

Thinking straight, not laterally, the way forward

The manner in which the recruitment of 45 officers of the Joint Secretary/Director level laterally was requisitioned and withdrawn suddenly is a good example. The withdrawal was surprising on three counts. One, lateral induction had been resorted to in the past, including by this government without getting mired in debilitating controversies. Second, as the Opposition fired its precision-guided 'reservation' missile, some ministers launched a counterattack, not aware of the swift, embarrassing retreat being planned. Third, a government known to be tough buckled under a smoking gun. The irony was that ministers who should have known better were brandishing their swords even as the retreat was being sounded. Before coming to the issues involved in the non-political endeavour of lateral recruitment, one cannot help but pity the language of the 'instrument of surrender', which could have been a straightforward official communication instead of a demi-official letter from the minister giving the impression that his ministry made a mistake, which the Prime Minister (who is in charge of the ministry) stepped in to correct. He even traduced the Opposition for overlooking the principle of 'social justice' it advocated while making lateral recruitment when in power.

Much has been written about previous governments inducting experts from the market into the bureaucratic system, the recommendations of the Administrative Reform Commission and the Group of Secretaries, the examination of the proposal by the Department of Personnel from various angles, and the peaceful induction earlier. This was not the first attempt by the government, and hopefully it will not be the last, to draft outside talent to shore up its skill set. It would be unfair to endorse lateral entry or dismiss it without understanding the context and the motivation for such a move. Let us look at some fundamental issues. The Government of India (GOI) runs the affairs of the Central Government and other national-level bodies by recruiting officers to services such as income tax, Railways and Posts through the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), following the reservation policy. It also takes on deputation All India Services (AIS) officers borne on state cadres recruited through the same process. The GOI has no cadre of AIS officers; the states maintain a deputation reserve as part of their sanctioned cadre strength. The GOI draws upon this reserve to fill positions at different levels in the ministries and other apex organisations through an empanelment process for joint secretaries and above.

Many GOI ministries have their specialised services to deal with their allotted subjects, as in the case of agriculture, commerce, civil and cost accounts, etc. In addition, the government has fruitfully drawn upon the expertise of outside talent occasionally without being bound by its reservation policy. While earlier governments selected eminent experts through an informal system, this government tried to institutionalise the selection through the UPSC. Also, there has never been an attempt at such large-scale lateral induction. It would be interesting to understand how effectively is the expertise of the existing specialised cadres utilised by the government, especially when professional advice conflicts with short-term objectives of the government or the political interests of the ruling party.

If the government wishes a sprinkling of external experts in the bureaucratic system and treat it as quasi deputation, it must identify ministries needing such 'market borrowing' and simultaneously rationalise and redraw existing cadres. Further, it should be clear whether such induction is routine recruitment or contextual. In case it is contextual and need-based, experts could be hired as consultants who can give their opinion and make recommendations freely without being burdened with bureaucratic decision-making.

50 years of India's steady outperformance

The country has become the third-largest contributor to global growth

IT may not have seemed so at the time, but 50 years ago India reached a turning point. There was an economic crisis and political turmoil. The decisive action a year later was the imposition of Emergency rule by Indira Gandhi. But that was overturned in less than two years. What proved more long-lasting was something barely noticed at the time: A new direction in economic policy, away from Mrs Gandhi's overtly Leftist phase. There followed in due course an end to India's long-term under-performance as an economy, and over time the birth of a new 'India story'. Until the mid-1970s, India had been growing more slowly than the world economy. The transition in the second half of the 1970s followed some 15 years of crises in the form of wars, failed harvests and even famine, a traumatic rupee devaluation and two oil shocks. Many of these events had contributed to a loss of national self-belief after the early optimism under Jawaharlal Nehru. But once the economy stabilised, what followed was a half century of steady outperformance. Growth outpaced both low-income and middle-income countries, as well as the world economy. The country consequently has an international heft today that it never enjoyed before. Yet, it has not been a 'shining' record, because of continuing poor socioeconomic metrics and rising inequality. Prior to the transition, India's share of the global economy had been on the decline — from 2.7 per cent in 1960 to 1.9 per cent in 1975 before the decline slowed, stabilised and eventually improved. Even in 2013, India's share of the world GDP was slightly smaller than in 1960. Now, in 2024, it is 3.5 per cent of the global GDP. And since the economy is growing at twice the global average, India is the third-largest contributor to global growth.

Per capita income similarly improved. From 8.4 per cent of the global average in 1960, India's per capita income dipped to 6.4 per cent in 1974. The numbers improved to 13.5 per cent in 2011, and further to 18.1 per cent in 2023. That is a near-trebling over five decades. Yet people in most countries enjoy a much better standard of living. Indeed, there are hardly any countries outside of Africa and in India's own South Asian neighbourhood where per capita

incomes are lower. A long road lies ahead. What transforms the India story is the size of its population. Per capita income is modest, but when multiplied 1,400 million times it makes the Indian economy the fifth largest. Already, India is the second-largest market for mobile phones and motorcycles/scooters, and the third- or fourth-largest for aviation and cars. Growth in these product and service markets has been underpinned by a burgeoning middle class. Businesses catering to it have generated great wealth for investors, leading to the rise of dollar-billionaires (at 200, the world's third-largest tally), while the stock market

population, and life expectancy has finally crossed the 70 threshold. Higher incomes find reflection in a more varied and richer diet. Milk consumption has multiplied 10-fold. So has fish consumption, while the consumption of eggs has increased more than 20-fold. Add to this the rapid growth of horticulture — fruits and vegetables. Meanwhile, household savings as a share of the income have gone up 70 per cent, even as average incomes have multiplied six-fold in real terms. More important than all these may be a change in mindset. India in the mid-1970s was still committed to socialist rhetoric. Apart from large-scale nationalisation of several industries,

there was also price and production control on everything, from paper to steel, and sugar to cement, even bathing soaps and cars! The inevitable result was shortages and black markets. State governments routinely sided with trade unions in industrial disputes. But things have changed. Indian politics is now more populist than socialist, the Communist parties are in the ICU, and governments want to change labour laws to facilitate business. Tax rates have become reasonable. Rs 12 crore (about Rs 350 crore in today's money). In comparison, in the last couple of years, several companies have done public issues of Rs 15,000-21,000 crore (LIC, Adani, Vodafone, etc). As recently as a decade ago, mutual fund companies managed sums equal to less than an eighth of bank deposits; that share has doubled to more than a quarter. The next five years could see India add more to its GDP, in absolute numbers, than it has done in the last 10. And yet, there is no story in India without a counter-story. The production of consumer durables has not increased at all compared to seven years earlier, and has gone up by an annual average of just 2.8 per cent for non-durables. Clearly, consumers are financially stressed, especially in the lower rungs of the income ladder — probably reflecting the lack of enough work on good wages. Only when that changes will the economy be able to get to the 7-plus per cent rate that once marked out the truly high-growth economies.



ranks fourth by market capitalisation. Up to the mid-1970s, close to half the population lived below a bare-bones poverty line. Today, less than 10 per cent of the people are officially poor. International mention of India is now more likely to refer to it as a rising power rather than as a country of poor people. Yet, India continues to feature as only a 'medium development' country in its human development, while countries like Vietnam have attained 'high development' status. India is unlikely to make it to the 'high development' category for another decade or more — beyond which lies the 'very high development' category comprising the developed economies, to which the country aspires.

Even here, though, the numbers are improving. The mean years of schooling have improved from 4.4 years in 2010 to 6.57 years now. India also has more than the WHO-prescribed ratio of a doctor per 1,000

Ahead of the curve

HP raises girls' marriage age before Central verdict

HIMACHAL Pradesh's move to raise the legal age of marriage for girls from 18 to 21 years through the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Himachal Pradesh Amendment) Bill 2024 has sparked a debate, particularly given the ongoing national discussions on this issue. With the Central Government's Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill still under review by a parliamentary panel, HP's law raises questions about the implications of pre-empting the panel's findings. The panel, tasked with examining the Central Bill that also raised the girls' age for marriage to 21, is deliberating on the matter. Its report is expected to address various concerns, including cultural sensitivities, socioeconomic factors and the potential impact on women's rights and personal freedoms. The HP decision to act independently is both progressive and precipitous. On one hand, the state's



proactive stance highlights its commitment to gender equality and empowerment of young women. By aligning the marriage age of women with that of men, the law aims

to provide them equal opportunities for education and personal development, free from the pressures of early marriage. However, this move also risks creating legal and social discrepancies if the parliamentary panel's report suggests a different approach or additional safeguards. The national legislation, once enacted, would supersede state laws, potentially leading to confusion and the need for amendments. The timing of HP's law undermines the broader consultative process that the parliamentary panel is engaged in, which seeks to balance diverse perspectives and ensure that the law is inclusive and well-considered.

While the HP law is a bold step, it underscores the importance of awaiting a comprehensive, nationally consistent approach that takes into account the complexities of implementing such a significant change across India's varied social landscape.

Farmers need assured prices to withstand market shocks

The only plausible way to pull the farmers out of perpetual poverty is by ensuring a legally binding framework for guaranteeing farm prices.

IT is called the pension reform. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) ensures dignity and financial security for government employees. "We are proud of the hard work of all government employees who contribute significantly to national progress," he said. In reality, the UPS — which assures a pension equivalent to 50 per cent of the last drawn salary — is an acknowledgement that the earlier market-linked New Pension Scheme had not worked for government employees. To assure a 'defined benefit' for government employees, the Union Cabinet tweaked the pension scheme to ensure that the retirees do not have to face the tyranny of the markets. While the PM has also applauded the country's farmers on a number of occasions and has often admired the resilience demonstrated by the farming community, there have been no takers for their long-pending demand for guaranteed prices. If markets have failed for retired employees, let me make it clear that markets have also failed for farmers. If employees need an assured pension, farmers also need an assured price. Nowhere in the world have markets ensured a higher income for farmers. In the major economies, either the subsidy fills the income gap (China has emerged at the top in providing agricultural subsidies) or agriculture is conveniently left at the mercy of market forces, like in India. The result, as some studies have shown, is not only that Indian farmers are at the bottom of the pyramid but also that they have been incurring losses year after year for nearly 25 years now.

The only plausible way to pull the farmers out of perpetual poverty is by ensuring a legally binding framework for guaranteeing farm prices. Regardless, the NDA government had sworn in an affidavit before the Supreme Court some years back that a law

to guarantee a minimum support price (MSP) would distort the markets. Strangely, when it comes to farmers, policymakers raise the bogey of assured prices distorting markets. For employees, everyone is fine with an assured pension; the fear of distorting markets suddenly disappears.

While mainline economists believe that a legal MSP will jack up consumer prices and thereby distort markets, in reality, it will squeeze corporate profits, and hence the outcry. Strangely, the same breed of free-market economists remain quiet when corporates in America go in for 'price gouging' — jacking up prices to rip off the consumers. This actually is price distortion. Already, 38 states, including California, Florida and New York, have brought in laws that prohibit the practice. For instance, the state of New York went against companies that had hiked the prices of hand sanitisers by 400 per cent during the pandemic. And yet, many market economists have called such checks on visible market distortions a return to Soviet-style price controls. The bias in favour of markets crops up when farmers have to be provided with economic security, but not when corporates jack up prices to extract their pound of flesh. This double speak on market distortion is coming in the way of providing farmers with a living income. As I have said before, markets will automatically adjust to the assured prices for farmers. It is only the ideology that is coming in the way. US Vice-President Kamala Harris has called for a ban on corporate price gouging, which alone is responsible for a 53 per cent increase in the prices of food and grocery items since the pandemic. Republicans have called her position on it



'communist'. Whatever the right wing may say, there is no denying, as some economists have acknowledged, that a ban on price gouging is good economics as well as good politics. Harris has promised action against companies that are keeping food prices artificially high.

Returning to the employees' pension, it is interesting to see the Department of Expenditure make an all-out effort to justify the decision, terming it 'fiscally prudent' and claiming that "it will be preventing fiscal hardship to future generations of citizens." Certainly, there is no one against an assured pension for employees. But if the employees can be assured of social security, there is no reason why economic security cannot be assured for farmers. They also contribute significantly to the national progress, and it is because of their relentless hard work that the country has food security. When Kamlesh Patidar a

farmer from Madhya Pradesh's Mandsaur district, re-ploughed his standing soybean crop on 10 acres, he did not realise that it would trigger a chain reaction. Just few days after a video of the incident went viral, reports of several anguished farmers uprooting the crop poured in. The crash in soybean prices — and that too, a month and a half before the harvesting season — has negated another economic belief that suggests farmers should hold on to harvest till the time they can realise a better price. Patidar had saved his last year's harvest in the hope of getting a higher price later. But even that did not work.

While the ruling soybean prices have dropped to a level that existed 12 years back, the destruction of farm livelihoods leaves hundreds of thousands of soybean farmers seething with anger. The prices, which are much lower than the MSP, are not even enough to cover the production costs. I wonder when we will have an assured price policy for farmers that will prevent fiscal hardship for not only future generations of farmers but also the present one. Soon thereafter, reports about tomato prices crashing by 60 per cent to a low of Rs 300 per crate of 25 kg poured in. And then came news reports about basmati prices falling by 28 per cent to Rs 2,500 per quintal. It is not something unique happening this year; it has emerged as a painful annual trend that the nation does not feel concerned about. Providing a legally guaranteed MSP to farmers who have marketable surplus and providing direct income support to marginal farmers is the big reform that agriculture awaits.

Acid attack, rain, and a gangrape-murder that shook Bengal 42 years ago

A cold-blooded gangrape and murder on a rainy June night in 1982 left the town of Cooch Behar, in West Bengal, scarred forever.

New Delhi: June in Cooch Behar is the month of incessant rain. It was the June of 1982. The Jyoti Basu government had just come to power. CPI(M) was at the peak of prominence in the state of West Bengal. Up north, a young woman had left her Balurghat home and moved to Cooch Behar for a government job. She was employed as the staff nurse at the state-run Maharaja Jitendra Narayan Hospital. She lived on rent with her sister and brother-in-law in a small house off an old post office in the town. The para, or locality, was known by that post office. Like every other workday, she came home in the evening. It was raining cats and dogs, like it is with rain in North Bengal.

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It rained all night that June day, and it rained through the next day. The roads of the town were inundated. The nurse's neighbours raised an alarm early in the morning. They found her naked, half-dead, unable to speak, allegedly gangraped. Her throat was scalded. Her private parts burnt. A bottle of acid had been poured into her mouth



through a Ryle's tube to ensure she never identified her rapists. The same acid was used to wipe off all physical marks of the rape. The tin roof of her home swallowed her cries that night. The rain was just too loud. A few good men hailed a cycle-rickshaw and helped her still-alive body on to it. They then pushed the rickshaw for a kilometre, through the knee-deep water of that June day, to MJN Hospital. She was admitted to her workplace. Sometime later, she died. The long arm of law caught hold of

ten men but justice was many miles away. Of these ten, three served a ten-year jail term. They then secured bail from a higher court. The other seven were let go. The main men behind the crime were allegedly very powerful, very close to the ruling government. Their power and the people in power shielded them from the blind eyes of justice. Her screams, once silenced by the rain and a bottle of acid, were silenced again in the courts of justice. Some of the real perpetrators were also interrogated by the police. But the power of the party in power reigned supreme. They had to be let go. No police officer in-charge was allowed to speak on the record. Questions posed to them were met with sad, wistful smiles. This was a time before mobile phones were mainstream, and social media the mainstay of people. Cooch Behar was not a place that

usually needed many journalists. Nothing really happened in that small town. So, when the story finally made it to a fledgling daily called Uttar Banga Sambad the next day, public rage spilled on to the streets.

Cooch Behar reclaimed the voice of the girl who was gangraped, killed in cold blood, doused in acid. But all of the town's cries fell on the deaf ears of blind justice. A few days later, the nurse's grief-stricken father breathed his last. Her sister and brother-in-law are still waiting for justice for their bright-eyed girl, forty-two years later. The town has seen forty-two Junes, eight governments, three chief ministers, and two political parties in power since then. It has seen inundated roads and government apathy. It still rains cats and dogs every June. Every oldtimer in the town sighs, cries, shakes their head when that June is brought up.

Bengal Governor meets Amit Shah, discusses Kolkata rape-murder case

New Delhi: West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose met Union Home Minister Amit Shah today at his residence to discuss the law and order situation in the state in the light of the rape and murder of a Kolkata trainee doctor at RG Kar hospital in Kolkata. The meeting continued for nearly an hour. According to sources, the Governor provided detailed information on the current situation in West Bengal. Protests erupted nationwide, particularly in Kolkata, over the trainee doctor's rape and murder, with protesters demanding swift action in the case. In Kolkata, protesting university students led the crowds, on August 27, in breaking through barricades set up by security forces to demand the resignation of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for her handling of the case.

The governor arrived in Delhi yesterday evening for the scheduled meeting. Last week, Governor CV Ananda Bose also met with President Droupadi Murmu and Vice President Jagdeep Thakker to brief them on the RG Kar incident and the subsequent events that unfolded in the state.

The body of the woman postgraduate trainee was found in a seminar hall at the hospital on August 9 morning. A civic volunteer, Sanjay Roy, was arrested the next day in connection with the crime. The Kolkata Police and hospital administration were criticised for their handling of the trainee doctor's case, with the Supreme Court highlighting the 14-hour delay in filing of the FIR. The case is now being probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

Revanth Reddy regrets remarks on K Kavitha's bail: Highest regard for judiciary

New Delhi: Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Friday apologised for his remarks about the bail granted to Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader K Kavitha in the Delhi liquor policy case. This comes a day after the Supreme Court reprimanded him for his comments about a 'deal' between the BJP and the BRS for securing bail for Kavitha. In a post on X, Reddy wrote that he has "the highest regard and full faith" in the Indian Judiciary. "I understand that certain press reports dated 29th August, 2024 containing comments attributed to me have given the impression that I am questioning the judicial wisdom of the Hon'ble Court. I reiterate that I am a firm believer of the judicial process. I unconditionally express my regret for the statements reflected in the press reports," the Telangana Chief Minister wrote.

The Congress leader alleged that his comments were "taken out of context" and stressed that he has "unconditional respect and the highest regard for the Judiciary and its independence". The Supreme Court granted bail to K Kavitha in the Delhi excise policy scam case on August 27, observing that prolonged incarceration before being pronounced guilty of an offence should not be permitted to become a punishment without trial. After the court verdict, the Telangana Chief Minister commented, "It is a fact that BRS worked for the victory of the BJP in the 2024 LS polls. There is also talk that Kavitha got bail because of the deal between BRS and BJP". Strongly criticising these comments, the Supreme Court on Thursday observed that such statements might create apprehensions in the minds of people. "Do we pass orders after consultations with political parties?" the court asked angrily, voicing displeasure. "Have you read in the newspaper what he said? Just read what he has stated. What sort of statement is this by a responsible chief minister. That might rightly create apprehension in the minds of people. Is this a kind of statement which should be made by a chief minister? A constitutional functionary is speaking in this manner," a three-judge bench headed by Justice B R Gavai told senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Reddy. The bench continued, "Why should they drag court in political rivalry? Do we pass orders after consultations with political parties? We are not bothered by politicians or if anybody criticises our orders. We do our duty as per conscience and oath".

Over a dozen leaders from AAP, BJP join Congress ahead of Delhi Assembly polls

New Delhi: More than a dozen leaders from the BJP and AAP joined the Congress in Delhi on Thursday ahead of next year's Assembly polls. At a ceremony held at Rajiv Bhawan, the headquarters of the Congress's Delhi unit, leaders from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) formally joined the Congress and were welcomed by Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav.

"Leaders from both BJP and AAP, along with their supporters, are transitioning to the Congress, motivated by the party's progressive

policies and the strong leadership of Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi," Yadav said. During the



event, Yadav specifically welcomed Amarlatha Sangwan, a former councillor and MLA candidate from Timarpur, back to the Congress fold.

"Sangwan will strengthen the party's position. She criticised the BJP's communal politics and lack of focus on public welfare," Yadav said.

Several senior Congress members, including former MLA Anil Bhardwaj, Communication Department Chairman Kunwar Karan Singh and other veteran Delhi Congress leaders, were present at the function. With the upcoming Assembly elections in sight, the Congress is working to regain its voter base by targeting the AAP government. The party plans to soon launch a campaign highlighting its 15-year rule in Delhi.

Feel nauseous when I sit with Ajit Pawar: Row over Shinde Sena leader's remark

Dharashiv: A leader of the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena said on Thursday that the party's proximity to the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) made him vomit, calling it an "allergic reaction". Shiv Sena leader Tanaji Sawant stirred a controversy when he stated that he had never agreed with the NCP throughout his life. He likened his relationship with the NCP to "sitting on their lap but feeling nauseous as soon as I get up". Tanaji Sawant's remarks sharp reaction from the Nationalist Congress Party. NCP spokesperson and Member of Legislative Council (MLC) Amol Mitkari condemned Sawant's remark and asked whether it was the responsibility of only his party to keep the alliance intact. "We are quite only to maintain the

coalition dharma. It is only the chief minister who can treat his nausea," the NCP leader said. Speaking at an event, Tanaji Sawant had said, "I am a



Shiv Sainik. It is true that in our lives, we have never gotten along with the Congress or the NCP. It's like an allergic reaction, where just the mere presence causes discomfort and nausea. The ideologies are completely different, and therefore, it

is not possible to be in agreement with them". He went on to add, "Even when I sit together in the cabinet with NCP chief Ajit Pawar, as soon as I step outside, I feel nauseous. It is something that cannot be tolerated, and at the age of 60, it is not something that cannot be changed. We are committed to our principles".

Tanaji Sawant's recent remarks have sparked concerns of a significant dispute within the Maha Vikas Aghadi coalition. This isn't the first time Tanaji Sawant has been at the center of controversy. Last year, a video surfaced showing him allegedly pressuring a senior police officer in Dharashiv (Osmanabad) district to transfer a police inspector, causing widespread debate and criticism.

BJP 'forcing' Chief Secretary to quit, appoint Eknath Shinde aide: Aaditya Thackeray

Mumbai: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Thursday slammed the Maharashtra government over reports on removing the state's first woman Chief Secretary with someone with the backing of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and invoked President Droupadi Murmu's recent statement on women's safety while speaking about the rape-murder of a trainee doctor in Kolkata. Thackeray's reaction came after Maharashtra Congress leader Sachin Sawant shared local reports that claimed that Chief Secretary Sujata Saunik could be replaced with former Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) chief Iqbal Singh Chahal, who was recently appointed Additional Chief Secretary (Home), and facing corruption allegations. "Just as the President of India, Murmuji, speaks about countering the mindset that sees women as 'less powerful, less capable', reports state that the BJP-Mindhe



government in Maharashtra is working on making Chief Secretary Sujata Saunik ji resign even before her tenure ends, to accommodate one of their favorites who can help BJP loot Maharashtra," Thackeray tweeted.

"What a shame! Why should she resign before her tenure ends? Only because the illegal Chief Minister and BJP want their man who can give contracts to their ladka (male) contractors? This is the same mindhe-BJP mindset that tries to lure women votes through Ladki Bahin, but

has cabinet ministers who have been accused of crimes against women," he alleged. Earlier, Sawant alleged that a reported move was being made to appoint Saunik as the state election commissioner and pressure her to make way for Chahal in her place. He questioned whether this was being done to facilitate Chahal's appointment as the Chief Minister with the help of a confidant of Shinde. Notably, Chahal has been embroiled in several scams, including the alleged irregularities in contracts for Covid care centres during the pandemic. His recent appointment as the Additional Chief Secretary (Home) in the state government snowballed into a controversy, with the Opposition slamming the move. Sawant also cited the transfer of IAS officer V Radha from the agriculture department due to alleged disagreements with Agriculture Minister Dhananjay Munde, who belongs to the Ajit Pawar faction of the NCP, which is a part of the Shinde-led government. His

allegations came against the backdrop of the post of the Maharashtra Election Commission that will become vacant following the completion of five years by retired IAS officer UPS Madan. For the new commissioner, the names of retired IAS officers Manoj Saunik (Sujata's husband), Nitin Kareer and Shrikant Deshpande, and serving IAS officers Rajiv Jalota and Rajgopal Deora are doing the rounds. According to sources, Saunik is reportedly not very interested and has not yet applied for the post of state election commissioner.

Saunik, a 1987 IAS officer, became the first woman Chief Secretary of the state on June 30 and her term is till May 31, 2025, when she will turn 60. If she is appointed as the state election commissioner, she will get a term of five years. Born on June 15, 1965, Saunik is a resident of Haryana. Her husband, Manoj Saunik, is a resident of Bihar and both are IAS officers of the same batch. Manoj Saunik earlier served as the Maharashtra Chief Secretary.

Rights body's notice to Kolkata cops over 'barbaric' action on Nabanna protesters

New Delhi: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Friday issued a notice to Kolkata Police seeking a report on the "barbaric" and "brutal" assault on the protesters during the 'Nabanna Abhijan' rallies. In its notice, issued to the Kolkata Police Commissioner, the human rights body has sought an "action taken" report in 14 days. On August 27, the 'Nabanna Abhijan' march was called demanding justice for the 31-year-old trainee doctor, capital punishment for the culprit, and the resignation of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Large-scale violence was reported in Kolkata



and adjacent Howrah during the 'Nabanna Abhijan' protest march after protestors, aiming to reach the West Bengal state secretariat, Nabanna, fought pitched battles with the police at multiple stoppage points. The violence, which lasted for nearly four hours, led to several injuries on both sides, with senior police officers and women protestors among those who were hurt.

After the protest, more than 200 people were arrested from across the state by the police.

Police resorted to large-scale lathi-charge, unleashed water cannons and lobbed tear gas shells to disperse the aggressive crowd who poured in from multiple converging points at Nabanna. The 'Nabanna Abhijan' call was given by an unregistered student body 'Paschim Banga Chhatra Samaj' and a dissident state government employees' platform 'Sangrami Joutha Mancha' who demanded the resignation of state Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee over the alleged rape-murder of a medic at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital on August 9.

NEWS BOX

Sophie Devine to resign as New Zealand T20I skipper after Women's T20 World Cup



New Delhi. Sophie Devine will step down as the New Zealand T20I skipper after the upcoming T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The 34-year-old all-rounder has led the White Ferns in 56 T20Is with 25 wins, 28 losses and one tied game.

"I'm very proud to have had the privilege to captain the White Ferns in both formats. With captaincy comes an additional workload that, while I've enjoyed taking on, can also be challenging at times," Devine said.

Devine, however, will continue leading in ODIs with the 50-over World Cup scheduled to take place next year on Indian soil.

"I'm not ready to give up ODI captaincy just yet. But I won't be around forever, so I think stepping away from captaining one format at a time gives the next leaders time to find their feet," Devine added.

Devine recently played for Birmingham Phoenix in the Hundred Women's competition. She played six games in which she scored 117 runs with a top score of 37 and could not pick up a wicket from 13 overs.

ENG vs SL: Joe Root remembers Graham Thorpe after record-leaving ton at Lord's

New Delhi. Star England batter Joe Root dedicated his record-breaking innings to late Graham Thorpe on Day 1 of the second Test against Sri Lanka at Lord's. Notably, Root scored a phenomenal 143 (206) to rescue England from early trouble after they were at 82/3 after being put in to bat first.

From there on, the 33-year-old stitched crucial partnerships with Harry Brook (33) and Gus Atkinson (74) to help his team reach a good score. Following his innings, Root remembered his long-term batting mentor and former England cricketer Graham Thorpe who died earlier this month.



England, took his own life earlier this month after a prolonged battle with anxiety. To honour the former batter, Root pointed out to the skies after completing his 33rd Test hundred. Speaking about the moment after the game, the Yorkshire-born cricketer recalled Thorpe's contributions in his career stressing upon the fact that he "wouldn't be here without him".

Notably, Thorpe also pushed for Root's selection in the England squad for the India tour in 2012 where he went on to make his debut in the fourth Test in Nagpur and scored a brilliant 73. Meanwhile, Root equaled Alastair Cook's record of scoring most Test hundreds for England levelling the former England captain with 33 centuries.

Tabraiz Shamsi slammed for poking fun at Suryakumar Yadav's T20 WC final catch

South Africa spinner Tabraiz Shamsi was slammed by fans for poking fun at Suryakumar Yadav's incredible catch from the T20 World Cup 2024 final.

New Delhi. South Africa spinner Tabraiz Shamsi was slammed by fans for poking fun at Suryakumar Yadav's iconic catch from the T20 World Cup 2024 final. Notably, the India cricketer took a phenomenal catch in the last over of the thrilling final to dismiss dangerous David Miller and turn the game in India's favour.



boundary. However, the batters quickly run to check its legitimacy and use a rope to check whether he stepped onto the virtual boundary. After a prolonged inspection, it was found out that the catch was not clear hence the batters survived. Giving his take on the hilarious video, Shamsi made a light

remark saying that the method should've been used to check Suryakumar Yadav's catch which may have resulted in the decision in their favour. "If they used this method to check the catch in the world cup final maybe it would have

been given not out," wrote Shamsi on his X account. However, the comment didn't go down well with fans who slammed Shamsi for questioning the legitimacy of Suryakumar's catch. As a result, the wrist spinner had to clarify that he was joking.

India's incredible comeback in T20 World Cup final

Coming back to the final, South Africa required 16 runs to win off the last six balls with David Miller at the crease. However, the southpaw hit a full toss from Hardik Pandya towards long off where Suryakumar Yadav showed great presence of mind to catch and quickly get rid of the ball before crossing the boundary and coming inside the boundary to catch it again.

PAK vs BAN: Ramiz Raja comes out in support of Babar Azam amid poor form

New Delhi. Former Pakistan cricketer and PCB (Pakistan Cricket Board) Chairman Ramiz Raja has come out in support of star batter Babar Azam who's experiencing poor form in recent times. Notably, Pakistan suffered a shocking 10-wicket loss against Bangladesh in the first Test at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi.



Babar couldn't do much to save his team from a loss registering scores of 0 and 22. The former Pakistan captain was almost dismissed for a duck in the second innings as well but was given a reprieve by Litton Das. However, that didn't help Pakistan's cause as they succumbed to their maiden Test defeat against Bangladesh. Following their loss, there has been widespread criticism of Babar owing to his poor form.

problem with anything except the form of Babar Azam. Unfortunately, what happens is when you lose a match and you have not scored runs and if you are Babar Azam, then you become a headline - How did we lose? What did he do? What was his contribution? And then this is the era of social media. Anybody can criticize and ridicule anyone,

this should be discouraged as much as possible," Ramiz said on his YouTube channel. Babar has been a big player in all three formats: Ramiz Raja. Further speaking ahead, Raja called Babar a stalwart of all three formats. "Cricket is in our blood but don't know for how long if we continue to lose matches like this in Test cricket. Fan following increases with wins and fans identify themselves with success stories.

Meet Botic van de Zanschulp, the man who stunned Carlos Alcaraz at US Open 2024

New Delhi. Botic van de Zanschulp of the Netherlands had a dream day after he handed World No.3 Carlos Alcaraz a shock exit from the US Open 2024. Alcaraz, who was one of the strongest contenders to lift the men's singles title, could not go beyond the second round.

session on Arthur Ashe. The crowd was amazing. Thank you for that. Unbelievable night," van de Zanschulp said after the match. "I got a lot of confidence from the



advertisement On Thursday, it took Van de Zanschulp an hour and 19 minutes to beat the 21-year-old Alcaraz 6-1, 7-5, 6-4 at Arthur Ashe Stadium. Before their clash in the hard-court major, the Dutchman was 0-2 down against the Spaniard on the head-to-head count. In fact, he had not won a single set, going down in straight sets both times.

title 2021 was the year when Van de Zanschulp started taking baby steps after he qualified for the main draw of a Grand Slam for the first time in the Australian Open. In the same year, he reached the quarters of the US Open where he took a set off Medvedev, although he lost the match 3-6, 0-6, 6-4, 5-7 at the Arthur Ashe Stadium. In 2022, van de Zanschulp reached the third rounds of the Australian Open and French Open, where he lost to Medvedev and Rafael Nadal respectively.

last match. I played really solid the last match. From point 1 I believed I could have a chance. You see how it sometimes turns out," Van de Zanschulp added. Botic van de Zanschulp looking for his maiden singles



But I lost in the 2nd round so it's a little rough. But also it's been fun playing a lot of tournaments. It's been a commitment for sure. I've been able to go to different cities that I hadn't been to before," Osaka said. "It's tough because I take these losses personally. This is a dramatic word... but I feel like my heart dies every time I lose. It sucks a lot. But I've been trying to be more mature and learn and talk more about them," Osaka added. Osaka made her return to Grand Slams earlier this year when she lost to France's Caroline Garcia in the opening round of the Australian Open. In the French Open, she ran Swiatek close and fetched a match point, but the latter won the second-round match to advance. Osaka also faltered at Wimbledon, where she could not go beyond the second round.

Burnt-out Carlos Alcaraz calls out 'tight scheduling' after shock US Open exit

Carlos Alcaraz highlighted the tight scheduling of the tennis calendar after his shocking second-round exit from the US Open 2024 after loss to Botic van de Zandschulp.

New Delhi. Carlos Alcaraz called out the tight scheduling of the Tennis calendar after his shocking exit from second round of the US Open 2024. Notably, the Spaniard was stunned by Botic van de Zandschulp who beat him in three straight sets on Friday, August 30 at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

title favourites in the second round itself. Having won back-to-back Grand Slam titles earlier this year by clinching titles at Roland Garros and Wimbledon, no one expected Alcaraz to bow out this early at Flushing Meadows. Following his loss, the 2022 US Open winner spoke about the tight scheduling of the tournaments one after the other. The 21-year-old mentioned the fact that he wasn't at his best heading into the tournament and highlighting his demands for longer breaks ahead of big events.



as I thought I was going to come with," said Alcaraz after the game. "But I don't want to use that as an excuse. But it's so tight. I'm a player who needs more days or more of a break coming into the big tournaments and important ones. I have to think about it and learn about it. Let's see," he added. I thought

he would give me more free points: Alcaraz. Further speaking ahead, Alcaraz praised Van de Zandschulp for his gameplay and rued not being able to match his level as the game progressed. "I don't know what to say right now. First of all he played great. He played really good tennis. I thought he would give me more free points. He didn't make a lot of mistakes I thought he was going to make... it was confusing a bit. I didn't know how to manage or deal with it. I couldn't increase my level. I think my level stayed the same the whole match. It wasn't enough to do it or to give myself the chance to get into the match or try to give myself chances," he further said. Meanwhile, the Dutchman earned the highest-ranked victory of his career. The World No 74 will next face 25th seed Jack Draper in the third round Saturday.



Karisma Kapoor

Was 1st Choice For Twinkle Khanna's Role In SRK's Baadshah Says Producer: 'She Couldn't...'

Shah Rukh Khan and Twinkle Khanna starrer Baadshah clocked 25 years recently. The film fast-tracked Shah Rukh Khan's journey to superstardom and remains one of Twinkle Khanna's most popular screen appearances. However, producer Ratan Jain has revealed that instead of Twinkle Khanna, Karisma Kapoor was the first choice to play the lead. In an interview with Bollywood Hungama, Ratan Jain said, "Earlier, we had considered Karisma Kapoor. She was almost finalised but then for some reason, she couldn't come on board. Then we looked for a few options. Finally, we locked Twinkle Khanna."

However, in a 2019 interview with the publication, Abbas-Mustan were asked if reports of Shilpa Shetty, Karisma Kapoor, Anupama Verma, Manisha Koirala being approached for the role of Seema (played by Twinkle Khanna) were true. They had said, "Even this is not true. Twinkle and Deepshikha were the only actors approached for their respective parts. Even Johny Lever, Amr Puri, Rakhee Gulzar etc were original choices." The director duo had also addressed reports of Akshay Kumar being considered for Shah Rukh Khan's role. "Not at all. Shah Rukh was always the first choice," they had clarified.

They added, "Shah Rukh provided a lot of inputs. Woh kamaal ke actor hain! Whether it's in humour or serious scenes, he's too good. Some of the card tricks were actually done by him, after a magician on the set taught him. No graphics or VFX were used. People still see the film and wonder how he managed to do it!" Producer Ratan Jain also opened up about the lack of technology and said, "There was no VFX like it is now. But we did have some effects. Honestly, in some scenes, we were not very happy with the effects. But we had to compromise. If there was VFX in those times, we could have done a lot more."

Baadshah featured Shah Rukh Khan as a detective, with gadgets and technology like shoes which allowed him to climb walls. The film remains one of Shah Rukh Khan's most popular works. However, when the film was first released, it did not perform well at the box office; but the film managed to amass a cult following much later



Tara Sutaria

Goes Bold in Chic Oversized Blazer and Mini Skirt on Latest Outing

Tara Sutaria stepped out in style during a recent night out in Bandra, Mumbai, and her fashion choices left quite an impression. Captured by the paparazzi, Tara opted for an effortlessly chic look, donning an oversized beige blazer with puffed sleeves that featured a deep V-neckline, adding a touch of allure to her outfit. She paired the blazer with a black mini skirt, showcasing her toned legs and bringing a contemporary edge to her ensemble. Accessorising the look, Tara carried a sleek black Gucci handbag with bamboo handles, which added a touch of luxury and complemented her outfit perfectly. Her black pointed-toe pumps matched her skirt, tying the entire look together. With her hair pulled back



into a sleek bun and her makeup kept minimal with a nude lip shade, Tara's look was all about glamour. As she exited the restaurant, Tara engaged briefly with her driver, instructing him with a casual, "Shukla ji, thoda aage," as she prepared to leave. The video shared by Voompla on Instagram quickly garnered attention, with fans praising her chic sense of style. This appearance comes amidst buzz about Tara's upcoming projects. There are strong rumours that Tara has been cast in Yash's much-anticipated film, Toxic. While the actress has previously dismissed reports of playing a significant role in the film, recent hints from her hairstylist's Instagram story suggest otherwise. The story, tagged with "toxic" and "team Tara," was geo-tagged to Bangalore, sparking speculation among fans and media alike. Set in the dark world of the drug mafia, Toxic is expected to be a high-octane thriller with an ensemble cast, including Nayanthara, Kiara Advani, and Huma Qureshi. Tara's association with this film, if confirmed, would add another feather to her cap, marking her foray into a more intense, action-packed genre.

Parvathy Calls Mohanlal's AMMA Resignation 'Cowardly' Amid Malayalam Cinema Chaos: 'No One Gives a Damn...'



Actor Parvathy Thiruvothu has lashed out at the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) committee for their decision of collective resignation. Parvathy, who is also the founding member of Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), recently questioned AMMA's move and called them cowards. Even though the actress did not name Mohanlal, she criticised the decision and argued that it was an attempt to avoid accountability. "The first reaction I had when I heard the news about this collective resignation was, 'how cowardly.' How cowardly of them to step away from a position where they are accountable to speak to the media. That's an immediate cop-out. With this, the onus has again fallen on women to take the conversations and debates forward. It would have been amazing if they had shown at least the intention to work with the state government and stakeholders to figure a way out," Parvathy told journalist Barkha Dutt on her YouTube channel.

Parvathy further expressed her anger and raised several important questions. "This is the same executive committee that welcomed the prime accused in the 2017 sexual assault case back into its fold when the case was still going on. This is the same executive committee that claimed none of these things actually existed until the allegations against them came out. Also, it was very careless of the government to make statements like, 'If the women have complaints, they should just file an FIR and come up with names.' Again the onus is put on women to name and shame and take the brunt of it after that. My question's always been, what is the proof of justice you can show for you to demand that we must name and shame (the perpetrators)? After that, what happens to us, our careers, lives, legal fees and mental health issues? No one gives a damn about that. Why, again and again, the onus is put on the women to take care of the problems that are not caused by us?" she said.

Salman Khan Hugs Young Fan Who Touched His Feet at Ganesh Chaturthi Event, Video Goes Viral | Watch



Salman Khan, the beloved superstar known for his immense global fanbase, is set to dazzle audiences with his upcoming film, Sikandar, directed by AR Murugadoss. While Salman's charisma is well-known on-screen, his off-screen interactions also capture hearts. The actor's fondness for children is particularly endearing, and he recently demonstrated this at a Ganesh Chaturthi event in Mumbai. In a heartwarming video that has taken Instagram by storm, Salman Khan is seen on stage at the Ganesh Chaturthi celebration, dressed casually in a blue tee and blue jeans. As a young fan approaches him, Salman opens his arms wide, welcoming the child with a warm hug. The fan, who appears to be holding a sketch of Salman, receives an autograph from the actor. The emotional moment culminates with the young boy touching Salman's feet. The video quickly went viral, with fans pouring in their admiration and praise for Salman's kind gesture. Comments ranged from expressions of awe to heartfelt declarations of appreciation. One fan described the moment as "beautiful" with a red heart emoji, while another praised Salman as a "true inspiration."

Amid the celebrations, Salman Khan was also spotted reuniting with Sonali Bendre, marking a poignant moment as it was their first public appearance together since the release of Hum Saath-Saath Hain 25 years ago. Despite facing discomfort from a rib injury, Salman's enthusiasm was commendable. He even promoted eco-friendly Ganesha idols and energetically performed to the song "Jalwa" from his film Wanted. Produced by Sajid Nadiadwala, Sikandar is set for release on Eid 2025. The film will also feature Rashmika Mandanna, Suniel Shetty, and other notable actors, promising an exciting cinematic experience.