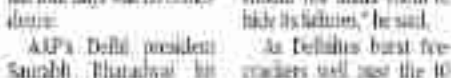


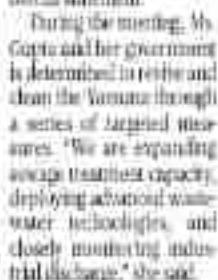
Twenty-five firemen and 14 riot units were deployed to douse the fires. However, no casualties were reported, officials said.

Eco-tourism: Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa accused the Jain Ashram Party



Environmental activist Maryam Kaulhar said PM2.5 crossed 1,000 micrograms per cubic meter last night, yet official data went missing at peak hours. If the low data are the worst

Gordon Berg, chair professor at the National Institute of Advanced Studies and assistant director of Center for Systems of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting Research (NSAFR), added that "moderately high" winds aides dispersion from a city towards "the inland area [which] indicates that some data [likely] extended the CMAQ data, leading to underestimation of AQI," he said.



Mr. Gupta briefed the Prime Minister on other major projects in the Capital, including the construction of new flyovers, underpasses, and transport connectivity. Upgrades meant to easing traffic congestion.

Twenty-nine earthquake-related fires, the biggest risk at a scrap yard in the Gurdaspur village, went reported from different parts of Gurdaspur on Deepawali night, a fire officer said on Tuesday. Although there were no casualties, non-harmless worth lakh went up in smoke in these incidents.

The latest is a warehouse in the Kothi was village took 20 hours to quell.

Punjab sees threefold spike in stubble burning in 10 days

Farmers set their fields on fire to clear paddy residue for sowing next crop; a fine of over ₹8 lakh in the form of environmental compensation has been imposed in 162 cases so far, say officials

Press Trust of India
CHANDIGARH

The number of stubble burning incidents in Punjab has touched 351 so far this season, with Tarn Taran and Amritsar districts accounting for the majority of such cases, according to data from the Punjab Pollution Control Board (PPCB).

In the last 10 days, the State has reported more than three-fold jump in farm fire incidents, the PPCB data showed. Till October 11, 165 such cases were reported.

At 125, Tarn Taran district has witnessed maximum stubble burning cases so far, followed by Amritsar with 82 cases as many farmers continue to burn crop residue, ignoring the State government's appeals to stop the practice.

Punjab saw 351 farm fire incidents between September 15 and October 20, according to the PPCB data.

Among other districts, 27 stubble burning cases



Flames and dense black smoke billow out from a field in Amritsar on Monday.

have been reported in Ferozepur, 23 in Patiala and eight in Sangrur.

Stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana is often blamed for the rise in air pollution in Delhi-NCR.

As the window for the Rabi crop, wheat, is very short after the paddy harvest in October and November, many farmers set their

fields on fire to clear the residue for sowing the next crop.

FIRs filed

The PPCB said that a fine of over ₹8 lakh in the form of environmental compensation has been imposed in 162 cases so far. Of the total fine, over ₹5.65 lakh has been recovered.

Additionally, 149 FIRs, which include 61 in Tarn Taran and 38 in Amritsar, have been registered over stubble burning incidents.

Cases have been registered under Section 223 (obedience of orders promulgated by a public servant) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

While the State government has launched a campaign to highlight the ill-effects of stubble burning and benefits of crop residue management machinery, it is still practised by many farmers to clear crop residue.

Punjab saw 10,909 farm fires in 2024 as compared to 36,162 in 2023, registering a 70% decrease in such cases.

The State had recorded 48,922 fire events in 2022, 71,034 in 2021, 74,590 in 2020, 55,280 in 2019 and 30,590 in 2018 with many districts including Sangrur, Meesa, Bathinda and Amritsar witnessing a high number of stubble burning incidents.

Student group forms panel to engage with J&K govt. ahead of report on revised quota policy

Deenbandhu Ashwin
BENGALURU

The Jammu and Kashmir Students' Association (JKSA) has formed a 10-member panel to review a report on the reservation policy being finalised by a Cabinet subcommittee set up by the Omar Abdullah government.

The panel will also engage with the government as well as the Opposition parties and propose actionable recommendations that "align with the aspirations and rights of the students of Jammu and Kashmir", said Dr Jashvir Bhatia, national spokesperson for the students' group.

The panel held consultations in Srinagar on Tuesday with representatives of various groups, including those studying medicine, nursing, and agriculture. The meeting aimed "to deliberate on the critical aspects of the reservation policy and its implications for the region", and to find a "balanced approach" to address concerns surrounding the reservation



Medical students stage a protest demanding rationalisation of reservation in Jammu and Kashmir, by Praveen K Singh

policy, it said.

JK's reservation policy, revised during the Lieutenant-Governor's rule, has earmarked 60% jobs and seats in educational institutions for various categories and kept 40% seats for the open category. The policy increased the reservation quota of Scheduled Tribes to 30% and of Other Backward Classes to 10%. This led to protests by certain sections, prompting the National Confederated Government to form a sub-committee to look into the issue. The subcommittee has studied its report and is in the process of submitting it to Lt-G Manoj Sinha for his nod.

It said.

The students' association has urged the government to make the report public to avoid confusion and apprehensions. It said that their panel will present its recommendations following consultations with the government and other stakeholders.

"Students are not seeking confrontation; they are seeking a conversation. Allowing such platforms will send a strong message that the government stands for inclusivity, transparency and participatory governance," Dr Bhatia said.

FIR against former Punjab DGP, wife over son's death

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

The Gurgaon police have filed a First Information Report (FIR) against Mohammad Mustafa, the former Director General of Police (DGP) for Punjab (Human Rights), his wife Rania Sultana, a former PWD Minister, and two additional individuals. They face allegations of murder and criminal conspiracy related to the mysterious death of their son, Aqil Akhtar.

The FIR was filed at the request of the deceased's neighbour, Shamabadeen Chaudhary, at the Mehra East Complex police station in Panchsala on October 20. Aqil's wife and sister have also been named as accused in the case.

Aqil had posted a video on his social media account on August 27 alleging that his father had illicit relations with his wife and said that his entire family was conspiring to kill or implicate him, said the FIR. He later died due to suspected drug overdose.

Air turns foul in Kolkata; 640 arrested for violations

Shrawana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

The air quality dipped in Kolkata and neighbouring West Bengal on Tuesday after the Dussehra and Kali Puja celebrations. Crackers were burst way beyond the 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. permitted window on Monday, flouting orders of the West Bengal Pollution Control Board (WBPCB) and the police.

The police arrested 640 people for bursting firecrackers beyond permitted hours, gambling, and disorderly conduct. Officials also seized over 152 kg of illegal fireworks and 90 litres of Black Spirit.

Mumbai chokes as quality of air dips

Purnima Nish
MUMBAI

Mumbai woke up to smog on Tuesday, a day after Deepavali celebrations that saw widespread use of firecrackers. The air quality across the metropolis deteriorated sharply overnight.

With several neighbourhoods recording AQI (Air Quality Index) levels in the 'unhealthy' and 'very' categories, experts attributed the spike in pollution to the extensive use of firecrackers during Diwali, compounded by seasonal meteorological conditions.

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Last date for submission of applications is 7th November, 2025 (1728 hrs).

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GENERAL

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UNDP India and Planning & Transformation Department, Government of Nagaland have entered into a partnership to provide technical support to the Nagaland Institute of Transformation (NIT) under State Support Mission. Under this partnership, UNDP India has engaged Strategic Alliance Management Services (SAMS) to recruit 11 technical experts to assist the development strategies in the State. Selected candidate will play a key role in providing policy advisory and recommendations to NIT.

For more details visit - <https://www.sams.co.in/>
Last date of application: 31 October 2025

GENERAL

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Research Department, Government of India, New Delhi

Invitation to Consultants, Government of India, New Delhi

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THE HINDU PRESENTS SCHOOL BUZZ

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATED

Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) celebrated their 10th anniversary with a grand event at Bengaluru. The celebration was presided over by BEL Chairman and Managing Director, Shri. Ramesh Chandra Singh. The event was attended by Shri. Ramesh Chandra Singh, Managing Director, BEL, and Shri. Ramesh Chandra Singh, Managing Director, BEL. The event was attended by Shri. Ramesh Chandra Singh, Managing Director, BEL, and Shri. Ramesh Chandra Singh, Managing Director, BEL.

WORKSHOP ON DECODING NCF-FS FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Rajendra Singh, former Modern School, Bangalore, under the guidance of the National Institute of Education, conducted a workshop on Decoding NCF-FS for Classroom Practice to enhance teachers' understanding of the National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage. The workshop was held at the National Institute of Education, Bangalore. The workshop was held at the National Institute of Education, Bangalore.

ICP ANNUAL COUNCIL 2025

Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) is collaborating with the International Commission of Primary (ICP) to host the ICP Annual Council Meeting, Bengaluru, India. The meeting will be held at the Bengaluru Convention Centre. The meeting will be held at the Bengaluru Convention Centre.

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if they're fun.**

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INBRIEF



CPI(M) will support changes to K-Rail project: Govindan

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) will support changes to the K-Rail project, with plans to shift it to a new route, party State secretary M.V. Govindan has said. Speaking to the media in Kuttanur on Tuesday, he clarified that a new approach was necessary since the Centre had not yet approved the existing proposal. Mr. Govindan said that financial constraints were not an issue and that the only hurdle was the lack of Central approval.

Kerala HC to watch film *Haal* in case challenging CBFC cuts

The Kerala High Court will watch the Malayalam film *Haal* here on Saturday in the wake of its interim challenging the Central Board of Film Certification's (CBFC) director to delete a few scenes and dialogues. The film's director and producer had contended that many of the scenes that the CBFC demanded to be deleted were critical to the film's theme. The scenes included the rape and consumption of beef by a man and in which the heroine uses Muslim religious attire.

Wild elephant causes major traffic hold-up in Athirappilly

Fragment elephant presence on the Athirappilly-Madhabappara in Kerala route has been causing constant among tourists and security forces. A wild elephant, locally called Kakkil, entered the road near Athirappilly on Sunday and Monday, leading to traffic hold-ups for nearly two hours on both days. Tourists and motorists were forced to wait in four while forest personnel tried to drive the elephant back to the jungle amid heavy rain.

HC relief for Ola chief in employee death case

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Karnataka High Court has directed the Bengaluru police "not to harass" Bharath Aggarwal, chairman and managing director of Ola Electric Technologies, and Subrat Kumar Das, the company's head of Human Resources Engineering, "in the guise of investigation" into the recent death of an employee.

The 39-year-old employee, K. Anand, allegedly attempted suicide at his apartment on September 28 and was rushed to a hospital, where he died later of injuries.

In a 26-page handwritten note recovered from Anand's room, he reportedly blamed his superiors for mental harassment and non-payment of salary and allowances.

Citing the note, Justice Kishan, the brother of the deceased, alleged that the top officials of the company had subjected Anand to "sustained" workplace harassment and withheld his salary and dues, causing him severe distress.

On Mr. Anand's complaint, the police filed an FIR naming Mr. Aggarwal and Mr. Das as accused. Justice Mohammad Noor granted the interim order on October 17 based on a petition filed by Mr. Aggarwal and Mr. Das.

The company, in a statement, had said that Anand never raised any complaint regarding his employment or any harassment, and his role also did not involve direct interaction with the company's top management.

For more on this story, email info@thehindu.co.in or call 022-26194000.

Investigate conspiracy angle in Sabarimala gold theft: HC

Probe team submits interim report to court; HC suspects 'well-planned scheme' to pilfer gold; it directs SIT to seize minutes book of temple Board and schedules in-camera hearing for Nov. 5

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala High Court on Tuesday directed the special investigation team (SIT) constituted to investigate the Sabarimala gold theft case, to probe 'criminal conspiracy' since 2019 and the subsequent entrapment of the gold-chained Damsapada idols in Uthirakulam Pottu, the key accused in the case.

A Division Bench of Justice Raja Viswanathan V and KV Jayakumar, during an in-camera trial held on Tuesday when the SIT submitted its interim report to the court, said it suspected a well-planned scheme to pilfer



Shah order says to reveal the gold-chained Damsapada at the Ayappa temple in Sabarimala on Friday, as it was

gold belonging to the Ayappa temple.

'Manual ignored'

The court wondered how the Tiruvananthapuram Board (TDB) officials, while entrusting the idols and their frames to a person with dubious antecedents,

ignored the instructions in a TDB manual, which stipulates that reports of this nature shall be carried out within the temple premises itself.

The court observed that the probe has revealed that only a perfunctory notice was prepared (while

handing over the idols to Mr. Pottu) and that their particulars were not entered in the registers. Mr. Pottu was also wrongfully permitted by the officials to retain approximately 429 grams of gold extracted from the gold-chained side frames.

Further, the TDB in 2019 erroneously categorised the Damsapadas as "copper plates" and handed them over to Mr. Pottu for gold-plating at a Chennai-based firm.

The court also directed the SIT to seize the minutes book of the TDB immediately and keep it in safe custody.

The matter has been posted for in-camera hearing on November 5.

Ajmer Sharif Dargah khadim moves HC over non-formation of panel, CCTV plan

The Hindu Bureau
LAKHNOU

An Ajmer Sharif Dargah khadim (custodian) has moved the Delhi High Court over the non-formation of the statutory Dargah Committee and against a proposed plan to install CCTV cameras inside the sacred sanctum sanctorum of the 16th-century shrine.

In his writ petition, the khadim has also sought directions for the proper management of the historic dargah.

Justice Sachin Lata of the Delhi High Court issued notices to the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs, the dargah Nazim (chief executive officer of the committee), and the Commissioner and Auditor General (CAG) last week on the petition filed by Syed Mehara Miya. The respondents were asked to explain financial irregularities flagged in the CAG reports and the absence of the Dargah Committee for the last three years.

Mr. Mehara Miya has contended that the Centre's failure to appoint the nine-member committee—a statutory body established under the Dargah Khwaja Sahib Act, 1953—led to mismanagement and corruption.

The post of the Nazim, which was vacant for two years, was filled only in January this year, he added.

The petitioner took exception to an "arbitrary de-

claration" by the Nazim recently to install CCTV cameras in the dargah's sacred sanctum sanctorum, which houses the grave of Sufi mystic Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, saying it would interfere with the rituals.

"Placing cameras in the most sacred area will violate its spiritual sanctity," Mr. Mehara Miya argued. The Centre had already granted exemption to major shrines from installing electronic devices and cameras in the inner precincts to preserve their sacred character, he said.

He also questioned administrative decisions taken by the Nazim's office in the absence of the committee. These decisions include the launch of a Web portal, livestreaming the proceedings on YouTube, collection of zakat (charity) and special membership to donors. His plea also referred to a response made by Union Ministry Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju in the Lok Sabha on August 20 regarding "serious financial irregularities" in the shrine administration.

The court will hear the case next on October 30.

'CPI's fears not misplaced on PM-SHRI'

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) seems to have extended an olive branch to the Communist Party of India after ideological differences emerged between the two riding front allies over the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government's controversial move to seek Prime Narendra Modi's schools for Rising India (PM-SHRI) scheme funds for Kerala's "comatose" general education sector.

The CPI is of the view that the PM-SHRI funds for States depend on adherence to the National Education Policy (NEP). Furthermore, the CPI, CP(M), and other non-RDP-ended States share the view that the NEP is the Centre's political tool to encroach on the jurisdictional authority of provincial governments.

CPI State secretary Binoy Viswan in apprehensive about signing up for the PM-SHRI funds as it could potentially sabotage the Left's "informed national line" against the

NEP. He also noted that belatedly seeking the 2022 scheme benefits when they are due to expire in 2026-27 would bring Kerala scarce benefits since the PM-SHRI has no retrospective effect.

'Strive for consensus'

CPIM general secretary M.A. Baly told reporters in New Delhi that the CPI's apprehensions about the NEP were not misplaced. He said the LDF has unequivocally rejected the NEP. However, the State, he said, would seek the

PM-SHRI funds without compromising on the NEP.

Mr. Baly said the LDF would strive to achieve a consensus among all the parties taking a final "principled call." Mr. Baly said the Union government's bid to link the release of the States' share for general education is a backwash from the Emergency days.

Mr. Baly noted that the Congress-led State governments have signed up for PM-SHRI funds. Tamil Nadu has not rejected the PM-SHRI, but, it has recoiled from agreeing to the NEP.

Sunset break



Evening joy: People walk in the shade of a sunset over the sea at the Promenade Bridge in Varanasi on Tuesday, as it was

Telangana CM announces ₹1 cr. to slain constable's kin

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Monday paid tribute to police officers killed in action and reaffirmed his government's commitment to the welfare of police personnel, while addressing the Police Flag Day programme in Hyderabad.

"Police means trust and assurance to society. Even when faced with life-threatening situations, the police never back down from their duty," he said.

Mr. Naidu said that the police personnel across the country and six in Telangana sacrificed their lives this year. Among them were Greyhounds commandos V. Venkatesh, V. Srihar, and N. Pawan Kumar, Assistant Commis-



A. Venkatesh Kumar

sioner Banathu Jawahar and Subandha Annababu B. Saidu.

He also remembered constable Bimballi Prasad Kumar, who died in an attack by a thief accused in Nizamabad three days ago.

He said the government would pay an ex-gratia of ₹1 crore to Bimballi's family, along with his last-drawn salary until retirement, a government job for a family member, and a 100-sq-ft house plot. An additional ₹1 lakh would be provided from police welfare funds, he said. He also noted that land had been allotted to families of 20 policemen who died in a Maoist attack in Orissa in 2008.

"The Telangana Police has set an example for the country in tackling terrorism, extremism, white-collar crimes, drug trafficking, cybercrime, and other non-social activities. Our newly formed 'Eagle' wing is effectively leading the fight against the drug menace," he said.

Calling upon States to join the movement, Mr. Naidu said peace in Telangana was achieved through the sacrifices and perseverance of the police. He urged those still underground to surrender.

Biocon founder, Karnataka Deputy CM hold discussions

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In what seems to be a sign of truce after a long war of words, Industrialist and Biocon founder Kiran Mazumdar (now retired) Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar at his residence on Tuesday.

"We had an engaging discussion on Bengaluru's growth, innovation, and the path ahead for Karnataka's growth story," said Mr. Mazumdar on X.

The meeting began with a letter exchange between Mr. Mazumdar and Mr. Shivakumar after the latter's criticism on the poor

After a bitter exchange, D.K. Shivakumar adopts a conciliatory tone with industrialist

state of infrastructure in Bengaluru.

social media sparring

The exchange started with Mr. Mazumdar on Monday, criticising the alleged infrastructure in the city on X.

"I had an over-the-top response to Biocon Park who said 'Why are the roads so bad and why is there so much garbage around?' Didn't the Govt want to support investment? I have just come

from China and can't understand why India can't get its act together especially when the winds are favourable," it read.

The comment drew sharp reactions from several Ministers, including IT Minister Prakash Kharage, and Industries Minister M.H. Padi. The Deputy Chief Minister, however, took a conciliatory tone, urging to "build the city together, instead of tearing it down".

The conversation soon turned political with several Congress functionaries questioning Mr. Mazumdar's silence on GST issues.

Mr. Mazumdar met Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Forest staffers revive baby monkey by performing CPR in an act of compassion

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

In a heart-warming act of compassion that has since gone viral, three tribal women from a Vannamkulam Senthil Forest protection committee (referred to by Instagram as the 'wildlife warriors') resuscitated a baby monkey after it suffered an electric shock near the Balder Golden Valley forest check post on Tuesday.

The incident unfolded along the Vithura Ponnudi road when two young monkeys came into contact with a high-tension power line. One of them fell onto a tree branch, while the other crashed



near the black-topped road, unconscious and suffering a wound to its forehead. Without hesitation, the three Vannamkulam Senthil members Udaya, Sachithra, and Sargandhi, members of the Senthil



The three staffers of the forest protection committee who revived the baby monkey, Udaya, Sachithra, and Sargandhi

tribe, their efforts succeeded.

After administering basic treatment to the wound, they released the revived monkey back into the wild, a moment that has captured widespread attention and praise.

'Not a menace'

"Even though we have suffered greatly due to wild animals and lost crops to wild boar, elephant, and bear incursions, we never thought of hurting our backs on these baby monkeys. Animals do pose a menace to us, yet we have always lived alongside the forest and its creatures," says Udaya.

Editorial



Cold calculations

NDA and Mahagathbandhan are using schemes and promises to get votes

Rival fronts in Bihar are setting their internal dynamics even as commitments negotiate seat sharing and individual parties choose their candidates for the two-phase Assembly polls, on November 8 and November 11. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has had relatively smooth sailing in seat sharing with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Janata Dal (United), or JD(U) taking 105 seats each. The Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) is contesting 29 seats, while 65 seats each will be contested by the Bharatiya Aam Morcha (Bharat) and Rashtriya Lok Morcha. The Mahagathbandhan or Grand Alliance of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the Congress, the CPI(M), CPI(ML), CPI(M) and others is, however, struggling with conflicting claims over seat sharing and even leadership of the alliance. In the closest manifestation of the BJP's upper hand in the NDA, it will, for the first time, contest as many seats in the JDU. The JDU had already lost its senior partner status in the alliance in 2020, but its leader, Nitish Kumar, continued at the helm as the BJP did not want to upset the apple cart. In 2025, the BJP appears more confident of being an authentic platform for the backward caste communities which surrounded Mr. Kumar as their key leader. Consequently, the BJP has indicated that Mr. Kumar may be replaced in the event of the alliance winning yet another term, boosting anti-incumbency.

The BJP's strategy for primary involves a combination of caste-based social engineering and a consolidation of horizontal identities such as youth, women, farmers and senior citizens. It is clever in accommodating caste interest groups, but is also using state resources in a biased manner to offer welfare schemes that cut across caste. It is notable that the BJP, which decries subsidies, has designed efforts to purchase votes. A grant of ₹10,000 to start businesses has reached more than a third of women voters. Between the Congress and the BJP now, there is a cold war. As they enter the decisive phase of the battle, the two big parties appear to consider each other necessary but share little organic and emotional bonding. Their resolve and posture appear to fall short against the challenges. A formidable caste combination in Bihar is against the Mahagathbandhan, and the RJD has a part that continues to haunt it. The Mahagathbandhan is trying to match the NDA's schemes by making indefensible promises. Unfortunately for Bihar, the strategies of both alliance groups are cold and unoptimistic.

Turning tides

Pakistan cannot ensure internal security by bombing Afghanistan

When the Taliban recaptured Kabul in August 2021, after two decades of insurgency, Pakistan viewed it as a tactical victory. Imran Khan, then Prime Minister, famously said the Afghans had "broken the shackles of slavery". But the Taliban's return emboldened the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is organisationally distinct from, yet ideologically aligned with, the Afghan Taliban. Over four years, Pakistan, particularly the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan, has seen a dramatic surge in militant attacks. This year alone, at least 2,400 people were killed in militancy-related violence in Pakistan, according to an Islamabad-based think tank. Pakistan blames the Afghan Taliban for sheltering the TTP, better known as the Pakistani Taliban, and tensions escalated into full-scale cross-border clashes. On October 15, while Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Murtaza was visiting India, Pakistan carried out air strikes in Kabul, apparently targeting the TTP. These strikes triggered a week of cross-border attacks that left dozens dead, before a fragile Qatar-brokered ceasefire took effect.

When the Afghan Taliban were waging an insurgency, Pakistan offered them refuge and support. Pakistan's military establishment expected the Taliban to remain loyal once in power. But when the Taliban took over the reins in Afghanistan, the old patron-client relationship was replaced by state-to-state ties, with deep structural contradictions. The Pakistani Taliban, which oppose the merger of Pakistan's tribal areas with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, want their version of a strict Islamic code to be enforced and demand the release of TTP prisoners, drew inspiration from the Afghan Taliban's triumph. The Durand Line, the colonial-era border, re-emerged as another faultpoint as Kabul has never recognised it. Besides, Pakistan's decision to deport thousands of Afghan refugees smacked free further. What likely provoked the Pakistani establishment even more was India's diplomatic outreach to the Taliban. By carrying out air strikes on Kabul in response to militant attacks, Pakistan appears to be setting a new precedent — holding Kabul directly accountable for cross-border militant attacks — in a move reminiscent of India's doctrine of responding to terrorism with overwhelming force against Pakistan. Yet, the security crisis in Pakistan now engulfing its tribal areas is largely of its own making. For decades, it has followed a contradictory policy — fighting terrorism while harbouring terrorist/militant groups that were fighting its neighbouring countries. It backed the Taliban for over two decades, buying that a Taliban-controlled Kabul would offer it strategic depth. That strategy has now backfired. If Pakistan believes that it can ensure internal security by bombing Afghanistan, it is mistaken. Prolonged conflict and chaos will only deepen instability and strengthen insurgency.

India's travails in negotiating a friendless world

For India, the challenge of adapting its foreign policy to emerging global realities is proving to be highly daunting for its foreign policy mandarins. Steeped in the traditions of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, they seem unable to come to terms with current realities. Adapting India's foreign policy to new global realities is, however, an urgent necessity.

With the advent of President Donald Trump in the United States, multilateralism or even plurilateral ways of advancing foreign policy, seem to have lost all meaning. India, however, is yet to demonstrate the necessary flexibility to deal with a seemingly friendless world, in its neighbourhood and well beyond. As signs go by, India's trust deficit only seems to be growing, and the consequences can be serious.

The view about India

At one level, it would appear that India is losing its geopolitical relevance despite the best efforts of its foreign policy establishment. Shockingly, Mr. Trump's geopolitical manoeuvres are aggravating the situation and his constant shifting of goal posts clearly demands extreme nimbleness on the part of the foreign policy establishment. For the present, India's foreign policy mandarins are finding themselves out of step, and increasingly isolated in the company of nations. That we should find ourselves in this difficult situation is unfortunate. US policy alone cannot be the reason, for there is much more happening across the world with India increasingly being seen as an outlier when it comes to situations and events. At this a time when India's economic hub is growing and it is among the top five economic powers of the world.

Two recent events bring this out in stark detail. Even as the world celebrates the new Gaza peace settlement — a critical breakthrough in the troubled politics of this region which was largely orchestrated by Mr. Trump and the U.S., with the support of Türkiye, Egypt, Qatar and a few other nations, India's absence or exclusion from the process smacks of its growing irrelevance in the politics of West Asia. That countries such as Türkiye, which demonstrate a degree of hostility towards India, should have been critical to the process of settlement adds further gloom to India's growing irrelevance.

India appeared to compartmentalise this situation even further by sending the lowest level of representation for the grand reconciliation held to celebrate the end of the Gaza conflict and the return of peace to West Asia, at which most world leaders were present. For Indians across the world, this should be a wakeup call, something that needs to be remedied sooner rather than later.

Closest home, another signal event where India "was a conspicuous absentee" was the Gen Z revolution in Nepal that seemed to spiral out of



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Adapting India's foreign policy to new global realities is a necessity

control. It only seemed to further demonstrate that India's foreign policy lacked both depth and content, even where its vital interests are at stake. The revolution, on India's doorstep, may have followed a slightly different pattern than the youthful dissent seen in Bangladesh and Indonesia previously, but the fact that India found itself helpless and a mere bystander when tumultuous events were taking place on its doorstep, should make discerning observers of the scene sit up and take notice.

Additionally, there is a disconcerting strategic angle to India's displacement from the driving seat, with this space being filled by countries not so well disposed, if not friendly inclined, towards India. Türkiye is a case in point, for during the recent India-Pakistan conflict, it was seen siding with Pakistan. Recently, Türkiye along with countries such as Egypt and Iraq were the host of West Asia even as Mr. Trump spread benediction across the entire West Asia.

Additionally, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have signed on to a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement to treat aggression against one as against both, which only seemed to confirm India's position as an outlier in a region where, previously, India's influence reigned supreme. All this would suggest that India's foreign policy has not demonstrated adequate sagacity and flexibility to deal with the many vicissitudes and problems that afflict the region.

The situation in the neighbourhood

India cannot afford to be complacent. In its immediate neighbourhood, the Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict threatens peace across a swath of India's northwest. India may tend to view the attacks by the Afghan Taliban on Pakistani cities as neighbourly jibes, but this would be short-sighted. Since Field Marshal Asim Munir effectively took over the reins of power in Pakistan, the threat that Pakistan poses to India, and the region has gone up significantly. There is every reason to suspect the Pakistani dragon to remain poised in the region. Being satisfied with the Afghan Taliban's attacks on Pakistan's rear can provide cold comfort at best. India's efforts should be on how best to create a conducive atmosphere where war remains the last resort.

The rest of India's neighbourhood also remains in turmoil, and the challenge before Indian diplomats is how to persuade countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal, which are currently perceived as hostile to India, to renounce their steps and make it worthwhile for them to maintain better relations with India. India-Sri Lanka relations are seen like an engine wrapped in a mystery. While outwardly, India-Sri Lanka relations are on an even keel, it would be a mistake to underestimate the latent potential of countries such as China to muddy the waters. We see China, while India's diplomacy may

look like "wee" in progress, it appears more an effort to patch over differences. This is especially so in the context of what may be termed as the current India-China imbalance. Since Tianjin (August 2023), there has been a tendency in India's diplomatic circles, and possibly within the political establishment as well, to gloss over the June 2020 Galwan episode as a "mere blip" in long-standing China-India ties.

This willingness to ignore the realities of a long-standing and fast festering China-Indian border problem appears intended to give an impression that "peace is at hand". Like, however, has changed on the ground and the current diplomatic and military exchanges clearly lack candour.

Ties with China

Indians have seldom been able to comprehend Chinese elliptical thinking on global and regional issues, and even more so in its diplomatic manoeuvres. China-India ties today have not returned to the period that existed in 1980, following Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's highly successful visit to China. There is, hence, every need for India to be cautious. India would do well to acknowledge that China is a conundrum that is not easily cracked. China's President Xi Jinping is much less a statesman than his predecessors Deng Xiaoping and Hu Jintao, and India cannot be too careful in its dealings with Xi's China.

China and the U.S. are, without doubt, presently engaged in a cat and mouse game on tariffs, and Mr. Xi's gambit, viz., immediate and tangible concessions for long-term gains (including coming into deals with regard to the resumption of exports on rare earth minerals to the U.S.) cannot possibly be the model for India to follow or adopt.

Also, when India needs to be concerned about is that, friendly or not, China is steadily expanding its influence across much of the region to India's east, and adopting devices ways, including proliferation of small businesses or one level to a growing presence in universities, research centres and in other spaces at another, to establish its dominance and reduce India's influence across this region. India needs to be wary and it is increasingly becoming evident that as the U.S.'s influence wanes across much of the world and is steadily being eclipsed in large parts of Asia, a new China-led order is emerging in East and Southeast Asia.

This article, hence, should be seen as a wakeup call. Reiteration of the old adage that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty is important. India's future is assured, but it also depends on how much effort is made to protect its brand of civilisation. It is quite distinct and different from that of China, the West, the Persian/Arab variety and other forms of democracy that had held sway over the years.

Unreliable air and noise data, real-time deception

Policy is only as strong as the credibility of the data it rests on. In recent months, two failures in Indian environmental monitoring systems have raised disturbing questions of governance — Delhi's Real-time Air Pollution Network and Lucknow's National Ambient Noise Monitoring Network. Both were launched with fanfare, but their scientific weaknesses made not only public trial but also India's international credibility.

For decades now, it has been evident that the air in Indian cities is yet to breathe, with Delhi ranked as the worst. Yet, audits and inquiries, including the recent Comptroller and Auditor General of India report reveal flaws in the monitoring network at multiple levels. Several sensors are placed under tree cover, behind walls or obstructions. More recently, the Delhi government has proposed installing sensors in relatively less polluted locations. Official data often report air quality as "moderate", while citizens gasp for breath in their living. This is not a matter of technical deficiency alone but raises a fundamental question of governance. When evidence itself is unreliable, on what basis can public pollution policy stand?

The importance of sound data

Every action plan for Delhi, whether on smog, burning, vehicular restrictions or industrial emissions, must rest on robust and scientifically sound data. If the very data are not representative or distorted to understate pollution, it is not only the policies but also their direction that stands compromised. Weak monitoring risks India's global commitments (Paris Agreement, World Health Organisation (WHO) Air Quality Standards), and priorities in the process.

In Lucknow, the situation is no different. In 2017, the average noise pollution levels in seven Indian cities exceeded the limits set by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). In 2017, the former Environment Minister, Anil Madhav



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With monitoring networks relying on outdated raw data, policy efficacy, public trust and international credibility become weak

Dave, in the Rajya Sabha, highlighted serious flaws in India's urban noise control policy. The noise monitoring network was flawed from the outset, with sensors failing to capture actual decibel levels. India continues to rely on the outdated Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000, which has been criticised as being inadequate. The decibel limits fall short of WHO guidelines, enforcement is weak, and penalties carry little deterrence.

Technology is deployed as spectacle without scientific discipline. Shiny hardware without rigorous audits. Misleading data downplay hazardous levels as merely "moderate." In a democracy, misleading the public on health is deeply troubling. Government ignores a conflict between citizens and industries. Flawed numbers favour industry and the voices of citizens demanding protection under the right to health and life are suppressed.

In Delhi, misleading Air Quality Index often delays judicial intervention. In Lucknow, inaccurate noise data weaken fundamental rights under Articles 19 and 21. The judiciary too has begun to acknowledge this. In a recent order, the Supreme Court of India transferred pleas highlighting noise pollution around Delhi Airport to the National Green Tribunal, underscoring that such disputes demand specialised adjudication. This recognition makes it clear that noise is no longer a nuisance but a constitutional and public health issue.

The missing pillars

The CPCB does have clear guidelines on sensor location, calibration and periodic audits. But enforcement is lax by design, political pressures abound, and independent scientific scrutiny is nearly absent.

The irony is glaring. Class-I quality sensors for air and noise monitoring are installed at enormous public expense by the CPCB under the aegis of the Environment Ministry. There is no

independent panel to review monitoring systems as an institutional norm. Without third-party audits and transparent processes, public trust in official data will continue to erode.

The latest Air Quality Life Index report (Energy Policy Institute) shows that if Delhi met WHO standards, average life expectancy could rise by 4.2 years. Across India, pollution silently erodes life expectancy by close to five years. The jugglery by agencies with misleading data (born from lack of accountability).

This debate is not about devices but about people's health. Fresh scientific evidence shows that exposure to pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) weakens lungs and accelerates myopia. When air quality indices misrepresent reality, children with asthma are exposed to unsafe air. Likewise, flawed noise monitoring leaves infants and the elderly unprotected. Behind every misleading index or incomplete dataset lies preventable harm.

Science as the foundation

For monitoring to inspire trust, science must guide its foundation. Install sensors strictly according to standards with independent experts. Keep raw data open, enable routine third-party audits and create formal citizen oversight.

The experiments of Delhi and Lucknow are a warning: environmental monitoring cannot be treated as a bureaucratic formality. Real-time technology is meaningful only if it reflects reality. In India's rapid urbanisation, environmental data will shape policy, inform the public and represent the nation globally. If the data regime is misleading, the price will be paid not in reports but in children's lungs and the sleepless nights of citizens. Scientific rigour, transparency and public trust must be the bedrock of India's environmental monitoring revolution. Otherwise, real-time networks will turn into real-time deception.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Toxic air

It is intriguing to note that Delhi, of all the cities in India, is always in the news on account of severe air pollution after Dehpalli. A friend of mine living in Delhi begs to disagree with this oft-repeated notion about the poor Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi. According to him, every other month, farmers in Punjab and

Rajasthan burn agricultural waste leading to smog over so frequently in Delhi. This friend also disagrees with the contention that vehicular traffic is a major contributing factor. I think the authorities should shift over the ground-level situation by inviting people's opinions on how best AQ levels be controlled and any other

decide on long-term measures to control air pollution in Delhi and other cities.

Govardhana Myerada,
Wajalwada, Andhra Pradesh

The policy of permitting so-called "green co-ops" while banning regular ones is akin to banning bears but allowing tigers. elgnetics — essentially

progressive but substantively hollow, in a city that is already gasping. This is a distinction without a difference. If cultural pressure and economic stakes could be leveraged earlier, they can be overriden now, especially when the winter inversion is already trapping India's air (under a toxic lid). The so-called "wicked path"

merely legitimises a controlled demolition.

Harish Panwar,
Ramesh, Haryana

Escalatory
The Defence Minister of India recently issued a veiled threat to Pakistan, which sparked a counter from the Pakistan Army chief. This exchange of rhetoric is perhaps reckless

and endangers South Asian fragile peace. Already swayed by mischief in Afghanistan, our region cannot afford this sort of escalatory brinkmanship. There ought to be diplomacy and dialogue.

Ab. Henna Tago,
Lecturer
Letter received at: editor@thehindu.co.in
must carry the postal address.

We need a law to protect domestic workers

In January, the Supreme Court directed the Union government to enact a comprehensive law to regulate the rights of domestic workers and set up a committee to look into setting up a framework for it. The Court directed the committee to submit a report in six months. Whether this has been done or not remains unclear.

Status of domestic workers
India is estimated to have 4 million-50 million domestic workers. A majority of them are women and girls and most of them are from Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities, rendering them particularly vulnerable to structural power differentials.

The Court's recent directive was issued as part of criminal proceedings involving the confinement and trafficking of a female domestic worker from a ST community from Chhattisgarh to Delhi. These proceedings bring attention to several considerations that are important in devising rights and protections for domestic workers. Workers tend to be female and work for other people, which has the effect of atomising them. Inspections into workplace conditions become nearly impossible. These workers may be subject to harassment, abuse, and segregationist practices. Child labour is rampant in this sphere. Exploitative employment agencies and brokers frequently mediate relationships between employers and employees. While some workers labour full time in a single household, others work across multiple households for a few hours each day. This can make the stipulation and enforcement of minimum wages, work hours, and leave entitlements tricky.

Many workers are migrant workers who need protection across State borders. Workers also routinely come in from neighbouring countries. The absence of a separate national-level legislation to look



R. Goetha
Member of the
Unorganised Workers
Federation



Prof. Suranjan
Assistant Professor in
the Department of
Geography at the
University of British
Columbia

The absence of a separate national-level legislation to look into protections and benefits hurts workers in multiple ways

into protections and benefits hurts workers in multiple ways.

In recognition of their contributions to the global economy, the International Labour Organisation passed a Convention (no. 189) in 2013 to ensure the rights and protections of domestic workers. While India signed in favour of the convention, it is yet to ratify it. As noted by the Court, there have been multiple attempts to pass legislation at the national level since the 1970s. The National Platform for Domestic Workers (NPDW) was formed in 2012 specifically to demand a comprehensive Central legislation for domestic workers. The MPDW drafted a Domestic Workers (Regulation of Work and Social Security) Bill in 2017, but this Bill was never enacted into law. While the Court's new directive is welcome, the fact that the Court directed stakeholders to constitute a committee comprising "subject experts" with no representatives of domestic workers is a matter of concern.

Gains made at the State level
In Tamil Nadu, where there are about 2 million domestic workers, a welfare board has been set up under the Tamil Nadu Manual Worker Act, 1992. Through it, registered workers receive benefits, including pensions, maternity benefits, educational assistance for children, and accident relief. However, a very small number of workers are actually registered. While minimum wage is stipulated at ₹17-20 per hour, workers tend to make much less. They are seen as "part-time" workers because they may not work full time in a single household. In response to a plea filed by a domestic worker in Chennai, the Madras Bench of the Madras High Court directed the State government to consider enacting a special legislation to protect domestic workers.

Meanwhile, the Karnataka government announced the introduction of the Domestic Workers (Social Security and

Welfare) Bill, 2025, which looks to regulate the working conditions of domestic workers. It requires that employers compulsorily register domestic workers with the government and commence employment with a written contract that includes an agreement on wages and work hours. It entitles workers to minimum wages, overtime pay, and weekly holidays. Importantly, it requires employers to contribute 7% of wages to a welfare fund that will distribute welfare benefits to domestic workers.

What should be done
Tamil Nadu is one of only 12 States that stipulates minimum wages for domestic workers. These wages must be updated and increased, while all States must be required to stipulate minimum wages for domestic workers. In addition to the already mentioned provisions in the MPDW draft Bill and the Karnataka legislation, the MPDW recommends that all employers, employment agencies, and workers be compulsorily registered with the State government. A workbook must be issued to each employer through a tripartite board comprising employers, employees, and the State. This must be mandated by each employer and employee and endorsed each month. Writing workers have reported not being able to access local complaint committees set up at the district level under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act. These complaint committees must be set up at panchayat and urban local bodies.

House is another critical consideration for domestic workers. While workers in Tamil Nadu received some assistance during the pandemic-induced lockdowns in 2021 and 2022, several could not pay rent. Rather than intermission relief in the event of a "crisis", structural solutions are imperative to protect the women in this critical workforce.

The long wait for a resolution

A High Court order on the Mumukshu dispute has deepened the legal tangle

STATE OF PLAY

K.S. Sudhi
senior law/technology expert



The recent order of the Kerala High Court, declaring the disputed Mumukshu building as not a Waqf property, has deepened the legal tangle rather than offering a lasting solution to the vexed issue.

The judgment of a Division Bench of the High Court, which found the actions of the Kerala Waqf Board regarding the Mumukshu land to be bad in law, stopped short of striking them down. The order has put the ball back in the court of the Waqf Tribunal, which is already seized of the matter.

Two sections of Kerala society, with the backing of various political and religious formations, are engaged in a pitched political and legal battle over the nearly 400-acre building located along the coastal belt of Ernakulam district.

The Bench passed a landmark order, while striking down a single judge's order, which cancelled the appointment of a former judge of the Kerala High Court as the Inquiry Commission into the Mumukshu issue. The Bench also termed the Kerala Waqf Board's notification and registration of the Mumukshu land as Waqf as an act of land grabbing with an eye on the valuable real estate.

A setback

The observations of the court are a major setback for the Board, which is mandated by the Waqf Act to protect and manage Waqf properties. The Board is now left with no option but to challenge the decision. The Board can either go for a review of the decision be-

fore the Division Bench, which joined the suit, or approach the Supreme Court with a special Leave Petition. In either case, the agency will have to spend much of its energy and resources on challenging the order, which has raised serious questions about its functions.

In its elaborate order spread over 422 pages, the five-member Bench also gave little consideration to the judicial wisdom of the single judge, who cancelled the government order appointing the Inquiry Commission. The Bench could have taken a lenient view of the conclusions of the single judge in the case than terming it as "a fair, reasonable and having been passed in pursuance of Mumukshu Waqf Act 1923 and the Waqf Acts of 1954 and 1995, as also the pronouncements of the Supreme Court from time to time."

What has come as a real surprise is the observation of the Division Bench regarding the possibility of even the High Court building or State Legislature Complex being declared as a Waqf property if the Board is allowed to continue with its "arbitrary declaration" of Waqf properties, as in the case of Mumukshu.

It may be recalled that some far-sight organisations had earlier raised the spectre of some historical monuments being declared as Waqf prop-

erty if the provisions of the Act were not struck down. The sarcastic comments of the Bench, presumably, have not gone down well with the stakeholders. The observations, which were given special emphasis in the court order, apparently lacked any legal backing or justifications and could leave wider socio-political ramifications.

Continuing fight

As the legal war over the Mumukshu building assumes new proportions, the plight of the Hindu deity owners of parcels of land in the coastal village is far from over. They had been petitioning the authorities, right from the village offices to the top political offices in the country, seeking justice. They have also initiated the support of various socio-political organisations in their fight for their buildings.

However, the claims of the villagers are heavily contested by the Board and the organisations, which are determined to realise what they term as the alienated Waqf properties in the State. The organisations, which have committed themselves to the restoration of Waqf properties say that around 30,000 acres of properties given as Waqf have either been encroached upon or changed hands, thus defeating the very purpose for which the properties were dedicated.

It may take a few more years and long-drawn legal battles, even to the highest court of the country, to find a judicial clarity in the contentious issue. Endless litigation and delay delivery of justice are what appears to be on the cards for the Mumukshu residents as well as the organisations fighting for the restoration of Waqf properties in the State.

Does India's 1.9 fertility rate reflect reality?

The large gap between real and calculated Total Fertility Rate is particularly relevant in a developing country such as India

DATA POINT

Anish Gupta
Shubham Sharma

The recent United Nations Population Fund's State of World Population 2025 report shows that India's current Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has fallen to 1.9. This sub-replacement fertility has shifted the focus of discourse from the belief that rapid population growth is the root of economic backwardness to new concerns about ageing population.

The report brings urgent questions to the fore: Does the methodology used to calculate TFR accurately reflect public perception? And could the decline in TFR pose risks to India's economic trajectory, thereby creating the need to raise the TFR?

Perceived meaning of TFR

In public discourse, TFR is interpreted as the average number of children a woman would bear by the end of her reproductive age. However, it is a statistical measure which calculates the average number of children a woman would have in her lifetime if she experienced the current birth rate trends at each age cohort from 15 to 49 years throughout her reproductive life.

The reproductive age is divided into seven five-year age cohorts: 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, and 45-49. For each age cohort, the number of live births per 1,000 women in a given year is calculated; this is known as age-specific fertility rate (ASFR). These ASFRs are then converted into per-woman figures by multiplying each rate by five (since each cohort covers five years) and dividing by 1,000. Adding up the figures for all seven cohorts gives us the TFR.

This calculation assumes that this year's 15-19 age cohort will show fertility patterns similar to today's 45-49 cohort or other older cohorts over their lifetimes

reach that age, and vice versa. This is known as the synthetic cohort assumption.

Limitation of TFR calculation
Real fertility preferences do not follow the synthetic cohort assumption. They often evolve differently, as future younger cohorts are likely to exhibit preferences that differ from those of today's older women.

Another important limitation is that it is a point-in-time measure, which is highly sensitive to a phenomenon known as the tempo effect. This refers to changes in the timing of childbearing, not necessarily reduction in the number of births. Since TFR is calculated from the ASFRs of women in a given cohort, births postponed are not captured in that year's data, so the fertility of women who delay childbirth is effectively "missed" even though they may have the same number of children later. Thus, tempo effect artificially reduces the TFR and gives a false impression of lower fertility. The phenomenon exacerbates when birth postponement takes place in the majority of the younger age cohorts. Interestingly, today's postponement will overestimate future TFR calculation. This large gap between real and calculated TFR is particularly relevant in India, which is simultaneously undergoing economic, social, and cultural transitions. These include rising female literacy and a more career-oriented outlook among women that creates a strong incentive to delay childbirth.

The ASFR trends presented in Charts 1 and 2 reflect a shift in childbirth patterns, with fertility being postponed from younger to older cohorts. In urban areas, the decline in the share of ASFR among the youngest two cohorts (15-19 and 20-24) and the corresponding increase across the older cohorts (25-29 to 45-49) strongly indicates a postponement of fertility preferences rather than an overall decline in fertility.

In rural areas, a decline in the share of ASFR is observed in the 25-29 age cohorts, along with an increase in the 20-24 to 30-34 age cohorts. This also suggests a postponement of fertility preferences. However, unlike in urban areas, this shift is largely confined to the middle age cohorts. The declining share of older cohorts (35-39 and above) points to a reduction in fertility preferences in these age cohorts.

Another key limitation of the TFR is its exclusion of births to women below 15 and above 49, based on the assumption that such cases are negligible. This assumption is less valid in developing and Islamic countries where early marriages are common. Owing to legal and social anomalies, births to underage girls are often concealed. Moreover, surrogacy arrangements may also avoid uncomfortable questions, as noted in the 2023 DHS Methodological Report.

Given these problems, and amid growing calls to raise the TFR due to concerns over ageing population, it is important to recognise that historically, sub-replacement fertility has not constrained economic progress, as evidenced in Europe, the U.K., and several newly industrialised economies. Moreover, India has missed the opportunity to fully harness its demographic dividend, constrained by persistent youth unemployment, a challenge likely to intensify with automation and AI. More importantly, the current size of the elderly population remains largely independent of present fertility trends. While caring for the ageing population is a moral responsibility of the state, its urgency does not automatically increase simply because of a reported decline in TFR.

With rapid population growth for the last 70 years, India's population has grown from 360 million in 1950 to 1.4 billion in 2023. India's population growth is projected to reach 1.6 billion by 2047, with a median peak of 1.5 billion in 2034.

Delayed and not counted

The data for the charts are based on the authors' calculations using unadjusted data from the DHS rounds 2, 4, 5, and 6.



- 1 The reproductive age is divided into seven five-year age cohorts: 15-19 to 45-49.
- 2 For each cohort, the number of live births per 1,000 women is calculated (ASFR).
- 3 These age-specific fertility rates (ASFR) are then converted into per-woman figures.

Chart 1: Unadjusted age-specific fertility rate (ASFR) contribution to total fertility rate (TFR)

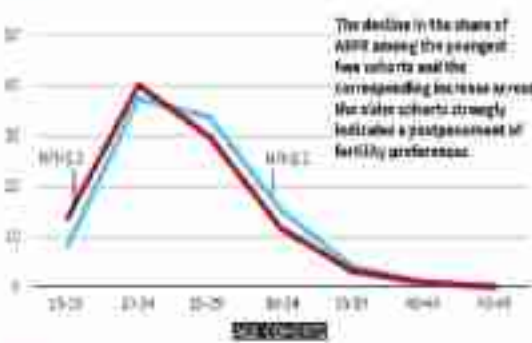
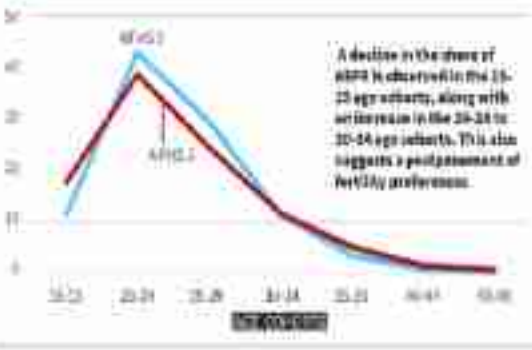


Chart 2: Unadjusted age-specific fertility rate (ASFR) contribution to total fertility rate (TFR)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 22, 1975

Jobless in Bombay living off jobless

Bombay, Oct. 21: Many jobless people in Bombay have been found living off the jobless.

Their strategy is to find employment agencies offering attractive openings in the old-rich Stockholders of West Asia.

Several agencies have been exposed by the victims in the last two months. But a majority remains silent sufferers to avoid legal proceedings.

The agencies caters for candidates seeking attractive salaries in the Gulf region and collect advance ranging from Rs. 150 to Rs. 5,000. The applicants are then asked to wait for appointment order and necessary travel documents, including passports and no objection certificates.

When nothing materialises even after months, the victims seek refund from the agencies who usually issue cheques that bounce at the bank counter.

In some cases, the agencies arrange no objection certificates and send applicants abroad. On landing there, they would find to their utter dismay that the travel documents empowered them to stay in that country only for 48 hours.

The agencies are said to be operating also in remote areas in Kerala through their agents. Remittances to distressed agencies by post from gullible people have been made. Many victims arranged for the advance by pawning their wristwatches.

Quite a few even quit their jobs in anticipation of lucrative salaries in the fabulous Stockholders. In one instance reported by the police this month, about 100 persons were collectively duped of over Rs. one lakh. The victims hailed from Kerala, Karnataka and Gujarat.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 22, 1925

Storm havoc in Rangoon

Rangoon, Oct. 21: The Collector, in the course of his report to the Chief Secretary, regarding the damage caused by the recent cyclone, says: The schooner "Wavelet", dragged foul of the brig "Tells", both sustaining damage. One cargo boat sank alongside the S.S. "Juma", off the floating food storages. Two cargo boats sank off the Thompson Street jetty 50 or 60 square logs of timber, adrift in the harbour, damaged and sank many small fishing boats and sampans.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of new births in Italy in the first seven months of 2025

1.98 million. This is a 1.3% decrease from the same period of 2024, the national statistical bureau (ISTAT) said.

Last year, the country recorded 3,10,000 new births, the lowest figure since Italy's unification in 1861, and the 15th year in a row in which the figure declined. —

Number of cases registered in Delhi related to crackers

150

Police have registered more than 150 cases against Delhi's over alleged violation of the Supreme Court's guidelines on banning fireworks. The Supreme Court has restricted the burning of fireworks to October 23 and 25, between 6 AM and 7 PM, and between 8 PM and 10 PM. —

Afghans deported from Pakistan's Punjab in October

22,000

The Punjab govt. statement of Pakistan this month reported around 22,000 Afghan nationals residing in the province allegedly leaving during the last Afghan refugee camp, a Pakistani newspaper reported. —

Russia-linked suspects held in Poland since the year 2022

55

These people, suspected of acting on behalf of Moscow, have been detained in Poland since the start of Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. "These people who acted to the detriment of Poland have all been charged under Article 130 of the penal code," said Jacek Długosz. —

The estimated cost to rebuild Syria after the civil war

216

in \$ billion. The cost is around 10 times Syria's 2024 gross domestic product. The World Bank says the rebuilding may cost between \$40 billion and \$240 billion, but their "baseline best estimate" is \$216 billion. —

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On CBI takeovers: a judicial standpoint

The Supreme Court has transferred the investigation into the Karur stampede from an SIT to the CBI. However, the top court's reasoning, entirely based on petitioners' pleadings, unaccompanied by prima facie evidence, is simply not enough to shift a case to the CBI

LETTER & SPIRIT

Krishnakumar Rajagopal

On October 23, the Supreme Court abruptly applied the brakes on a fledgling investigation of a Madras High Court-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) and a three-member Enquiry Commission headed by Justice (retired) Aruna Jagadeesan into the Karur stampede on September 27. 41 people were killed during a stampede at a political rally hosted by actor-politician Vijay in Karur district, Tamil Nadu.

Both the SIT and Justice Jagadeesan were directed to immediately hand over papers and evidence to the officers of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The court's decision to shift the Karur stampede investigation to the CBI was powered by two "swinging" factors — the "political undertones" of the case and a perception that top-ranking Tamil Nadu Police officers made comments in a press conference to the extent that their subordinates were not at fault. The bench of Justices J.L. Mheeswar and N.V. Anura concluded that the conduct of the State's senior police officers "may create doubts in the minds of the citizenry about the impartiality and fairness of the investigation", necessitating its transfer to the CBI.

The CBI is a central agency governed by the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946 which traces its origin to the Special Police Establishment (SPE) formed in 1941 to weed out corruption in war-time procurements. Once control by the Supreme Court as a "caged parrot" of the Centre, the CBI is considered a premier investigative body which probes a wide range of crimes with inter-State and national ramifications.

However, the top court's reasoning, entirely based on petitioners' pleadings and "swinging remarks" unaccompanied by prima facie evidence to show the SIT probe was tainted by bias, are simply not enough to shift a case to the CBI without the express consent of the State government. While it is well-settled that a constitutional court can order a CBI probe as judicial review is part of the Basic Structure, the court, be it the Supreme Court or a State High Court, must not direct a CBI enquiry in a "routine manner". A judicial order of transfer of a probe to the CBI is only the "last resort".

'Measure of last resort'

The Supreme Court has a well-developed jurisprudence, evolved through judgments, which imposes significant self-restraint on the exercise of the extraordinary constitutional power to order a CBI probe under Article 32 (for the Supreme Court) or Article 226 (High Court) of the Constitution. The top court has held that the exercise of inherent powers to direct the CBI to investigate must be exercised "sparingly, cautiously, and only in exceptional situations". The court has consistently cautioned that a CBI investigation should not be directed "merely because a party casts certain aspersions or harbours a subjective lack of confidence in the State Police".

It goes without saying that for invoking this power, the court concerned must be satisfied that the material placed prima facie discloses commission of offences and necessitates a CBI investigation to ensure the fundamental right to a fair and impartial investigation, or where the complexity, scale, or national ramifications of such allegations



Newsfile (left) Tenshiga, State (right) Karur, Tamil Nadu, September 27, 2025. —

demand expertise of central agencies," the court has explained.

Judicial precedents have underscored that an order directing an investigation to be carried out by CBI should be treated as a "measure of last resort", justified only when the constitutional court is convinced that the integrity of the process has been compromised or has reasons to believe that it may get compromised to a degree that shakes the confidence of courts or public faith in the justice delivery system.

Such circumstances compelling the judicial transfer of an investigation to the CBI from the State Police may typically arise when the materials placed on record before a court prima facie point towards systemic failure, the involvement of high-ranking State officials or politically influential persons, or when the local police's conduct itself creates a reasonable doubt in the minds of the citizenry regarding their ability to conduct a neutral probe.

In the absence of these factors, constitutional courts must avoid placing unnecessary burdens on a specialised agency with "matters that do not satisfy the threshold of an exceptional case".

The reason for the shift

The 25-page order of the Supreme Court shifting the Karur stampede probe to the CBI shows that the decision was largely made on the basis of "allegations" raised by the petitioners, who have been identified as relatives of victims and public-spirited persons.

The court noted that the tragedy which claimed 41 lives and left over 100 injured at a rally organised by Vijay, founder of the Tamilaga Vairam Karthigam (TVK), at Velamangalam in Karur District had "aroused public sentiment and shook the confidence of people across the nation". The court said that petitioners have made "allegations" that the ruling dispensation, which has "control over the immense machinery of the State", did not discharge its functions "properly". The bench, in this context, referred to averments in the petitions that top police

officers, held a press conference during which they "intentionally" defended their colleagues, raising the apprehension that the probe by the SIT comprising Tamil Nadu Police officers would not be held fairly. It recorded submissions in the petitions that the police had denied permission earlier, in January, to another political party to conduct a rally at the same place where the tragedy occurred during the TVK event. The court noted this vagueness in hint at "political undertones" at play.

These facts led to the court to prima facie conclude that there was "a doubt in the minds of the general public about the independence and impartiality of the investigation" and victims should be spared of being caught in the "political tussle between two sides".

Previous judgments

A cursory read of the order shows that the decision to shift the probe to the CBI was entirely based on the allegations levelled by the petitioners. The Supreme Court judgment in Secretary, Water Irrigation & Power Dept. Services (IT) has observed that the power of a court to shift an investigation to the CBI "can be exercised only in cases where there is sufficient material to create in a prima facie conclusion (that there is a need for such transfer). It is not sufficient to have such material in the pleadings".

Secondly, the Supreme Court did not specify a single instance of bias or delay by the Tamil Nadu Police's SIT. In a Constitution Bench judgment in *State of West Bengal versus Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights*, the top court had held that the extraordinary power to transfer probes to CBI "cannot and should not be exercised in a routine manner without examining the complexities, nature of offences and sometimes the tardy progress in the investigation involving high officials of the State investigating agency itself".

In an October 16, 2025 order authored by Justice Mheeswar himself in the case of *Legislative Council (IT) versus State of Bihar*, the judge noted that public order

(Entry 1) and the police (Entry 2) was a State subject falling in List II of Schedule VII of the Constitution. "It is a primary responsibility of the investigating agency of the State Police to investigate all offences which are committed within its jurisdiction. The investigations can be entrusted to the CBI only in exceptional circumstances," Justice Mheeswar had written. In *KV Rajendran versus Superintendent of Police, CBCT*, the top court had held that a transfer of a case to CBI could only be justified by showing sufficient material to prove that the State investigation was dishonest or malafide.

Thirdly, ambiguous inferences about "political undertones", "political tussle between two sides" and reported comments made by police officers in a press meet cannot be grounds for making inferences into a State's power to investigate crimes within its own jurisdiction, especially when Tamil Nadu had withdrawn its general consent to CBI investigation in 2023. The Supreme Court has further constituted a committee headed by former top court judge, Justice Mheeswar, to oversee the CBI probe. Such an arrangement does not have any statutory backing.

Besides, the SIT was formed separately by the Madras High Court in the Karur stampede case. The Justice Jagadeesan Commission of Enquiry was constituted on the very night of the tragedy. There had been no allegation of specific bias levelled against the SIT or the Enquiry Commission, warranting a change of the probe agency. The Madras High Court had also previously refused a specific demand for transfer to the CBI. In the *Shree Shree Ram Janti Ashwin Tapovan Mande* judgments, the top court had held that it was not for the judiciary to make sweeping remarks about the State government and its functionalities and subject them to CBI investigation merely based on allegations brought before it. The court said the judiciary has to understand that the "functioning in the government is by different officers and the working of the Executive has to build checks and balances".

THE GIST

The top court's decision to shift the Karur stampede investigation to the CBI was powered by two "swinging" factors — the "political undertones" of the case and a perception that top-ranking Tamil Nadu Police officers made comments in a press conference to the extent that their subordinates were not at fault.

Judicial precedents have underscored that an order directing an investigation to be carried out by CBI should be treated as a "measure of last resort", justified only when the constitutional court is convinced that the integrity of the process has been compromised.

In an October 26, 2025 order authored by Justice Mheeswar himself in the case of *Legislative Council (IT) versus State of Bihar*, the judge noted that public order (Entry 1) and the police (Entry 2) was a State subject falling in List II of Schedule VII of the Constitution.

CACHE

Electoral roll revamp: the case for digital transformation

The Election Commission has initiated a Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls starting in Bihar. However, outdated verification methods and lack of digital tools stress the need for technology-driven reforms

Rajeev Kumar

For two decades of silence on one of India's most critical democratic processes, the Election Commission (EC) has finally revived the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls – beginning with Bihar, followed by West Bengal, and later the rest of the country. Electoral rolls require continuous updating – removing those who have died or surrendered citizenship and transferring entries for individuals who shift residence to another constituency. A person must be an Indian citizen of at least 18 years of age and ordinarily resident in India to be included in the roll. However, concerns persist about including ineligible persons, especially those who may have entered from neighbouring countries, underscoring the need for transparent verification. Although this long-maligned SIR aims to update the voter database, it became controversial due to procedural ambiguities and reliance on outdated and cumbersome Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) instead of modern digital tools.

Reliance on outdated methods
The last full-fledged SIR of electoral rolls in most Indian States was conducted between 2002 and 2004, when voter data was entirely paper-based, fragmented, and manually verified. Two decades later, despite India's sweeping digital transformation – from Aadhaar integration to the Digital India mission – the SIR 2025 framework remains rooted in outdated, paper-era procedures. To mirror the 2002-04 model, it documents were mandated for voter verification, including birth certificate, passport, driving licence, domicile, caste certificate, and family register. However, the list excluded Aadhaar, India's most widely used and digitally verifiable ID. The justification that Aadhaar is not foolproof and can be manipulated is only partly valid, as the same limitations apply to most other accepted documents. More reliable documents such as passports and government service IDs cover only a small section of the population. Relying on limited and often inaccessible proofs contradicts the spirit of Digital India – turning what was meant to be a modern transparency reform into a bureaucratic bottleneck. The exclusion of Aadhaar made verification cumbersome and eroded public trust, particularly among migrants, first-time voters, and marginalised groups. The deeper issue lies in the failure to adopt interoperable, technology-based systems. Most approved databases remain isolated and inaccessible, preventing real-time verification and automated consistency checks. As a result, the SIR of 2025 repeated the old cycle of manual errors, delays, and inconsistencies. A credible and trustworthy SIR requires a nationally unified, technology-driven framework that ensures accuracy, accountability, and transparency across India's billion-plus voters – not replicating the early 2000s outdated methods in 2025's digital era.

Aadhaar: a national digital ID
After extensive lawsuits and deliberation,



Outdated methods: Despite their reputation for innovative digital governance efforts, Bihar remains the SIR in November 2025 on July 23, 2025

Aadhaar was upheld as a valid and legitimate digital ID for electoral governance processes. Despite earlier concerns about privacy and misuse, the decision confirmed Aadhaar's operational legitimacy, establishing it as the backbone of India's digital ecosystem. India has no comparable identity system. Aadhaar uniquely combines personalised details with biometric data, enabling reliable individual verification. It is the only verified identity database accessible to multiple government and private agencies for authentication. Over time, Aadhaar verification has become routinely used for attendance systems, scholarship disbursement, welfare distribution, financial transactions, life verification, and educational institutions. In practice, it has emerged as India's de facto national digital identity register. Therefore, rather than sidelining it, India's technical leadership must make the Aadhaar ecosystem more robust, tamper-proof, and transparent. It can securely integrate birth, death, and migration records with appropriate safeguards, ensuring that electoral rolls remain dynamically updated without compromising privacy. Integrating verified Aadhaar data into electoral roll management under strict data protection norms could eliminate duplication, automatically remove deceased voters, update residential shifts, and prevent false or multiple registrations. Every addition, deletion, or correction would carry a digitally signed authentication, create an auditable digital audit trail, and ensure a transparent, verifiable, and accountable

electoral database. **Data anomalies**
The revised electoral roll of Bihar revealed significant inconsistencies, including deleting 300 lakh names without adequate clarity or traceable communication to those affected. The total number of electors was around 80 lakh (nearly 10% lower than the estimated adult population of the State, with no verification trail explaining the reasons for such deletions or confirming that due notice had been given. Further scrutiny exposed several irregularities such as contradictions being listed as new voters, and names re-included without supporting documents to maintain overall voter counts. There were also gross variations in demographic statistics, such as a decline in the gender ratio from 954 to 902 in the final roll, a statistically implausible shift, inconsistent with population trends. These anomalies suggest data entry errors or unverified mass revisions, raising serious questions about the integrity of the database. Moreover, data transparency remained the primary concern. The lists of additions and deletions were not published in machine-readable format, preventing independent audit or public scrutiny. Collectively, these anomalies – from demographic distortions and manual errors to opaque data handling – expose the fragility of electoral roll management and underscore the urgent need for technology-driven verification and

transparent data governance in elections.

On ECI-Net
ECI-Net is among the world's largest and most dynamic digital databases, housing records of nearly one billion voters. Continuously updated through additions, address changes, and profile modifications, it is searchable by Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) ID and voter name and administered by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC), Pune, India's premier computing R&D institution. Globally, few systems match the scale, functionality, and democratic significance of this mission-critical database. Its design, ECI-Net can detect duplicates, flag inconsistencies, and facilitate corrections through automated verification. Its architecture can instantly produce real-time demographic and statistical reports transparently and accurately. With the integration of data analytic APIs, the system can automatically identify and resolve most mistakes and demographic inconsistencies identified during recent revisions. However, the lack of disclosure and system-level analytics raises serious concerns. If automated audit and analytical tools already exist – as expected in a database of this scale – they could have easily detected duplication, demographic distortions, and data irregularities without large-scale manual intervention. The failure to utilise these digital capabilities suggests institutional inertia or deliberate avoidance of technology-based transparency. Such practices erode confidence in the integrity of existing SOPs. Despite strong technical expertise within its leadership, the reliance on manual verification over verifiable, software-driven protocols remains inexplicable. Until data-driven audits and system-level transparency are prioritised, claims of purification of electoral rolls will continue to erode public acceptance and institutional respectability.

The way ahead
Today, India has one of the world's most advanced digital ecosystems – from Aadhaar-linked databases and UP to data analytics and e-governance. Yet, the procedures guiding SIR 2025 show little reflection of this progress. The weaknesses are not merely administrative but structural, stemming from the absence of transparency, and database integration. Reforming the SIRs is therefore not optional; it is vital for safeguarding democratic credibility. The electoral roll must be recognised as a living, dynamic national asset rather than a static, state-bound record. Its accuracy directly shapes the integrity of elections and public confidence in electoral governance. Recent judicial observations have underscored the need to learn from the Bihar experience as preparations begin for a nationwide revision. Future SIR exercises must demonstrate procedural correctness, viable fairness, transparency, and accountability. The focus should shift to software-driven verification, digital audit trails, and real-time corrections. The ECI-Net should be made more user-friendly, technical glitches should be fixed promptly, and an efficient and quick grievance redressal mechanism should be incorporated. The 2025 SIR must not become another verification ritual; it must transition into a trust revolution powered by technology based on transparency, verification, and integrity. **Rajeev Kumar is a former Professor of Computer Science & Engineering at IIT Kharagpur, IIT Kharagpur, IIT Patna, and IIT, and a former scientist at DRDO and DST.**



Language in conversation

Yashraj B. Venkat

"Genie, my mom says I can cuddle a cute little baby in my arms, and it's just two months away!"
Hopes bubbling in the moonlight, the Genie Genie smiled. He said, "Ah, little Moon, your mother is pregnant. But you know, 'pregnant' isn't just about babies."
"Really, Genie? I think being pregnant means there must be a baby involved all the time!"
"Dear Moon, most people think that, but the word 'pregnant' itself is pregnant with surprises, ready to unfold when you least expect it."
Moon furrowed her brows and blinked, her eyes wide with wonder. "Genie, I don't understand. How can a word be pregnant?"
"Some words are like treasure chests, full of meaning waiting to be discovered." "So, no babies in this time?"
Genie smiled, saying, "Exactly, Moon. The word 'pregnant' means 'full of something' – like qualities, ideas, feelings, or secrets that are waiting to be discovered. For example, the sky is pregnant with countless stars, each one glimmering like gold. Look at the ocean, it's pregnant with whispering waves. The night air is pregnant with the scent of rain and the hush of still night, even amid the morning waves."

"Wow, Genie! The sky, the ocean, and even the air can become pregnant in a different sense. Surprising! Words can be so magical."
"Sometimes a moment is so important and quiet that it's called a 'pregnant pause'. For instance, the water seems to hold their breath, pausing before they burst onto the shore, or when a tide hesitates for a heartbeat before rolling in again. In real life, it's like when your teacher stops mid-sentence and everyone waits patiently to hear the next word, or when a puppy freezes before pouncing, full of excitement. It's like the pause is pregnant with what's about to happen."
"But how do these 'pregnant pauses' in a sentence?"
"A pregnant pause hangs in the air before the teacher announces the winner. Also, a pregnant pause fills over the moon as everyone waits for the secret to be revealed."
"Is there any other word like 'pregnant pause'?"
"Dear Moon, 'pregnant pause' isn't a word. It's an idiom, a group of words that together mean something entirely different from their literal meaning. For example, when someone says 'it's raining cats and dogs', the phrase doesn't mean animals are falling from the sky; it just means it's raining heavily."
"Got it. What are the other named words?"
"Ah, words are like families, and the words 'pregnancy' and 'pregnantly' are like branches from the same root. 'Pregnancy' means a state of being full and 'pregnantly' describes something done or said in a way that carries a lot of meaning. We can meet the other members of this family another time, Moon."
"Any examples, Genie?"
"The poet's verse is pregnant with peace, and it's a kind of poetic pregnancy. Further, when your mom gives you a silent look that says more than a thousand words, she's looking *pregnantly* without speaking."
"Cool, I got it Genie."

THE DAILY QUIZ

With the high profile mayoral elections in New York city due in a fortnight, here is a quiz on famous mayors of cities

Swaminathan Ramani

QUESTION 1

What service and hence, district provides Mayor's Kinner's victory in the recent elections in Rajasthan, Chhatrapati in 2017?

QUESTION 2

Name the freedom fighter who became the 1st mayor of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation in 1926. What was his primary home in?

QUESTION 3

Another freedom fighter, who played a vital role in

the Quit India movement and later became the first elected mayor of Delhi, Name her

QUESTION 4

Two persons, nominated to the post of Mayor in Nagpur (currently Chennai) in 1957, was later re-elected to a scheme on role-day made for childrens typing or computer schools, Name her

QUESTION 5

Entered for national assembly elections in 1957, he was elected to a post of local government in London, this group is also known for his quirky 'see no digital' in Tufalga, Name him



Visual questions: Identify this current head of government of a country who earlier served as the mayor of its capital city. Name the country as well.

Questions and Answers to the October 23 edition of the daily quiz: 1. "The year in which World Statistics Day was first observed. **Ans: 2020; it is observed every five years.**" 2. The poet of this year's World Statistics Day. **Ans: "Bringing change with quality statistics and data for everyone"** 3. Member of member states which make up the United Nations. **Ans: 193 member states** 4. The North-west widely practiced religion in the world. **Ans: Buddhism** 5. This is the range of all Orders, constituting 20% of all known animal species. **Ans: The insect Order, Coleoptera** 6. The world's largest company by market cap estimated to be in excess of \$4.5 trillion. **Ans: Nvidia** Visual: Name this current. **Ans: Prof. N.C. Mahalingam** Early Hindi Poet's Name of Lachand Bhadani, and Writer: Desraj Sengupta. Another figure.

Word of the day

Excoriate: represent strong disapproval of, tear or peel off the outer or outer skin by attacking

Synonyms: excoriate, decry, repudiate

Usage: The candidates have excoriated each other throughout the campaign

Pronunciation: /ˌɛks.əˈrɪ.ə.ʃeɪ.ʃən/

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ɛks.əˈrɪ.ə.ʃeɪ.ʃən/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to letters@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Text & Context'

Additionally, the EC reviewed that dissemination of both SMS and audio messages is permitted during the 48-hour silence period before the initiation of polling.

IN BRIEF



LS appoints consultant for probe against Justice Varna

The Lok Sabha Speaker has appointed advocate Karan Ghosh Sanyal as a consultant to assist the committee constituted under the Judges Inquiry Act, 1968, to probe corruption charges against Justice V. Ramana. The notification of Mr. Sanyal's appointment was issued on October 27 by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla's office. A probe panel earlier constituted by the Supreme Court had recommended Justice Varna's removal. He was transferred from the Delhi High Court to the Allahabad High Court earlier this year after several weeks of currency notes were reportedly found at his official residence on March 14.

Google directed to remove fake Jagadish Vasudev ads

The Delhi High Court has directed Google to employ its technological tools to detect and remove misleading advertisements featuring AI-generated images and videos of spiritual leader Jagadish Vasudev. The Court passed the order in favour of him in his suit seeking protection of his personality rights being infringed by various rogue websites and unknown entities. The court also allowed Google to file an affidavit to show it takes any technological limitations or reservations in complying with the order.

Four dead, nine injured in Navi Mumbai high-rise fire

Six-year-old and her parents fall victim to the blaze, officials say short-circuit in air conditioner may have started the fire that spread to other apartments in 13-storey building, a probe is under way

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

A major fire broke out shortly after Monday midnight at an apartment complex in Navi Mumbai's Vashi, killing four persons, including a six-year-old girl, and injuring nine others, said officials of the fire department.

The blaze began between 12.30 a.m. and 12.40 a.m. in flat number 1004 on the 10th floor of Rajeev Residency, MIM Complex. Officials said preliminary investigation revealed that an electrical short-circuit in an air conditioner of flat 1004 caused the fire that quickly spread to the 11th and 12th floors of the 13-storey building. The building has four flats on each floor.

The fire claimed the lives of six-year-old Vedika Sankar, Rakshitkumar, her parents — Soumit Rakshitkumar, 44, and Pooja Rajan, 39 — and Sumit John Toppo, 38.

Firefighters reached the spot around 1.20 a.m. and brought the blaze under



Charred walls: Police personnel conducting an inspection after a fire broke out at Rajeev Residency II MIM Complex, in Vashi, Navi Mumbai early on Tuesday (N).

control by 4 a.m. Officials said the operation involved four fire engines. They said teams from Airoli, Koperkhavane, Vashi and MIDC fire brigades responded to the emergency.

"Four fire tenders were deployed, and each vehicle carried seven firemen, one officer and one driver, bringing the total strength to nearly 40 personnel. Firefighters battled thick smoke and flames for nearly four hours before the

blaze was contained. The rescue operation was difficult as it happened at midnight when people were asleep. Some people were stuck in the smoke and fell unconscious," said an official from the fire department.

Nine residents sustained injuries and were rushed to hospitals in Vashi.

Most of the injured persons, admitted to two hospitals, complained of suffocation, said Sachin Kulkarni,

chief of the Disaster Management Cell of the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation. Seven of them were discharged later in the day and the condition of others was said to be stable, he said.

The fire brigade also rescued over a dozen people from the building, Mr. Kulkarni said. A case was registered at the Vashi police station and further probe was on, he said. (With PTI inputs)

Woman doctor assaulted in Bengal hospital, two held

Berikhand Chatterjee
KOLKATA

A woman doctor was assaulted over a dispute with a patient's attendants at a State-run medical college at Elberia in Howrah on Monday. Two persons were arrested, one of them said to be a police home guard.

The police said a junior resident doctor at the Elberia State Chandra Chatterjee Government Medical College and Hospital was assaulted.

"The doctor has lodged an official complaint. We have filed a first information report, and the two persons named in the FIR were arrested soon after the assault," jailay Subhan Pandurang, Sub-Divisional Police Officer (Elberia), said. The incident on Tuesday. He also confirmed that an investigation is under way.

One of the accused is allegedly a police home guard who threatened the doctor with consequences if she tried to leave the hospital premises. She alleged that she had received rape threats during the assault.

The arrested home guard has been identified as Sheikh Tahmid.

One of the accused is a police home guard who allegedly threatened doctor with consequences

The doctor said she was pushed around and physically assaulted during a heated altercation after the patient's companions began escalating the situation.

The Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) slammed the ruling Trinamool Congress for the deteriorating law and order situation and repeated assaults on women doctors in the State.

Homemaker raped

In a separate case of sexual assault on a woman, three men were arrested in Jalpaiguri district of north Bengal.

A homemaker in north Bengal's Maynagar area was gang-raped by a group of miscreants. Those men were arrested for the crime. The homemaker alleged that she was sexually assaulted inside her home and that the perpetrators threatened to kill her if she revealed details of the incident.

FATF may discuss state sponsorship of terrorism; Pakistan entities in focus

Dimple K. Pandey
NEW DELHI

The ongoing Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meetings in Paris are expected to deliberate on state sponsorship as a means to fund and support terrorism, including the financing of armed outfits and their proxies operating in Pakistan, said senior law-enforcement agencies.

The FATF work started on Monday, and its plenary will be held from Wednesday to Friday. Representatives of over 200 jurisdictions and observers are attending the meetings.

"Over 130 terror entities and individuals based in or linked to Pakistan are listed on the United Nations Security Council's ISIL/Al-Qaeda Sanctions List. The Resistance Force, a proxy of Pakistan-based banned outfit Lashkar-e-

state sponsorship includes providing direct funding, logistics, materials, or training

Taliba that carried out the gruesome killings in Pulwama on April 22, has also been designated by the United States as a global terrorist outfit," an official said.

In June, the FATF issued a statement condemning the Pulwama terror attack, stating that it could not "occur without money and the means to move funds between terrorist supporters". In July, it released a report, "Comprehensive update on terrorist financing risks", which for the first time, recognised state sponsorship as a long-standing, terror-financing threat to global peace and security.

State sponsorship includes providing direct funding, logistics, materials, or training.

Indian security agencies have gathered inputs showing that the Lashkar-e-Taliba, under the front of Jamaat-ul-Dawa, has raised funds to rebuild its headquarters in Muzaffar, which was destroyed by the Indian Air Force on May 7.

In May, the Pakistani government had announced that it would finance reconstruction of the Lashkar-e-Taliba and Jund-e-Mohammed facilities. It allocated four crore Pakistani rupees to the Lashkar-e-Taliba for its headquarters Markaz Taliba, while the estimated cost of its complete reconstruction was likely to exceed 15 crore Pakistani rupees. Therefore, according to the agencies, the outfit raised funds on the pretext of "relief for flood victims".

Doctor raises fresh concern as Delhi HC permits ORSL sales

Vidhyanagar Kumar Singh
HYDERABAD

The Hyderabad-based paediatrician Sriram Kumar Singh, who has been at the forefront of a nationwide campaign against real hydroxychloroquine (ORSL) products, has raised fresh concern after the Delhi High Court granted interim protection to JNTL Consumer Health (India), the manufacturer of ORSL.

The development comes amid an ongoing tussle between the health authorities and the company marketing sugary beverages reportedly under the guise of medically approved ORSL formulations.

The Delhi High Court's interim order allows JNTL to continue selling its existing stock, valued at around 100 crore, until the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) completes its hearing on the matter. However, the pro-

duction of new "high-sugar variants" under the ORSL label remains suspended.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Dr. Sriram Kumar said that companies may take advantage of the temporary stay to push misleading products into the market under the pretext of clearing old stock. "The order prohibiting the use of the term 'ORSL' in such formulations has been in place for some time now. The companies have been allowed to clear old stocks, but that does not mean unrestricted sale everywhere," she observed.

JNTL had approached the court after FSSAI withdrew earlier permissions that allowed the use of ORSL with phrases or adjectives in product trademarks. The regulator also clarified that only formulations adhering strictly to World Health Organisation (WHO) standards can be labelled as ORSL.

Impish glee fades: Asrani, a master of the comic timing, passes away at 84

Anil Kumar

Known for his unrelenting comic timing and expressive facial contortions, Govardhan Asrani had the ability to infuse everyday characters with wit and relatability that withstood the test of time.

The veteran comedian passed away in Mumbai on October 20, aged 84, after a prolonged illness.

Versatility was his middle name as he transcended the typical stockish stereotype to become a perfect foil for the lead character, blending slapstick with subtle satire and dramatic depth.

Born in a South Indian family in Bihar on January 1, 1941, Asrani turned away from the carpet business of his father and wanted to pursue acting. He joined the Film And Television Institute of India under Bhanu



Govardhan Asrani

Taneja. Taking the comic baton, he carved his own niche, appearing in more than 600 films.

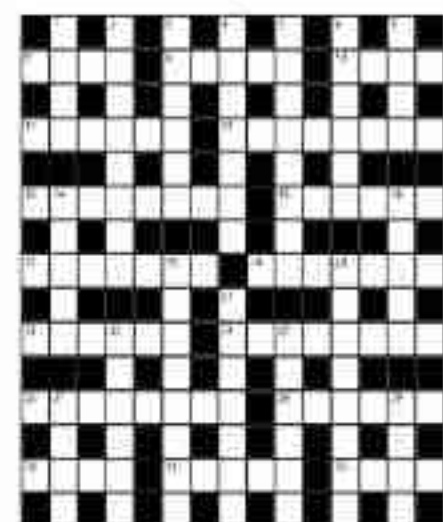
His genius lay in turning brief appearances into memorable moments. Combining physical comedy with sharp dialogue delivery, his most popular performances in the budding jibba, a parody of Adolf Hitler and mispho-

series of power, in 1960s. In Asrani's account, Hindi, the single action sequence became a popular culture staple that hasn't lost its charm even 50 years after it first cracked up the audience. There was much more to him than just a purveyor of lightheartedness. A dynamic presence in Hrishikesh Mukherjee and Gulzar's movies, with his wide-eyed innocence and goofy smiles, Asrani made even stock characters come alive with his infectious energy.

His popular movies include Mamoo Haroon, Bawarchi, Gaddi, Ashwini, Sabse Badhe Sehi, Soorya, Poo Ka Ghar, Mere Apne, Parichay, Kismet, Aapko, among others.

In 1980, he returned to his alma mater, and as the Principal of FTI helped shape its curriculum and remained a guiding light.

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(set by Anagha)



Across

6. Best feeling that only a dog (10)
9. Quickest? What can you do with little... (1)
10. Sweet little baby for pet (4)
11. Distinct after for manufacturing unit (10)
12. Topping off the west through gutters in public place (10)
13. Ball with gel and egg with soft in age house (8)

14. Repeat a word (verb) perhaps (4)
 17. Indian-born manufacturer gets a message to move forward (7)
 18. Cat's desire to avoid how of legs (7)
 22. Letter's element (1)
 24. Internet browser starting with dot (10)
 26. Wrongly used: Ring no good for something to be used as a (10)
 28. Order in India, East Coast Food to be by him (10)
 30. Only water pollution from: Arsenic and Kerosene? (4)
 31. Test primarily stop and covering seven-sided America (4)
 32. Incredible if play (arch) (10)
- Down
1. Letter's estimated time of arrival? After 10th of September (4)
 2. Girl appearing in outdoor play this evening late for singing (10)
 3. Soldier "Superman" (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)
 4. Close up of our junior's, giving support to (10) (10)
 5. Small (small) word, referred by (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)
 6. Connect with (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)
 7. In (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)
 14. Repeat of all ages (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)
 25. Repeating makes water (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)
 26. Arise (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)
 28. In (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)
 29. Sister's (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)
 30. Contrast to make (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)
 31. After (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)
 32. In (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10) (10)

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY: NATURAL ★★☆☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Govinda Pattabhishekam

Among all his manifestations, Pottanna's descent on earth as Krishna is the most celebrated one. As Krishna, He destroyed evil (perpetrated by numerous warriors) from the very beginning, many times. Among all His deeds and sports, it is His act of lifting the Govardhan hill, holding it aloft like an umbrella and protecting everyone, culminating in Govinda Pattabhishekam, is an affirmation of His kindness towards His devotees, said Damini Perambalur.

Growing up in Nanda Gokulam, Krishna endeared Himself to everyone to such an extent that residents perceived His name in everything. One example will suffice: they did not sell butter; instead, vendors called out, "Do you not want to buy Krishna?" Such being His everlasting love for butter. An expert guide border, Krishna was astounded when He found his father Nandagopa making everyone to make offerings to Indra, the god of rain. Krishna's father said Indra had to be propitiated and honoured since with out his preceding rainfall, people's lives would not flourish, nor cattle thrive. Krishna pointed out that good things happen only due to innate goodness and none should ponder to another's ego. He directed everyone to pray to the Govardhan hill near their homes, as it offered protection and livelihood to them. They readily agreed.

A furious Indra caused a heavy downpour, flooding it up with hailstorm, unrelentingly, for seven days. However, Krishna, tilted up hill in one hand, held it like an umbrella over all the residents and livestock. His ego punctured, he daughtered water to perform abhishekam to Krishna, which is known as Govinda Pattabhishekam and Krishna came to be known as Govinda.

Business

IN BRIEF



RBI sold \$77 billion in August to check rupee volatility

The Reserve Bank sold \$77 billion in August to check exchange rate volatility as well as to arrest the decline in value of the rupee against the American currency. The central bank's net sale of U.S. dollars was at \$7.58 billion in August, nearly three times higher than in the preceding month, according to the data on sale/purchase of U.S. dollars published in the RBI's latest bulletin. The data also showed that the Reserve Bank did not purchase U.S. dollars in July and August. —

Dr. Reddy's Srikakulam plant gets VAI tag from U.S. FDA

Dr. Reddy's Laboratories has received establishment inspection report for its Srikakulam formulation manufacturing facility from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration with a voluntary action indicated classification. Referring to the July inspection, following which the facility was issued seven observations, the company on Tuesday said the U.S. FDA has classified the inspection outcome as VAI. The inspection is officially closed, it said.

U.S. transshipment tariff: Firms to face compliance issues

The 40% transshipment tariff by the U.S. will create major compliance issues for firms in India and the ASEAN region, with high risks for sectors such as machinery, electrical equipment and semiconductors, Moody's Ratings said. Moody's, in its 'Trade - Asia Pacific' report, said it remains unclear how the Trump administration defines transshipment, but the measures appear to target products originating in China and shipped through third countries with lower tariffs. —

Core sector growth slows to 3-month low of 3% in Sept.

Slowdown driven by 4 fuel-related sectors — coal, crude oil, natural gas, and refinery products. Steel was the only one of the eight core sectors that saw growth quicken in September to 4.1%.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Growth in activity in the eight core sectors of the economy slowed to a three-month low of 3% in September, dragged down by contraction in the coal, crude oil, natural gas and refinery products as well as a relatively sharp slowdown in fertilizers, official data showed.

The data in the Index of Eight Core Industries released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shows the index's performance in September was lower than a year earlier but slower since this June.

Fuel-related sectors
The slower growth was driven by fuel-related sectors — coal, crude oil, natural gas and refinery products.



Growth sources: Crude oil sector contracted 1.25% from a contraction of 2.9% in September, year-on-year.

The coal sector contracted 1.8% compared with 2.6% growth a year earlier, and a 0.4% growth in August.

Crude oil sector contracted 1.25% from a contraction of 2.9% in September last year. Notably, the crude oil sector had grown

2.4% in August, the first month of growth in eight months.

The natural gas sector witnessed the largest contraction, of 3.8%, in September. The sector contracted for 45 consecutive months, data showed.

Likely due to the slide in

the crude oil sector, refinery products contracted by 3.0% this September compared with a 5.8% growth a year earlier.

Fertilizers slow down
The fertilizer sector saw growth slowing to 1.8% in September compared with 1.9% a year earlier and 4.6% in August 2025. The cement sector, too, saw growth slowing to 3.3% in September from 3.6% a year earlier.

Growth in the electricity sector slowed to 2.4% in September, faster than the 0.5% seen in September 2024, but slower than the 4.2% in August this year.

The steel sector was the only one of the eight core sectors that saw growth quicken in September to 4.1% from 1.8% in September last year, and 0.5% in August 2025.

Diwali delivers blockbuster sales for consumer products

Moonsikoti Varma Anubhag
S. K. Ramesh
NEW DELHI

A blockbuster Diwali weekend has topped robust festive season sales growth for consumer products industry.

"Over the 30-day period from Navratri to Diwali, we

achieved a landmark milestone with over one-lakh vehicle deliveries, reflecting 32% growth compared to the same period last year," said Shalini Chandra, MD and CEO, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles.

Consumer durables, too, have been witnessing a sparkling festive season.

According to estimates released by the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), total retail sales this year touched a record 66,051 lakh crore, comprising 45,40 lakh crore in goods and 20,650 crore in services.

(The writer is with The Hindu Businessline)

Organised retail apparel to get a boost on GST rate cut

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The recent GST rationalisation will add about 300 lakh points to revenue growth of India's organised apparel retail sector this fiscal, said C&E Ratings.

Foreign carriers 'poaching' Indian pilots would be disturbing: Elbers

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI



Peter Elbers

Poaching of Indian pilots on a large scale would be 'disturbing' as public and private players in the aviation sector were making large investments in adding new planes and developing airports, said IAGG CEO Peter Elbers.

The CEO was concluding the rationale behind a working paper presented by the Indian government before the UN's aviation safety body, International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), calling for a mechanism to curb poaching of Indian pilots by foreign carriers. Government sources said the paper was presented at the behest of the industry and was primarily about Indian aviation professionals migrating to Gulf carriers.

"Both IndiGo and Air India are making massive investments in buying new planes, and now we are collaborating with airlines. There are both public and private sector investments in developing airports and other infrastructure. In that context it would be a bit disturbing if you have large groups of people being poached and moved away," Mr. Elbers told The Hindu in an exclusive interaction earlier this month.

On whether attrition was a concern for IndiGo, Mr. Elbers said it "goes a bit up and down," but emphasised the need for "mobility" to enable long-term planning as airlines were investing in planes for the next 20 to 25 years.

The working paper titled "Practices Impacting Orderly Conduct of International Civil Aviation" called for a "code of conduct" among Member States to regulate cross-border staff recruitment, noting that foreign airlines recruiting skilled personnel from Indian carriers that include pilots, engineers, technicians, and cabin crew disrupted the planned growth of domestic players.

The paper was submitted to the ICAO in August ahead of its General Assembly meeting in the last

week of September to be taken up for discussion.

"The impact is particularly severe for specialised roles such as MROs [aircraft maintenance], Engineers and type-rated pilots [pilots trained on specific aircraft types], where replacement training can take months or even years. This practice creates an unfair competitive disadvantage where Indian carriers effectively subsidise the training costs of foreign airlines while bearing the operational disruption costs themselves," the paper asserted.

However, Indian proposal failed to garner major support at ICAO.

Against labour market

"While the Commission expressed appreciation for the issues raised in the working paper, it noted the majority of States did not support the action items presented in the paper as these were considered to undermine the core principles of labour market competition. The Commission agreed with the views expressed by several States that these issues should be dealt with at a national level and do not fall within the purview of ICAO," according to the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations, which

also presented a counter paper. The groupings have contested India's stance and said the proposal violates fundamental rights by restricting Indian professionals from seeking lawful employment overseas and fails to diagnose the root cause for pilots migrating due to dissatisfaction over poor working conditions, lack of contractual security, limited upward mobility and a lack of standardised pay structures.

Dusopoly dynamics

"This proposal risks further undermining a form of bonded labour in a duopoly environment, where Indian pilots may be locked into employment with a single airline under volatile and ever-changing service conditions," said Air Line Pilots' Association.

While proposing a Code of Conduct, the Working Paper references the DGCA's 2017 rule, where the regulator for the first time determined a six-year period for pilots imposing one year for pilots in command and six months for first officers. This was until then only part of employment contracts with 14 months of notice period being the norm. However, the Delhi High Court in 2018 put a temporary stay on this rule.

'India's H2FY26 tech hiring outlook not so promising'

Shilpi Tugareli
BANGALORE

India's tech hiring outlook for the second half of FY26 seems "not so promising" with new signs of clear uncertainties emerging on the ground including 'No Kings' protest and the ongoing government shutdown, which could hamper economic growth and create more uncertainty, in the sector's largest customer market, the U.S., say industry observers.

The newer problems are happening even as the real impact of tariffs are expected to hit the market hard in the coming quarters. Overall economic conditions are not promising with a potential rise in debt, inflation and negative consumer sentiments amid trade tensions and geopolitical issues. All these are likely to lead to further cuts in customer budgets and that will eventually impact jobs in India, they cautioned.

"The U.S. administration has opened up a bundle of uncertainties for citizens, entrepreneurs, and Indian tech providers. Uncertainties are only increasing month after month. Now, with 'No Kings' protests, a clear and without doubt, uncertainty has emerged on the ground with over seven



Typical recruitment by tech firms in Q3 showed slow momentum.

million citizens trying to push back Mr. Trump's reforms, including tariffs," observed R.S. Murthy, CEO, Leadership Capital, a CXO advisory firm.

New disruptions

This cluster upon may lead to newer disruptions and all these may adversely hit end-customer sentiments and economic growth in the U.S. and their impact IT budgets of enterprises and therefore, Indian tech jobs, Mr. Murthy said.

Aravind Vashista, Global Chairman & CEO and also formerly chairman & MD of Accenture India told The Hindu, "U.S. macroeconomic headwinds, including tariff and debt uncertainties, etc already has the potential to shirk discretionary IT budgets in H2 FY26, impacting tech hiring in India."

According to Equitas

TVS' Venu Srinivasan reappointed trustee for life by Tata Trusts

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI



Venu Srinivasan

Tata Trusts has unanimously reappointed Venu Srinivasan as a trustee for life and all eyes are now on the upcoming decision regarding Mithi. Mithi's term renewal, amid reported internal divisions within the organisation.

The reappointment of Mr. Srinivasan this week, ahead of his term expiring on October 23, comes amid reports of a vertical split within Tata Trusts — with one faction said to align with Neehi Tata, who took over as chairman following Ratan Tata's death, and the other comprising those seen as loyalists of the former owner.

A source with direct knowledge of the matter said reappointment of Mr. Srinivasan, chairman emeritus of TVS Group, was unanimous. Tata Trusts declined to comment on the matter.

The focus now shifts to Mr. Mithi, whose term ends on October 25, with opinions divided on if his continuation is automatic or requires unanimous approval from the trustees for lifetime tenure.

Umbrella body

Tata Trusts, the umbrella body overseeing several charitable trusts including the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, holds a 60% stake in Tata Sons — the holding company of the 156-year-old Tata Group with about 400 companies.

"Renewal and fresh appointment is required to be unanimous as per past practice. Renewal, after which it will be for life, requires unanimous approval," said a source.

However, another person said, "The reappointment is automatic and it is applicable to all the trustees." Citing minutes of the joint meeting of the trustees of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and the Sir Ratan Tata Trust held on October 15, 2024, the person said it was resolved on the expiry of the tenure of any trustee, the trustee would be reappointed by the concerned trust without any limit being attached to the period of tenure.

Any trustee who chose to vote otherwise would be in breach of their commitment and is not fit and proper to serve on Tata Trusts by such conduct", the person added.

As per the October 17, 2024 resolution, all trustees are appointed on a long-term and life basis and trusteeship would be retained upon reaching 75 years of age.

India faces specialty fertilizer price jump

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India is preparing for high specialty fertilizer prices ahead of the crucial rabi (winter) crop season after China suspended exports of urea and specialty fertilizers from October 15, a senior industry official said.

China, which had only recently resumed fertilizer exports from May 15 to October 15 with increased inspections, has now suspended the export window until further notice, affecting not just India but global markets as well.

The suspension covers specialty fertilizers like NMAP (Nutrient Management Programme) Phosphorus and Urea-sulphate products like AdBlue, as well as conventional fertilizers such as DAP and urea.

"China has closed the export window from October 15 not only for India but the entire world market," Soluble Fertilizer Industry Association (SFIA) President Rajiv Chakraborty told PTI. "I believe the export suspension will be for the next 5-6 months."

India imports about 95% of specialty fertilizers, including phosphates like NMAP and urea-sulphate compounds like AdBlue, from China.

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TENDER NOTIFICATION (Through KPP Portal only)

BESCOM invites tender through KPP Portal vide Enquiry No.BEBC/KR/2023-24/SE(1349) for "Providing Application Address Control System for BESCOM for 3 years." Bid documents available from 27.05.2023, 5.30 PM (Onwards). Last date for bid submission is 25.11.2023, 4.00 PM. Opening of bid document is on 26.11.2023, 6.30 PM. The Tender documents can be obtained through KPP Portal, <https://kppc.karnataka.gov.in>. Applying tenders need to register in KPP Portal. Further, bidders can take assistance with BPP helpline/contact numbers (+91-80-46811030, +91-886-6994777) or email at support@aptochrydesh.com.

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Parvez Rasool, J&K's first international cricketer, retires



West Indies pips Bangladesh via Super Over in the second ODI



Vishwas on the charge as Warriorz turn the tables on Thalaiyas



South Africa sends Pakistan packing

Chamari keeps Lanka alive; Bangladesh out

Muddled India needs to have a serious introspection

Australia aims to cope with skipper Healy's absence

Pant to lead India-A against SA-A

Verstappen chasing perfection in pursuit of a fifth World title

American GM Naroditsky passes away

A former world youth champion, he became a GM in 2013. In addition to competing, finishing ninth in the final World championship last year, he was widely known as a popular commentator, writer and online educator.



A vibrant domestic system independent of the scouting process followed by IPL franchises has given resources that are capable of exploiting whatever conditions might be on offer, depending on where matches or tournaments are played.

Nitch Paddy is being groomed as a next breeding off-spring because of the balance between his personality and his business acumen.

SCIENCE

Chimps imbibe two cocktails' worth of ethanol daily from ripe fruits

Do chimpanzees actively prefer fruits with higher alcohol content, or are they simply attracted to the sweetness of ripe fruits? Robert Dudley, who first proposed the drunken monkey hypothesis in 2004, has theorised that alcohol in fruits could serve as a cue for ripeness — a signal of extra calories and perhaps enhanced taste

Arshita Bhattachar

While humans have been drinking alcohol for thousands of years, some scientists think this history could go back millions of years. According to the drunken monkey hypothesis, humans' taste and alcohol preference for alcohol may have evolutionary roots, shaped by our primate ancestors consuming small doses of alcohol found inside ripe fruit. Our bodies may also have evolved to metabolise alcoholic compounds more effectively as a result.

In a new study in *Science Advances*, researchers at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, analysed ripe fruits eaten by wild chimpanzees, the closest living relatives of humans, to discover that chimpanzees could be ingesting as much alcohol as one to two glasses of wine every day.

Ripe fruits

Chimpanzees share about 98.5% of their DNA with humans, making them an excellent model for exploring questions about human evolution. Their fruit-heavy diet is also believed to resemble that of our last common ancestor. By estimating the chimpanzees' daily alcohol intake from these fruits, researchers can gain insights into the levels that may have been ingested by this ancestor as well.

The researchers conducted their studies in two forests in Africa: one in Niogo in Gabon National Park in Equatorial Guinea, home to one of the world's largest known chimpanzee communities; and the other in the Tai National Park in Côte d'Ivoire.

From previous observations, the researchers had already identified the fruit varieties the chimpanzees consumed. They collected ripe fruits from these feeding sites — sometimes plucked directly from branches, at others scooped up from the ground just after they dropped — and tested them in the lab for their alcohol content. Since they also knew the approximate quantity of fruit a single chimpanzee ate, they were able to estimate the amount of alcohol the individual ingested in a single day.

The lab results confirmed that the fruits the chimpanzees consumed did contain small amounts of ethanol. The microbe yeast, which is used to brew beer and wine, is naturally present in fruits. When the fruits ripen, their sugar content increases and the yeast ferments these sugars into alcohol.

'Nearly two drinks'

The lab results also showed that ripe fruits contained less than 1% alcohol. To compare, a pint of beer (475 ml) typically



An adult female and an infant chimpanzee feeding on Ficus in Niogo National Park, Equatorial Guinea, 2015. (Image courtesy of the authors)

contains 4-6% alcohol by volume. However, unlike humans, a large portion of a chimpanzee's diet consists of fruits: nearly three-quarters of their intake, amounting to around 4.5 kg per day.

"The chimpanzees are eating 5-6% of their body weight in a day in ripe fruit, so even low concentrations yield a high daily total, a substantial dosage of alcohol," Robert Dudley, an evolutionary physiologist at UC Berkeley, and co-author of the study, said.

Researchers calculated that the total alcohol intake from consuming fruits amounted to roughly 16 grams — equivalent to a glass of wine, or two when adjusted for a chimpanzee's body weight.

"Across all sites, male and female chimpanzees are consuming about 14 grams of pure ethanol per day in their diet, which is equal to one standard American drink," said Menay Nani, a PhD researcher at UC Berkeley, and the first author of the paper. "When you adjust for body mass, because chimps weigh around 40 kg versus a typical human at 70 kg, it goes up to nearly two drinks."

An evolved attraction

Among the 21 fruit varieties the researchers identified in the chimpanzees' diet, the primates showed a strong preference for sticky figs (*Ficus* species). Only 25 of these figs, which are shrubby and sugary, can contain as much as 80 grams of alcohol — a significant amount when consumed in a



These findings suggest that an attraction to ethanol is deeply embedded in animal and human evolutionary history

KIMBERLEY HOCKING

University of Exeter

single fruit

However, despite consuming as much as 80 g of alcohol in a day, the chimpanzees didn't display any obvious signs of intoxication. Researchers suggested this was because they didn't metabolise the alcohol in one go but spread it throughout the day. The researchers also noted such low-level exposure to natural alcohol may have influenced key physiological adaptations.

"Our research shows that chimpanzees in Cameroon National Park in Guinea-Bissau share fermented fruits with each other and use leaf tools to access fermented palm wine harvested by humans, indicating an evolved attraction and tolerance to ethanol," Kimberley Hocking, a primatologist at the University of Exeter who has been studying apes in West Africa, said. "These findings suggest that an attraction to ethanol is deeply embedded in animal and human evolutionary history."

This interpretation is aligned with research by Matthew Carrigan, an

associate professor of biology at College of Central Florida, USA. His work has concluded that about 10 million years ago, the last common ancestor of living African apes and modern humans experienced a genetic mutation that increased the rate of ethanol metabolism 10-fold.

Case for ripeness

The UC Berkeley study also raises a few questions. Do chimpanzees actively prefer fruits with higher alcohol content, or are they simply attracted to the sweetness of ripe fruits?

Dr. Dudley, who first proposed the drunken monkey hypothesis in 2004, has theorised that alcohol in fruits could serve as a cue for ripeness — a signal of extra calories and perhaps enhanced taste that adds to the pleasure of eating.

While previous studies have documented alcohol use in chimpanzees, the UC Berkeley effort is the first to measure the alcohol content of the fruits they consume.

Tetsuro Matsuzawa, former director of the Primate Research Institute at Kyoto University, Japan, said, "These observations contribute to a growing body of evidence for the drunken monkey hypothesis. From fermented palm wine drinking to the spontaneous consumption of fermented fruits, wild chimpanzees consistently show behaviours that suggest an evolved attraction to ethanol."

Arshita Bhattachar is an independent science writer. arshita@arshita.com

THE GIST

Chimpanzees drink approximately 94.5% of their DNA with humans. They live in a diet believed to resemble that of our last common ancestor. By estimating chimpanzees' alcohol intake, researchers can gain insights into this ancestor's diet.

The surveyed chimpanzees consumed 1.5% of their body weight in ripe fruit per day, so even low concentrations yielded a high daily total. Alcohol intake amounted to 14 grams of pure ethanol per day. When adjusted for body mass, it amounted to two drinks.

Among the 21 fruit identified in the chimpanzees' diet, the primates showed a preference for sticky figs. Only 25 of these figs can contain as much as 80 grams of alcohol. Researchers say such exposure to alcohol may have influenced key physiological adaptations.

BIG SHOT



In this photo provided by Arshita Bhattachar, she and her husband, Piyush, stand in front of a piece of NASA research equipment attached to a parashute that fell from the sky over their home in Ghyemmen, Nepal, in October 2, 2019.

QUESTION CORNER

Flashes in the pan

Dr. Vandana Mukund

Q: What are transient lunar phenomena?
A: For centuries, voyagers have reported seeing peculiar,

short-lived events on the moon's surface, from orange flashes of light to hazy glows and patches of unusual colour. These fleeting occurrences are called transient lunar phenomena (TLPs). A TLP can last anywhere from a few seconds to several hours before vanishing.

Scientists don't know what they really are or why they happen, but they've interpreted the TLPs' existence to mean the moon is more dynamic than they once believed. People have documented reports of these mysterious events for a thousand years, even the Apollo 11 astronauts reported witnessing a luminous glow in 1968. The most common sightings include bright, star-like beams of light, reddish or coloured glows, and some sort of misty obscuring the view. Some of the most active areas for these phenomena include the Aristarchus and Plato craters. While scientists are still exploring the origins of TLPs, there are a few leading theories. One is the



Scientists have interpreted the TLPs' existence to mean the moon is more dynamic than they once believed was.

release of gases such as neon and argon from beneath the moon's surface. This outgassing could be triggered by gravitational stresses or the heating of the surface, causing the released gas and dust to glow or reflect sunlight. Another likely cause is meteoroid impacts, which are frequent on the moon because it lacks a protective atmosphere. These high-velocity collisions can generate a flash of light. Other possibilities include electrostatic phenomena, where lunar dust becomes charged and levitates, and disturbances in the earth's own atmosphere that distort our view of the moon.

For feedback and suggestions
for Science, please write to:
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with the subject 'Daily page'