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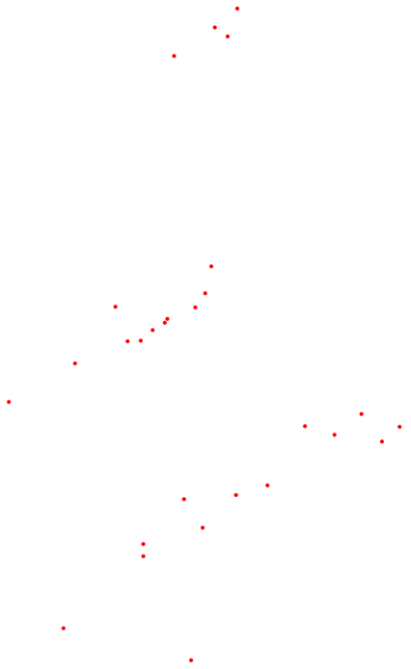


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10 MCQ QUIZ

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10 MCQ from the session

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. Donald Trump announced a 25% tariff on imported vehicles and auto components, effective April 3.
2. Japan and Germany are exempted from the new US tariff.
3. The move is expected to impact Tata Motors' subsidiary, Jaguar Land Rover.

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

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. ATF constitutes 45% of the air ticket price in India.

2. Tamil Nadu levies the lowest VAT on ATF among all Indian states.

3. DGCA requires airlines to submit tariff sheets only at the start of each season.

• **Select the correct answer using the code below:**

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 3 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

Q. With reference to “Green Iron,” consider the following:

- 1.It uses green hydrogen in place of coal for reducing CO₂ emissions.
- 2.It can reduce emissions from 2.2 tons/ton to 300 kg/ton.
- 3.The steel industry contributes 2–3% of global carbon emissions.

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

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q. Which of the following is true about Bedmap3?

1.It maps the seafloor terrain of the Arctic Ocean.

2.It builds on the data from the earlier Bedmap2 dataset.

3.It includes over 50 million additional data points.

• **Select the correct answer:**

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

Q. Consider the following about Israel's new judicial law:

1. It increases political influence in judge appointments.
2. The law was unanimously passed in the Knesset.
3. The opposition fully supported the reform.

• **Which is/are correct?**

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q. Which of the following is/are true regarding the Abel Prize?

1. It is awarded by the UN to mathematicians.
2. Masaki Kashiwara won it in 2024 for work in D-modules and crystal bases.
3. It was first awarded in 2003 by the Norwegian Parliament.

• **Select the correct answer:**

- A. 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q. Which of the following features apply to Great White Sharks?

- 1.They are listed as “Endangered” by IUCN.
- 2.They exhibit regional endothermy.
- 3.Their decline has led to food chain imbalances.

• **Choose the correct option:**

- A. 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q. Regarding parliamentary privilege motions in India, consider:

- 1.It can be admitted or rejected by the Speaker or Chairman.
- 2.It addresses breach of privilege or contempt of court.
- 3.Penal action is often taken in most privilege motions.

• **Correct answer:**

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q. Which of the following are features of the Kaizen model adopted by Gujarat?

- 1.Emphasis on incremental improvements.
- 2.Encouraging employee suggestions via QR codes.
- 3.Focus on large, one-time reforms.

• **Correct answer:**

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q. Regarding the new Pamban Rail Bridge:

- 1.It will be India's first vertical-lift railway bridge.
- 2.It is being constructed by L&T.
- 3.It connects Rameswaram with mainland Tamil Nadu.

• **Correct answer:**

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

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30

FIR AGAINST JUDGE
CJI can refer action on probe results: SC
NEWS » PAGE 3

CASE SURVEY
'One in five parents navigates challenges'
NEWS » PAGE 5

TEESTA PROJECT
Bangladesh welcomes Chinese participation
WORLD » PAGE 12

SECURITY BREACH
A minefield of gold blows up
Alleged gold smuggling case in Karnataka raises serious concerns
GROUND ZERO » PAGE 7

EMPHATIC WIN
Royal Challengers too good for Super Kings
SPORT » PAGE 14

INSIDE
Dallewal breaks fast: SC lauds him as genuine leader
NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Friday said septuagenarian Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who ended his indefinite hunger strike in support of farmers' demands after about four months, was a "genuine leader without a political agenda". » PAGE 2

Cannot change Pak's 'bigoted mindset': EAM
NEW DELHI
External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Friday, responding to questions about the condition of minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh, that even the former PM Indira Gandhi could not change Pakistan's "bigoted mindset" and it was not possible to "change the mindset" of a neighbouring nation. » PAGE 3

Security forces continue Kathua search operation
JAMMU
Security forces on Friday failed to establish contact with holed-up militants in the Juhana Safan forest area of Kathua district of J&K. Officials indicated the likely death of an additional police officer and a militant at the encounter site, which could raise the total toll to four police personnel and three militants. » PAGE 3

Dhankhar leaves meeting as MPs seek EPIC debate
NEW DELHI
Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday walked out of a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee of the Upper House, accusing the Opposition of not maintaining decorum. The differences arose over opposition's demand to have a discussion on "ensuring free and fair elections". » PAGE 4

'Nepal student's death blamed on varsity negligence'
BHUBANESWAR
The negligence of the KIIT University in Odisha was responsible for the death of a Nepali woman student on its campus last month, said the National Human Rights Commission. The report deemed it an instance of abetment to suicide. » PAGE 5

HC grants Kamra legal protection

Mohamed Imramullah S. CHENNAI
The Madras High Court on Friday granted interim protection from arrest to stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra, 36, in a case booked against him by the Khar Police in Mumbai for having allegedly made slanderous comments against Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Krunal Shinde in his comedy show titled "Naya Bharat".
Justice Sunder Mohan ordered notice, returnable by April 7, to the Khar Police on the comedian's main plea for grant of inter-State anticipatory bail until he could approach the Bombay High Court for obtaining regular bail.
In the meantime, the judge granted interim anticipatory bail so that the comedian does not get arrested.
For the purpose of obtaining the interim relief, the petitioner was directed to execute a bond, along



Kunal Kamra

Free speech is an integral part of healthy and civilised society: SC

It quashes hate speech case filed against Congress MP; Bench says a person's views can't be silenced because the majority does not like them; Justice Oka says State shouldn't victimise individual opinions on behalf of those crippled by insecurity

Krishnadas Rajagopal NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Friday said the fundamental right to free speech through poetry, theatre, stand-up comedy, and satire must be cherished, as it quashed a criminal case accusing Congress MP Imran Pratapgadhi of inciting discord through his poem on "suffering injustice with love".
The judgment was based on an appeal filed by Mr. Pratapgadhi against the registration of a criminal case by the Gujarat Police under Section 196 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. "Seventy-five years into our Republic, we cannot seem to be so shaky on our fundamentals that mere recital of a poem, or



The Gujarat Police had filed a case against Imran Pratapgadhi, accusing the Congress MP of inciting discord through his poem.

for that matter, any form of art or entertainment, such as stand-up comedy, can be alleged to lead to animosity or hatred among different communities. Subscribing to such a view would stifle all legitimate expressions of view in the public domain, which is so fundamental to a free society," a Bench of Justices A.S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said in their verdict.
Restrictions and rights
Justice Bhuyan explained to Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta that the "reasonable restrictions" on free speech must remain reasonable. "Restrictions cannot be harmful or oppressive. Restriction cannot overshadow the fundamental right to free speech," Justice Bhuyan said pointedly.

The top court said free speech was an integral part of a healthy and civilised society. "Restrictions cannot be silenced merely because the majority does not like the sound of them. The law enforcement authorities have to employ the standards of reasonable, strong-minded, firm, and courageous minds, and not weak and vacillating ones who scent danger in every hostile point of view, before initiating criminal action against the freedom of expression."
Justice Oka, who authored the judgment with inputs from Justice Bhuyan,

Massive quake kills at least 144 in Myanmar and 8 in Thailand; junta seeks foreign help



Shells shocked: Rescue workers near an under-construction building that collapsed after the tremor hit Bangkok, Thailand, on Friday.

Agence France-Presse NAYPIDAW
A huge earthquake hit Myanmar and Thailand on Friday, killing more than 150 people and injuring hundreds, with dozens trapped in collapsed buildings and the death toll expected to rise.
The shallow 7.7-magnitude tremor hit north-west of the city of Sagayin in central Myanmar in the early afternoon, and was followed minutes later by a 6.4-magnitude aftershock.
The quake flattened buildings, downed bridges, and cracked roads across swathes of Myanmar, and even demolished a 30-storey skyscraper under construction hundreds of kilometres away in Bangkok.

While the full extent of the catastrophe is yet to emerge, the leader of isolated Myanmar, in the grip of a civil war, issued a rare plea for international aid.
Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said 144 people had been killed, with 732 confirmed injured, but warned the toll was "likely to rise". Eight deaths have been confirmed so far in Thailand, with more expected.
He urged massive relief efforts in the wake of the disaster and said he had "opened all ways for foreign aid".
Four years of civil war sparked by the military have left Myanmar's infrastructure and healthcare system, leaving it ill-equipped to respond to

Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, appeared to have been badly hit.
A resident reached by phone said the city was badly lacking in rescue personnel.
"Across the border in Thailand, a 30-storey skyscraper under construction collapsed to a tangled heap of rubble and dust in a matter of seconds."
Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said eight dead bodies have been recovered and, with between 90 and 100 people unaccounted for, the toll is expected to rise.
"We see several dead bodies under the rubble. We will take time to bring the bodies out to avoid any further collapses," he told presspersons.
As night fell, around 100 rescue workers assembled at the scene to search for survivors, illuminated by specially erected floodlights.
Visiting the site, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra said "every building in Bangkok would need to be inspected for safety, though it was not immediately clear how that would be carried out."
An emergency zone was declared in Bangkok, where metro and light rail services were suspended.
Strong quakes are extremely rare in Thailand.
India, France and the European Union all offered to provide assistance, while the WHO said it was mobilising its logistics hub in Dubai to prepare trauma injury supplies.

X Corp. is trying to 'mislead' court with false claims: Centre

The Hindu Bureau BENGALURU
The Union government has told the Karnataka High Court that X Corp. is "attempting to mislead the court" about the law used to direct social media platforms to block access to harmful content.
X is "falsely alleging that authorities are passing information blocking orders" under Section 79(3)(d) of the Information Technology Act, 2000 in a bid to circumvent a Supreme Court judgment that only allows such orders to be issued under Section 69A of the same law, the Centre said in a statement filed before the court, opposing X's petition.
The Centre insisted that Section 79 is a suitably tailored regime, in line with global practices, which seeks to balance the competing interests of the stakeholders involved, while keeping legitimate state interests in mind.
X Corp. is trying to wrongly portray the SAHYOG portal as a "censorship" tool, the Centre said, pointing out that 38 top IT intermediaries - including Google, Microsoft, and Amazon - have already come aboard the portal for posting lawfully issued notices for removal of unlawful content.
The portal has been created to ensure a seamless process and cooperation for routing notices lawfully issued by different authorised agencies and branches of government, including by the courts, for the removal of unlawful content. In fact, Meta Inc., the bodies out to avoid any further collapses," he told presspersons.
The Centre also argued that illegal or unlawful content cannot attract the same level of constitutional protection as free speech, while insisting that there is no prohibition or embargo on exercising freedom of speech and expression, and that any pre-publication censorship under Section 79.



The Centre says X is trying to wrongly portray the SAHYOG portal as a 'censorship' tool.

integration with the SAHYOG portal to enable real-time action, the Centre claimed, in its statement.
'No blocking orders'
The Centre also made it clear that it was not issuing direct 'blocking orders' under Section 79(3) in violation of Section 69A, but was simply notifying platforms of harmful content and warning them of their liability if they ignored such notices.
"Section 79 regime does not envisage any 'blocking orders' and merely issues notice informing intermediaries of their due diligence obligations. In case of non-compliance of the notices, the result is lifting of safe harbour protection and consequent action under extant law as per Rule 7 of IT Rules, 2009, and the same is fundamentally at a different plane altogether," it said.

Free speech is an integral part of healthy and civilised society: SC

It quashes hate speech case filed against Congress MP; Bench says a person's views can't be silenced because the majority does not like them; Justice Oka says State shouldn't victimise individual opinions on behalf of those crippled by insecurity

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

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The judgment was based on an appeal filed by Mr. Pratapgadhi against the registration of a criminal case by the Gujarat Police under Section 196 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. “Seventy-five years into our Republic, we cannot be seen to be so shaky on our fundamentals that a mere recital of a poem, or

for that matter, any form of art or entertainment, such as stand-up comedy, can be alleged to lead to animosity or hatred amongst different communities. Subscribing to such a view would stifle all legitimate expressions of view in the public domain, which is so fundamental to a free society,” a Bench of Justices A.S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan wrote in its verdict.

Restrictions and rights

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The Gujarat Police had filed a case against Imran Pratapgadhi, accusing the Congress MP of inciting discord through his poem. ANI

The top court said free speech was an integral part of a healthy and civilised society. A person's views cannot be silenced merely because the majority does not like the sound of them. The law enforcement authorities and courts must employ the standards of reasonable, strong-minded,

firm, and courageous minds, and not weak and vacillating ones who scent danger in every hostile point of view, before initiating criminal action against freedom of expression.

Justice Oka, who authored the judgment with inputs from Justice Bhuyan,

said the State and the police should not play ball to victimise individual opinions on behalf of those crippled by insecurity and view criticism as a threat to their power and position.

The Gujarat Police had registered a case against Mr. Pratapgadhi, accusing him of promoting enmity among people of different groups on the basis of caste and religion.

Justice Oka, during a March 3 hearing of the case, remarked the poem was a reference to non-violence, a path followed by Mahatma Gandhi himself. Mr. Mehta had however found the poem at best “*sadak chaap*” (cheap). He objected to the comparison with Mahatma Gandhi.

The Bench referred to a tendency to stifle art and poetry.

- **Supreme Court of India** ने Congress MP **Imran Pratapgarhi** के खिलाफ दर्ज **hate speech case** को खारिज कर दिया।
- मामला उनकी कविता *“suffering injustice with love”* को लेकर था।
- ◆ कोर्ट ने कहा:
- “Free speech through poetry, theatre, satire, comedy must be **protected** in a democracy.”

Key Observations by the Supreme Court | सुप्रीम कोर्ट की टिप्पणियाँ

- Fundamental rights cannot be **diluted** due to “insecurity” of the powerful.
- “A person’s views cannot be silenced merely because **the majority disagrees.**”
- Satire, dissent, stand-up comedy—even harsh critique—are protected under **Article 19(1)(a)**.

Restrictions on Free Speech | अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता पर सीमाएं

Justice Bhuyan:

- “Reasonable restrictions” must be **narrowly defined**.
- Restrictions must not be **harmful, vague, or excessive**.
- Courts must ensure **freedom of expression remains intact**.

UPSC Relevance:

◆ GS2 – Polity & Constitution:

- Article 19(1)(a) – **Freedom of speech & expression.**
- Judicial interpretation of **reasonable restrictions.**
- Role of **state and police** in protecting or misusing free speech boundaries.

◆ GS4 – Ethics & Integrity:

- **Moral courage, Tolerance, and Right to dissent.**
- Conflict between **law and conscience.**

◆ Essay Topics:

- “Freedom of speech is the cornerstone of democracy.”
- “Is freedom of expression under threat in modern societies?”

Theme

Insight

👤 Article 19(1)(a)

Guarantees free speech and expression

🛡️ SC Observation

Free speech must include poetry, satire, comedy

🚫 State Role

State shouldn't silence or harass dissenters

📖 Gandhi Reference

Poem rooted in idea of **non-violence**, not hate

🧱 Danger of Misuse

Invoking criminal law can chill artistic expression

Massive quake kills at least 144 in Myanmar and 8 in Thailand; junta seeks foreign help



Shell-shocked: Rescue workers near an under-construction building that collapsed after the tremor hit Bangkok, Thailand, on Friday. AP

Agence France-Presse
NAYPYIDAW

A huge earthquake hit Myanmar and Thailand on Friday, killing more than 150 people and injuring hundreds, with dozens trapped in collapsed buildings and the death toll expected to rise.

The shallow 7.7-magnitude tremor hit northwest of the city of Sagaing in central Myanmar in the early afternoon, and was followed minutes later by a 6.4-magnitude aftershock.

The quake flattened buildings, downed bridges, and cracked roads across swathes of Myanmar, and even demolished a 30-storey skyscraper under construction hundreds of kilometres away in Bangkok.

While the full extent of the catastrophe is yet to emerge, the leader of isolated Myanmar, in the grip of a civil war, issued a rare plea for international aid.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said 144 people had been killed, with 732 confirmed injured, but warned the toll was “likely to rise”. Eight deaths have been confirmed so far in Thailand, with more expected.

He urged massive relief efforts in the wake of the disaster and said he had “opened all ways for foreign aid”.

Four years of civil war sparked by the military seizing power have ravaged Myanmar’s infrastructure and healthcare system, leaving it ill-equipped to respond to

such a disaster.

The country declared a state of emergency across the six worst-affected regions after the quake, which the World Health Organization described as a “very, very big threat to life and health”.

‘Mass casualty area’

Hundreds of casualties arrived at a major hospital in Naypyidaw, where the emergency department entrance had collapsed on a car.

An official at the hospital, the same one visited by the junta chief, described it as a “mass casualty area” with medics treating the wounded outside.

“I haven’t seen [something] like this before. We are trying to handle the situation,” a doctor said.

Mandalay, Myanmar’s second largest city, appeared to have been badly hit.

A resident reached by phone said the city was badly lacking in rescue personnel.

Across the border in Thailand, a 30-storey skyscraper under construction collapsed to a tangled heap of rubble and dust in a matter of seconds.

Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said eight dead bodies have been recovered and, with between 90 and 110 people unaccounted for, the toll is expected to rise.

“We see several dead bodies under the rubble. We will take time to bring the bodies out to avoid any further collapses,” he told presspersons.

As night fell, around 100 rescue workers assembled at the scene to search for survivors, illuminated by specially erected floodlights.

Visiting the site, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra said “every building” in Bangkok would need to be inspected for safety, though it was not immediately clear how that would be carried out.

An emergency zone was declared in Bangkok, where metro and light rail services were suspended.

Strong quakes are extremely rare in Thailand.

India, France and the European Union all offered to provide assistance, while the WHO said it was mobilising its logistics hub in Dubai to prepare trauma injury supplies.

Key Highlights

Earthquake Details:

- **Magnitude:** 7.7 on Richter scale
- **Location:** Northern Myanmar (epicenter – Sagaing region)
- **Aftershock:** Magnitude 6.4
- **Impact area:** Myanmar, Thailand; tremors also felt in India

Country	Deaths	Details
Myanmar	At least 144	Over 700 injured, toll expected to rise
Thailand	At least 8	30-storey building collapse in Bangkok

- **Casualties and Damage**
- Hundreds trapped in **collapsed buildings**.
- Infrastructure extensively damaged – roads cracked, skyscrapers demolished, hospital buildings collapsed.

overnment & Rescue Response

- **Myanmar junta** declared **emergency** and **sought international aid**.
- **Mandalay city** (Myanmar's second-largest city) facing **rescue personnel shortage**.
- Thai PM **Srettha Thavisin** ordered inspection of buildings.
- **Rescue teams** working under floodlights to search for survivors.

International Reactions

- **India, France, EU** offered emergency aid.
- **WHO** activated regional logistics hub to support operations.

✓ GS1 – Geography:

- Earthquake: tectonic origin in **Sagaing Fault Zone** (active fault system).
- Disaster-prone zones in Southeast Asia.

✓ GS3 – Disaster Management:

- Emergency rescue efforts, international coordination.
- Need for **earthquake-resistant infrastructure**.

✓ GS2 – IR/Current Affairs:

- **Humanitarian diplomacy**: India's soft power role in offering disaster aid.

Topic	Data/Insight
Earthquake zone	Sagaing Region, Myanmar
Magnitude	7.7 (major earthquake)
Casualties (Total)	150+ deaths (Myanmar + Thailand)
Aid offered by	India, France, EU, WHO
WHO statement	“Very, very big threat to life”



Exam Pointers:

Why is Myanmar Frequently Rocked by Earthquakes?

- A powerful earthquake of magnitude 7.7 and at least six aftershocks struck central Myanmar.

About

- It was the **strongest earthquake globally in the last 2 years.**
 - It was a **shallow earthquake**, with a depth of only 10 km.
 - The **epicenter was located 17.2 km from Mandalay**, a metropolis with a population of around 1.5 million people.

- **Affected Areas:** Thailand (Bangkok),
 - Northeast India – tremors felt, no reported casualties or significant damage.
- **Tectonic Plates Involved:** Indian Plate (west) and Eurasian Plate (east).
- **Cause of Earthquake:** Tectonic plates slipping past one another, releasing stored-up energy as seismic waves.

- The Myanmar earthquake took place due to the “**strike slip faulting**” between the Indian and Eurasian plates, meaning these two plates rubbed sideways against each other.
- **Myanmar** experiences frequent earthquakes, especially along the **Sagaing Fault**.
 - It runs north to south through the centre of Myanmar, and is prone to earthquakes.
 - Since 1900, at least six quakes of magnitude greater than 7 have occurred near the Sagaing Fault.

- **Previous Significant Earthquakes in Myanmar:**

- **1839:** Magnitude 8.3, estimated 300-400 deaths.
 - **1990:** Magnitude 7, 32 buildings collapsed.
 - **1912:** Magnitude 7.9, near the recent epicenter.
 - **2016:** Magnitude 6.9.
-
- India has launched **Operation Brahma**, sending humanitarian aid and relief supplies to the affected region.

IN BRIEF



Assam Police search arrested reporter's residence twice

The Assam Police searched the residence of arrested digital media reporter Dilwar Hussain Mozumder in Guwahati's Ghoramara area twice within three hours on Friday morning. The search preceded a call by the Gauhati Press Club urging all members of the print, electronic, and digital media to wear black badges for three days leading to a meeting on Sunday to discuss the issue of journalists' safety. The protest was against Mr. Mozumder's rearrest on Thursday for allegedly trying to steal bank documents. On Tuesday, he was accused of criminal intimidation and abusing a member of the Scheduled Tribe.

Panchayat official transferred after he refuses to arrange tea

A dispute over serving tea at a government press conference led to a heated exchange in Hapur on Friday between local BJP MLA Vijaypal Aadhari and a panchayat assistant development officer (ADO), who was transferred, officials said. The altercation began after ADO Bishan Saxena allegedly refused to arrange tea, prompting the District Magistrate to transfer him to Garhmukteshwar. However, Mr. Aadhari said, "This is not enough. I will take this matter to the Chief Minister." Defending himself, Mr. Saxena said, "I hold an official position. I am not a peon to arrange tea. We had already served tea once, but they kept demanding it again."

Vijay: T.N. poll will be a battle between TVK and DMK only

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The 2026 Assembly election will be a battle only between the TVK and the DMK, TVK president Vijay said on Friday.

Speaking at the party's first general body meeting in Chennai, he said, "Politics is about caring for each and every family. It is about only one family? Honourable 'monarchies' Chief Minister Stalin...if the BJP government at the Centre is fascist, then what is your government? Your government is nothing short of a fascist regime. Who are you to stop me from meeting the public?"

"Tamil Nadu is a land of social justice and communal harmony. If democracy should prevail in Tamil Nadu, the DMK should be unseated," Mr. Vijay said. He described BJP as the "secret owner" of the DMK.

BJD clout on wane, Cong. looks to capture 'ceded' space in Odisha

NEWS ANALYSIS

Satyansundar Bhaskar
Bhubaneswar

Citing a traffic advisory ahead of a Congress protest in front of the Odisha Assembly on Thursday, senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh had claimed that his party is now Odisha's main Opposition. But has the party truly overcome its organisational struggles? Despite optimism from its Assembly protests, it still has a long road ahead to reclaim lost ground in the State.

The Budget Session saw Congress MLAs highlighting the issue of violence against women and getting suspended for resorting to unconventional methods. The MLAs also beat gongs and came

Dalewal breaks fast; SC says he's a genuine leader without political agenda

Protesting farmers at Khanauri and Shambhu borders dispersed and all blocked roads and highways cleared, Punjab gov. informs court; Bench seeks status report on ground situation

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday said septuagenarian Jagjit Singh Dalewal, who ended his indefinite hunger strike in support of farmers' several demands after about four months, was a "genuine leader without a political agenda".

A Bench of Justices Surya Kant and N. Kottiswar Singh was informed by Punjab Advocate-General (A-G) Gurminder Singh that protesting farmers at Khanauri and Shambhu borders were dispersed and all blocked roads and highways cleared.

The court lauded Mr. Dalewal, calling him a "genuine farmer leader who had raised real issues of the farming community with out any political agenda." "We know some people did not want settlement of grievances of farmers. We are not sitting in an ivory tower. We know everyth-



Doctors examine farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dalewal after he drank water and broke his fast in Patiala on Friday.

ing," the court said. The Bench asked the Punjab and Haryana governments to file a status report on the prevailing situation on the ground.

Mr. Gurminder Singh, on the other hand, said even Haryana had cleared all the barricades on highways enabling smooth flow of traffic. "It was the daily pain suffered by the commuters that was in our mind," he said.

The A-G added that lakhs of people would now reap the benefits after the highways were cleared as

they had to take a detour earlier.

Saying people should not suffer due to protests on roads, the court pointed out that Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh had freely moving traffic.

In September 2024, the top court formed a high-powered committee with the aim to amicably resolve the grievances of protesting farmers.

The Bench asked the committee headed by a former High Court judge to look into the grievances of farmers, and file its next

supplementary status report. It also dropped the contempt proceedings initiated against the Punjab Chief Minister and Director General of Police for not complying with the top court's order on providing medical aid to Mr. Dalewal.

Leaders released In a related development, farmer leaders Sarwan Singh Pandher, Abhimanyu Kohar, and Jai Singh Kotra, detained in a recent police crackdown following a meeting with a Central delegation, were released on Friday.

Mr. Pandher, a Kisan Mazdoor Morcha leader, was released from Patiala Jail, whereas Mr. Kohar, Mr. Kotra, and other farmer leaders were released from Patiala Central Jail.

In a police crackdown on March 19, several farmer leaders were detained on their return from a meeting with a Central delegation led by Union Agriculture Minister Shri Singh Choudhan in Chandigarh.

Self-styled preacher convicted in rape case; sentencing on April 1

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

Self-styled Christian preacher Bajinder Singh was Friday convicted in a 2018 rape case by a local court in Punjab's Mohali district.

The court of Additional District and Sessions Judge Vikrant Kumar held Singh guilty of sexual misconduct and rape in the case but acquitted five other co-accused in the case. The court will pronounce the quantum of sentence on April 1.

He was taken into custody by the police soon after the judgment was delivered.

Mr. Singh, 42, a self-proclaimed pastor, runs the Glory and Wisdom Church in Yajpur (Jalandhar) and Majra (Mohali district) in Punjab as a part of his ministries, and claims to cure ailments and other pro-

Restaurants can't enforce service charge: Delhi HC

Solbham Rocky Singh
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday ruled that service charge or tips is a voluntary payment by the customer, and it cannot be made compulsory or mandatory by hotels and restaurants.

The court ruled that "the mandatory collection of service charge is contrary to law and violates the guidelines".

It also said that if consumers wish to pay any voluntary tip for services that they had enjoyed, the same would obviously not be barred.

The court rejected the plea by associations of hotels and restaurant owners such as National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) and Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations challenging the Central Consumer Protection Authority's (CCPA) July 2022 guidelines prohibiting hotels and restaurants from automatically levying service charge over and above the cost of the food items.

The CCPA had been receiving several complaints regarding restaurants and hotels collecting "service



Mandatory collection of service charge is contrary to law and violates guidelines, rules HC

charge" in the range of 5-20% in lieu of "tip" or "gratuity" from consumers on a compulsory basis.

The court, on Friday, ruled: "All restaurant establishments would have to adhere to the guidelines passed by the CCPA. If there is any violation, action is liable to be taken in accordance with law".

The CCPA had been receiving several complaints regarding restaurants and hotels collecting "service

'Will confiscate Lalu's assets to recover fodder scam money'

Amit Bhehrai
PATNA

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister and BJP leader Samrat Choudhary on Friday said the State government will approach the court to get back its ₹950 crore embroiled through the fodder scam in which BJP chief and former Chief Minister Lalu Prasad was convicted.

Mr. Choudhary, who also holds the finance portfolio, said the government would speak to the CBI and the Income Tax department so that Bihar's money could be brought back to its treasury.

Speaking to the media, he said legal action will be taken by confiscating the properties of people involved in the fodder scam. The scam relates to the misappropriation of around ₹950 crore from the treasury in 1995-1996. The funds were meant for the Animal Husbandry department.

Amid tight security, prayers on last Friday of Ramadan held peacefully across U.P.

The Hindu Bureau
LUCKNOW

Alvida Jumma Namaz, the prayers on the final Friday of Ramadan, was offered peacefully in mosques across Uttar Pradesh amid tight police security and elaborate surveillance via drone and CCTV cameras.

The prayers at Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal, which has been tense since the violence on November 24 last year, took place in a peaceful manner with the police conducting flag marches.

Prohibiting congregational prayers on public roads in a bid to maintain law and order, the Rapid Action Force and the Provincial Armed Constabulary remained active in different parts of the State.

Director General of Police (DGP) Prashant Kumar monitored the security situation from the dedicated control room at the State police headquarters in



Devotees offering prayers on the last Friday of Ramadan at the Jama Masjid in Sambhal on Friday.

Lucknow. In Meerut, where authorities had cautioned people against offering namaz on roads, no untoward incident was reported. The Inspector General of Ayodhya, Pravin Kumar, said the prayers were held peacefully in all districts.

In Meerut, one of the latest in the district, prayers were held peacefully in 367 mosques across the district. Superintendent of Police Aparnata Rajat Kaushik said sensitive areas were monitored via CCTV and additional forces were posted in key areas, including the Jama Masjid in Amethi, Jagdishpur, and Jala.

In Mirzapur, Additional SP Nitesh Kumar said no untoward incident was reported from the district. He said the mosque at Imanibara, one of the latest in the district, saw the usual number of worshippers and namaz began at 12-30 p.m. He said tight security measures were in place around the mosque. (With inputs from PTI)

A silent protest with armbands

Ziva Us Salam
NEW DELHI

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) appeal to Muslims to wear a black armband when they offer Jumu'at (Friday) prayers (Ramazan) was greeted with a quiet response. The Board had asked the community members to protest in this peaceful manner against the proposed Waqf (Amendment) Bill.

Across Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Jaipur, and other cities, Muslims offered prayers with a black armband. In many mosques, the Friday sermon was used to alert the community to the Bill's passage by Parliament.

Self-styled preacher convicted in rape case; sentencing on April 1

The Hindu Bureau
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Mr. Singh, 42, a self-proclaimed pastor, runs the Glory and Wisdom Church in Yajpur (Jalandhar) and Majra (Mohali district) in Punjab as a part of his ministries, and claims to cure ailments and other pro-



Odisha Congress president Bhaskar Das, P.S. PHOTO

Class 10 have conceived. The BJP is not giving emphasis on this burning issue," he said.

According to the State Congress chief, the issue has gained traction on the ground, with party workers putting up a strong fight. However, the party still grapples with significant organisational weaknesses. After the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee was dissolved fol-

lowing last year's electoral debacle, the president's post remained vacant for several months until Mr. Das took over. The reconstruction of district and block units is still pending, and the party's financial resources are reportedly insufficient to sustain its public outreach efforts. Except for its presence in the southern districts, the party remains a marginal force in coastal and western Odisha.

'Opposite moment' Despite these challenges, political observers feel the Congress has the right moment to assert itself. In the Assembly, the Congress has the support of three Independent MLAs. The BJP government led by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi is navigating Congress

without prior ministerial experience. The BJP, now the principal Opposition with 51 seats, finds itself in unfamiliar territory. The Congress trails at a distant third with just 14 seats.

The BJP is not formidable as it was two in power. For more than two decades, the party revolved around Navendra Patnaik and late-in-charge V.K. Pandian. Mr. Patnaik's governance style allowed him to remain behind closed doors as the entire administration functioned through his residence.

However, being in the Opposition requires direct contact with the public. The second-rung leadership cannot be expected to gain acceptance overnight. Mr. Patnaik's absence from public plat-

forms has weakened the BJP's organisational strength, making it evident that the party is not at its best.

3,000-km roadwork opportunity The Congress aims to reassert itself as a formidable player alongside the BJP and the BJD. "We will focus on rural and backward districts based on their active participation in protest-style allowed him to remain behind closed doors as the entire administration functioned through his residence."

While Mr. Ramesh's assertion that the party could emerge as the main Opposition in the State may be premature, a wait-and-see approach is the right messaging could set the stage for its revival.

Karti meets PM, flags safety concerns over menace of stray dogs

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress MP Karti P. Chidambaram met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday to raise the issue of health and safety concerns posed by stray dogs. He also suggested the setting up of a national task force to tackle the problem.

As per Mr. Chidambaram, India is home to one of the largest stray dog populations globally, with over 6.2 crore dogs.

Sharing the photographs of his meeting with the Prime Minister, he said, "The menace of the current system, where local bodies lack the resources, funding, and technology to tackle the issue effectively. It's clear that urgent action is required," the Congress leader said in the post.



Karti Chidambaram with Prime Minister Modi on Friday.

Restaurants can't enforce service charge: Delhi HC

Soibam Rocky Singh

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday ruled that service charge or tips is a voluntary payment by the customer, and it cannot be made compulsory or mandatory by hotels and restaurants.

The court ruled that “the mandatory collection of service charge is contrary to law and violates the guidelines”.

It also said that if consumers wish to pay any voluntary tip for services that they had enjoyed, the same would obviously not be barred.

The court rejected the plea by associations of hotel and restaurant owners such as National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) and Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations challenging the Central Consumer Protection Authority's (CCPA) July 2022 guidelines prohibiting hotels and restaurants from automatically levying 'service charge' over and above the cost of the food items.

The CCPA had been receiving several complaints regarding restaurants and hotels collecting 'service



Mandatory collection of service charge is contrary to law and violates guidelines, rules HC

charge' in the range of 5-20% in lieu of 'tip' or 'gratuity' from consumers on a compulsory basis.

'Follow guidelines'

On July 4, 2022, the CCPA, under the Consumer Affairs Ministry, issued guidelines stating that hotels or restaurants cannot add service charge automatically or by default in the food bill. “No collection of service charge shall be done by any other name,” it said.

The court, on Friday, ruled: “All restaurant establishments would have to adhere to the guidelines passed by the CCPA. If there is any violation, action is liable to be taken in accordance with law”.

Key Highlights:

- The **Delhi High Court** ruled that **service charges/tips** are **voluntary** and **cannot be made mandatory** by hotels or restaurants.
- Making service charge compulsory **violates consumer protection laws and guidelines**.



Court Observations:

- Mandatory service charge is “**contrary to law**” and **violates guidelines**.
- Consumers can **voluntarily pay** for services they enjoyed.
- No consumer can be **denied service** for refusing to pay a service charge.

Rejection of Plea:

- The HC **rejected the plea** by hotel/restaurant associations such as:
 - **NRAI** (National Restaurant Association of India)
 - **Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations**
- These associations challenged the **July 2022 guidelines** issued by the **Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)**.

CCPA Guidelines (July 2022):

- Hotels/restaurants **cannot auto-add service charges** to food bills.
- No service charge can be collected under **any alternative name**.
- The **range of 5–20% service charge** (in lieu of tip/gratuity) **must not be imposed compulsorily**.

Consequences of Violation:

- **Strict action** will be taken under consumer laws if establishments violate these norms.
- Restaurants must **follow CCPA guidelines strictly**.

Important Pointers:

Topic	Detail
Case	Delhi HC on mandatory service charges
Issue	Restaurants forcing service charge
Verdict	Violates law and consumer rights
Key Authority	Central Consumer Protection Authority
Applicable Guidelines	CCPA July 2022
Legal Principle	Voluntary vs. Mandatory charges

UPSC Relevance:

GS2 – Polity & Governance:

- **Consumer Protection** (Rights of consumers under the **Consumer Protection Act**)
- Role of **judiciary** in upholding rights.

GS3 – Economy:

- **Ethics in business practices**
- Regulation of **hospitality industry**

Indian courts have 1.45 lakh contempt cases pending

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

More than 1,800 contempt cases are pending in the Supreme Court, while another 1.43 lakh cases are pending in the High Courts, Law Minister Arun Ram Meghwal told the Lok Sabha in a written reply on Friday.

As per data shared by the top court, 1,852 contempt cases are pending before the Supreme Court as of March 20, the Minister said.

Citing information available on the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), the Minister said that 1,43,573 contempt cases were pending in the High Courts as of March 24. "The reasons for non-compliance with the orders in contempt cases pending before the Supreme Court and various High Courts are not available with the government," Mr. Meghwal said.

"As far as the Government of India is concerned, the responsibility of implementation of Court orders rests with the respective administrative Ministries," he added.

Even India couldn't change Pak's 'bigoted mindset', says Jaishankar

External Affairs Minister responds to questions in Parliament on minority rights in Bangladesh and Pakistan; he says India has raised issue at international forums and with government concerned; Islamabad brazenly harbours terrorists, he adds

Suhasini Haider
NEW DELHI

Even the former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi could not change Pakistan's "bigoted mindset" in 1971, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Friday, responding to questions in Parliament about the condition of minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Mr. Jaishankar said that it was not possible to "change the mindset" of a neighbouring country, but that India had raised the issue at international forums, and in Bangladesh and Pakistan, as of March 24. "The reasons for non-compliance with the orders in contempt cases pending before the Supreme Court and various High Courts are not available with the government," Mr. Meghwal said.



Thorny issues: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament on Friday. ANI

Mr. Jaishankar said that India had raised the issue at international forums, and in Bangladesh and Pakistan, as of March 24. "The reasons for non-compliance with the orders in contempt cases pending before the Supreme Court and various High Courts are not available with the government," Mr. Meghwal said.

"As far as the Government of India is concerned, the responsibility of implementation of Court orders rests with the respective administrative Ministries," he added.

On Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and Ahmadias sect members. "We are making our position very well-known, we are taking it up at the international level but we as a government and a country cannot change the mindset of a neighbour who has a fanatical, bigoted mindset. Even Indira Gandhi could not do it," Mr. Jaishankar told the House, referring to the 1971 India-Pakistan war and the creation of Bangladesh. "Despite it being taken up in international fo-

rum and bodies, the Government of Pakistan does not take action to protect its minorities and this is the position on which we have been very public and very clear," he added.

Quoting from recent speeches made by India's representatives at the United Nations and Human Rights Council, Mr. Jaishankar said that Pakistan is a country with "human rights abuses, persecution of minorities and the systematic erosion of democratic values" and state policies to "brazenly harbour UN-sanctioned terrorists."

During Question Hour in the Lok Sabha on Friday, Mr. Jaishankar received a number of questions about the treatment of the minority Hindu community in both Bangladesh and Pakistan. However, he resorted most of his responses to Pakistan's failure to keep promises given in a number of India-Pakistan agreements on equal and fair treatment of religious minorities there, enumerating at least 10 cases of attacks just in February 2025.

"I have taken it up with my counterpart [Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser Toufik Hossain], Foreign Secretary [Vikram Misra] took it up when he

visited Bangladesh [in December 2024], and this continues to be a matter of concern for the Government of India," Mr. Jaishankar said in response to a question by Arun Kumar Sagar, MP, though he sidestepped references to Bangladesh in responses to other MPs from the Bharatiya Janata Party, including Ravi Shankar Prasad and Nishikant Dubey, and Arvind Sawant of the Shiv Sena (UBT).

The Minister's statements comes at a time when a report issued by the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom recommended that Pakistan continue to be designated a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) by the U.S., and said minorities there were persecuted by violent attacks, mob lynching, and false blasphemy cases.

The Ministry of External Affairs had sharply rejected the report as it also criticised India for attacks on religious minorities.

Cabinet increases DA, DR for Central staff and pensioners

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved an additional installment of dearness allowance (DA) to Union government employees and dearness relief (DR) to pensioners effective from January 1.

The Centre said 48.66 lakh employees and 66.55 lakh pensioners will get a 2% increase over the existing rate of 53% of the basic pay or pension.

It will cost ₹6,614.04 crore a year to the exchequer.

Trade unions have alleged that it was done without holding any discussion with the stakeholders. All India Trade Union Congress general secretary Manoj Sinha said the demand of the day that the Central Civil Service Pension Rules amendment, "betrayed lakhs of pensioners."

Kaur said the amendments exclude existing pensioners from being covered by the proposed Eighth Pay Commission and make it applicable on new entrants. He also criticised India for attacks on religious minorities.

48.66 lakh Union govt. staff and 66.55 lakh pensioners will get 2% increase over the existing rate of 53% of basic pay or pension, says Centre

One Rank One Pension is always the demand of the Armed Forces. Personnel and parity between the past and future pensioners is the demand of the Union government civilian pensioners. The 5th Central Pay Commission and the 6th Central Pay Commission have specifically recommended that the necessity to achieve parity between the past and future pensioners," she said, adding that the amendment also negates Supreme Court verdicts in favour of pensioners.

The proposed Eighth Pay Commission will be implemented after the implementation of the Pay Commission.

HC rejects pleas against Kerala CM, daughter in financial dealings case

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Friday dismissed pleas by Congress MLA Mathew Kuzhalnadan, and late BJP activist Girish Babu who had sought a probe against Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on the alleged financial transactions between Exalogic Solutions Limited, the now-defunct company of his daughter Veena, and Cochin Minerals and Rutile Limited (CMRL).

The court, however, termed unwarranted the remarks made by the trial court — that the plea by Mr. Kuzhalnadan was politically motivated — and quashed them.

The High Court had earlier issued notices to Mr. Vijayan and his daughter on

Pinarayi Vijayan

a petition filed by Mr. Kuzhalnadan, which challenged the order of a special court of the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau that dismissed his petition seeking a probe into the financial dealings between the two firms.

"No services provided" In his petition before the special court, Mr. Kuzhalnadan had sought a probe

into the payment of ₹1.72 crore to Exalogic by the CMRL, although it had not provided any services to CMRL.

He had also contended that the CMRL made the payment to facilitate purchase of mineral sand from the Thottappally spillway, mined by the Kerala Minerals and Metals Ltd. However, the special court had rejected the plea.

Mr. Kuzhalnadan argued that the special court did not consider the interim order for settlement under the Income Tax Act.

The court said that the complainant could only place materials highlighting suspicious based on the allegations in the complaint, and not facts constituting the alleged offences.

Kathua operation continues, more militants holed up in forest range

Poorgram Ashu
JAMMU

Security forces failed to establish contact with holed-up militants on Friday in the Juthana Sub-division area of Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir. Officials indicated the likely death of an additional police officer and a militant at the encounter, which could raise the total fatalities since Thursday to four police personnel and three militants.

Following a night-time suspension, security forces resumed operations, employing heavy gunfire and controlled explosions to pinpoint the locations of the militants believed to be in hiding. Officials said that the operation continued throughout Friday to locate any remaining active militants.

Security agencies suspect that more than five



In action: Security personnel during the anti-terrorist operation in Kathua on Friday. PTI

tracking. The joint operation involves personnel from the J&K Police's Special Operations Group, the Army, the National Security Guard, and the Central Reserve Police Force.

Officials reported that a drone surveillance operation on Friday sighted one more body in the forest area where a significant exchange of fire occurred on Thursday. Security

agencies suspect this body to be that of a police officer, though official confirmation from the police is still pending.

Security forces are yet to recover the bodies of the three militants believed to have been killed thus far. Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, while offering his condolences for the three police officers who died on Thursday, said, "In the ongoing Kathua encounter, several terrorists were neutralised. The J&K Police and security forces were actively engaged, and the operation is in progress."

The bodies of all three deceased police officers were transferred to Kathua Hospital on Friday. Anti-militancy operations have been ongoing in the forest area where a significant exchange of fire occurred on Thursday. Security

Gehlot refers mineral tax Bill to Murmu for assent

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Karnataka Governor Thawarchand Gehlot has referred the Karnataka Mineral Rights and Mineral Bearing Land Tax Bill, 2024, which proposes taxes on mineral-bearing land and mineral rights, for the assent of President of India Droupadi Murmu.

The Bill proposes to levy a tax of ₹20 to ₹100 per tonne for different minerals.

The proposed law is expected to bring in revenue of ₹4,207.95 crore, and tax on mineral-bearing lands would fetch another ₹505.9 crore a year.

Citing various provisions of the Bill passed by the State Legislature, the Governor said they would have an impact on the earlier passed parliamentary legislation, Central Acts

Army inducts in-house developed First Person View drones

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Indian Army has begun inducting a First Person View (FPV) drone with anti-tank payload that was developed, tested and validated in-house, in collaboration with the Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory (TBRL), Chandigarh.

Five of the FPV drones, each costing ₹1.4 lakh, have been inducted and 95 are being procured, officials said. The FPV drones came into prominence in the war in Ukraine and have changed the battlefield dynamics by disproportionately taking out heavy and expensive military platforms like tanks.

Centre signs ₹62,700-crore deals with HAL for 156 ICH

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

The Defence Ministry on Friday signed two contracts worth ₹62,700 crore to buy indigenous Light Combat Helicopters (LCH) and associated equipment for a total of over ₹62,700 crore, excluding taxes.

The Army will get 90 of the helicopters, while the remaining 66 are meant for the Air Force. The contracts were signed soon after the deal got final sanction from the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS).

The supply of these helicopters shall commence from the third year onwards, over the next five years. The contracts will enhance the combat capability of the Indian Armed Forces at high altitudes," a Defence Ministry statement said.

The Ministry also signed a contract with Metra Management for West Leasing of one flight refueller aircraft for providing air-to-air refuelling training to pilots of the IAF and Navy.

"Metra will provide one KC35 aircraft within six months which will be the first FRA to be west leased by IAF," the statement added. The major deal is an order for 97 Light Combat Helicopter (LCA-MkIIA), is set to be concluded in the next few months.

The Army and IAF have already inducted 15 Mistral Production models of the LCH which were approved at a cost of ₹4264 crore.

The IAF inducted the LCH in October 2022 into 143 Helicopter Unit "Dhanush" at Jodhpur Air Force Station.

Justice Varma case: SC says CJ can act upon results of in-house probe

Krishnakadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday said the Chief Justice of India has multiple options, including criminalising or a reference to Parliament for removal of Justice Yashwant Varma, depending on what is unearthed by an in-house inquiry into the alleged discovery of half-burnt currency at the High Court judge's residence after a fire on March 14.

The Centre, meanwhile, notified the transfer of Justice Varma from the Delhi High Court to the Allahabad High Court. The Supreme Court Collegium recommended his transfer on March 24.

Following the notification, the Supreme Court will involve over 250 domestic companies mostly MSMEs and will generate over 8,500 direct jobs.



Justice Yashwant Varma

when the latter assumed charge as a judge of the High Court.

"Right now, the in-house process is going on. Justice Varma has not submitted his resignation. He can agree to the resignation or he can let the committee's report to Parliament for removal," Justice A.S. Okar heads of the Bench with Justice Ujjal Bhattacharya, addressed advocate General Mathew J. Nedumpara.

Mr. Nedumpara has asked why an FIR was not registered on neither the fire nor the alleged finding of the money at Justice Varma's residence.

"Today is not the day or time to consider an FIR. The inquiry is going on," Justice Okar heads of the Bench.

As per a Constitution Bench, another major deal in the K. Veraswami case, no criminal case can be registered against a High Court judge, a Chief Justice of a High Court or a Supreme Court judge without prior consultation with the Chief Justice of India. Mr. Nedumpara contended that the judgment had fettered the police by creating a "special class of privileged."

He further questioned the jurisdiction of the three-member committee comprising three judges including Justice Ujjal Bhattacharya, addressed advocate General Mathew J. Nedumpara.

In-depth inquiry into the allegations against Justice Varma.

The in-house procedure was approved by the Supreme Court in 1999. It is based on the spirit of important charters governing judicial ethics — The Restatement of Values of Judicial Life and the Bangalore Principles of 2002.

The in-house procedure was devised keeping in mind the sensitivity of conducting a probe into allegations against a sitting judge, the individual integrity of the parties and the preservation of institutional reputation.

The ongoing enquiry is diving deep into three questions put forth by the CJ during the preliminary probe, that is, how does Justice Varma account for the money allegedly found in the room; the source of the money; and who removed it from the room on March 15.

Army inducts in-house developed First Person View drones

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

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It was developed by Maj Cephass Chetan with a team of TBRL, led by Dr. Raghendra under an initiative launched in August 2024.

- The Indian Army has achieved a milestone by developing and successfully testing an **indigenous First Person View (FPV) drone** equipped with an **anti-tank kamikaze payload**

About First Person View (FPV) Drones

- **Definition:** FPV drones are remotely piloted aircraft that transmit real-time video feed from an onboard camera to the operator's goggles or screen, providing a first-person view of the drone's perspective.
- **Purpose:** Offers precise navigation and control, especially for tactical or combat missions, racing, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

Significance

- These drones offer a cost-effective means to neutralize high-value enemy assets, such as tanks, thereby enhancing the Army's combat effectiveness.
- The prominence of FPV drones in recent conflicts, notably in Ukraine, has demonstrated their capability to alter battlefield dynamics by effectively neutralizing substantial and costly military assets.

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'Landslides wiped out forest encroachments'
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Le Pen barred from holding public office for five years
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Trump slams Zelenskyy, Putin as truce delayed
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Home Ministry 'dropped' most assurances
Close to 15% dropped in the Lok Sabha
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FIRST WIN
Ashwani, Ricketlon deliver for Mumbai
SPORT » PAGE 16

NEARBY
Farmers protest outside houses of AAP Ministers
CHANDIGARH
Farmers and farm workers in Punjab on Monday staged protests outside the houses of Aam Aadmi Party Ministers and MLAs against the recent police action on leaders and even of protesters from Shambhu and Khannu. » PAGE 2

Govt. pushes to clear Waqf Bill; Rijju slams Opposition parties

The Minority Affairs Minister accuses the Opposition of misleading innocent Muslims by telling them that the government will snatch their properties; he says the 'propaganda' is harmful for the country; Centre likely to table the Bill tomorrow

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI
A mid countrywide farm protest against the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju on Monday slammed the Opposition parties for allegedly misleading people from the Muslim community on the Bill.
Mr. Rijju's statement came ahead of the Union government's proposed plan to table the Bill in Parliament on Wednesday. Sources in the government said that it is hopeful that the Bill will be passed. Government managers have reached out to allies to drum up support.
"Some people are saying that the Waqf Amendment Bill is unconstitutional. Waqf rules, its



KIREN RIJJU
Union Minority Affairs Minister

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Union Minority Affairs Minister

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The Minority Affairs Minister said that the Opposition parties are misleading innocent Muslims by telling them that the government will 'snatch' their graveyards and mosques.
'Identify liars'
"I would like to request everyone to please identify those leaders who are lying. These are the people who misgaid the country during CAA. They had said that CAA was brought to snatch the rights of Muslims," he said.
He added that the Opposi-

tion's 'propaganda' is harmful for the country.
The Minister, while extending ID wishes, added that he is "proud" to say that minorities are by their "best" rights of freedom.
'Several consultations'
Urging political parties to participate in the debate on the Bill in Parliament, Mr. Rijju said that the legislative process has undergone a record number of consultations and deliberations over the Waqf Bill. He welcomed the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council asking MPs from the State to back the Bill.
"It is the duty of those in politics to care for and address problems and challenges faced by our people," he said.
"For example, hun-

After clampdown in India, return of Bangladeshis up

The voluntary return of undocumented Bangladeshis who were apprehended while leaving India through the eastern border from January to July 2024, those apprehended in the subsequent months, from August 2024 till March 21 this year, stood at 906. Out of this, 411 exits had been recorded in the past three months, data accessed by The Hindu shows.

In December 2024, the MHA wrote to all States to identify and deport undocumented Bangladeshis migrants. The Delhi Police, for instance, commenced a two-month drive in January to identify Bangladeshis living illegally in the country. Such drives were also conducted in Rajasthan, Telangana, and Odisha among other States.
2,355 held in 13 months
In the past 13 months, as many as 2,355 undocumented Bangladeshis nationals were also apprehended as they were trying to enter the country. Also, 153 people from other nationalities, including Myanmar, were apprehended along the Bangladesh border during the same period. A senior government official said that the agencies maintained a record of an El Nino in the coming southwest monsoon season this year.
An El Nino, characterised by a warming of the central equatorial Pacific Ocean, is frequently associated with reduced monsoon rainfall in India.
"Based on the climate forecasts, including international ones, we can rule out El Nino for the monsoon. We will most likely see neutral El Nino conditions," M. Mohapatra, Director-General, IMD, said in a briefing on Monday.
In 2023, which was an El Nino year, the monsoon season saw a 6% deficit.



Data seen by The Hindu show 411 Bangladeshis exited in the past three months. FILE PHOTO

the Bangladesh border — 237 while entering the country, and 296 while they were exiting India. Bangladesh witnessed significant political changes in August 2024, following the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.
Identify checks
A senior Border Security Force (BSF) official explained how they determined if an undocumented person was from Bangladesh or India. "We have ways to check their identity through local sources as, usually, we have a record of people living within few kilometres of the border. Those apprehended at times confess also," the BSF official said.
Another BSF official said that to avoid legal cases that went on for years, they had been pushing back undocumented migrants in coordination with Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB).
"Since the MHA's directive to identify and deport illegal Bangladeshis, we have seen a surge in the number of such people voluntarily leaving the country," the official said.
The BSF, deployed along the 4,096 km international border with Bangladesh, has been on heightened vigil since August 2024, with instructions from MHA "to not allow anyone into the country without valid documents".

3 militants cornered in Kathua operation

Poorzada Ashita
JAMMU
Security forces on Monday night encircled three militants, suspected to have escaped from an encounter site in Kathua's Sullian village in Jammu and Kashmir on Friday.
They were trapped in Panjirtibi area of Jathama on a tip-off.
Officials said the hiding militants opened fire on a search party and an intense encounter ensued. Additional forces have been rushed to the area. "The operation to neutralise the militants is continuing," an official said.
Earlier, the J&K Police detained six members of a

family for questioning regarding the encounter in which two militants and four policemen were killed. One of the family members was held last year for his alleged support to militancy in the area. Villagers had earlier confirmed the movement of "escaped militants" in Kathua. "Three militants, young and sporting beards, in black uniform came to our house looking for food on Sunday afternoon. They barged into our kitchen, took away our ter and took away rotis. They offered money but my grandmother declined. They left without much conversation," a resident of Kathua's Rul village said.



Congregational prayer: People offering special Namaz (prayer) on the occasion of the ul-ul-hi at the Eidgah in Bhopal of Madhya Pradesh on Monday as the day marks the end of Ramzan, a month of fasting from dawn to dusk for Muslims. A. FRAUQUI (SHUTTER REPORTS, PAGE 4)

Govt. rejects U.S. media report claiming HAL supplied sensitive tech to Russia

Kalpal Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI
The External Affairs Ministry on Monday said a U.S. media report that claimed state-run defence major Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) supplied items sourced from a British company to Russia was "factually incorrect and misleading".
"The Ministry came to HAL's defence earlier by reporting in the New York Times (NYT) alleged that 'technical part of British aerospace manufacturer H.R. Smith Group, sent critical components to HAL, which, in turn, sent them to the Russian arms agency Rosoboronexport on which Western countries have imposed sanctions. While Russia had at-

MEA defends HAL
The External Affairs Ministry said the report "has tried to frame issues and distort facts to suit a political narrative".
HAL has "scrupulously followed all its international obligations" on strategic trade controls and end-user commitments, the Ministry said.
It also noted that India's robust legal and regulatory framework on strategic trade continues to guide overseas commercial ventures by its companies.
The Western sanctions in the aftermath of the Ukraine war, India's defence trade with Moscow continued given its dependence on Russian military hardware.
"The said report is factually incorrect and misleading. It has tried to frame issues and distort

technology worth almost \$2 million to HAL during the period 2023-24. It did not specify if H.R. Smith's products had indeed landed up in Russia through HAL," but said, "They show that, in some instances, the Indian company received equipment from H.R. Smith and, within days sent parts to Russia with the same identifying product codes".
According to the report, Techtext made 118 shipments of restricted technology to HAL in 2023 and 2024. On September 2, 2024, the Indian company sold parts to Russia with matching identification codes," the report said.
"Nineteen days later the Indian company sold parts to Russia with matching identification codes," the report said.

Summer set to be warmer, but El Nino unlikely during coming monsoon: IMD

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI
The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has "ruled out" the possibility of an El Nino in the coming southwest monsoon season this year.
An El Nino, characterised by a warming of the central equatorial Pacific Ocean, is frequently associated with reduced monsoon rainfall in India.
"Based on the climate forecasts, including international ones, we can rule out El Nino for the monsoon. We will most likely see neutral El Nino conditions," M. Mohapatra, Director-General, IMD, said in a briefing on Monday.
In 2023, which was an El Nino year, the monsoon season saw a 6% deficit.

Climate forecast: IMD Director-General M. Mohapatra says there is no El Nino conditions.
Last year witnessed an 8% surplus as "neutral conditions" prevailed.
The El Nino implies a temperature rise between 0.5 degree Celsius to 1 degree Celsius in the Central Pacific. "Neutral" suggests no such rise.
However there have been instances when neu-

tral conditions have led to national ones, "neutral conditions" prevailed.
The IMD gives its first forecast on monsoon rainfall in April.
'Wait for April forecast'
"We will have to wait for the April forecast to get a sense of the monsoon rainfall this year," said Mr.

Mohapatra.
Before the monsoon kicks in, however, India will be reeling under "above normal" temperatures during the summer months.
From April to June, India on average reports four to seven heatwave days defined as temperatures exceeding 45 degrees Celsius or greater-than-five-degree rise from what's normal in a region.
"Parts of eastern India could potentially see 10 heatwave days this year," said Mr. Mohapatra.
In March, several parts of central and southern India reported "above-normal" temperatures and one of the potential reasons was changes in climate due to "global warming", said Mr. Mohapatra.

Govt. pushes to clear Waqf Bill; Rijiju slams Opposition parties

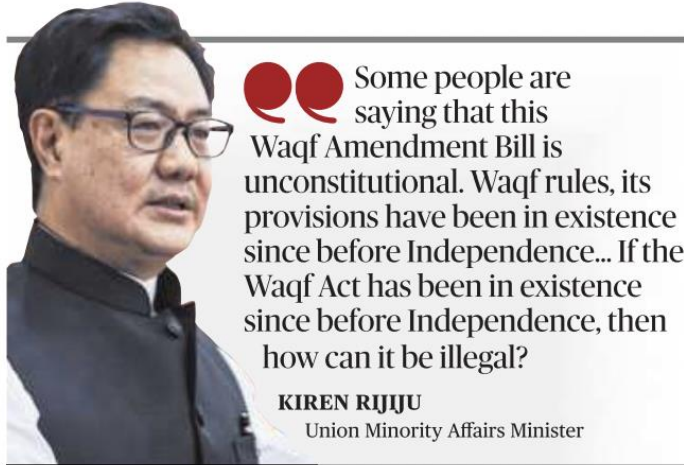
The Minority Affairs Minister accuses the Opposition of misleading innocent Muslims by telling them that the government will 'snatch' their properties; he says the 'propaganda' is harmful for the country; Centre likely to table the Bill tomorrow

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NEW DELHI

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Mr. Rijiju's statement came ahead of the Union government's proposed plan to table the Bill in Parliament on Wednesday. Sources in the government said that it is hopeful that the Bill will be passed. Government managers have reached out to allies to drum up support.

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veyards and mosques.

'Identify liars'

"I would like to request everyone to please identify those leaders who are lying. These are the people who misguided the country during CAA. They had said that CAA was brought in to snatch the rights of Muslims," he said.

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sition's 'propaganda' is harmful for the country.

The Minister, while extending Id wishes, added that he is "proud" to say that minorities are the "safest" in India and enjoy the "best" rights of freedom.

'Several consultations'

Urging political parties to participate in the debate on the Bill in Parliament, Mr. Rijiju said that the legislative process has undergone a record number of consultations and deliberations over the Waqf Bill. He welcomed the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council asking MPs from the State to back the Bill.

"It is the duty of those in politics to care for and address problems and challenges faced by our people," he said.

"For example, hun-

dreds of families in Munnambam, Kerala, have suffered and continue to seek a solution to protect their properties and homes. This act is not against any community - that is propaganda being spread to poison minds of some," Mr. Rijiju said. He too asked MPs from Kerala to support the Bill in the interest of all people and refrain from 'appeasement politics'.

The Union government, on July 28, 2024, had tabled the Bill in Parliament proposing the inclusion of non-Muslims and Muslim women on the Waqf boards. The amendment proposes to strip the boards of powers to declare a property as 'waqf'. In August, a 31-member Joint Parliamentary Committee was set up to review the Bill.

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- The **Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024** is being **pushed by the Central Government** amid **nationwide protests**, especially from the **Muslim community**.
- **Union Minister Kiren Rijiju** defended the Bill and **accused the Opposition** of misleading Muslims by falsely claiming the Bill will “snatch” their properties.
- Rijiju emphasized that **Waqf laws have existed since before Independence**, calling claims of unconstitutionality **baseless propaganda**.

- **Amends the Waqf Act** to allow:
 - **Inclusion of non-Muslims and Muslim women** on Waqf Boards.
 - Empower the government to **declassify or strip properties** designated as “Waqf”.
- Aims to address **disputes and misuse** of Waqf land and properties.

Background & Context:

- The **Waqf Act** has governed properties like **graveyards and mosques** since **pre-Independence**.
- In **July 2024**, the Bill was tabled proposing reforms.
- A **31-member Joint Parliamentary Committee** was set up in **August 2024** to review it.



WHAT IS WAQF?

- Waqf refers to properties dedicated exclusively for religious or charitable purposes under Islamic law. Once designated as Waqf, ownership is transferred from the person making the Waqf (waqif) to Allah, making it irrevocable.
- These properties are managed by a *mutawwali*
- Waqf boards control 8.7 lakh properties spanning 9.4 lakh acres across India, with estimated value of Rs 1.2 lakh crore

A Waqf is **a personal property given by Muslims for a specific purpose** – religious, charitable, or for private purpose

- **Historical Background:** The concept of Waqf (endowment) was introduced in India **with the advent of Muslim rule.**

- During the **Mughal and Sultanate periods**, Waqf management was **centralised and theocratic in nature.**

The earliest recorded Waqf in India **dates back to the Delhi Sultanate**, when **Sultan Muizuddin Sam Ghaor** dedicated **two villages to the Jama Masjid of Multan** and entrusted its administration to Shaikhul Islam.

Waqf was also **closely linked to conversion and cultural appropriation** in pre-British India.

The Existing Waqf Board Act

EXPLAINED IN 12 POINTS

1 Waqf: Permanent dedication of property for purposes recognized by Muslim law as pious, religious, or charitable.

2 Regulation of Auqaf: Regulates 'Auqaf' (assets dedicated as Waqf) by a 'wakif'.

3 Waqf Boards: State/UT Waqf Boards manage and supervise Waqf properties.

4 Powers and Duties: Waqf Boards can manage properties, address unauthorized occupation, and handle illegal transfers.

5 Property Claims: Waqf Boards can decide if a property is Waqf without mandatory verification.

6 Administrative Structure: Includes appointment of CEOs and officials to manage Waqf properties.

7 Amendments History: Originally enacted in 1954; amended in 1964, 1969, 1984, and 2013 to improve regulation and prevent illegal property transfers.

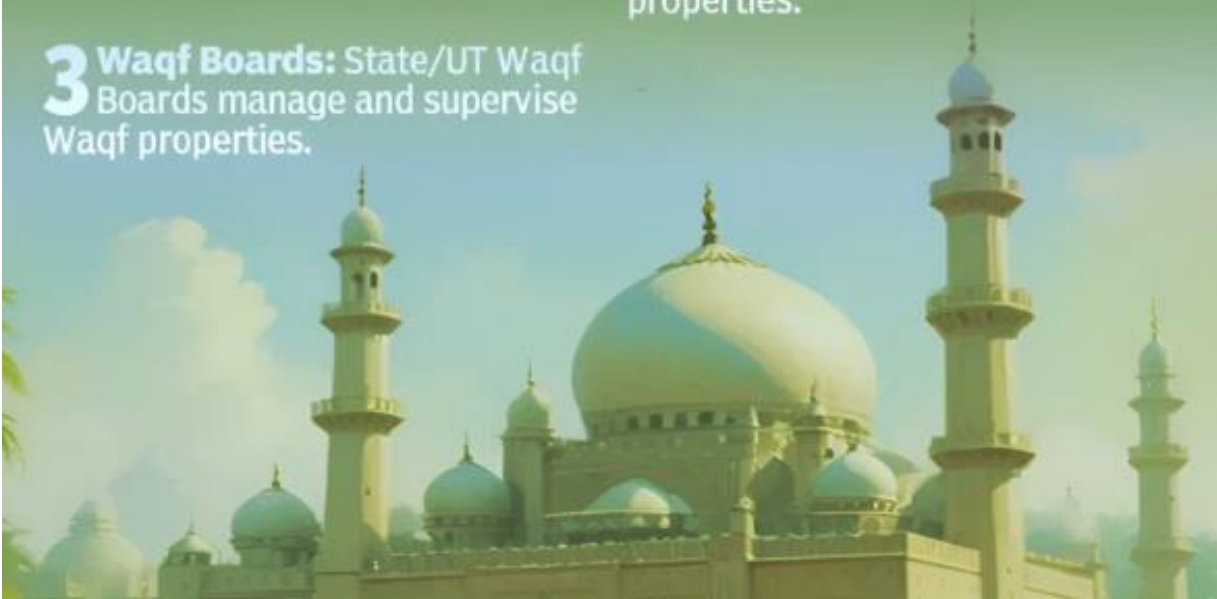
8 Role of District Collectors: Assist in removing encroachments and illegal occupation of Waqf properties.

9 Financial Management: Requires Waqf Boards to maintain accounts and submit annual reports to the state government.

10 Transparency and Accountability: Mandates inspections, audits, and public disclosure of Waqf property management information.

11 Dispute Resolution: Provides mechanisms through Waqf Tribunals.

12 Community Representation: Ensures representation from various Muslim community sections in Waqf property management.



Congress seeks law for reservation in private institutions

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Centre should bring in legislation to ensure reservation for Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backward Class (OBC) communities in private, non-minority educational institutions, the Congress said on Monday.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, in a statement, cited a recent parliamentary panel report to make a pitch for implementing Article 15(5) of the Constitution in private institutions. Article 15(5) allows the State to make special provisions for the advancement of Socially and Educationally Backward Classes, SCs, and STs, including reservation in educational institutions, both public and private, except for minority educational institutions.

In its 56th report on the Demand for Grants for the Department of Higher Education, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth, and Sports recommended new legislation to implement Article 15(5) as well. The Indian National Congress reiterates this demand. Mr. Ramesh said.

The Constitution (93rd Amendment) Act, 2005



Jairam Ramesh

came into effect from January 20, 2006, introducing Article 15(5) in the Constitution.

"Nothing in this article or sub-clause (g) of clause (1) of Article 19 shall prevent any special provision, by law, for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes insofar as such special provisions relate to educational institutions, including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State, other than the minority educational institutions referred to in clause (1) of Article 30," the article reads.

The Congress had proposed this reservation for SCs, STs, and OBCs in its Lok Sabha manifesto. Mr. Ramesh said.

P.A. Sangma had advocated division of northeast: Biren

Former Manipur CM shares video of former LS Speaker's decade-old speech to 'push a narrative against separatism in the State'; Meghalaya CM calls act of using his father's name unfortunate

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma condemned the use of a decade-old video of a speech of his father, the late Purno A. Sangma, in Parliament, to push a narrative against separatism in Manipur.

On Monday, former Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh said former Lok Sabha Speaker P.A. Sangma once advocated the "dangerous idea" of dividing the northeast into smaller States on ethnic lines.

Sharing a video of the late Speaker's 2014 speech in Parliament, favouring Kukiland and other smaller States in the region, Mr. Singh said similar attempts were being made today to interfere in Manipur's internal affairs to destabilise the State.

Kukiland or a similar separate administration has been the demand of Manipur's Kuklizo people, caught in an ethnic conflict with the majority Meiteis since May 2023. More than 250 people were killed and some 60,000 became



Former Manipur Chief Minister

homeless in the conflict. Manipur's situation is unique. This State is home to several small, vulnerable indigenous communities, whose protection necessitated the implementation of the Inner Line Permit (ILP). The present crisis is political at its core. It stems from a complex mix of challenges: the drug menace, illegal immigration, destruction of forests, and the systematic pursuit of power by select groups," Mr. Singh wrote on X.

"After years of effort to safeguard our indigenous populations, we have begun to make real progress, such as the implementation of ILP, a hard-won achievement," he further wrote before taking a pot-



Former Manipur Chief Minister

shot at the Meghalaya CM. He said Mr. Conrad Sangma should know that the ethnic violence in Manipur was not spontaneous, but instigated by those who felt threatened and insecure by such kind of progress.

"Does Mr. Conrad Sangma know that Manipur had already initiated border fencing? That the Free Movement Regime (FMR) is now strictly regulated? Has he noticed the alarming rise in unrecognised villages within Manipur's borders?" Mr. Singh wrote.

"It was not clear why he targeted the Meghalaya Chief Minister."

"Today, various groups across the Northeast are beginning to recognise its seriousness of FMR, ILP,

and border security. Manipur's experiences should serve as a lesson, not a platform for political posturing. We must ensure that way of life deserve protection. Refrain from interfering in matters that threaten the delicate balance. The people of Manipur have endured enough. Let us live in peace," he stated.

The Meghalaya Chief Minister reacted on X: "It's unfortunate that @NBSingma Ji has dragged the name of @LS_Shri_P_A_Sangma Ji has always fought for the people of the North East, was a strong advocate for different issues and rights of the people of the North East. At this time, why regulated? Efforts should be towards the restoration of peace and harmony in Manipur and not indulge in political posturing. We all strive to work for everyone to think for the people of Manipur. This is what @L_P_A_Sangma Ji would have wanted."

Those who have faith in Aurangzeb can visit tomb: RSS leader

Jehina Mishra
NEW DELHI

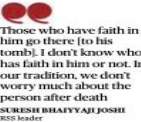
Senior Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh (RSS) leader Suresh Bhatnagar Joshi said on Monday that a controversy had been "raised unnecessarily" over Meghal ruler Aurangzeb's tomb.

His statement contradicts RSS general secretary Daratraya Hosabale, who questioned if iconising someone who was "against the ethos of India" was right.

"Aurangzeb died here and his grave was built. Those who have faith in him go there [to his tomb]. I don't know who has faith in him or not. In our tradition, we don't worry much about the person after death," Mr. Joshi said.

Mr. Joshi was responding to a statement made by Maharashtra Nannirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray, who, on Sunday, slammed people for attempting to incite communal tensions in Maharashtra over Aurangzeb's tomb.

He had said Aurangzeb's relevance was brought up many times in the past. The senior RSS leader had said that if the fight against the British was to be fought for the country's freedom, then the fight against those who ruled the country before the British was also a "freedom movement."



Suresh Bhatnagar Joshi

Those who have faith in him go there [to his tomb]. I don't know who has faith in him or not. In our tradition, we don't worry much about the person after death," Mr. Joshi said.

Mr. Joshi's views were backed by the RSS national publicity in-charge, Sunil Ambekar, who said that Aurangzeb was "irrelevant" in the present times.

Different opinion
Mr. Hosabale, however, had a different opinion. He had said Aurangzeb's relevance was brought up many times in the past.

The senior RSS leader had said that if the fight against the British was to be fought for the country's freedom, then the fight against those who ruled the country before the British was also a "freedom movement."

Two-day Congress session in Gujarat will seek to highlight party's 'rich legacy' in State

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

From holding the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting at Sardar Vallabhbhai National Memorial in Ahmedabad to gathering at Sabarmati Ashram, the two-day-long All India Congress Committee (AICC) session on April 8 and 9 will underscore the party's long-standing legacy in Gujarat.

A senior Congress leader said that the session at CWC, which will adopt a resolution of the AICC session, will meet at the Sardar Patel memorial on April 8.

"Though the venue of the meeting could be interpreted as the Congress's attempt to reclaim Sardar's



Grand plans: Top Congress leaders will meet at the Sabarmati Ashram on the evening of April 8. GETTY IMAGES

legacy, party insiders strongly denied it. "Even in 2019, we had held a CWC meeting before the Lok Sabha polls. The memorial is still headed by former Union Minister, veteran Congress leader Dinsha Patel," the source said.

On the evening of April 8, top Congress leaders

Rahul urges Modi to cancel tenders for offshore mining

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking cancellation of tenders permitting offshore mining along the coast of Kerala, Gujarat, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Flagging the threat to marine life, the Congress leader said opening up offshore mining blocks to private players without any rigorous assessment of its impact was concerning.

"I write to you to strongly condemn the Central Government's decision to permit offshore mining along the coast of Kerala, Gujarat and Andaman & Nicobar," he said in his let-

ter to the Prime Minister. Mr. Gandhi said coastal communities have been protesting against the manner in which tenders for offshore mining have been floated without evaluating its environmental impact.

Millions of fisherfolk are dependent on the sea for their livelihood and way of life, he said.

"Offshore mining will impact the livelihoods of millions of fisherfolk. Irreversibly damage our diverse marine life. The government must immediately revoke this decision," Mr. Gandhi said in his WhatsApp channel.

He also called for rigorous scientific studies to assess the environmental, as well as the economic impact of offshore mining.

NEP promotes Indianisation of education system, Sonia should support it: Fadnavis

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Endorsing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday said that the policy promoted Indianisation of the Indian education system and Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) chairperson Sonia Gandhi should support it.

Speaking in Nagpur, Mr. Fadnavis said, "I believe that we should know about this more and must fully support the Indianisation of the education system. It is concerned only with climate-specific adaptations to provide advanced heating systems in sub-zero temperatures; the system is embedded with heating elements for defrosting and to prevent snow during harsh winters."

While the ambitious project to connect Kathra by train began in 1997, it

His statement comes after Sonia's opinion piece "The 3Cs that haunt Indian education today."

blem with that. Any patriot will support the NEP. I think Sonia Gandhi ji should know about this more and must fully support the Indianisation of the education system. It is concerned only with climate-specific adaptations to provide advanced heating systems in sub-zero temperatures; the system is embedded with heating elements for defrosting and to prevent snow during harsh winters."

Thomas Babington Macaulay's education system in India in the 19th Century. Mr. Fadnavis's statement came in response to Ms. Gandhi's opinion piece, "The 3Cs that haunt Indian education to-

day," published in The Hindu on March 31.

She wrote, "The introduction of the high-profile National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, has hidden the reality of a government that is profoundly indifferent to the education of India's children and youth. The Union Government's track record over the last decade has convincingly demonstrated that in educational system."

Thomas Babington Macaulay's education system in India in the 19th Century. Mr. Fadnavis's statement came in response to Ms. Gandhi's opinion piece, "The 3Cs that haunt Indian education to-

CBCI seeks unbiased approach to Waqf Bill

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), which is the permanent association of Catholic Bishops in India, has urged political parties and legislators to adopt an unbiased and constructive approach to the Waqf Amendment Bill.

In a statement on Monday, the CBCI said certain provisions in the existing Central Waqf Act were consistent with the Constitution and the democratic values of the country. "In Kerala, the Waqf Board has issued these provisions to declare the ancestral land, properties of more than 600 families in the Munnambay region as a secular land. Over the past three years, this issue has escalated into a complex legal dispute," it said.

Ministers issuing threats to Kunal Kamra over remarks on Eknath Shinde, says Raut

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Monday accused Maharashtra Cabinet Ministers of issuing violent threats to stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra over his controversial remarks about Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

Ministers in the State Cabinet are openly threatening Kunal Kamra, demanding that he be "shot and hanged immediately." Despite such lawlessness, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis remains a mute spectator.

The Mumbai Police have issued two summonses to Kamra. The warrants, issued on March 24, required him to appear at the Khar police station on March 31 in connection



Sanjay Raut

with his recent "traitor" jibe at Mr. Shinde. However, he failed to do so.

Fresh FIRs
Mr. Kamra also faces three fresh FIRs on illegal betting from his Ministers. "If public representatives openly call for extrajudicial action, it reflects the breakdown of constitutional governance," he said.

Mr. Kamra's case has ignited a political storm in Maharashtra.

Modi likely to inaugurate Vande Bharat train to Srinagar on April 19

Maitri Porocha
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the first Vande Bharat train to Kashmir in April, railway sources told The Hindu on Monday.

The Vande Bharat train journey from Katra to Srinagar will reduce the travel time to a mere three hours.

The inauguration, likely on April 19, will complete the 272-km Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project.



Official launch: The Vande Bharat Express train, which will run on the Katra-Srinagar route, during a trial run. FILE PHOTO

The Kashmir version of Vande Bharat system is sub-zero temperatures; the system is embedded with heating elements for defrosting and to prevent snow during harsh winters.

While the ambitious project to connect Kathra by train began in 1997, it

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Official launch: The Vande Bharat Express train, which will run on the Katra-Srinagar route, during a trial run. FILE PHOTO

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While the ambitious project to connect Kathra by train began in 1997, it

tion between Banihal and Sangaldan was started, and now the connectivity between Sangaldan to Katra, which is believed to be the most difficult of all sections, has been completed.

The Vande Bharat train will snake through the Chanab Bridge standing 359 meters above mean sea level. Developed at an estimated cost of ₹37,000 crore, the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link project involved laying out ballast bed, tracks, overbridges and tunnels, spanning deep gorges, with multiple delays due to geographical challenges posed by the terrain of Himalayas.

In 2009, the Qazigund-rail section in Kashmir was rendered operational, following which in 2014 the 18-km Banihal-Katra section and the 24-km Udhampur-Katra section was started. In 2023, the sec-

On the Katra-Banihal section the train will also traverse another engineering marvel, the Anji Khad bridge which is India's first cable stayed bridge.

Modi likely to inaugurate Vande Bharat train to Srinagar on April 19

Maitri Porecha

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the first Vande Bharat train to Kashmir in April, railway sources told *The Hindu* on Monday.

The Vande Bharat train journey from Katra to Srinagar will reduce the travel time to a mere three hours. “Currently the road route takes at least 6 to 7 hours,” railway officials said.

Currently, railway services are operational between Baramulla-Srinagar to Sangaldan in the Kashmir valley. “Now that Sangaldan has been connected to Katra in Jammu via rail, trains can run between the whole stretch,” officials said.

The inauguration, likely on April 19, will complete the 272-km Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project.



Official launch: The Vande Bharat Express train, which will run on the Katra-Srinagar route, during a trial run. FILE PHOTO

The Kashmir version of Vande Bharat is equipped with climate-specific adaptations to provide advanced heating systems in sub-zero temperatures; the driver’s front look-out glass is embedded with heating elements for defrosting and to ensure clear visibility during harsh winters.

While the ambitious project to connect Kashmir by train began in 1997, it

was commissioned in bits and parts and faced multiple delays due to geographical challenges posed by the terrain of Himalayas.

In 2009, the Qazigund-Baramulla section in Kashmir was rendered operational, following which in 2013, the 18-km Banihal-Qazigund section, and in 2014, the 24-km Udhampur-Katra section was started. In 2023, the sec-

tion between Banihal and Sangaldan was started, and now the connectivity between Sangaldan to Katra, which is believed to be the most difficult of all sections, has been completed.

The Vande Bharat train will snake through the Chenab Bridge standing 359 meters above mean sea level. Developed at an estimated cost of ₹37,000 crore, the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link project involved laying out ballast less tracks over bridges and tunnels, spanning deep gorges, with 90% of the route traversed over 943 bridges, and 36 main tunnels, including India’s longest railway tunnel, T-50 stretching more than 12.7 kms.

On the Katra-Banihal section the train will also traverse another engineering marvel, the Anji Khad bridge which is India’s first cable stayed bridge.



Project Overview:

- **Train:** Vande Bharat Express
- **Route:** Katra (Jammu) to Srinagar (Kashmir)
- **Travel Time:** Will reduce from 6–7 hours (by road) to **just 3 hours**
- **Distance:** 272 km
- **Project Name:** Udhampur–Srinagar–Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL)

- **Sections Now Connected:**
 - Baramulla → Srinagar → Sangaldan → Katra
- **Completed Challenges:**
 - **Sangaldan to Katra:** The most difficult section is now operational.
- **Chenab Bridge:**
 - Height: **359 meters** above sea level (taller than Eiffel Tower)
 - Cost: Part of ₹37,000 crore USBRL project
- **Tunnels and Bridges:**
 - 90% of the route through **943 bridges** and **36 tunnels**
 - Longest tunnel: **T-50** (12.7 km)
 - **Anji Khad Bridge:** India's first cable-stayed railway bridge

- **Climate-Adapted for sub-zero temperatures**
- Heated driver's windshield for **clear visibility during snow**
- **Advanced heating systems and frost protection**

Construction Timeline:

Year	Milestone
1997	Project conceived
2009	Qazigund–Baramulla section commissioned
2013	Banihal–Qazigund (18 km) opened
2014	Udhampur–Katra (24 km) section operational
2023	Sangaldan–Banihal completed
2025	Katra–Srinagar Vande Bharat inauguration likely

Significance:

- Provides **all-weather rail connectivity** to Kashmir.
- Reduces **travel time, boosts tourism, and strengthens national integration.**
- One of the most **technologically challenging** railway projects in India's history.

India-U.S. tri-service exercise from April 1 to 13

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The fourth iteration of the India-U.S. tri-service Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise, named Tiger Triumph, is scheduled to take place from April 1 to 13.

In a statement released on Monday, the Navy outlined the objectives: “The exercise aims to enhance interoperability for conducting HADR operations and to formulate Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for establishing a Combined Coordination Centre (CCC). This centre would facilitate rapid and seamless coordination between Indian and U.S. Joint Task Forces (JTF) during exercises, crises, and contingencies.”

The Harbour Phase is scheduled at Visakhapatnam from April 1 to 7.

Cost of living woes fuel fake drug demand in Nigeria



Getting worse: Big pharmaceutical firms have exited the country because of its difficult business environment. AFP

Agence France-Presse
LAGOS

A long-running struggle in Nigeria against fake medicines has become even harder because widespread economic hardship is driving up demand, experts say.

The scale of the problem was highlighted in March when authorities set ablaze \$645 million worth of counterfeit medicines seized in six weeks of raids in Lagos and two southern states. "What we have found could ruin a nation," said the head of the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Mojola Adeyeye. "What we have found could destabilise a government."

Efforts in Nigeria to curb sales of fake and substandard medicines has been going on for decades. Porous borders and weak regulations have created a situation in which medicines of unknown quality and provenance are sold in open-air street markets and in thousands of unlicensed pharmacies.

For Nigeria and other countries with rampant sales of counterfeit medicines, such products pose significant health risks, the World Health Organization has warned.

Nigeria's battered economy is not helping the fight against such medicines, prompting desperate people to turn to them, said Tanimola Akande, a professor of public health.

"Many Nigerians now find it difficult to buy drugs for their ailments," Mr. Akande, from the University of Ilorin, told AFP.

Economic reforms brought in by President Bola Tinubu since taking office in May 2023 have exacerbated the cost-of-living squeeze they face.

Mr. Tinubu ended a fuel subsidy and loosened the exchange rate of the naira, in reforms aimed at reviving the economy and attracting investors. But with inflation at a three-decade high, the value of the naira has plummeted as the cost of goods has soared, leading to one of Nigeria's worst economic crises in decades.

"Public health challenge" Estimates are patchy as to the proportion of counterfeit medicines in Nigeria.

Some 25 years ago, around 70% of medicines sold in the country were believed to be fake. Today, the amount is thought to be less than that, but no firm figures exist.

"The prevalence has reduced, but is still high enough to be considered a serious public health challenge," Mr. Akande said.

"The fact that the NAFDAC raids filled 180 trucks with 'more than the amount of banned medicines' and opioids underscored the scale of the whole problem," said March 4 and Sanyo Akintola, a NAFDAC spokesman, said that officials did not anticipate such large amounts of fake medicines being seized.

Compounding the problem in Nigeria is that big pharmaceutical companies have exited the country because of its difficult business environment and persistent inflation, leaving a void in the market.

Why efficient air conditioners must be a national priority in India

Even with many new thermal and hydro plants under construction, India faces a projected shortfall in firm capacity as early as 2026 — just one summer away; the most immediate and cost-effective solution lies in improving the energy efficiency of air conditioners in the market

NEWS ANALYSIS

Nikhil Abhyankar
Jose Dominguez

As India braces for another intense summer, the country's power grid is once again under strain. With temperatures soaring past 45°C in many regions, millions of households and businesses are switching on their air conditioners (ACs) for relief. But while ACs provide essential comfort and protection, they are fast becoming the single largest driver of peak electricity demand — especially during the evening and night-time hours when solar generation fades but the heat lingers.

India is currently adding 10 to 15 million ACs each year, with another 150 million expected over the next decade. Our recent study shows that without urgent policy action, ACs alone will add nearly one-third of India's projected evening peak electricity demand by 2030 and 150 GW by 2035. That would represent nearly one-third of India's projected evening peak-placing enormous stress on the grid, requiring expensive new investments in power generation and storage, and significantly increasing the risk of blackouts.

This crisis is not hypothetical — it's already underway. In May 2024, India's national evening peak hit an all-time high of 240 GW, driven largely by cooling loads. While the country has made remarkable progress in building renewable capacity, solar power tapers off just when evening demand surges. Even with many new thermal and hydro plants under construction, India faces a projected shortfall in firm capacity as early as 2026 — just one summer away.

The most immediate and cost-effective solution lies in improving the energy efficiency of air conditioners. At the heart of this challenge lies India's outdated minimum energy performance standards (MEPS) for room air conditioners. ACs sold in India are re-



Hot demand: In May 2024, India's evening peak demand hit an all-time high of 240 GW.

quired to carry energy labels from one to five stars, with the one-star level serving as the minimum standard. However, for India's variable-speed ACs — which now dominate the market — India's one-star rating is nearly 50% less efficient than the minimum standard in countries like China and Japan. In fact, China's current mini-

mum requirement is comparable to India's five-star rating, meaning most ACs sold in India today wouldn't even qualify for sale in the Chinese market.

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Shrinking U.S. risk premium to divert cash to EU

Reuters

The premium that investors enjoy from holding U.S. government debt over that of Germany is now its biggest quarterly drop in years, with tectonic fiscal policy shifts on both sides of the Atlantic expected to shrink this gap further, luring more cash into Europe.

The spread between U.S. and German 10-year bond yields reflects the difference in how much it costs each government to borrow over the long term. It has fallen by 62 basis points since the start of the year to 158 bps, and is set for its biggest quarterly fall since the global financial crisis in 2008, excluding moves during the pandemic.

The gap reflects the divergence in interest rates



New regime: Policy shifts on both sides of the Atlantic are expected to shrink the gap between U.S. and German yields further. REUTERS

and economic outlooks and is crucial for both investment flows and the euro-dollar exchange rate, which in turn affects trade balances, inflation levels, and corporate profits.

Germany in March approved plans for a massive spending surge, jettisoning decades of fiscal conservatism, which sent

tors are worried about a slowdown in growth, prompting a fall in Treasury yields.

"Fiscal policy outlook is now the main reason behind the current divergence between the euro and the U.S.," said Athanasios Vamvakidis, chief economist at BoFA. Some analysts and investors believe the U.S.-German spread, which is narrowing as German yields rise, could fall below 100 bps — a level not seen with any regularity since 2013.

"A recession should be a scenario where Treasury yields collapse, and the spread goes to levels seen before 2008 and 2010, when it averaged 30 bps," said Pichitra Garvey, regional head of research at ING, who sees the spread at below 100

already being sold by leading brands. This trajectory would give manufacturers the long-term clarity needed to invest in advanced components, such as high-efficiency compressors, heat exchangers, and smart control systems. Without a predictable policy signal, manufacturers are hesitant to retrofit their supply chains and scale up production of energy-efficient models. But with a phased, transparent MEPS timeline, they can plan and invest with confidence.

Tightening AC efficiency standards is one of the fastest, most cost-effective ways to reduce future electricity demand and strengthen India's power system. According to our study, a strengthened MEPS could reduce peak demand by 10 GW by 2028, 23 GW by 2030, and 60 GW by 2035 — the equivalent of 120 large power plants. These reductions would help India avoid up to ₹7.5 trillion (about \$85 billion) in new power generation and grid infrastructure costs.

Consumers also stand to benefit directly. Although energy-efficient ACs may carry slightly higher up-front prices, they pay for themselves in two to three years through lower electricity bills. Over time, the net savings are substantial — ranging from ₹66,000

crore to ₹2.25 lakh crore (\$8-26 billion) by 2035. That's real money going back into the pockets of Indian households.

Contrary to popular belief, upgrading efficiency standards doesn't always mean higher prices. In both Indian and global markets, past MEPS revisions have not led to price spikes. In fact, inflation-adjusted AC prices have continued to decline over time, driven by economies of scale, improved supply chains, and greater competition. Our study confirms that energy efficiency is not the primary driver of AC prices in India. Many efficient, no-frills models are now available at prices that are comparable to less efficient models.

Tightening MEPS is the most powerful way to transform the market quickly — shifting the entire baseline upward, lowering electricity demand, and ensuring that every new AC sold in India contributes to a more reliable and affordable grid. Raising AC standards is not just an energy efficiency measure — it's a power system reliability safeguard, a consumer savings strategy, and an industrial competitiveness lever all rolled into one.

Nikhil Abhyankar is a faculty member and Jose Dominguez is a researcher at Climate Center, University of California, Berkeley

tract more capital from investors seeking better returns for their cash.

The shift in the U.S./Bunds spread has supported the euro, which has gained 4% in the three months to March, its best quarterly performance since the fourth quarter of 2023. European stocks are set for their best first-quarter relative to U.S. stocks in a decade.

"Interest in Europe was amazing among U.S. investors," said Reinout De Bock, strategist at UBS after a trip to the U.S. last week to meet clients.

"Since the euro crisis, I have not seen so much interest in Europe on a New York visit, but clients are struggling to gauge to what extent it is a growth-positive story for Germany versus other (euro area) countries," he added.

For businesses, Trump's trade war feels much worse this time

Reuters
SHANGHAI

Orders have evaporated for Richard Chen, who manufactures Christmas decorations in southern China for U.S. retailers, including Walmart and Costco, facing crippling U.S. tariffs. "The orders are half of what they were last year," said Mr. Chen, who runs a firm based in the manufacturing hub of Dongguan. He is now in survival mode.

"There's no more scope to cut prices. But to get orders we sometimes have to take a price cut," he laments. "We're losing money."

On February 4, U.S. President Donald Trump applied a new 10% tariff to

the \$400 billion worth of Chinese goods exported annually to the U.S., with an additional 10% tariff announced on March 4 and further reciprocal tariffs expected on April 2. Chinese suppliers and their American clients are now coming to grips with the grim reality that this trade war will hit harder than in Mr. Trump's first term in 2018. This time is different because low-end manufacturers are already struggling with razor-thin margins, so they cannot cut prices to help their U.S. customers, and local Chinese governments that might have provided support to protect jobs are mostly too cash-strapped to give new subsidies.



Hard times: Low-end manufacturers are already struggling with razor-thin margins. GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

the first U.S.-China trade war of 2018, while raw material costs have climbed for some sectors and overseas competition has intensified, making Mr.

Trump's latest tariffs the final straw for many low-end manufacturers.

Liz Picarazzi, the Brookings-based founder and CEO of trash box company Citibin, said her goods produced in China are now subject to 52.5% tariffs and she can no longer afford to manufacture there. "My whole business has

been based on a long-term order of 7,000 units. It was a real shock," she said, referring to two rounds of 10% tariff increases on Chinese goods in addition to a global 25% aluminum tariff.

"We knew this was coming but there's no way any of us could have predicted an additional 45% in tariffs."

Pressing for cuts U.S. customers are pressuring suppliers to pay for container-loads of goods yielding average discounts of 3% to 5% in the past few weeks, they said.

Chitayat, the Asia boss of Desmarais Group, a contract manufacturer that derives 70% of its revenue from U.S. customers. "Most people don't have 10% to give to be honest. Maybe two or three, but 7% is the ceiling for most people."

On the Chinese side, suppliers who got hurt in 2018 when some U.S. customers refused to pay for container-loads of goods subjected to higher tariffs are now asking for payments upfront rather than waiting 30-90 days after sending an invoice.

"We told our U.S. clients to work for that, but they elected that the payment terms were 100% upfront from all suppliers because we anticipated this

tariff nightmare," said Dominic Desmarais, chief sales officer at Liya Solutions, which connects small and medium-size companies with suppliers in China.

Academic research following 2018 showed that each 1% tariff rise impacts Chinese supplier margins by 0.35%. That trade war also resulted in the loss of around 3.5 million Chinese manufacturing jobs, according to Reuters calculations based on Dartmouth estimates of manufacturing jobs in China lost.

The message from Beijing is that exporters can pivot to other markets and also work for new customers, but that too is a difficult strategy in a time of overcapacity and depressed domestic demand.

Why efficient air conditioners must be a national priority in India

Even with many new thermal and hydro plants under construction, India faces a projected shortfall in firm capacity as early as 2026—just one summer away; the most immediate and cost-effective solution lies in improving the energy efficiency of air conditioners in the market

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As India braces for another intense summer, the country's power grid is once again under strain. With temperatures soaring past 45°C in many regions, millions of households and businesses are switching on their air conditioners (ACs) for relief. But while ACs provide essential comfort and protection, they are fast becoming the single largest driver of peak electricity demand—especially during the evening and night time hours when solar generation fades but the heat lingers.

India is currently adding 10 to 15 million ACs each year, with another 150 million expected over the next decade. Our recent study shows that without urgent policy action, ACs alone could contribute as much as 120 gigawatts (GW) to peak electricity demand by 2030 and 180 GW by 2035. That would represent nearly one-third of India's projected evening peak—placing enormous stress on the grid, requiring expensive new investments in power generation and storage, and significantly increasing the risk of blackouts.

This crisis is not hypothetical—it's already under-



Hot demand: In May 2024, India's evening peak demand hit an all-time high of 240 GW.

way. In May 2024, India's national evening peak hit an all-time high of 240 GW, driven largely by cooling loads. While the country has made remarkable progress in building renewable capacity, solar power tapers off just when cooling demand surges. Even with many new thermal and hydro plants under construction, India faces a projected shortfall in firm capacity as early as 2026—just one summer away. The most immediate and cost-effective solution lies in improving the energy efficiency of air conditioners.

At the heart of this challenge lies India's outdated minimum energy performance standards (MEPS) for room air conditioners. ACs sold in India are re-



China's current minimum requirement is comparable to India's five-star rating, meaning most ACs sold in India today wouldn't even qualify for sale in the Chinese market

quired to carry energy labels from one to five stars, with the one-star level serving as the minimum standard. However, for inverter (variable-speed) ACs—which now dominate the market—India's one-star rating is nearly 50% less efficient than the minimum standard in countries like China and Japan. In fact, China's current mini-

mum requirement is comparable to India's five-star rating, meaning most ACs sold in India today wouldn't even qualify for sale in the Chinese market.

Yet the gap is not difficult to close. Our research proposes a roadmap for progressively raising India's MEPS over the next decade. Starting in 2027, the minimum standard could be set to the current five-star level (ISEER 5.0, or Indian Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio), then gradually increased to ISEER 6.3 by 2030—matching the most efficient AC models already available in India—and finally to ISEER 7.4 by 2033, aligned with global best-in-class performance. Each of these steps is grounded in technologies

already being sold by leading brands.

This trajectory would give manufacturers the long-term clarity needed to invest in advanced components, such as high-efficiency compressors, heat exchangers, and smart control systems. Without a predictable policy signal, manufacturers are hesitant to retool their supply chains and scale up production of energy-efficient models. But with a phased, transparent MEPS timeline, they can plan and invest with confidence.

Cost-effective strategy

Tightening AC efficiency standards is one of the fastest, most cost-effective ways to reduce future electricity demand and strengthen India's power system. According to our study, a strengthened MEPS could reduce peak demand by 10 GW by 2028, 23 GW by 2030, and 60 GW by 2035—the equivalent of 120 large power plants. These reductions would help India avoid up to ₹7.5 trillion (about \$85 billion) in new power generation and grid infrastructure costs.

Consumers also stand to benefit directly. Although energy-efficient ACs may carry slightly higher upfront prices, they pay for themselves in two to three years through lower electricity bills. Over time, the net savings are substantial—ranging from ₹66,000

crore to ₹2.25 lakh crore (\$8-26 billion) by 2035. That's real money going back into the pockets of Indian households.

Contrary to popular belief, upgrading efficiency standards doesn't always mean higher prices. In both Indian and global markets, past MEPS revisions have not led to price spikes. In fact, inflation-adjusted AC prices have continued to decline over time, driven by economies of scale, improved supply chains, and greater competition. Our study confirms that energy efficiency is not the primary driver of AC prices in India. Many efficient, no-frills models are now available at prices that are comparable to less efficient models.

Tightening MEPS is the most powerful way to transform the market quickly—shifting the entire baseline upward, lowering electricity demand, and ensuring that every new AC sold in India contributes to a more reliable and affordable grid. Raising AC standards is not just an energy efficiency measure—it's a power system reliability safeguard, a consumer savings strategy, and an industrial competitiveness lever all rolled into one.

(Nikit Abhyankar is a faculty member and Jose Dominguez is a researcher at the India Energy and Climate Center, University of California, Berkeley)

Context:

- As India faces extreme summer heat (up to 45°C), demand for air conditioners (ACs) is surging rapidly.
- This peak demand is putting **severe stress on the national power grid**, especially during **evening and night hours** when solar generation drops.

Indicator	Value
ACs in use (2024)	15 million
Expected by 2035	120 million
May 2024 Peak Power Demand	240 GW (all-time high)
Shortfall in Firm Capacity (By)	2026
Potential Savings (via efficient ACs)	₹6.3 lakh crore (~\$85 billion)
Efficiency boost impact (2030)	Save 120 GW, reduce CO ₂

Challenges:

- Most ACs in India are **3-star rated or lower**.
- India's **minimum energy efficiency standard (MEPS)** is equivalent to **China's lowest efficiency level**.
- Lack of clear **policy signal** discourages manufacturers from investing in energy-efficient technology.

Solutions Proposed:

- **Raise MEPS (Minimum Energy Performance Standards)** steadily through 2027–2033.
- Improve **ISEER (Indian Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio)** target to **6.3 by 2030**, from the current average of 3.5–4.
- Incentivize manufacturers to upgrade components like **compressors, heat exchangers, and smart controls**.
- Provide predictable timelines for **manufacturing investment** and **consumer clarity**.

Benefits of Efficient ACs:

- **Cut peak demand** by:
 - 20 GW (by 2030)
 - 60 GW (by 2035)
- Equal to eliminating need for 12–20 large power plants.
- **Save ₹6.3 lakh crore** in reduced power generation and infrastructure.
- Bring down **AC electricity costs** for households.
- Avoid a looming **power crisis** from mismatch of demand and supply.

Global Comparison:

- China mandates **five-star efficiency** for all ACs.
- India is lagging and has potential to leapfrog with smart MEPS reforms.

Fig 1.3: Estimated Reserves of Crude Oil in India as on 01.04.2024

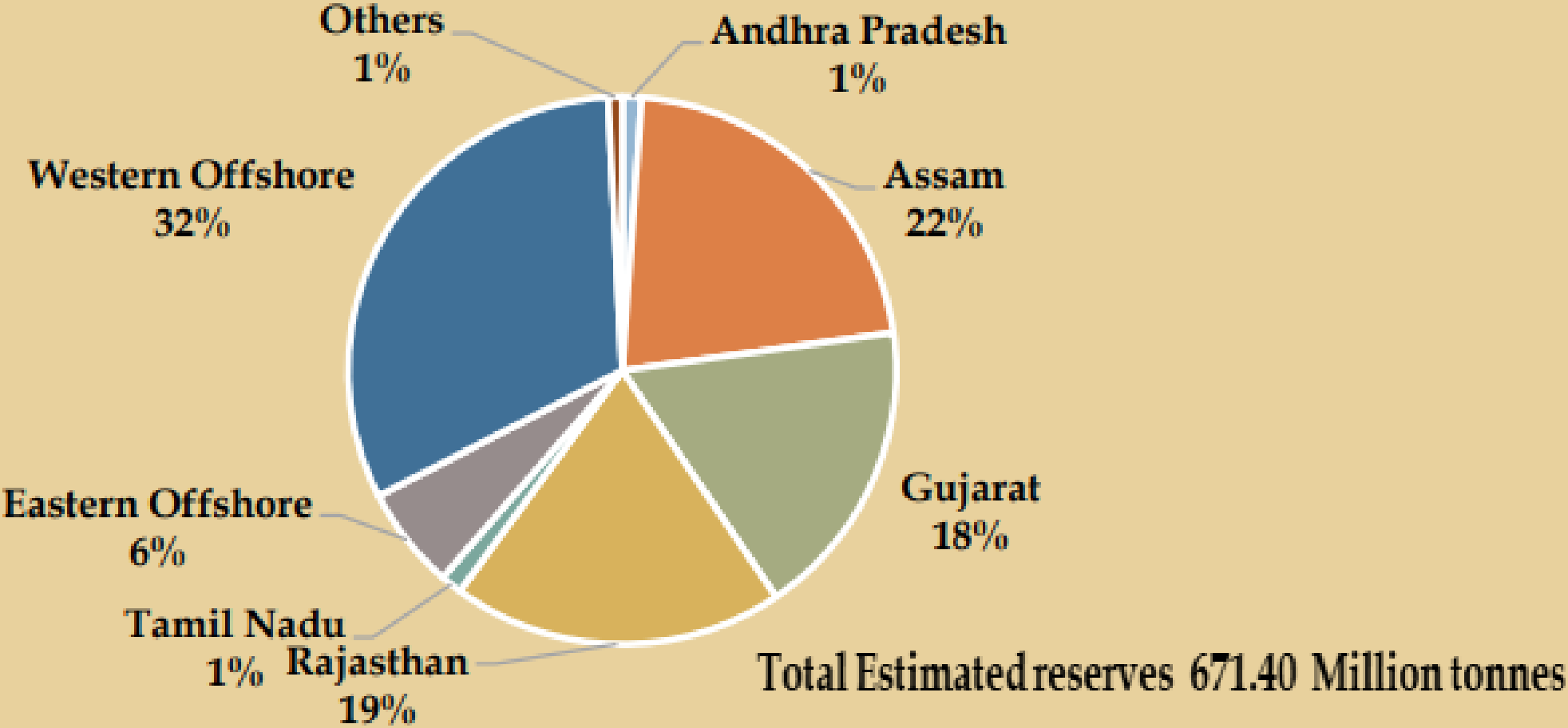
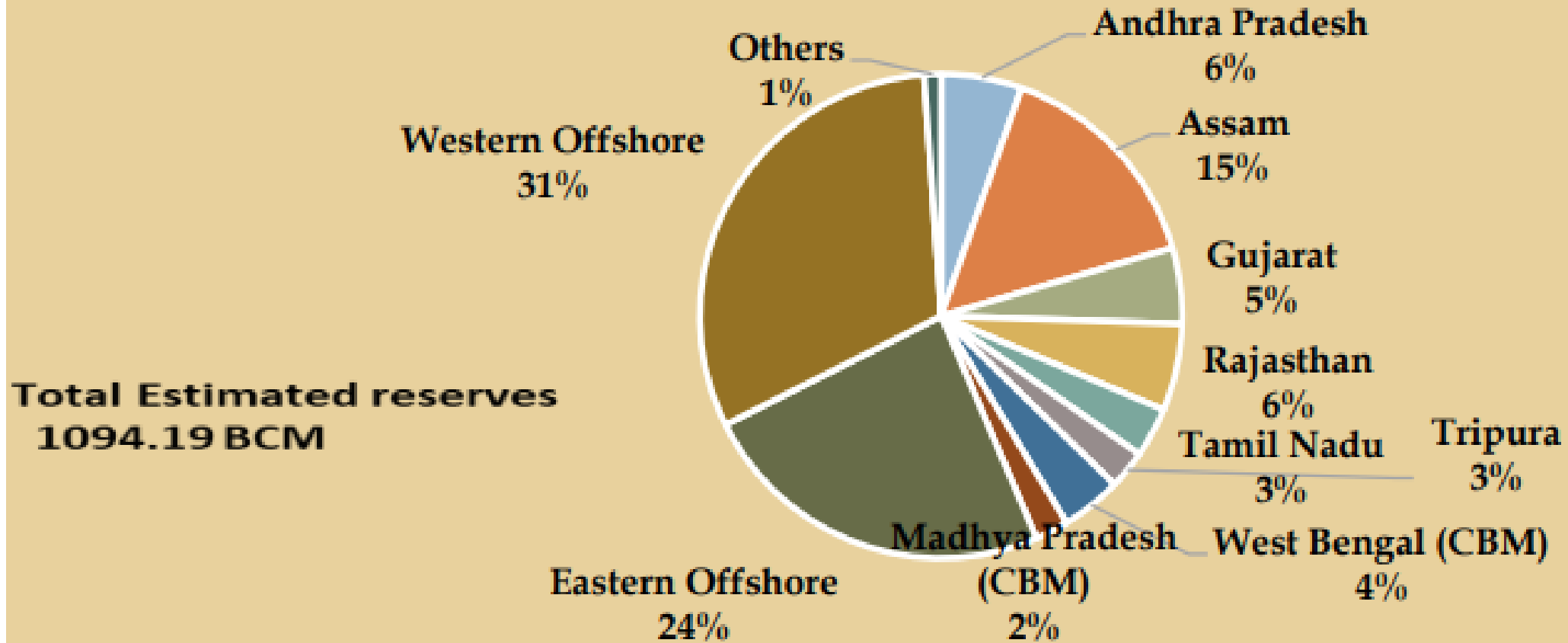
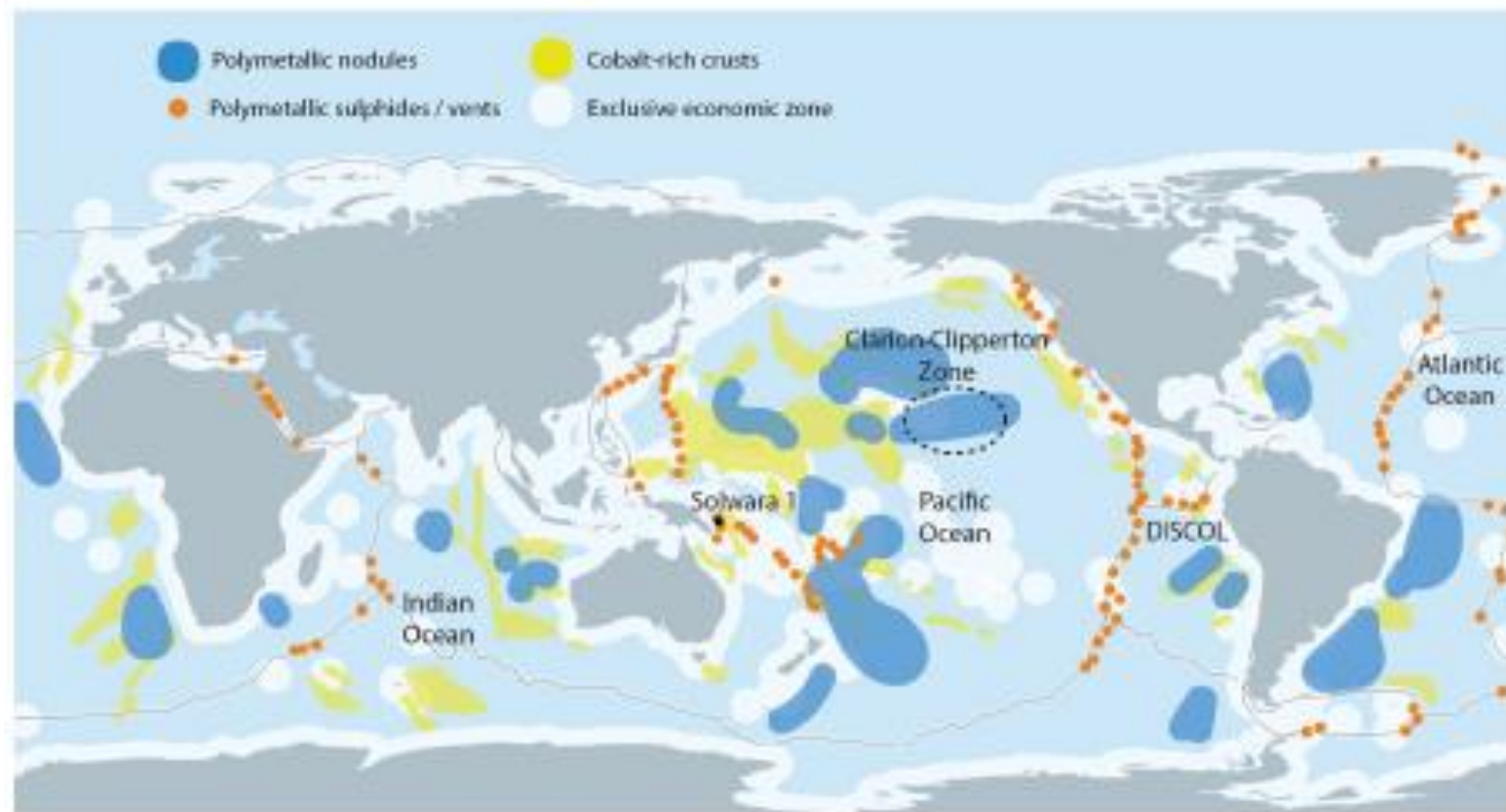


Fig 1.4 : Estimated Reserves of Natural Gas in India as on 01.04.2024



Distribution of critical mineral resources in the deep sea



Note: The white area around Antarctica is not an exclusive economic zone but rather governed by an international commission.

Source: Miller et al. 2018; Hein et al. 2013.

SDG Progress & Challenges

- India has shown significant improvement in its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) index 2024 ranking which has improved to 109th out of 166 countries.
- States have also demonstrated better performance, with an average increase of five units in the composite index over the past three years.

How Has India Performed on SDGs So Far?

- **Overall Progress:** India's **SDG index score improved from 57 (2018) to 71 (2023-24)**.
- **States Performance: Kerala & Uttarakhand lead with 8 goals each** scoring above 80 (above 80 score is an indicator of **achievement**).
 - However, over **9 states** recorded a decline in **No Poverty (Goal 1), Gender Equality (Goal 5), Reduced Inequality (Goal 10), and Strong Institutions (Goal 16)**.

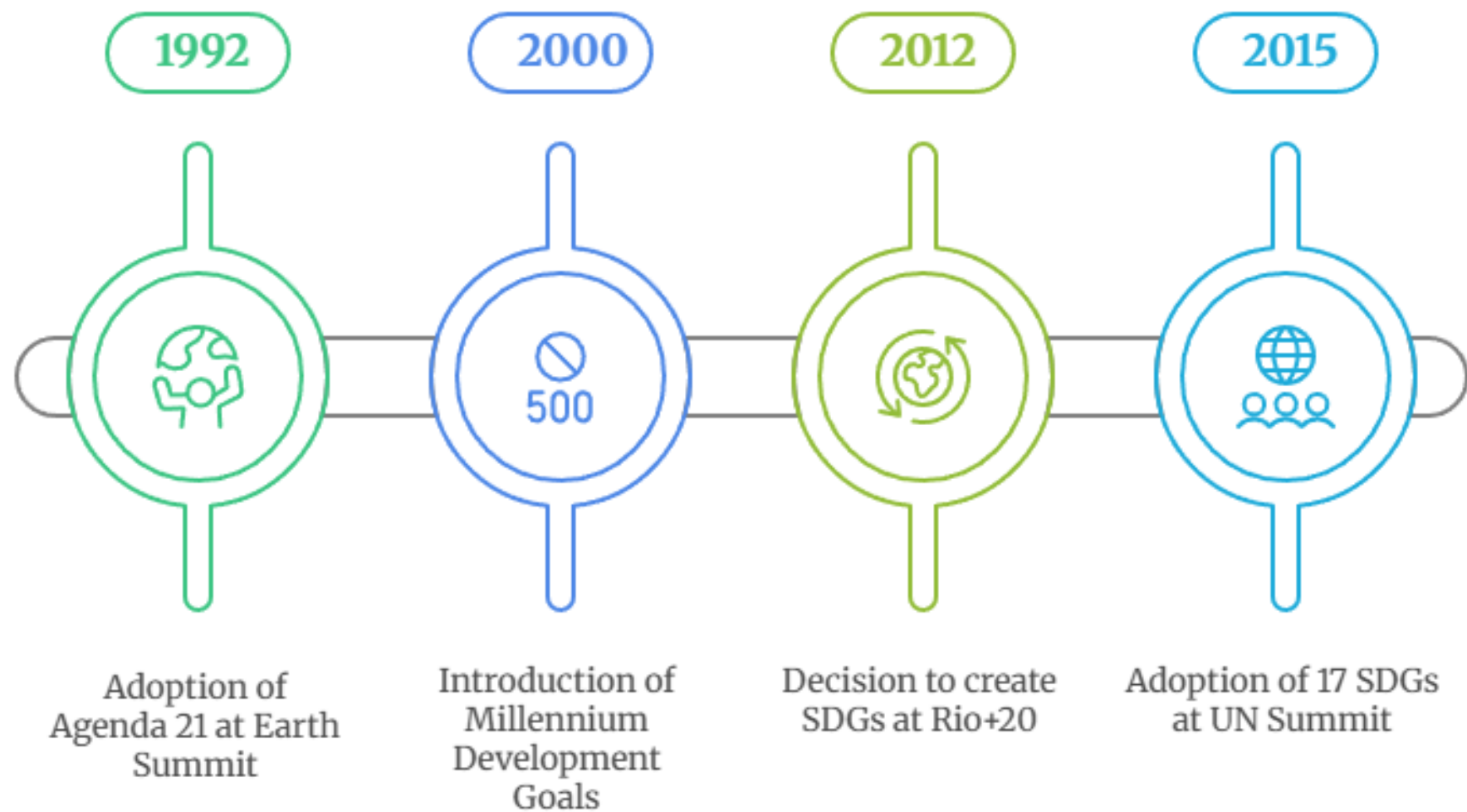
- **Target Specific Progress: SDG-3: Maternal Mortality Ratio** reduced from **130 (2014-16)** to **97 (2018-20)** per 1,00,000 live births.
- **SDG-4: The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education** rose from **23.7% to 28.4%** between 2014-15 and 2021-22.
- **SDG-6: Over 95%** of people in **rural areas** and **97.2%** in **cities** are having access to improved sources of drinking (potable) water during 2020-2021.

- **SDG-7:** India's renewable energy capacity increased from **180.80 GW** in December 2023 to **209.44 GW** in December 2024.
- **Budgetary Allocations:** Some states (like **Haryana, Odisha, Meghalaya**) now publish **SDG-specific budgets**.
 - Developing nations need **USD 4 trillion annually** to meet SDGs.

What are Sustainable Development Goals?

- **About:** SDGs are **17 interconnected goals** addressing global challenges like **poverty, inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation**.
 - It was adopted in **2015** by **193 UN Member States** as part of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**
- **Aim:** It aims to achieve **peace, prosperity, and sustainability** by **2030** through **global partnership**.

Historical Background



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

- The Uttarakhand Forest Department has partnered with WWF to install trap cameras in forest interiors to provide real-time wildlife alerts on forest roads. Forest department is installing trap cameras in interior forest roads to alert drivers about wild animal movement in real time.

- **What is WWF?**

- **An international NGO** working for environmental conservation and reducing human impact on nature.

- **Established: 1961**

- **Founders: Sir Peter Scott, Max Nicholson, and others**

- **Origin:** Initiated to support IUCN and global conservation efforts via fundraising and activism.
- **Headquarters:** Gland, Switzerland
- **Objective of WWF:**
 - To **halt environmental degradation** and promote a **sustainable future** where humans live in harmony with nature.

Sarhul Festival

- The tribal communities of Jharkhand and Chhotanagpur region are celebrating Sarhul, a New Year and spring festival rooted in nature worship.

About Sarhul Festival:

- What is Sarhul?

- Sarhul literally means ‘**worship of the Sal tree**’ and marks the **onset of spring** and the **Adivasi New Year**.
- It symbolizes the **cosmic union** of the Sun and Earth, essential for the **cycle of life and agriculture**.

- Tribes Associated:

- Celebrated by Adivasi groups such as the: Oraon, [Munda](#), Santal, Khadia, and Ho.
- The festival is observed across **Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Bihar**, and also by **tribal diaspora** in **Assam, Andaman, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan**.

Tribhuvandas Patel

- The Lok Sabha has passed a Bill to establish Tribhuvan Sahkari University in Anand, Gujarat, named after Tribhuvandas Patel, founder of the Kaira Milk Union (Amul).



- **Early Life & Background:**

- **Born:** 22 October 1903 in **Anand**, Kheda district, Gujarat.
- **Family:** Son of **Kishibhai Patel**, a farmer; studied at **DN High School**, Anand.
- **Education:** Graduate from **Gujarat Vidyapith**, Ahmedabad.
- Participated in movements like **Civil Disobedience**, **Salt Satyagraha**, and **anti-untouchability drives**; jailed in **Nasik (1930)** and **Visapur**.

- **Contribution to the Cooperative Movement:**
 - Founded **Kaira Milk Union (Amul)** on 14 December 1946 to end **dairy exploitation** by private traders like Polson Dairy.
 - Promoted **inclusive village-level dairy cooperatives** based on:
 - *One man, one vote* principle
 - Equal participation across **castes and communities**

- Appointed **Dr. Verghese Kurien** and supported him in building the foundation of **India's White Revolution**.
- Later helped establish:
 - National Dairy Development Board ([NDDB](#))
 - Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA)
 - Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF)

- **Role in Freedom Struggle:**

- Close follower of **Mahatma Gandhi's principles.**
- Dedicated life to **rural upliftment, community health, and self-reliance.**
- Founded **Tribhuvandas Foundation** from public donations to serve rural health needs.

- **Recognitions & Awards:**

- Ramon Magsaysay Award (1963) for Community Leadership.
- Padma Bhushan (1964) for Social Service.

Word of the day

Propriety:

correct or appropriate behaviour

Synonyms: correctitude, properness

Usage: *She has always behaved with the utmost propriety.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/proprietypro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /prə'pɪəti/

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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, some in the foreground and some blurred in the background. The lighting is soft and moody, with a blueish tint. In the top left corner, there is a solid orange horizontal bar and a cluster of small, glowing red and blue dots. The text "Thank you guys." is overlaid on the left side of the image in a white, sans-serif font, with a thin white horizontal line underneath it.

Thank you
guys.
