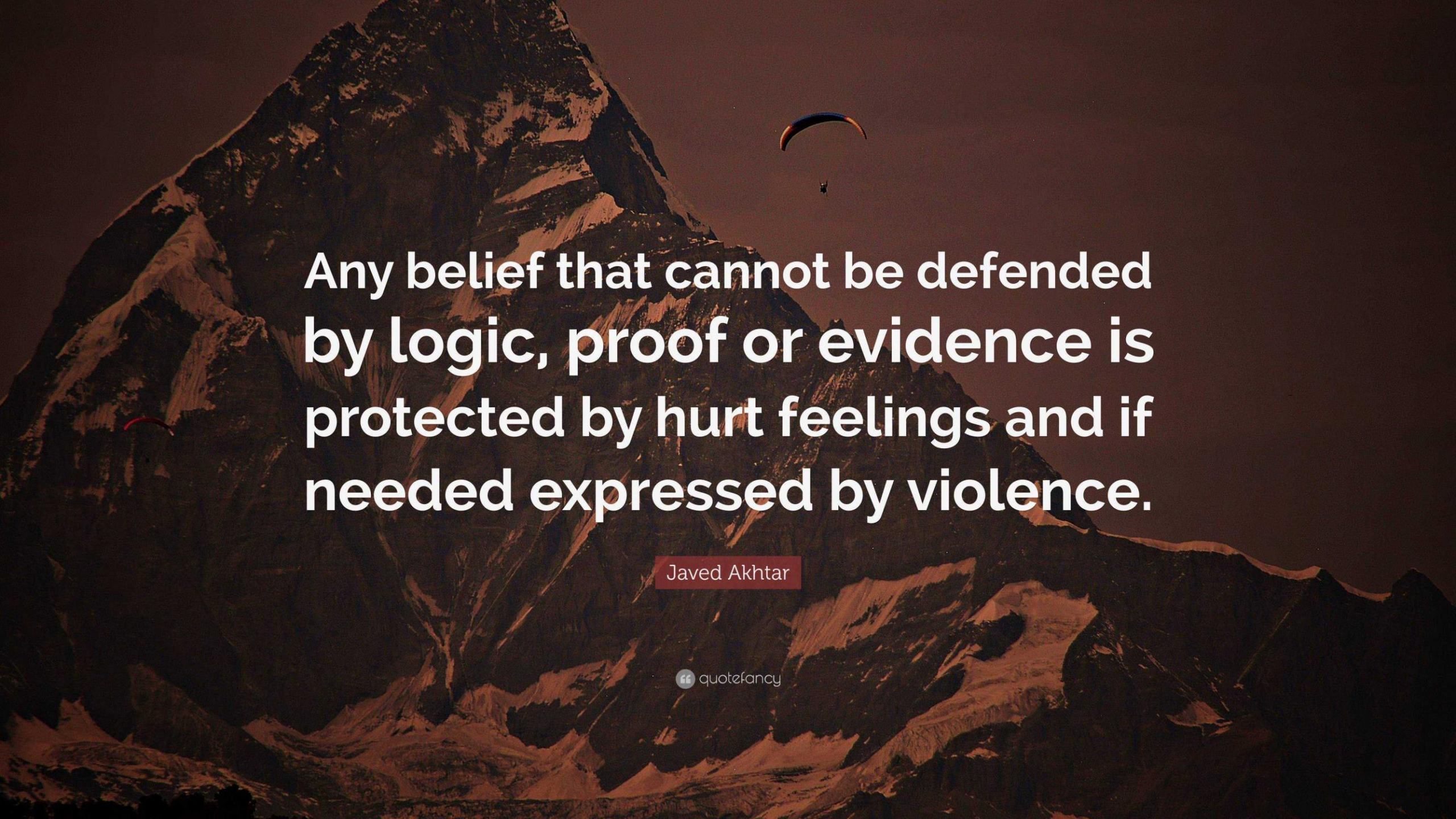
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**Any belief that cannot be defended
by logic, proof or evidence is
protected by hurt feelings and if
needed expressed by violence.**

Javed Akhtar

quote fancy

ELECTORAL BOND BUYERS
Several pharma firms
faced regulatory actions
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FAMINE LOOMS
UN blames
Israel for starvation
in Gaza
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Congress to focus
on 25 guarantees
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INDIA-BHUTAN RELATIONS
Ties epitomising
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Both nations share
a unique level of trust
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CANCELLED WAITING LIST TICKETS
Railways earned
₹1,230 cr. in 3 years
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INSIDE



**BJP's Muslim
candidate kept
out of PM's rally**
PALAKKAD
BJP's Malappuram candidate
M. Abdul Salam was denied
permission to accompany
Prime Minister Narendra Modi's
roadshow in Palakkad as his
name was not on the SPC
list. > PAGE 3

**Ex-police officer
gets life term for
fate encounter**
MUMBAI
The Bombay High Court on
Tuesday sentenced to life
imprisonment former Mumbai
Police Inspector Pradeep
Sharma for the fatal encounter
killing of Lakhon Babu, alias
Ramnarayan Gupta. > PAGE 4

**Forced labour
generates profits
of \$36 billion**
NEW DELHI
A study by the International
Labour Organization (ILO),
released in Geneva on Tuesday,
has found that forced labour
generates illegal profits worth
\$36 billion per year. This is an
increase of 37% of such illegal
profits since 2014. > PAGE 6

**T.N. start-up to
launch its first
rocket on Friday**
CHENNAI
Tamil Nadu will witness history
when one of its space start-ups
launches its first rocket on
Friday. The space start-up
Space Industries Private
Limited will be launching its
rocket Agniham Sub Orbital
Technology Demonstrator from
the Satish Dhawan Space
Centre. > PAGE 3

SC will hear petitions to stay CAA on April 9

Centre refuses to state that it would refrain from granting the fast-tracked citizenship

Citizenship based on religious identity violated fundamental rights, says advocate for petitioners

Muslims left out of National Register of Citizens in Assam may face executive action, says petitioner

Krishnadas Rajasozhil
NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to consider the question of staying the operation of the rules notified under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA on April 9, days before the first phase of the Lok Sabha election, even as the government refused to make a statement that it would not grant fast-tracked citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan during the pendency of the case.
"I am not ready to make any statement," Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said.
A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud sought to calm the apprehensions of the 237 petitioners who go ahead and implement the CAA rules in the meantime.
"They do not even have the infrastructure in place," Chief Justice Chandrachud told the petitioners' side, led by senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Indra Jaising.
Violation of rights
However, Ms. Jaising, for Trinamool Congress leader Mahua Moitra, cautioned the court against relying on a "hope-and-trust jurisprudence" in favour of the government.
"But we are here," the Chief Justice assured her. Mr. Sibal and advocate Haris Beeran, for the Indian Union Muslim League, said they should be given the liberty to mention in court if the government began the citizenship process under CAA.
Mr. Sibal said if the Centre could wait nearly five years to notify the CAA

The Big test
Arguments coming before the Supreme Court on April 9:
• CAA rules operate solely on the basis of religious identity.
• Once the process of granting citizenship starts under the CAA rules, it cannot be reversed.
• CAA rules have done away with the scrutiny of applications of citizenship by District Collectors, and recommendations of State governments on applications.
rules, they could wait till July 2024. He said citizenship, once granted, was irreversible. Fast-tracking citizenship based on the religious identity of a person violated the fundamental rights to non-discrimination and equality under the Constitution.
Advocate Kaleeswaram Iyal supported the argument, noting that the top court had stayed the controversial farm laws.
Mr. Mehta sought four weeks' time to file responses

December 31, 2014.
"This law does not take away the citizenship of anyone... Those who have entered by 2014 will be considered for grant or renewal of citizenship," Mr. Mehta reasoned.
Advocate Nizam Paasha, also for the petitioners, linked the implementation of the CAA to the lakh people excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) list in Assam. No affirmative decision has been taken about them. He apprehended that the CAA would now apply to these people. Those who do not belong to "one particular community or religion" would get their citizenship applications processed "all of a sudden" while the Muslims were out of NRC may face executive action.
"That is prejudice," Mr. Mehta said similar attempts to "mislead" people had been made out-
side the court. "The NRC is not an issue before the court, only the grant of citizenship under CAA is the issue," he clarified.
"Will get right to vote"
Senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, for a party supporting CAA, illustrated the case of a persecuted Hindu migrant from Balochistan.
"How does grant of citizenship to me affect anyone else's right?" Mr. Kumar asked.
"They will get a right to vote," Ms. Jaising shot back to objections from Mr. Kumar. Ms. Jaising said the government should let the petitioners either make good their plea in court for a stay or be willing to give up the grant of citizenship under Section 6B(i) of the CAA contradicted Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, which mandated deportation for foreigners who had crossed over after March 25, 1971.
larger Bench.
Senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, appearing for a group of petitioners from Assam, contended that the CAA and its rules were a threat to the State's demography. He said 27 districts in Assam were brought under the purview of CAA "for no reason at all".
The lawyer noted that the CAA did not apply to tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, or Tripura included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution and the areas covered under "The Inner Line" notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873.
He said the cut-off date of December 31, 2014, for the grant of citizenship under Section 6B(i) of the CAA contradicted Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, which mandated deportation for foreigners who had crossed over after March 25, 1971.

Set for a splash



Festival bees: Workers prepare coloured powder, also known as 'Gulaal', at a factory in Jaipur ahead of the Holi festival, on Tuesday. PTI

21 lakh SIM cards in use have fake proof: DoT

S. Vijay Kumar
CHENNAI
At least 21 lakh SIM cards have been activated using fake proof of identification or proof of address documents, according to an analysis carried out by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). In an effort to identify MTNL, BSNL, Reliance Jio, Idea, and Airtel, the DoT provided a list of suspicious subscribers and called for an urgent verification of their documents and disconnection of those found to be bogus.
A fresh pan-India analysis of 114 crore mobile phone connections by the DoT's Artificial Intelligence & Digital Intelligence Unit (AIDIU) has shown that invalid, non-existent, fake, or forged documents were used to activate at least 21 lakh SIM issued by various telecom service providers. A majority of these numbers are suspected to be in use for committing various types of cyber crimes or illegal activities.
It was found that in 1.92 crore cases, an individual had subscribed for too many mobile connections, crossing the permitted limit of nine SIM cards across service providers across the country. This included connections that were "non-activated" and categorised as individual instead of bulk connections.
The nationwide analysis was taken up as part of the DoT's digital intelligence centric initiative that empowers citizens to know their own data. The DoT was taken up as part of the DoT's digital intelligence centric initiative that empowers citizens to know their own data. The DoT was taken up as part of the DoT's digital intelligence centric initiative that empowers citizens to know their own data.

SC issues summons to Ramdev in Patanjali misleading ads case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked self-styled yoga guru Baba Ramdev to personally appear in a contempt case initiated against Patanjali Ayurved for publishing misleading advertisements in violation of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954 despite an undertaking given to the court in November last year.
A Bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Dhananjay Kumar Ammalah issued a show cause notice to Baba Ramdev to file his response against initiating contempt proceedings against him.
The Bench further directed Acharya Balakrishna, the Managing Director of Patanjali Ayurved, to be present in the court along with Baba Ramdev for the next hearing on April 2.
The court ordered the presence of Balakrishna after learning that he did not file response to the show cause notice issued to him on February 27. The Bench brushed aside the explanations offered by senior advocate Mukul Kohli, appearing for Patanjali, for not filing a reply.
The Bench indicated that Baba Ramdev should be heard in the case as he had endorsed the Patanjali advertisements prohibited by the court on November 21, 2023.
The nationwide analysis was taken up as part of the DoT's digital intelligence centric initiative that empowers citizens to know their own data. The DoT was taken up as part of the DoT's digital intelligence centric initiative that empowers citizens to know their own data.

Tariff regulator snubs revenue projections at Adani airport in Thiruvananthapuram

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI
The Adani-controlled Thiruvananthapuram airport's projection of revenue from non-aeronautical services such as the sale of food and beverages — used to subsidise costs levied on airlines and passengers — is just a "minute" 12% of the norm, according to the country's airport tariff regulator. In fact, it is only a third of what the airport earned before privatisation.
The Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) has recommended that this revenue projection should be hiked four-fold, from the ₹103 crore

This structure led to the airport operator reducing the mandatory 30% of non-aero revenue — which must be funnelled back for cross-subsidising the costs borne by airlines and passengers — to 30% of only the 10% of revenue shared, that is, a mere 3% of the total. This arrangement will impact airport users, the AERA has said.
The global airlines body, the International Air Transport Association, has also said that this formula is "not justified".
Revising tariffs
These observations were made in a consultation paper floated by the AERA on February 12 to determine the revised tariff for the five-year control period, from April 2022 to March 2027.
It invited various stakeholders, such as airlines, airports, and ground handling agencies, to submit their comments by March 15, after which it will issue a tariff order.
The Thiruvananthapuram Kerala International Airport Ltd (TKIAL) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Adani Enterprises Ltd, which signed a concession agreement with the Airports Authority of India in January 2021 after a privatisation process to operate, manage and develop the airport for a period of 30 years.

proposed by the airport to ₹395 crore, over five years. The Adani-run airport has dismissed the AERA's projection as "notional revenue".
The AERA has also questioned how the master contract for non-aeronautical services was awarded to an Adani group subsidiary with restrictive bid criteria and "a low revenue share of 10%".
The AERA has also questioned how the master contract for non-aeronautical services was awarded to an Adani group subsidiary with restrictive bid criteria and "a low revenue share of 10%".

Baba Ramdev
"This court is *prima facie* of the opinion that he has also violated the provisions of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954," the court observed.
In the February hearing, the petitioner, the Indian Medical Association, had described Baba Ramdev's association with Patanjali as "everything and nothing at the same time".
"In November, we had specifically said there should be no violation of any law. That means there should be nothing misleading, especially advertisements of drugs manufactured and marketed by you. But you are still advertising your products as a 'permanent relief'," Justice Kohli had told Patanjali's lawyers at the time.

Absence of Muslim candidate triggers row

BJP's Malappuram candidate M. Abdul Salam was allegedly denied permission to accompany Modi during his roadshow in Palakkad; CPI(M) accuses the party of insulting not only Dr. Salam, but the Muslim community as well; this was the Prime Minister's second visit to Kerala within a week

The Hindu Bureau
PALAKKAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi took a roadshow in Palakkad town on Tuesday, infusing enthusiasm and excitement in thousands of BJP workers who gathered here to greet him. It was Mr. Modi's second visit to Kerala within a week as part of the BJP's election campaign. He had addressed a rally in Pattanamthitta on March 15, BJP leaders said. Mr. Modi would visit the State again to campaign for the party's key candidates in April.

The roadshow started at 10.45 a.m. from the Anjilivilaku Junction, Thoosavadi

of BJP workers lined up on both sides of the road and cheered for the Prime Minister.

Mr. Modi was flanked by BJP's Palakkad candidate C. Krishnakumar and Ponnani candidate Nivedita Subramanian. BJP State president K. Surendran and two SPG guards stood behind him.

'Not allowed'

However, BJP's Malappuram candidate M. Abdul Salam was denied permission to accompany Mr. Modi during the roadshow.

Dr. Salam, the only Muslim candidate on the BJP's first list, reached here on time to join the roadshow, but he was not allowed to



On the move: Prime Minister Narendra Modi waving to supporters during a roadshow in Palakkad on Tuesday. PTI

but the Muslim community as well. "The BJP had announced earlier that the candidates of Ponnani, Malappuram and Palakkad would accompany the Prime Minister. But by denying Dr. Salam, the BJP has sent a wrong message. It can be interpreted that Dr. Salam was denied entry because he is a Muslim," said Mr. Balan.

He said that minorities would have to suffer more such insults from the BJP. However, Dr. Salam denied Mr. Balan's allegation, saying that it was a fabricated story. "His job is to fabricate such stories," Dr. Salam said in Malappuram.

Dr. Salam told a channel that he went to Palakkad to meet Mr. Modi, to take a photo with him, and to announce the election of the candidates of Ponnani, Malappuram and Palakkad. Dr. Salam added that he was disappointed at being denied the opportunity to accompany the Prime Minister's vehicle.

Salam could not be accommodated as there was no space in the vehicle.

CPI(M) leader A.K. Balan accused the BJP of insulting not only Dr. Salam,

SC permits BRS leader to withdraw 2023 plea challenging ED summons

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday permitted Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) leader Ms. Kavitha to withdraw a writ petition filed in March last year challenging summons issued by the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) to her in connection with the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy case. Ms. Kavitha is the daughter of former Chief Minister and BRS leader K. Chandrasekhar Varma.

K. Kavitha

Her withdrawal petition was filed on March 19, 2023, and came two days before Ms. Kavitha was scheduled to appear before the ED for questioning. The BRS leader said she had already been arrested on March 15 and remanded in ED custody.

The plea was dismissed as the ED summons was an intimidation tactic. Ms. Kavitha alleged that she was compelled to produce her mobile phone and was questioned after sunset the last time. She said her personal details had also been noted.

The 2023 petition said she was implicated in the case on the basis of statements extracted out of certain persons using coercion.

Radhakrishnan gets charge of Telangana and Puducherry

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday gave Jarkhand Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan additional charge of Telangana and Puducherry. She also accepted the resignation of Tamil Nadu Governor Arjun Ramdas who had stepped down from the post.

"The President of India is also pleased to appoint Shri C. P. Radhakrishnan, Governor of Jharkhand to discharge the functions of the Governor of Telangana and Lieutenant-Governor of Puducherry in addition to his own duties, until regular appointments are made," a Rashtrapati Bhavan communique said.

Mr. Radhakrishnan thanked Mr. Murmu for giving him the additional responsibility.

IN BRIEF

Sangeetha Kandavel

Tamil Nadu will witness history when one of its space start-ups launches its first rocket on March 22.

The Chennai headquartered space start-up AgniKul Cosmos Private Limited will be launching its rocket Agnihaas Sub Orbital Technology Demonstrator (SORTEd) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, in Sriharikota.

There are several interesting facts about this first launch from a private launch pad in India. SORTEd will be India's first launch from a private launch pad and its engine is the world's first single piece 3D printed engine. It was designed and built indigenously.

Kumaraswamy to undergo aortic valve replacement

JD(S) president and former Chief Minister of Karnataka H.D. Kumaraswamy will undergo a transcatheter aortic valve implantation (TAVI), a non-surgical procedure, at Apollo Hospitals in Chennai on Thursday. This is the third time that he has developed restenosis due to tissue valve degeneration, the previous occasions being in 2007 and 2017. The surgery is being done in Chennai to avoid the regular flow of visitors and his well-wishers to the hospital, sources said.

NIA arrests PFI worker in RSS leader murder case

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday arrested Shaifekh, a native of Kolathur in Malappuram district and member of the banned Popular Front of India (PFI), in connection with the murder of RSS functionary Theenvasan at Melamuri, Palakkad, on April 16, 2022. He has been absconding since the incident and was tracked to Kollam district, according to a release. He was produced before the NIA Special Court here, which sent him to judicial custody on Tuesday. He was allegedly a part of the hit squad of the PFI. A total of 71 people have been identified as part of the conspiracy.

T.N. start-up to launch its first rocket on Friday

Sangeetha Kandavel
CHENNAI

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BJP leaders protest 'assault' on shopkeeper, detained

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The BJP held a 'Hanuman Chalisa Rally' here on Tuesday over the alleged assault on a shopkeeper in Bengaluru.

The police had refused permission for the rally in light of the Model Code of Conduct, sources said. All three BJP candidates from Bengaluru — Tejasvi Surya (Bengaluru South), P.C. Mohan (Bengaluru Central) and Shobha Karanadas (Bengaluru North) — who led the protest, were detained by the police and shifted to CAM court.

Senior police officials said that around 40 BJP leaders and workers were taken into preventive custody when the group allegedly assaulted MUKESH.

The alleged assault occurred on March 17 when an argument broke out between a group of youth and Mukesh Singh, a mobile phone shop owner. The accused — Sulaiman, Shah Nawaz, Rohith, Danish, Tarun and some others — objected to Mukesh playing music over the loudspeaker.

Mr. Rajesh Pandhakar, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command, have said that "Tiger Triumph-24, the Indo-U.S. bilateral Tri Services Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, will further strengthen the ties between the countries. Mr. Garretti and Vice Admiral Pandhakar were on board the INS Jalajanga as part of the Tri Services Indo-U.S. amphibious exercise, at the Naval Base here on Tuesday." "Our relations have never been so strong, and we are accelerating our collaboration between the partner nations."

Mr. Garretti and Vice Admiral Pandhakar were on board the INS Jalajanga as part of the Tri Services Indo-U.S. amphibious exercise, at the Naval Base here on Tuesday.

Tiger Triumph-24 will boost bilateral ties, says U.S. Ambassador

The Hindu Bureau
VISAKHAPATNAM

U.S. Ambassador to India Keith G. Seitz on Tuesday said the Indo-U.S. amphibious exercise at the Naval Base here on Tuesday will further strengthen the ties between the countries.

Mr. Garretti and Vice Admiral Pandhakar were on board the INS Jalajanga as part of the Tri Services Indo-U.S. amphibious exercise, at the Naval Base here on Tuesday.

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Police rescue four children sold to couples, arrest two

The Hindu Bureau
THOOTHUKUDI

Police have rescued four children, who were allegedly kidnapped by two persons and sold to issueless people, and arrested the accused.

The duo sold girl children to issueless couples and the police rescued all the four children. The kidnapers had convinced the couples that they had babies abandoned by poor families living in hilly regions.

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The parents of three of the children have been identified and steps are being taken to reunite them

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Karnataka HC stays ban imposed on 23 'ferocious' dog breeds

The Hindu Bureau
BANGALURU

The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday stayed the operation of a circular issued by the Union government banning 23 breeds of 'ferocious and dangerous' dogs. However, the court clarified that the stay of the circular, issued on March 12 by the Animal Husbandary and Dairying Department of the Centre, would be limited only to Karnataka.

Justice M. Nagaprasanna passed the interim order on a petition filed by Bengaluru residents. The High Court also directed the Centre to produce those documents, based on which the circular for banning the dog breeds was issued, for examining the prior consultation process.

The circular stated that all those who have reared these breeds as pets should sterilise the dogs to stop further breeding.

The Centre's counsel told the court that the circular was issued based on a decision issued by the Delhi HC asking the Department to consider the representation of the P.I. respondent for banning certain dog breeds.

Noticing that the Delhi HC's order was "unwarranted in directing that all the stakeholders must be invited for further consideration of representation for banning certain dog breeds", Justice Nagaprasanna said that there is a need to examine the documents for the decision-making process to ascertain criminal and natural disasters across maritime borders, apart from collaboration between the partner nations.

The exercise was aimed at facing the challenges of transnational crimes and natural disasters across maritime borders, apart from collaboration between the partner nations.

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T.N. start-up to launch its first rocket on Friday

Sangeetha Kandavel

CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu will witness history when one of its space start-ups launches its first rocket on March 22.

The Chennai headquartered space start-up Agnikul Cosmos Private Limited will be launching its first rocket Agnibaan Sub Orbital Technology Demonstrator (SOrTeD) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, in Sriharikota.

There are several interesting facts about this particular launch – Agnibaan SOrTeD – will be India's first launch from a private launchpad, India's first semi-cryogenic engine powered rocket launch and



Ready for lift off: Srinath Ravichandran, Moin SPM and Satya Chakravathy founded Agnikul Cosmos in 2017. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

piece 3D printed engine designed and built indigenously.

Founded in 2017 by Srinath Ravichandran, Moin SPM, and Satya Chakravathy, Agnikul Cosmos be-

the country to sign an agreement with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) under the IN-SPACE initiative to have access to the space agency's expertise and its facilities

in September 2020.

Commenting on the launch, Mr. Chakravathy, co-founder and adviser, Agnikul Cosmos, and professor at the Department of Aerospace Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, told *The Hindu*, "This would be India's first liquid oxygen-kerosene rocket flight in India, from India's first privately developed launchpad, in Sriharikota."

"More importantly, we would be flying our patented world's most integrated single piece 3D printed rocket," he added.

He further explained, "This is a sub-orbital launch but it is not a sounding rocket. It has the

feedback guidance and control with a gimbaled thrust vector control. As such, this is the first private launch in India requiring a flight termination system and a safety radius from the launchpad calculated from some tens of thousands of simulations of worst case scenarios."

He pointed out that the next step post the mission would be post-flight analysis of all the subsystem performance. The immediate future plan is to get ready for the orbital flight.

Agnikul's rocket is the second privately-developed rocket in India. In 2022, Vikram-S, India's first privately-developed rocket, lifted off from a

On the launch pad

Hyderabad-based Skyroot's satellite launch vehicle is called Vikram and Chennai-based Agnikul's is called Agnibaan. A look at their payloads

Vikram 1



225-315kg

Vikram 2



410-520kg

Vikram 3



580-720kg

Agnibaan



100kg

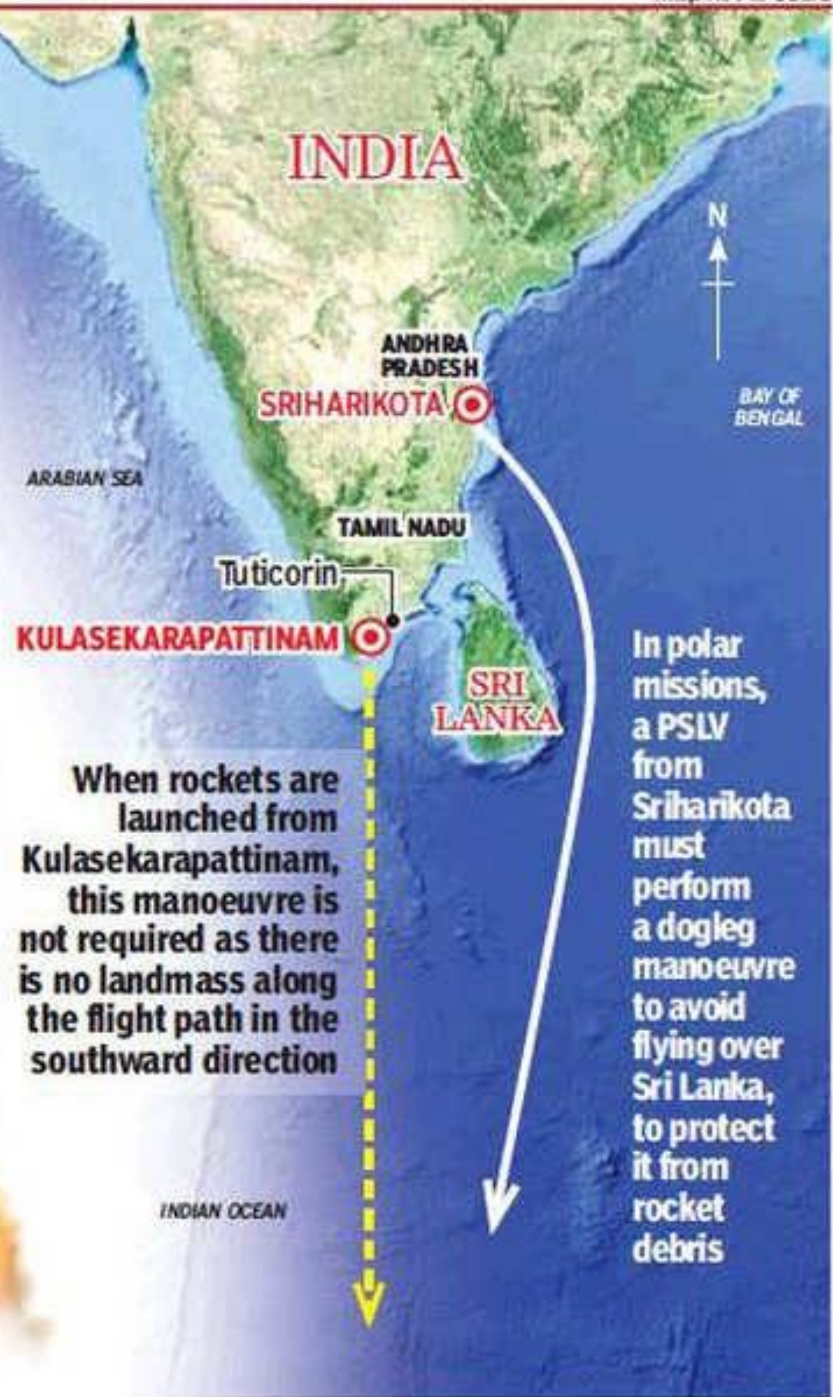
Source: Skyroot Aerospace, Agnikul Cosmos

ON A MORE DIRECT ROUTE

Second spaceport will be used for smaller rockets

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE

- > Dogleg manoeuvre is a sharp turn that causes the rocket to deviate from a straight flight path
- > This manoeuvre requires more fuel in the rocket which eats into the payload capacity of the launcher

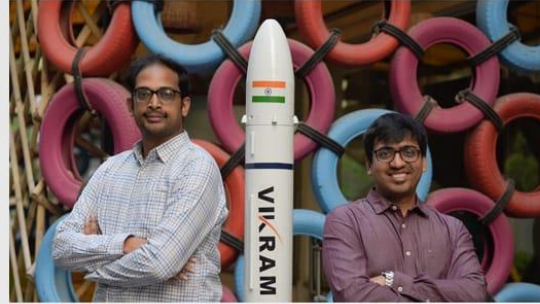


When rockets are launched from Kulasekarapattinam, this manoeuvre is not required as there is no landmass along the flight path in the southward direction

In polar missions, a PSLV from Sriharikota must perform a dogleg manoeuvre to avoid flying over Sri Lanka, to protect it from rocket debris



WHAT MAKES INDIA'S FIRST PRIVATELY BUILT ROCKET SPECIAL: SKYROOT'S VIKRAM-S



The Vikram-S launch vehicle or rocket is developed by the Kondapur (Telengana)-based **spacetech startup Skyroot**. The firm was launched by former ISRO Engineers **Pawan Kumar Chandana** (31) and **Naga Bharat Daka** (32) in 2018. Skyroot has raised **\$68 mn in funding** to date.

VIKRAM-S - VITAL STATS

Mass
546 kg

Length
8 m (approx. 27 ft)

Diameter
0.376 m (approx. 1.24 ft)

Peak Vacuum Thrust
7 t (7,000 kg)

Peak Combustion Pressure
80 bar

Peak Velocity
> Mach 5 (Hypersonic)

Payload Capacity
83 kg to 100 km altitude



INSIDE VIKRAM-S

- Made using composite materials, it has an **all-carbon fibre core structure**
- Equipped with **3D-printed engines** for spin stability during flight
- Co. claims it to be **one of the cheapest rockets built in its category**, globally
- A **200-engineer team** worked to build it in a record time of **2 years**

LAUNCH TO TEST

- 80% of onboard technologies for company's future Vikram Series launches
- Effectiveness of inflight avionics, including telemetry, tracking, inertial measurement, GPS, camera, and data acquisition and power systems

Source: Company, industry

Many pharma companies that bought poll bonds faced regulatory actions

A closer look at the electoral bond data indicates several firms in the pharmaceutical sector that purchased the bonds were under the scanner of the Enforcement Directorate or the I-T Department in the past five years; some were also in the cross hairs of U.S. FDA over quality control

Vignesh Radhakrishnan, Yasudevan Mukumthi

In March 15, The Hindu reported that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had also scanned the list of companies that bought electoral bonds. A closer look at the electoral bond data released indicates more such companies, especially in the pharmaceutical sector. For example, on July 6, 2022, the I-T Department searched more than 40 offices of the Bengaluru-based major Micro Labs Ltd., which makes Dolo 650. Officials also searched the residences of its owners. In the same month, the Indian government said the searches revealed "substantial incriminating evidence" of unethical practices and frescoes to medical professionals to

the tune of ₹1,000 crore. The same month, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) asked the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA) to investigate the matter. The NPPA is an independent regulator attached to the Department of Pharmaceuticals and Fertilizers, and is responsible for pricing drugs to keep them affordable. In September, the IPA cleared the company in a report to the NPPA, declaring the "₹1,000-crore expenditure on single brand Dolo 650 on free-basis in one year" to be "not correct". A month later, Micro Labs purchased electoral bonds worth ₹6 crore, an additional set worth ₹3 crore on November 15, 2022, and another worth ₹7 crore on October 9, 2023, taking the total tally to ₹16 crore. In April 2022, Hetero Drugs Ltd. and Hetero



Pharmaceuticals major Micro Labs Ltd. bought poll bonds worth ₹6 crore after the I-T Department searched its offices. I-T/ESI/PT

Labs Ltd. each purchased bonds worth ₹20 crore. Six months earlier, on October 12, 2022, after searching the offices of the Hetero pharmaceutical group across six States, the I-T Department reported detecting an "unaccounted income" of ₹580 crore and also seized ₹42 crore in cash. In December the same year, residents of a village in Visakhapatnam demanded action against Hetero Drugs Ltd. because, they alleged, it had laid a four-km-long pipe without requisite clearances. In all, these two firms purchased bonds worth ₹55 crore. Hetero group chairman Bandi Parthasaradhi Reddy is an investor in Hazelo Lab and Hinds Lab, among others. Both Hazelo and Hinds also purchased electoral bonds for ₹2.5 crore each on July 6, 2022, and for ₹10 crore each on

April 12, 2023. Hinds also purchased another tranche worth ₹5 crore on July 12, 2023. The MSN Pharma group also faced an ED search for "unaccounted income" of ₹400 crore from the I-T Department in February 2021. In April 2022, MSN Pharmaceuticals Pvt. Ltd. purchased bonds worth ₹20 crore and another tranche of bonds worth ₹6 crore on November 16, 2023.

Quality issues Intas, Lupin, and Natco went to the cross hairs of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) over quality control issues at their drug-making facilities in India. On October 10, 2022, Intas purchased bonds for ₹20 crore. Two days later, the I-T Department raided Mankind's facilities also on allegations of tax evasion. (With inputs from Jasmin Nihalani)

tions at some of its facilities in India. On January 25, 2023, it purchased bonds worth ₹18 crore. Natco purchased bonds worth ₹25 lakh on October 5, 2019, and in October and November 2023, worth ₹32 crore. In August 8-9, 2019, the FDA inspected a Natco facility near Hyderabad and concluded with six "observations". Natco responded that it would specify corrective actions in two weeks. At another facility in Rangareddy district on October 5-8, 2023, the FDA reportedly found unclean equipment. In another example, on November 10, 2022, Mankind Pharma Ltd. purchased bonds worth ₹24 crore months ahead of its IPO in May 2023, with a value of ₹1,236 crore. Two days later, the I-T Department raided Mankind's facilities also on allegations of tax evasion. (With inputs from Jasmin Nihalani)

SSC withdraws result for recruitment exam in Manipur

One phase selection exam in Manipur

Abhinav Lakshman, NEW DELHI

The Staff Selection Commission (SSC) on Monday withdrew the final results for the recruitment of Constable (GD) in Central Armed Police Forces, SSF, Rifleman (GD) in Assam Rifles, and Sepoy in Narcotics Control Bureau Examination 2023 in Manipur, just days after announcing it on March 15, saying that a revised final result would soon be published. In the notice issued by the SSC, the government said that given the law and order situation in the State, physical and medical tests were conducted in multiple phases and consequently, the data from one phase were declared, set out in the now-withdrawn result. "Revised result soon" The revised final result in respect of Manipur incorporating the complete data of the candidates will be published shortly," the SSC said. (With inputs from Jasmin Nihalani)

the final result selecting 260 candidates for 597 vacancies in the State had led to a massive uproar from the Mised community over claims of a disproportionate number of people from Kukizho community being selected. The Joint Action Committee, an Imphal-based civil society organisation, had met with Chief Minister N. Biren Singh on Monday for urgent intervention to correct the "unfair merit list". Even as the results were announced for other States in August 2023, the last round of selection for Manipur went on till February 2024, following which on March 15, the final results for the 597 vacancies in Manipur were declared, showing the selection of 260 candidates. "Even as this result, of the 260 selected candidates, 150 were selected under the Scheduled Tribe quota, three were selected under the Other Backward Classes quota and 107 were selected under the Unreserved category. The withdrawal came as

Modi promises strict action against corruption over the next five years

S.P. Saravanan, M. Sabari, SALEM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said stringent action would be taken against corruption over the next five years, and asked the people of Tamil Nadu to give the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) a massive mandate in the Lok Sabha election. Speaking at a public meeting in Salem, Mr. Modi contended that the DMK and the Congress were two sides of the same coin as both the parties were involved in corruption and family rule. Only after sending the Congress home, technology grew. But in Tamil Nadu, the fifth generation of the DMK is coming to power.



Warm reception: Prime Minister Narendra Modi greating BJP cadre at a public meeting in Salem on Tuesday. E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

The DMK has lost its steep because of the support that the NDA alliance partners have been receiving in the State... Mr. Modi claimed that the Centre was allocating funds for development schemes to Tamil Nadu, but the DMK government was trying to loot them. The DMK had become clear after their first rally in Mumbai's Shivaji Park. "They are attacking

Mr. Modi said that the DMK had lost its steep because of the support that the NDA alliance partners have been receiving in the State... Mr. Modi claimed that the Centre was allocating funds for development schemes to Tamil Nadu, but the DMK government was trying to loot them. The DMK had become clear after their first rally in Mumbai's Shivaji Park. "They are attacking

Activist calls for border march in Ladakh to mark land lost to China

Vijain Singh, NEW DELHI

Around 10,000 people from Ladakh will march to the border along China to show how much land has been lost to the neighbouring country, climate activist and educator Parag Wanchuk said on Tuesday. Mr. Wanchuk has been protesting in open in sub-zero temperature in Leh, surviving only on salt and water for the past 10 days to demand constitutional safeguards for the Union Territory. "We know from the shepherds that they are not allowed (anyone) to go to the places that they always used to go in, in particular areas, they are stopped kilometres before where they used to go earlier. We



No step back: Sonam Wanchuk is on a fast seeking constitutional safeguards for the Union Territory. PTI

will go and show whether land has been lost or not," Mr. Wanchuk said. The Centre would be taken out in Finger area (north and south bank of Pangong Tso), Demchok, Chushul among others would be taken out of Actual Control with China. He said two dates have been shortlisted for the

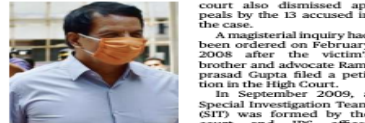
No-go areas

After the June 15, 2020 incident in Galwan where 20 Indian soldiers were killed in violent clashes with the Chinese People's Liberation Army, several rounds of talks took place between the two armies have taken place leading to disengagement and creation of buffer zones or no-go areas. At the centre of Mr. Wanchuk's protest that has received huge support from local people is the failure of Statehood talks between Ladakh civil society leaders and Union Home Minister Amit Shah on March 4.

Former police officer gets life term in fake encounter case

The Hindu Bureau, MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday sentenced to life imprisonment former Mumbai Police Inspector Pradeep Sharma in the fake encounter killing of Lakhani Baiya, alias Ramnarayan Gupta, an alleged aide of convicted gangster Chhota Rajan, in 2006. The court also upheld the life sentence awarded to 13 more people in the case. Twelve of them are former police personnel — Dilip Palande, Nitin Sarfate, Ganesh Harpude, Anand Patade, Prakash Kadam, Devdas Sakpal, Dera Durang Kokam, Ratnakar Kamble, Sandeep Sardar, Tanaji Desai, Pradeep Suryavanshi and Vinayak Shinde — and one a civilian, Hitesh Solanki. Gupta was killed on November 11, 2006 at Nana Nani Park in Versova in northwestern Mumbai. It is alleged that a police team led by Sharma, who was known as an encounter specialist, picked up Gupta and his friend Anil Bheda from their home at Vashi in Navi Mumbai. He



Pradeep Sharma killed Gupta in a staged encounter. Later, Bheda was also found dead.

"Perverse acquittal" The Division Bench of Justice Ravindra Mohite, Dera Durang Kokam, Ratnakar Kamble, Sandeep Sardar, Tanaji Desai, Pradeep Suryavanshi and Vinayak Shinde — and one a civilian, Hitesh Solanki. Gupta was killed on November 11, 2006 at Nana Nani Park in Versova in northwestern Mumbai. It is alleged that a police team led by Sharma, who was known as an encounter specialist, picked up Gupta and his friend Anil Bheda from their home at Vashi in Navi Mumbai. He

court also dismissed appeals by the 13 accused in the case. A magisterial inquiry had been ordered on February 2008 after the victim's brother and advocate Ramesh Gupta filed a petition in the High Court. In September 2009, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) was formed by the court and IPS officer M.M. Trassande, then Deputy Commissioner of Police, was appointed to investigate the case. In April 2010, the SIT filed a chargesheet against 22 accused in the case. It said that a real estate agent, Jantaran Bhangre, had given a murder contract to former Inspector Sharma and Pradeep Suryavanshi against Mr. Gupta over a love-triangle relationship. On March 13, 2011, ahead of his testimony before the court, Bheda, the prime witness in the case, went missing from his residence in Vashi. Four days later, his decomposed and burnt body was found in Thane. A Sessions Court awarded life sentence to 22 accused but acquitted Sharma.

M.K. Stalin seeks legal action against Union Minister's comments

The Hindu Bureau, CHENNAI

Condemning Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje's "hate speech" against people from Tamil Nadu living in Karnataka, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Tuesday sought legal action against her. Ms. Karandlaje had reportedly told presspersons that people from Tamil Nadu who come to Karnataka, get trained in Tamil Nadu and plant bombs in Karnataka. She had also reportedly said that they had placed the bomb in the cafe, in an apparent reference to the recent incident in Bengaluru. "Divisive politics" "Tamilians and Kannadigas alike will reject this divisive rhetoric of the BJP," Mr. Stalin said in a social media post, "accusing her of 'causing threat to peace, harmony and national unity'." From the Prime Minister's office, it was said that the BJP should stop engaging in this divisive politics.

Delhi HC to hear HC to plea against tax recovery

The Hindu Bureau, NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday listed a petition by the Congress challenging the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act, by the Chair of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee has questioned the timing of the Modi government's decision. In a statement issued in Washington on Monday, U.S. Senator Ben Cardin said that he was "deeply concerned" by the Indian government's decision to notify the controversial CAA and its "potential ramifications" for India's Muslim community. "Shared values" "Making matters worse is the fact that it is being pushed through during the holy month of Ramadan (Ramadan) when the U.S.-India relationship deepens, it is critically important that our shared values of protection of religious freedom, respect for all persons, regardless of religion."

Notifying CAA during Ramadan makes it worse: I.S. Senator

Suhasini Haider, NEW DELHI

Adding to the heated exchange of words between Delhi and Washington over the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act, by the Chair of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee has questioned the timing of the Modi government's decision. In a statement issued in Washington on Monday, U.S. Senator Ben Cardin said that he was "deeply concerned" by the Indian government's decision to notify the controversial CAA and its "potential ramifications" for India's Muslim community. "Shared values" "Making matters worse is the fact that it is being pushed through during the holy month of Ramadan (Ramadan) when the U.S.-India relationship deepens, it is critically important that our shared values of protection of religious freedom, respect for all persons, regardless of religion."

Ben Cardin

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has issued a comment on the remarks by the U.S. Senator. Last week the MEA had responded sharply to the U.S. State department statement on the notification of rules for the CAA. In response to the State department's concerns, M.E.A. spokesperson Karanbir Jaiswal had said that there were no grounds for concern on the treatment of the human rights in India, calling the U.S. spokesperson's comments "misplaced, misinformed and unwarranted", and accusing the U.S. administration of practicing "vote bank politics".

Activist calls for border march in Ladakh to mark land lost to China

Vijaita Singh

NEW DELHI

Around 10,000 people from Ladakh will march to the border along China to showcase how much land has been lost to the neighbouring country, climate activist and education reformer Sonam Wangchuk said on Tuesday.

Mr. Wangchuk has been protesting in open in sub-zero temperature in Leh, surviving only on salt and water for the past 14 days, to demand constitutional safeguards for the Union Territory.

“We know from the shepherds that they are not allowed [anymore] to go to the places that they always used to go. In particular areas, they are stopped kilometres before where they used to go earlier. We



No step back: Sonam Wangchuk is on a fast seeking constitutional safeguards for the Union Territory for the past 14 days. ANI

will go and show whether land has been lost or not,” Mr. Wangchuk said.

The march would be taken out in Finger area (north and south bank of Pangong Tso), Demchok, Chushul among others along the Line of Actual Control with China.

He said two dates have been shortlisted for the

march – March 27 and April 7.

“The march will also highlight the areas, prime pasture lands, that are being turned into solar parks. On one hand, nomads are losing their land to corporates who are coming to set up their plants, maybe mining in future...on the other hand they are losing

pasture land to China which is encroaching from the north, the Chinese have captured huge chunks of land in the last few years,” he said.

No-go areas

After the June 15, 2020 incident in Galwan where 20 Indian soldiers were killed in violent clashes with the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, several rounds of talks between the two armies have taken place leading to disengagement and creation of buffer zones or no-go areas.

At the centre of Mr. Wangchuk’s protest that has received huge support from local people is the failure of Statehood talks between Ladakh civil society leaders and Union Home Minister Amit Shah on March 4.

CHINESE CLAIM LINE

INDIA

INDIAN CLAIM LINE

FINGER 1

FINGER 2

FINGER 3

FINGER 4

FINGER 5

FINGER 7

FINGER 6

FINGER 8

POST

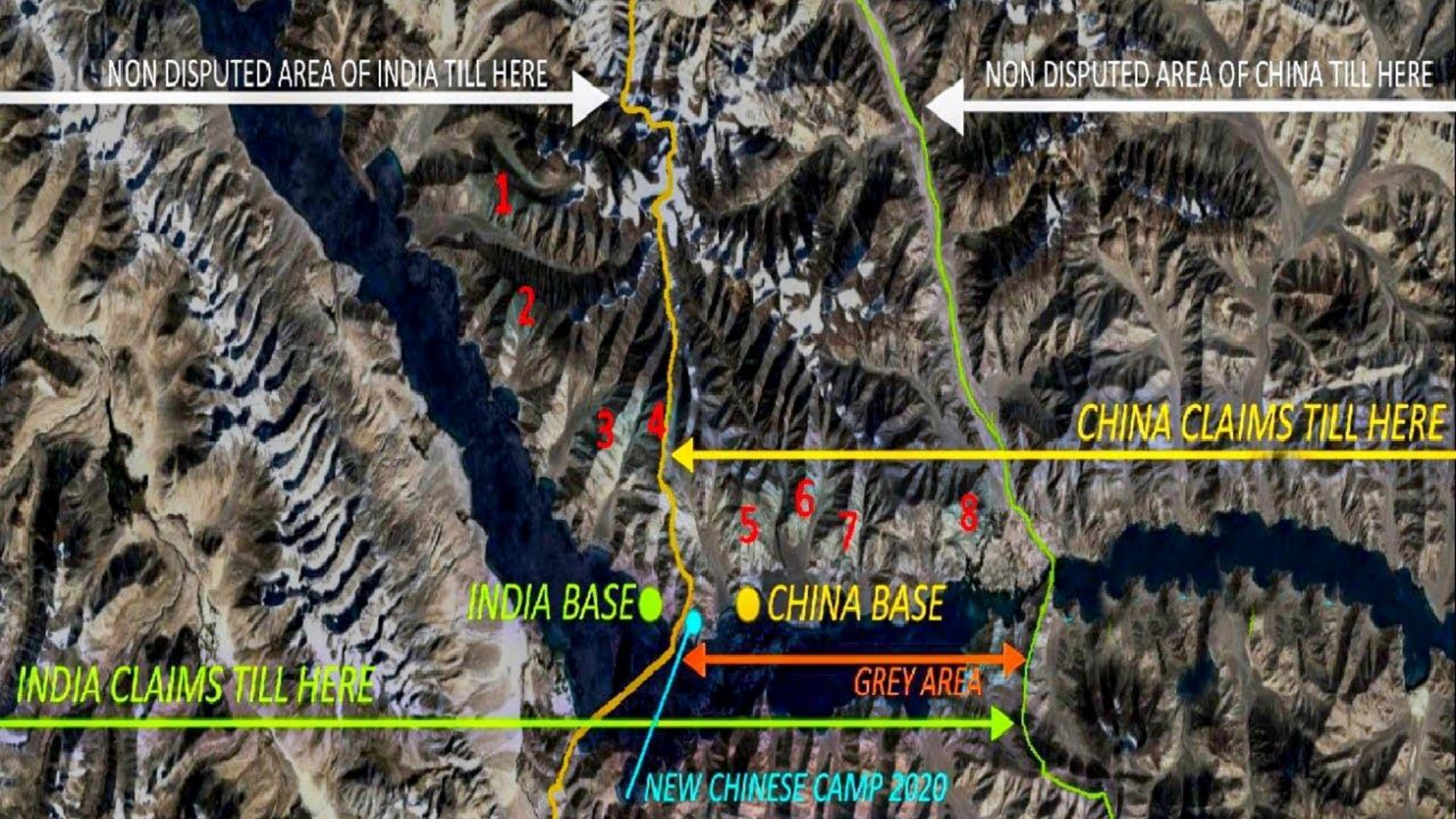
BASE

BASE

8 KM







NON DISPUTED AREA OF INDIA TILL HERE

NON DISPUTED AREA OF CHINA TILL HERE

1

2

3

4

CHINA CLAIMS TILL HERE

5

6

7

8

INDIA BASE

CHINA BASE

INDIA CLAIMS TILL HERE

GREY AREA

NEW CHINESE CAMP 2020



Primary Demands:



The two socio-political organisations spearheading the movement are seeking protections for the UT previously enshrined under Article 370 and 35A. Their primary demands include:



Statehood for Ladakh: Seeking to elevate Ladakh from its current Union Territory status to a full-fledged state, granting it greater political autonomy and decision-making powers.



Safeguards under the 6th Schedule: Advocating for Constitutional provisions under the 6th Schedule to protect the **cultural, linguistic, and land rights** of the indigenous population.

Reservation of Jobs: Calling for reservations in employment opportunities for the youth of Ladakh, ensuring equitable access to economic resources and opportunities.

Creation of Separate Parliamentary Constituencies: Proposing the establishment of distinct Parliamentary constituencies for **Leh and Kargil**, reflecting the unique demographic and geographical characteristics of each region.

-
- **What are the Constitutional Provisions Related to Formation of States in India?**
 - **Article 3 of the Indian Constitution grants Parliament the authority to undertake various actions regarding the formation, alteration, or dissolution of states. These actions include:**
 - **Formation of New States:** Parliament can create a new state by separating territory from an existing state, uniting two or more states, or combining any territory with a part of an existing state.
 - **Increase or Decrease in State Area:** Parliament has the power to increase or diminish the area of any state.
 - **Alteration of State Boundaries:** Parliament can alter the boundaries of any state.
 - **Change of State Name:** Parliament can change the name of any state

What is the Sixth Schedule?

About:

Sixth Schedule contains special provisions for the administration of tribal areas in the four northeastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram under Article 244(2) of the Indian Constitution

Objectives: It aims to safeguard tribal land and resources, preventing their transfer to non-tribal entities.

It also strives to protect tribal communities from exploitation, ensuring their cultural and social identities are upheld and promoted.



Q2. Under which Schedule of the Constitution of India can the transfer of tribal land to private parties for mining be declared null and void? (2019)



- (a)** Third Schedule
- (b)** Fifth Schedule
- (c)** Ninth Schedule
- (d)** Twelfth Schedule

IN BRIEF



Lokpal asks CBI to probe cash for query case against Mahua

Lokpal, the anti-corruption body, on Tuesday directed the CBI to probe the cash-for-query allegations against Trinamool Congress leader Mahua Moitra who was expelled from Lok Sabha last year. CBI has been asked to submit findings before Lokpal within six months. The CBI, however, submitted that the allegation that Ms. Moitra received ₹2.75 crore cash in two tranches from businessman Dushan Hirannandani in 2019 and 2021 “is not substantiated as sufficient evidence could not be collected due to the limited scope of the inquiry,” the order said. The CBI added that a probe is required to unearth the truth of this allegation of a serious nature.

2023 was the ‘hottest year’ on record, confirms WMO

In line with observations by climate agencies, the World Meteorological Organisation has officially confirmed 2023 to be the hottest year on record. “The State of Global Climate Report”, published on Tuesday, stated that the global average near-surface temperature was 1.45 degrees Celsius (with a margin of uncertainty of ± 0.12 degrees Celsius) above the pre-industrial baseline. It was the warmest 10-year period on record. The previous, joint warmest years were 2016 (+2.12°C), 2023 (+2.05°C), and 2019 (1850-1900 average and 2020 at 1.27 ± 0.13 degree Celsius).

SC directs States to give ration cards to 8 cr. workers

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday took exception to the delays in the implementation of its April 2023 order to provide ration cards to about eight crore migrant workers registered in the eShram portal but not covered under the National Food Security Act. The portal has 28.6 crore registrants. Of this, 20.63 crore are registered on ration card data. A Bench led by Justice Hima Kohli directed ration cards to be given to the remaining eight crore migrant and unorganised sector workers registered on the eShram portal in two months. The court was acting on the arguments raised by advocates Prashant Bhushan and Chery D’Souza for activists Anjali Bhardwaj, Harsh Mander and Jagdeep Chhokar. Mr. Bhushan had argued that there could be more than 10 crore workers left outside the protective umbrella of the Food Safety Act if the statistics were based on the 2011 census. The court had said last year that it was the duty of a welfare state to include migrants and the worker on the ration card roll expeditiously.

Railways earned ₹1,230 crore from cancelled waiting list tickets in span of three years

Reply to RTI query shows that the number of such cancellations rose from 2.53 crore in 2021 to 5.26 crore in 2023; former official calls for recalibration of waitlisted slots that are on offer

Mailto Porecha
NEW DELHI

The Indian Railways clocked earnings of ₹1,230.85 crore from cancelled waiting list tickets between 2021 and 2024 (till January), a response to a query under the Right to Information Act has revealed. The Railway Ministry response to the RTI application filed by Mailto Porecha said that the earnings of ₹1,230.85 crore from cancelled waiting list tickets between 2021 and 2024 (till January), a response to a query under the Right to Information Act has revealed. The Railway Ministry response to the RTI application filed by Mailto Porecha said that the earnings of ₹1,230.85 crore from cancelled waiting list tickets between 2021 and 2024 (till January), a response to a query under the Right to Information Act has revealed. The Railway Ministry response to the RTI application filed by Mailto Porecha said that the earnings of ₹1,230.85 crore from cancelled waiting list tickets between 2021 and 2024 (till January), a response to a query under the Right to Information Act has revealed.



In the month of January 2024, 45.86 lakh tickets were cancelled, leading to earnings of 443 crore for the Railways. FILE PHOTO

cancelled, leading to earnings of ₹443 crore for the Railways. “It is very clear that with limited capacity, the Railways is unable to cater to demand. They should gauge the demand pattern and avoid offering too many waiting list tickets,” a former Railway official told *The Hindu*. “For instance, an 18-coach train has 720 seats in the sleeper compartment, and the Railways allots a waiting list of 600. There will be no scope for accommodating such a large number, and tickets are bound to get cancelled so long as the railway recalibration of their waiting list threshold,” the former official pointed out.

Deeppavali week Between November 5 and November 17 last year, during the Deeppavali week, the Railways saw 56.18 lakh ticket cancellations. This number included those cancelling their confirmed, reservation against cancellation (RAC) and waiting list tickets. Of these 56.18 lakh cancellations, 47.82 lakh cancellations (up to 45%) were those of waitlisted passengers from the Centre for Railway Information Systems. Only in the Deeppavali week, the Railways clocked earnings of ₹10.37 crore as “total cancellation earning” from all tickets having final status as waiting list.

Other than the shanties at least three other buildings in the vicinity of the building have been evacuated by the administration. Buildings erected recently, have been built with barely a couple of feet between the structures. These illegal structures are in a highly populated area of Garden Reach. The alley leading to these houses was not even three to four feet wide. On Paharpur Road, a few metres away from the site of the March 17 accident, two high-rises are leaning on each other leaving no space between them.

Kolkata building collapse toll rises to 10

Sibby Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Two more people died in the collapse of a five-storey building at Garden Reach in Kolkata, taking the toll to 10 as of Tuesday. One person died on Tuesday late on Monday evening and another died on Tuesday. The building was located at Azhar Molla Lane in Metiabruz which is on the city's southwestern fringe. Residents of adjacent shanties on which the under construction building collapsed have been asked to vacate their homes. The building had collapsed on March 17.

27.6 million people engaged in forced labour in 2021: ILO

A.M. Heesch
NEW DELHI

A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO), released in Geneva on Tuesday, has found that forced labour generates illegal profits worth \$36 billion per year. This is an increase of 37% of such illegal profits since 2014 and the study said this fuelled by both Asia and the Pacific (\$62 billion), the Americas (\$52 billion), Africa (\$20 billion), and the Arab States (\$18 billion), the report said. The report also said forced commercial sexual exploitation accounts for more than two-thirds (73%) of the total illegal profits, despite accounting for only 27% of the total number of victims in privately imposed labour. “After forced commercial sexual exploitation, the sector with the highest annual illegal profits from forced labour is industry, at US\$35 billion, followed by services (US\$28 billion), agriculture (US\$8.0 billion), and domestic work (US\$2.6 billion). These illegal profits are the wages that rightfully belong in the pockets of workers but instead remain in the hands of their exploiters, as a result of their coercive practices,” the ILO Director-General at Gilbert F. Houngbo said. A mob set ablaze a shop belonging to the accused man. Tension gripped Buduan district as news of the murder spread. The international mobility must urgently include measures to end this injustice,” said the ILO Director-General.

It perpetuates cycles of poverty and strikes at the heart of human dignity, says report

There were 27.6 million people engaged in forced labour on any given day in 2021, the report said, meaning 3.8 people for every 1,000 people in the world. “Between 2016 and 2021, the number of people in forced labour increased by 2.7 million,” it said.

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UP, police gun down man accused of murdering 2 minors

Lalita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The police shot dead a man accused of murdering two brothers aged 12 and 6 in Buduan district of Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday. A mob set ablaze a shop belonging to the accused man. Tension gripped Buduan district as news of the murder spread. The international mobility must urgently include measures to end this injustice,” said the ILO Director-General.

Zomato brings ‘pure veg’ fleet, draws criticism from public

Aroon Deep
Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The fleet’s personnel are shown in promotional images wearing green uniforms and with green boxes on their bikes. The company will not assign “pure veg” delivery partners to any orders from restaurants where food is not exclusively vegetarian. While some vegetarian users welcomed the announcement on social media wholeheartedly, it immediately sparked backlash from app-based workers’ unions, activists, and academics, who argued that the move will invariably translate into harassment and violence against ground-level delivery partners, most of whom are from minority caste backgrounds, further saying that the move was planned and rolled out in response to user feedback. “If this is the case, there have been so many cases of users requesting delivery partners of a particular caste and religion, will this not be agreed to as well?” asked Mr. Salauddin, adding, “There have already been multiple instances of customers requesting delivery partners of a particular religion or community.” Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal said “food has no religion”. Today, he seems to have gone back on this. I ask him directly, is he now going to categorise delivery partners on the lines of caste, community and religion?” Karti P. Chidambaram,

Food delivery platform Zomato on Tuesday launched a “pure veg” delivery fleet that would deliver orders from restaurants that do not serve meat, fish, or egg-based dishes. The fleet’s personnel are shown in promotional images wearing green uniforms and with green boxes on their bikes. The company will not assign “pure veg” delivery partners to any orders from restaurants where food is not exclusively vegetarian. While some vegetarian users welcomed the announcement on social media wholeheartedly, it immediately sparked backlash from app-based workers’ unions, activists, and academics, who argued that the move will invariably translate into harassment and violence against ground-level delivery partners, most of whom are from minority caste backgrounds, further saying that the move was planned and rolled out in response to user feedback. “If this is the case, there have been so many cases of users requesting delivery partners of a particular caste and religion, will this not be agreed to as well?” asked Mr. Salauddin, adding, “There have already been multiple instances of customers requesting delivery partners of a particular religion or community.” Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal said “food has no religion”. Today, he seems to have gone back on this. I ask him directly, is he now going to categorise delivery partners on the lines of caste, community and religion?” Karti P. Chidambaram,

Zomato’s new ‘pure veg’ fleet. XIGDEEP/SIGNAL

Zomato’s new ‘pure veg’ fleet. XIGDEEP/SIGNAL

CROSSWORD 14127 (set by Afterdark)

13 Ball takes edge to deviate (4)
15 Always enters house by said or other side (7)
17 Worrying after son's accommodation (7)
20 Turn around for watering-hole (4)
22 Responded to a news broadcast on leftist (8)
25 Husband's relative in capital of Georgia gets nostalgic (11)
26 Country is a primarily religious nation (11)
27 Observe that these days tax overwhelms the French and British (9)
28 Cheat cleared contents of portable shelters (5)

Down
1 Cops detailed nuts on drug possession by people (9)
2 That woman's seniority overcomes a beginner in team with legacy (8)
3 Bask only someone erected a small idol depicting Esauhar at beach (7)
4 Awful mistake, kept note outside with book on aisleway essentially (8)
5 State not in a mess (8)
6 Trill out of shelves, not being quiet (5)
9 For starters, husband exhibits ardour, treats with warmth (4)
14 Gains in surplus covered by states' 50% subsidy (9)
16 Say, workers pass current through fuses (8)
18 Opinions of conservatives binding the man (8)
19 First neutralist arrogant husband, to be put away for being wayward (7)
21 Jumps, misses ball and drops (6)
23 Opening was primarily short and brilliant (4)
24 Nurses can access records, examine, seclude at the very outset (5)

SUDOKU

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

Solution to previous puzzle

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

FAITH Superior bhakti

Superior bhakti Lakshmana serves Rama in the forest. Yet it is Bharata's bhakti that is considered superior to Lakshmana's. Lakshmana's bhakti was sebhavta, while Bharata's was paratantriya, said Navalkpakkam Vanudevachariar, in a discourse. Sebhavta is the quality of dedicating oneself to the Lord and serving Him. But paratantriya is the attitude of thinking of oneself as belonging to the Lord. The very essence of such a bhakti is to carry out the Lord's will. Bharata was one such bhakta. He never questioned Rama. Usually an example is given to show the difference between sebhavta and paratantriya. Suppose the Lord asks a person whose bhakti falls under the classification of sebhavta to jump into a fire, he will ask, “If I am not here, who will serve You?” But if the same order were given to one whose bhakti can be classified as paratantriya, then he will obey, without questioning the Lord.

In his Paduka Sahasram, Vedanta Desika praises Bharata as the one who first proclaimed the greatness of Raghuva paduka (Rama's sandals). There are many conversations that Bharata has with various characters in the Ramayana.

Through every conversation that Bharata has, Valmiki shows us the importance of the dharma sastra. He has had harsh words for Kaikeyi. He assures Kaushalya that he had no part in Kaikeyi's decisions. Vasistha insists that Bharata should be the throne, but Bharata refuses. When he arrives at the bank of the Ganga, he has a conversation with Gusha. Looking for Rama, he arrives at sage Bharatwaja's ashram and talks to the rishi, who tells him where he can find Rama.

2023 was the 'hottest year' on record, confirms WMO

In line with observations by climate agencies, the World Meteorological Organisation has officially confirmed 2023 to be the hottest year on record. “The State of Global Climate Report”, published on Tuesday, stated that the global average near-surface temperature was 1.45 degrees Celsius (with a margin of uncertainty of ± 0.12 degrees Celsius) above the pre-industrial baseline. It was the warmest 10-year period on record. The previous, joint warmest years were 2016 at 1.29 ± 0.12 degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 average and 2020 at 1.27 ± 0.13 degree Celsius.

2023 warmest year on record, 2014-23 warmest decade: WMO

ANJALI MARAR

BENGALURU, MARCH 19

THE WORLD Meteorological Organisation (WMO) has made it official: 2023 was the warmest year on record, while the past decade (2014-23) was the warmest ever, the WMO said in its latest report on Tuesday.

In its annual State of the Climate Report, the WMO has said that global mean surface temperature in 2023 was 1.45 degrees Celsius higher than the average of the 1850-1900 pre-industrial period. This is significantly higher than the 1.29 degrees Celsius increase from pre-industrial times that was recorded in 2016.

The decadal average of the global mean surface temperature between 2014 and 2023 was 1.2 degrees Celsius higher than the pre-industrial average, making it the warmest 10-year period on record.

The WMO report noted that the observed concentrations of three main greenhouse gases — carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide — also touched new records in 2022, the last year for which consolidated global figures were available. Carbon dioxide

concentrations in 2022 had reached 417.9 parts per million, 150 per cent of the levels seen in the pre-industrial times, while methane concentrations were 1,923 parts per billion, which was 264 per cent of pre-industrial levels. Nitrous oxide concentrations in 2022 were observed at 335.8 parts per billion, which was 124 per cent of pre-industrial level, the report said.

Much of this information had been released in November last year, using data till October, in a provisional report that WMO brings out to coincide with the annual climate change conference. The data till October was so strong that none of the trends were expected to change during the remaining two months of the year. "Concentrations of greenhouse gases continued to rise (in 2022). Ocean heat content and sea level reached record observed highs and the rate of increase is accelerating. Antarctic sea ice extent hit record observed lows. Key glaciers suffered record losses. The climate crisis is the defining challenge that humanity faces," said Celeste Saulo, Secretary-General, WMO, in a statement.

With 70 per cent of Earth's area covered by water, the rising

greenhouse gases generate excess energy, which remains accumulated in the form of heat and is absorbed by oceans. In addition to this heat, oceans absorb carbon dioxide, which together with warming of the sea waters result in ocean acidification, rising sea level and more.

The ocean heat content in 2023 exceeded the 2022 value, thus reaching a 65-year high record, the WMO said.

The Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean remained unusually warm, besides the Pacific Ocean warming owing to the El Nino conditions that commenced in June last year.

As like heatwave and cold-wave on land, there are ocean-equivalent components in the oceans known as marine heat wave and marine cold wave. 2023 being an El Nino year — when there prevails higher than normal sea surface temperatures along the equatorial Pacific Ocean — marine heat wave persisted along the North Atlantic Ocean. According to WMO, at least 32 per cent area of the total global oceans suffered from marine heatwave everyday last year (23 per cent area during the 2016 El Nino episode).

India to join U.S.-led carbon market project



Green moves: India is also considering clean electricity and sustainable aviation fuel initiatives. AP

Amrit Sen
NEW DELHI

India has decided to join at least one of the four cooperative work programmes unveiled last week under the "clean energy pillar" of the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) — the one on facilitating and promoting carbon-market activities.

Officials said New Delhi is also considering two of the other co-operative work-programme initiatives, one on clean electricity and the other on the use of sustainable aviation fuel but will take a call on whether to join or not after thorough analysis.

"India will join the cooperative working group on carbon markets through the Ministry of Power and the Bureau of Energy Efficiency will be the nodal body," an official tracking the matter said. The IPEF, an initiative led by U.S. President Joe Biden, was unveiled in May 2022, bringing together 14 regional partners — Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the U.S. and Vietnam.

Four pillars
Seen by many analysts as an attempt by the U.S. to counter China's growing influence in the region, the IPEF aims at having a common set of rules and standards around four pillars viz. connectivity and digital trade; resilient supply chains; clean energy; and corruption-free fair trade.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Nvidia's dizzying rally spurs rush into AI-themed Exchange Traded Funds

The funds run the gamut from those offering a bouquet of the biggest AI winners to more esoteric themes such as robotics, sound generation, the universe of AI-themed ETFs traded in the U.S. has soared to \$6.88 bn as of the end of Feb. from \$2.55 billion a year earlier. Morningstar data show

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters

The fervour around artificial intelligence has sparked a gold rush into AI-themed ETFs, as investors seek fresh ways to play the burgeoning technology following breathtaking rallies in market darlings such as Nvidia.

The funds run the gamut from those offering a bouquet of the biggest AI winners to more esoteric themes such as robotics and sound generation. All told, the universe of AI-themed ETFs traded in the United States has soared to \$6.88 billion as of the end of February from \$2.55 billion a year earlier, Morningstar data showed.

"It's still so early in the evolution of this category ... that investors are still sorting through the possibilities," said Will Rhind, founder and CEO of GraniteShares.

The exuberance surrounding AI funds echoes responding with enthusiasm and Nvidia — whose chips are seen as the gold standard in AI — continues to grab the spotlight.

The assets of the GrantShares 2x Long NVDA Daily ETF, which seeks to deliver twice the daily return of the chipmaker's shares and is not included in Morningstar's data on AI-themed funds, doubled to \$2 billion earlier this month. Those flows have followed the nearly 80% climb in Nvidia's shares so



In the chips: Nvidia's Blackwell B200 AI chip is 30 times speedier than its previous chip. REUTERS

same time, many of the companies whose shares soared in previous market booms eventually saw their stock prices fizzle, a fate that may await some of the market's current AI favourites.

For now, investors are responding with enthusiasm and Nvidia — whose chips are seen as the gold standard in AI — continues to grab the spotlight.

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far this year, after the company's shares tripled in the year 2023.

Speedier chip
At its developer conference on Monday, the company unveiled the Blackwell B200, an AI chip it says is up to 30 times speedier than its previous chip.

Smaller ETFs have also prospered. Assets in the Themes Generative Artificial Intelligence ETF tripled to about \$20 million from \$7.5 million earlier this month, said Taylor Krzyzowski, investment strategist at Themes ETFs.

Seven of the 18 diversified AI-related ETFs that Morningstar tracks have launched within the last three years. An eighth was redesigned to target AI more directly.

The funds have had collective inflows of \$2.68 billion in the last 12 months, according to Morningstar. That is almost double the inflows into global real estate ETFs, the firm said.

Fuelling bubble
Whether investor excitement about the possibilities of AI is more or just contributing to a

strong bull run in stocks is unclear. The S&P 500 is up nearly 8% year-to-date, fuelled in part by rallies in AI beneficiaries such as Nvidia and Microsoft, following a 24% gain last year.

The AI fervour has also driven parabolic moves in the shares of other companies, including a more than 250% gain in Super Micro Computer, which joined the S&P 500 this week.

Limiting exposure
Some investors appear to be limiting their exposure to Nvidia and other stocks that have notched big moves. ETF issuer Global X found that its Global X Artificial Intelligence and Technology ETF, which caps Nvidia exposure to 3%, has tripled in size over the last three months.

By comparison, its Robo Global Robotics & Automation ETF, which has more than 20% of its assets invested in the chipmaker, grew by 20%.

Others are focused on finding new areas that will benefit from AI, said Rene Reynolds, head of thematic ETF strategy at Invesco AI and Next-Gen Software ETF.

"Changing landscape"
The "conversations we have with investors don't focus on finding the next position, but more on recognising that these technolo-

gies are changing the landscape and finding ways to get exposure to some of this growth," he said.

Analysts at Morgan Stanley last week published a list of 400 individual stocks that may benefit from AI. Less obvious beneficiaries included Walmart and Caterpillar. The bank also recommended exploring "less crowded sub-themes" like the integration of AI and smartphones.

ETFs are also scrambling to provide offerings for every taste.

Robo Global Robotics & Automation ETF supplements its Nvidia exposure with holdings in stocks some expect to benefit from AI technology, like Intuitive Surgical.

The Roundhill Generative AI & Technology ETF is the latest on company, it expects to be beneficiaries of generative AI, including Salesforce.com and Marvel Technology.

Sees outflows
Still, at least one flavour of AI-themed ETF has failed to win fans. The WisdomTree US AI Enhanced Value ETF, which uses AI to select its portfolio, has seen outflows of \$48.2 million in the last 12 months and lags the S&P 500.

One possible reason the fund and others in its category have underperformed: many of them lack a position in more on recognising that these technolo-

Driving over woods



Not green anymore: Environmental activists occupy tree huts in the forest in Greenheide, southeast of Berlin, protesting against the plans of U.S. electric carmaker Tesla to extend the company's factory.

Central banks deploy AI to assess climate-related financial risks

Reuters
LONDON

Central bankers said on Tuesday they have broken new ground by using artificial intelligence to collect data for assessing climate-related financial risks, just as the volume of disclosures from banks and other companies is set to rise.

The Bank for International Settlements, a forum for central banks, the Bank of Spain, Germany's Bundesbank and the European Central Bank said their experimental Gaia AI project was used to analyse company disclosures on carbon emissions, green bond issuance and voluntary net-zero commitments.

Regulators of banks, insurers and asset managers need high-quality data to assess the impact of climate change on financial institutions. However, the absence of a single reporting standard confronts them with a patchwork of public information spread



Clearing the smokes: Gaia AI was used to analyse firm's disclosures on carbon emissions and voluntary net-zero commitments. REUTERS

across text, tables and footnotes in annual reports.

Overcoming differences
Gaia was able to overcome differences in definitions and disclosure frameworks across jurisdictions to offer much-needed transparency,

and make it easier to compare indicators on climate-related financial risks, the central banks said in a joint statement.

Despite variations in how the same data is reported by companies, Gaia focuses on the definition of each indicator, rather than how the data is labelled.

Furthermore, with the traditional approach, each additional key performance indicator, or KPI, and each new institution requires the analyst to either search for the information in public corporate reports or contact the institution for information.

With Gaia, adding new KPIs or new institutions is quick and easy, the Central banks said.

Clamour for collateral clouds China firm Vanke's credit pursuit

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
SHANGHAI/BEIJING/HONG KONG

A rare Beijing directive to help Vanke beat a liquidity crisis has left lenders scrambling for the assets that the State-backed developer has proposed for collateral, as parties pull out all the stops to avert deterioration in the property sector.

China Vanke is gasping for funding after sales in both January and February fell below the monthly break-even point of 20 billion yuan (\$2.8 billion), meaning cash flowed out of the business, an internal memo showed.

crisis since mid-2021. Local policymakers' stimulus and easing measures have struggled to boost sales or increase liquidity, while many property developers have defaulted on debt obligations.

Rare intervention
Reflecting the deepening crisis, regulators asked financial firms and creditors to step up financing support for Vanke — China's second-biggest property developer by sales — in a rare intervention by central government, Reuters reported last week.

With plunging sales as well as bond prices clouding Vanke's outlook, the developer has shared a list of mainly commercial projects such as shopping malls and their revenue



Contagion effect: Vanke's financial woes became public after debt defaults of marquee peers. REUTERS

streams with potential lenders to access fresh credit, said two people with knowledge of the matter.

Those lenders include a group of banks, led by Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), which is in early talks to lend as much as 80 billion yuan, two other people said.

Lenders are reviewing assets as they can, the people said. At the same time, the two people said, they have demanded further collateral before agreeing to extensions to the maturities of their debt holdings,

said a fifth person. Vanke declined to comment. ICBC did not respond to a request for comment.

"The more demanding approach from creditors shows they have turned cautious even with State-related and better-performing developers, generally perceived as safe," said a Ng. Nat. Asia-Pacific senior economist.

"It's more difficult situation about the biggest risk in the property market remains in the sluggish home sales and in 2023.

Analysts estimate the value of Vanke's unpledged commercial property at 77 to 90 billion yuan, meaning the developer could borrow as much as 45 billion yuan if banks lend at a 50% loan-to-value ratio. The ratio could be as

much as 70% depending on collateral quality, said some bankers and analysts, underscoring the pressure Vanke faces to add high-value guarantees to its list.

Bond Hierarchy
Analysts expect Vanke to have enough cash to repay \$1.6 billion worth of public bonds maturing this year, but question its long-term ability to service debt, considering its fast-depleting cash and \$3.5 billion worth of debt in 2023.

Vanke's financial woes became public after the debt defaults of a string of marquee peers, including China Evergrande Group and Country Garden, amid an industry-wide sales drop. Sales by floor area plunged 20.5% in January-

February from the same period a year prior. For all of 2023, sales fell 8.5%.

Confidence among homebuyers as well as investors could drop even more should Vanke struggle to repay debt, considering Vanke is State-backed — about a third held by the State-owned enterprise — and has more projects in big cities, and so was widely believed to be financially soundly supported by participants said.

Vanke has asked creditors, including insurance, State-owned PICC Property and Casualty and New China Life Insurance for permission to extend debt maturities. Creditors reported this month. The three firms did not respond to calls and emails seeking comment.

India to join U.S.-led carbon market project



Green moves: India is also considering clean electricity and sustainable aviation fuel initiatives. AP

Amiti Sen
NEW DELHI

India has decided to join at least one of the four cooperative work programmes unveiled last week under the ‘clean energy pillar’ of the U.S.-led Indo Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) - the one on facilitating and promoting carbon-market activities.

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Four pillars

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(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

No stay on CAA Rules, SC tells Govt to respond to pleas

Apex court tells Centre to file reply by April 2, next hearing on April 9

ANANTHAKRISHNAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

WHILE IT refused to stay the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act Rules notified earlier this month, the Supreme Court on Tuesday issued notice to the Centre, asking it to respond to petitions challenging the Rules.

A three-judge bench led by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud also issued notices to the Centre on citizenship challenging the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

"Solicitor General Tushar Mehta submits that four weeks time may be granted to file response to the applications for stay at this stage. The request of four weeks time is opposed on the ground that in the meantime, the citizenship were to be granted, that process would become irreversible. Bearing in mind all the facts and circumstances, we direct that the proceedings be listed on April 9," the bench, which included Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said.

The bench asked the Centre to file its reply by April 2, after which the Centre will be asked to file its reply by April 9.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

On the ground in Assam, no clear answers yet: 'Will wait and watch'

SUKRITA BARUAH
SILCHAR, MARCH 19

AJIT DAS'S ordeal began in 2014 when he first received a notice that his citizenship was under investigation. Over the next 10 years, his struggle to prove his Indian citizenship has included three months of detention, and culminated in an order by the Foreigners Tribunal in 2021 declaring him a foreigner.

Das says his father and grandfather fled from East Pakistan in 1956 and spent a few years in Assam.



Desperate to clear my name, says Ajit Das, who runs a shop in Amrighat Bazaar, 30 km from Silchar. Express

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



DAY AFTER BIHAR SNUB, PARAS QUITS MODI GOVT. LOOKS FOR OPP. LIFELINE

PATANJALI ADS. SUPREME COURT SUMMONS RAMDEV, MD BALKRISHNA

PAGES 7 & 9

Soren's daughter-in-law joins BJP: 'Isolated by JMM, family members'

ABHISHEK ANGAD
RANCHI, MARCH 19

JHARKHAND Mukti Morcha MLA Sita Soren, daughter-in-law of JMM president Shibu Soren, resigned from the party on Tuesday and joined the BJP.

In her resignation letter addressed to Shibu Soren, the MLA from Jhama said that ever since the death of her husband Durga Soren — the JMM's chief's son and elder brother of former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren — she had been "isolated by the party and family members".

"Since the demise of my late husband, Durga Soren, who was a leading warrior of the Jharkhand movement and a great revolutionary, I and my family have been victims of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

17TH RAMNATH GOENKA AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

On way to being economic power, our ideals, convictions also key in a democracy: Gadkari



Winners of the Ramnath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Awards for 2021 (left) and 2022 with Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways; Viveck Goenka, Chairman, The Indian Express Group; Anant Goenka, Executive Director, The Indian Express Group; and Justice B N Srikrishna, jury member, in New Delhi on Tuesday. Present: Kishore Kulkarni



Politics to investigation, sports to economy, 44 felicitated for works of excellence across print, digital and broadcast during 2021 and 2022

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

UNION MINISTER for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari said Tuesday that India is powering its way to become the third largest economy, but economic progress apart, convictions and principles are

equally important to live by in a democracy. Presenting the 17th Ramnath Goenka Awards for Excellence in Journalism for the years 2021 and 2022 at a well-attended ceremony in New Delhi, Gadkari said, "We are the fastest growing economy in the world and working towards becoming the third largest economy in the world."

Economic progress is important but it cannot be the ultimate end of life. Those who have stayed with their conviction and ideals and worked for democracy since 1947, we will remember them when we complete 100 years of independent India."

He also said that people are no longer interested in who said what, but in gaining knowledge. "Only giving information is not the ultimate goal in this fast-changing world," he said. "India is trying to be world class in the field of sports, culture, knowledge, agriculture and industry. In this fast-changing world, the media has an important role to play," he said, adding, "People are not interested in who said what, but in knowledge."

Gadkari recalled the days of the Emergency and how that phase impacted his life. "On June 25, 1975, when the Emergency was imposed, many people from my family were arrested under the MISA," he said. "Those two years were a very painful phase. That's when I decided I will work against the Emergency."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Ex-cop Pradeep Sharma gets life term in 2006 Mumbai fake encounter case

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, MARCH 19

SETTING ASIDE his acquittal by a sessions court, the Bombay High Court on Tuesday convicted and sentenced former Mumbai police officer Pradeep Sharma to life imprisonment in the 2006 fake en-

counter killing of Raminarayan Gupta alias Lashan Bhausa, an alleged member of the Chhota Rajan gang.

The court directed Sharma, considered an "encounter specialist", to surrender within three weeks.

Allowing the state government's appeal against Sharma's acquittal in July 2013, a bench of

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leged member of the Chhota Rajan gang. The court directed Sharma, considered an "encounter specialist", to surrender within three weeks. Allowing the state government's appeal against Sharma's acquittal in July 2013, a bench of

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In Ladakh, astronomy ambassadors are trained to offer a tour of the night sky

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

ANJALI MARAR
BENGALURU, MARCH 19

CROWDING UP in Buk-Shado hamlet of Ladakh's Hanle, Rangdrol Dorjee, 25, recalls spending several nights under the star-spangled astral skies in the early 2000s. Living his dream of becoming an astronomer, Rangdrol is now a local collector



Amateur astronomers view the star-filled skies during the fresher course at Hanle in Ladakh in October 2023. Indian Institute of Astrophysics

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

who takes visitors on celestial tours with his telescope. "As a child, I used to see the telescope (at the local observatory) and dream of becoming an astronomer. Now, I know the names of many constellations and I am proud to be an astronomy ambassador," Rangdrol, a computer science engineer from Punjab Technical University, told The Indian Express recently.

In October 2022, 24 ambassadors from Hanle village, including 18 women, were hand

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Delhi tops the list — world's most polluted capital city in 2023

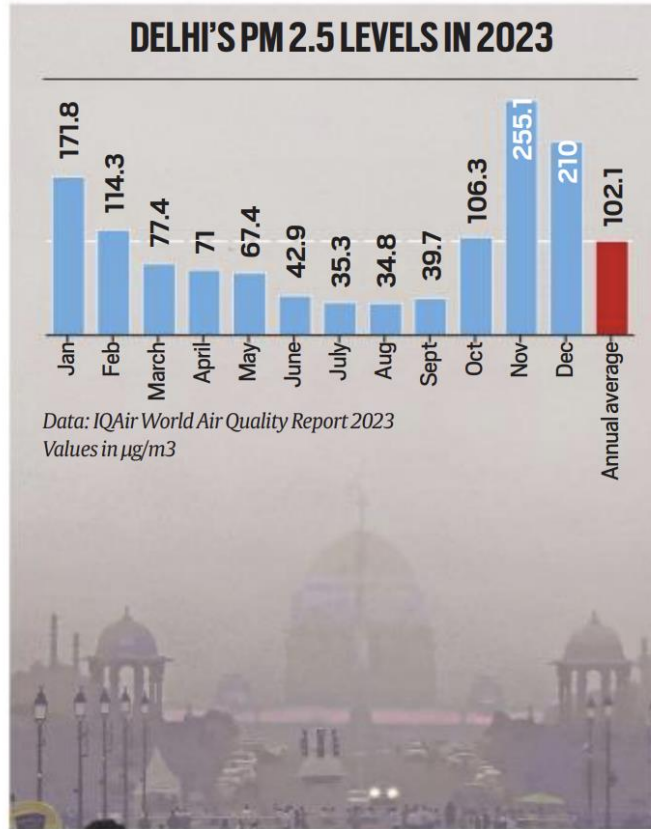
EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

DELHI WAS the most polluted capital city in the world last year, and the third most polluted city in India after Begusarai and Guwahati in terms of PM (Particulate Matter) 2.5 levels, according to the World Air Quality Report for 2023.

The report was prepared by IQAir, a Swiss air quality technology company. It uses data from monitoring stations of government agencies, educational institutions, and non-profits across the world, the report said.

In 2023, Delhi's annual average PM 2.5 level was 92.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ — placing the Indian national capital at the top of a list of 114 capital cities in the world. This was followed by Dhaka in Bangladesh, with a PM 2.5 level of 80.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. Air quality guidelines of the World Health Organisation (WHO) suggest that annual average PM 2.5 levels should not exceed 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

But within the country, Begusarai in Bihar and Guwahati in Assam fared worse than Delhi in terms of annual average PM 2.5



According to the report, Delhi was the third most polluted city in India in terms of PM 2.5 levels. *Archive*

- *Delhi world's most polluted capital, India has 3rd worst air quality – World Air Quality Report.*
- **Released by** – Swiss organisation IQAir.
- **IQAir** – A Swiss air quality technology company, prepares the annual world air quality reports based on data from monitoring stations operated by governments, institutions and organisations across the world.
- **Data** – Report includes 7,812 locations in 134 countries, regions and territories

Causing an estimated one in every nine deaths worldwide, air pollution is the greatest environmental threat to human health.

Key Findings – India had the *third-worst air quality* out of 134 countries in 2023 after Bangladesh and Pakistan.

PM2.5 Concentration – India (54.4 micrograms per cubic metre), Bangladesh (79.9 micrograms per cubic metre) and Pakistan (73.7 micrograms per cubic metre).

In 2022, India was ranked as the eighth most polluted country with an average PM2.5 concentration of 53.3 micrograms per cubic metre.

Begusarai – Begusarai, in Bihar stood out as the most polluted metropolitan area globally with an average PM2.5 concentration of 118.9 micrograms per cubic metre.

The city did not even figure in the 2022 rankings.

It is estimated that 1.36 billion people in India experience PM2.5 concentrations exceeding the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended annual guideline level of 5 micrograms per cubic metre.

FSSAI sets up lab network to test food for pathogens

ANONNA DUTT

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

WITH FOOD poisoning and diarrhoea becoming a common occurrence, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is working towards creating a network of 34 microbiology labs across the country that will be equipped to test food products for 10 pathogens, including E coli, salmonella and listeria.

“These labs will help test food for microbial contamination that can lead to spoilage of food and potential health risks,” said a senior health official of FSSAI.

Another official said: “In fact,

34 MICROBIOLOGY LABS IN 24 STATES

Three labs	Karnataka, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh
Two labs	Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra
One lab	Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, New Delhi, Himachal, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Assam, Sikkim, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Puducherry and Tripura



(Source: FSSAI)

diarrhoea and food poisoning is so common that most people do not even report such instances. However, it is the job of the department to ensure that the food is safe. These labs will be able to test the food samples collected

during routine surveillance for microbes now.”

Data from the National Centre for Disease Control, which tracks the trajectory of several diseases every week, shows that acute diarrhoeal disease and food

poisoning were the two most common outbreaks in the country. There were over 1,100 outbreaks of acute diarrhoeal disease across the country in the last four years and nearly 550 outbreaks of food poisoning.

However, none of the state food safety labs are currently equipped to test for pathogens as they require maintaining live reference samples, expensive reagents and a microbiologist. “There are 79 state food testing laboratories in the country, but none of them really tests for microbes. They are equipped to test for protein or carbohydrate content of a food item to see whether it has what is written on the pack,” said the official.

Pandavula Gutta and Ramgarh Crater as Geo-Heritage Sites

-
- **Pandavula Gutta, an ancient geological marvel predating the Himalayan hills, has been officially designated as the sole Geo-heritage site in Telangana.**
 - **Also, the Rajasthan government designates Ramgarh Crater in Baran district as a geo-heritage site.**
 - **The recognition marks a significant milestone in preserving the region's geological legacy.**



What are the Key Facts About Pandavula Gutta?

Pandavula Konda (Pandavula Gutta) is a geological marvel situated in the Jayashankar Bhupalpally district of Telangana.

Pandavula Gutta is rich in terms of rock shelters, and habitation from the Mesolithic period (about 10,000 B.C. to 8,000 B.C.) to mediaeval times.

Pandavula Gutta boasts Palaeolithic (500,000 BCE–10,000 BCE) cave paintings offering a glimpse into prehistoric life.

-
- **The cave paintings depict wildlife like Bison, Antelope, Tiger, and Leopard, as well as shapes like swastika symbols, circles, squares, and weapons.**
 - **The paintings also feature geometrical designs and impressions in green, red, yellow, and white pigment colours.**
 - **The topography of Pandavula Gutta makes it a popular destination for rock climbing enthusiasts.**
 -



What are the Key Facts About Ramgarh Crater?

Ramgarh Crater, Rajasthan formed around 165 million years ago due to a meteor impact, this 3-km diameter crater provides essential ecosystem services, contributing to the region's ecological balance and biodiversity.

Recognised as a Ramgarh Conservation Reserve under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Ramgarh Crater is protected to preserve its unique ecological and cultural heritage.

It is declared as the Ramgarh Conservation Reserve under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and the presence of Pushkar Talab complex within the crater, recognised as wetlands under Wetland (Conservation & Management) Rules, 2017.

Ramgarh Crater



Geo-Heritage Site/National Geological Monuments

Geoheritage refers to **sites or areas with significant scientific, educational, cultural, or aesthetic value** due to their geological features.

- These sites may have **unique rock formations, fossils, or landscapes** that are important for education, research, cultural significance, or visual appeal. They can also contribute to local and regional economies as tourist destinations.
- GSI or the respective State governments take necessary measures to protect these sites.

GUJARAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sedimentary Structures – Eddy Markings, Kadan Dam, Panch Mahals Dist.
RAJASTHAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sendra Granite, Pali Dist.▪ Barr Conglomerate, Pali Dist.▪ Stromatolite Fossil Park, Jharmarkotra Rock Phosphate deposit, Udaipur Dist.▪ Gossan in Rajpura-Dariba Mineralised belt, Udaipur Dist.▪ Stromatolite Park near Bhojunda, Chittaurgarh Dist.▪ Akal Fossil Wood Park, Jaisalmer Dist.▪ Kishangarh Nepheline Syenite, Ajmer Dist.▪ Welded Tuff, Jodhpur Dist.▪ Jodhpur Group – Malani Igneous Suite Contact, Jodhpur Dist.▪ Great Boundary Fault at Satur, Bundi Dist.

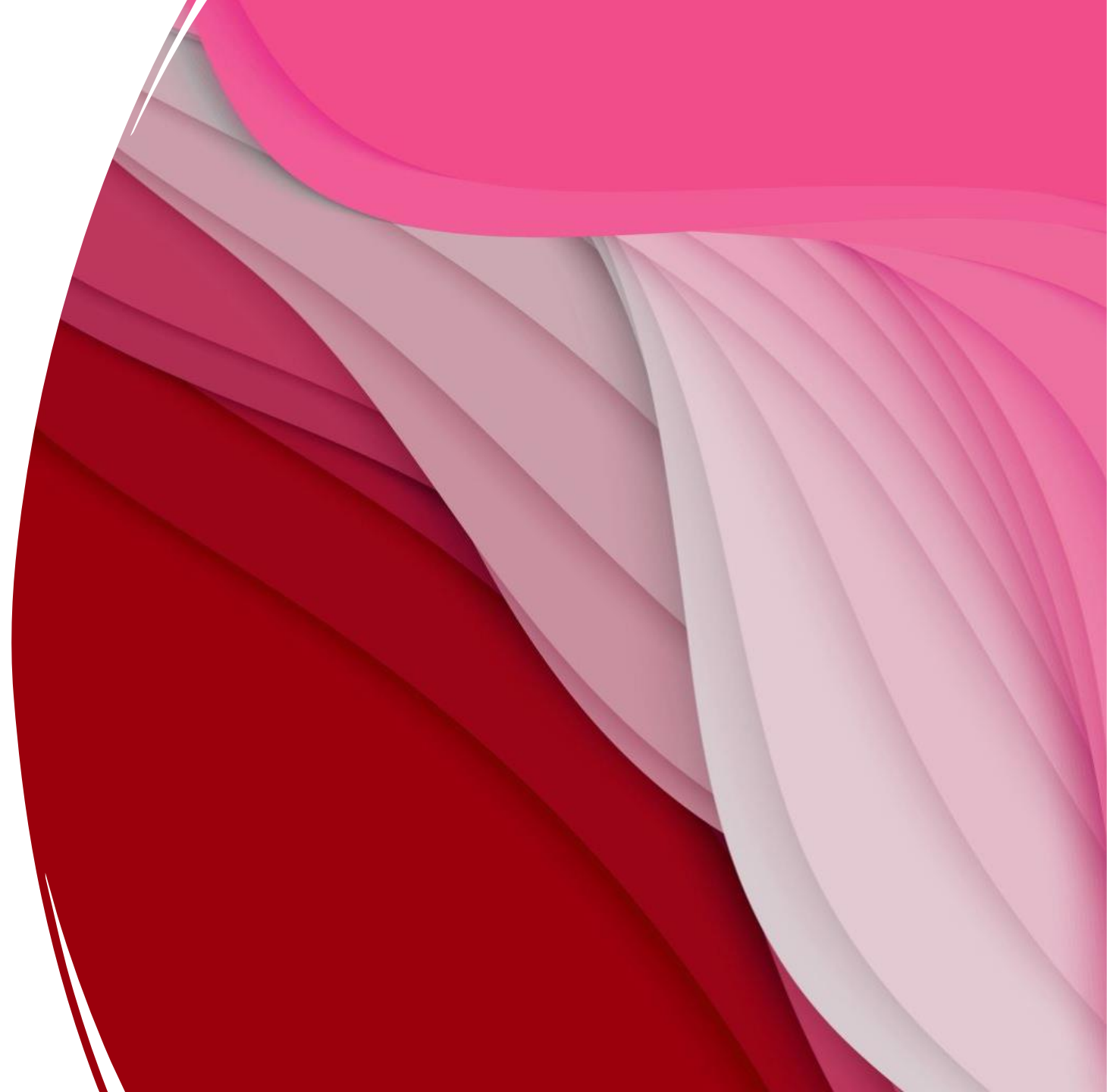
Exercise Bharat Shakti

A Tri-Services Live Fire and Manoeuvre Exercise named "Bharat Shakti" is being conducted in Pokhran, Rajasthan, demonstrating India's indigenous defence capabilities.

It included successful test firing of the long-range AGNI missile with advanced MIRV technology.

Key equipment and weapons systems featured in the exercise include T-90 (IM) Tanks, Dhanush and Sarang Gun Systems, Akash Weapons Systems, Logistics Drones, Robotic Mules, Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH), Naval Anti-Ship Missiles, Light Combat Aircraft Tejas, Light Utility Helicopters, and Advanced Light Helicopters.

Reserve Bank of
India (RBI)
integrated
Ombudsman
Scheme (RB-IOS)



The number of complaints filed under the **Reserve Bank's ombudsman schemes** increased by over 68 per cent to 7.03 lakh in the fiscal 2022-23.

About RB-IOS

The RB-IOS was introduced on November 12, 2021.

It integrates the erstwhile three Ombudsman schemes of RBI namely, (i) the Banking Ombudsman Scheme, 2006; (ii) the Ombudsman Scheme for Non-Banking Financial Companies, 2018; and (iii) the Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions, 2019

The Scheme simplifies the grievance redress process at RBI by enabling the customers of Regulated Entities (REs) to register their complaints at one centralised reference point.

RB-IOs, 2021 covers all commercial banks, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), Payment System Participants, most Primary (Urban) Cooperative Banks, and Credit Information Companies.

The objective of the Scheme is to resolve the customer grievances involving 'deficiency in service' on part of REs in a speedy, cost-effective and satisfactory manner.



Negative interest rate policy

Bank of Japan exits world's last negative-rate regime in landmark policy shift recently.

A negative interest rate policy (NIRP) is a monetary policy that allows central banks to set interest rates **below 0%**.

This policy used to encourage borrowing, spending, and investment, rather than hoarding cash.

Central banks and regulators use negative interest rates when there are **signs of deflation**.

In a negative interest rate environment, borrowers are paid interest instead of paying interest to lenders.

NIRP is seen as a “last resort” policy to use after exhausting all other options.

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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.
