



PROHIBITION ORDERED

WHEN VILLAGES VOTE TO BAN LIQUOR SHOPS



SRI LANKA & RAMAYANA



Transcending Boundaries

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FILMS, POLITICS & NARCOTICS THE TAMILNADU STORY



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SIMILAR TO

MALDIVES



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EDITORIAL

The Tamil film industry has produced a lot of legendary actors as well as politicians. But it was never found using drug money to finance its movies. Now a DMK politician has been charged with trafficking narcotics worth thousands of crores.

DMK has dismissed him from the party and has even gone to the extent of accusing him of damaging the party's reputation. That means the party has understood that he was trafficking drugs.

Sadiq perhaps could not believe that any criminal activity cannot be covered up for long.

He was caught in Rajasthan after a long manhunt.

This edition also carries an interesting article as to how Sri Lanka has managed to protect the places where the events narrated in epic Ramayana took place. What is far more interesting is that Sri Lanka can earn thousands of crores in tourism revenue if it starts attracting Hindu tourists to its historical sites.

Meanwhile Rahul Gandhi is facing the prospect of losing election in Wayanad, which he won last time by a large margin. Communist party in Kerala has fielded its own candidate against Rahul in violation of alliance agreement.

There is also an informative article about a startup program for women in the country. Lakpathi Didi will turn out to be a huge success if educated women in the country make the most of it.

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Editor: **P. S. Prakash**
Resident Editor: **Prathima G. Kulkarni**
✉ editoraseema@gmail.com

Design: **Ashwath Krishna**

Business Head
Chandrakant Patil ☎ 8530941088
✉ aseemaadvertise@gmail.com

Office Head
Jayavanth ☎ 9686113537

Mentor: **Bhuvanish Sheth**
✉ bhuvan.aseemagoa@gmail.com

Advertise & Circulation Executive
Vikas Patil ☎ 9049958797
✉ vikaspatillic475@gmail.com

Dr. Sunil G. Gurav ☎ 8421647603
✉ aseemamaharashtra@gmail.com
Maharashtra Executive

HEAD OFFICE

Aseema Monthly, HOSADIGANTHA
"MICASA", 2nd Floor, Opp.to TATA Show Room
Near KSRTC Bus Stand, Mangalore-575003

GOA OFFICE

ASEEMA MONTHLY SM-112,
Nova Cidade Complex, Near Mall De Goa,
Alto Porvorim, North Goa 403 521
✉ aseemagoa@gmail.com ☎ 0832 6747347

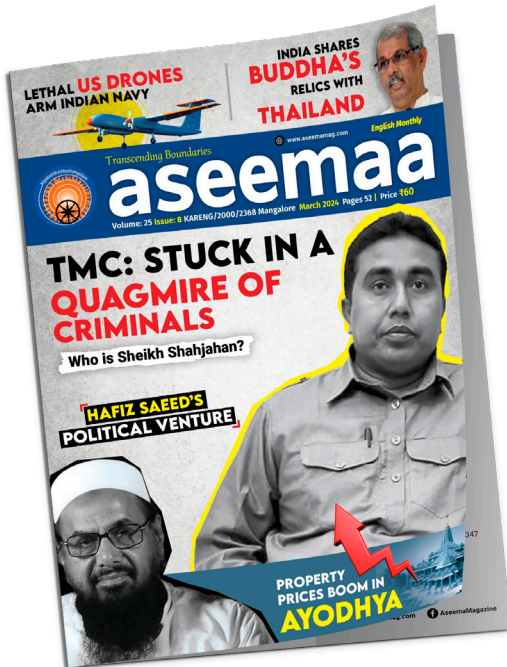
BENGALURU OFFICE

ASEEMA MONTHLY, Vikrama Building,
No. 106, 5th main Road, Chamarajpet,
Bengaluru – 560 018

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aseema Readers opinion



Craving a deeper understanding of modern India? Look no further than Aseema Magazine. This publication dives into political, economic, and foreign affairs, offering insightful analysis on the issues shaping this dynamic nation.

Aseema goes beyond basic reporting. They provide in-depth analysis, empowering readers to form their own informed opinions. Articles explore the motivations behind political decisions and delve into the long-term consequences. They don't shy away from complex issues, tackling tough subjects like COVID-19's impact and emerging issues such as deep seabed mining. Well-researched and engagingly written, Aseema Magazine is a must-read for anyone wanting to stay informed about contemporary India.

| **Vaideeshwari Roshan**
Associate Manager

As a reader always lagging behind on understanding international issues, Aseema provides expansive articles detailing relevant history before elaborating on specific topics of the issue. The wide range of topics covered from polity to social reforms as well as history helps in getting up to date with all important topics of the day. The articles have a crisp and to-the-point nature making it an immersive read.

Looking forward to the next issue!

| **Roshan Raghuram**
Consultant



share your opinion: editoraseema@gmail.com



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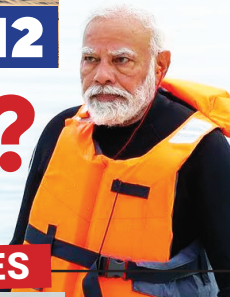
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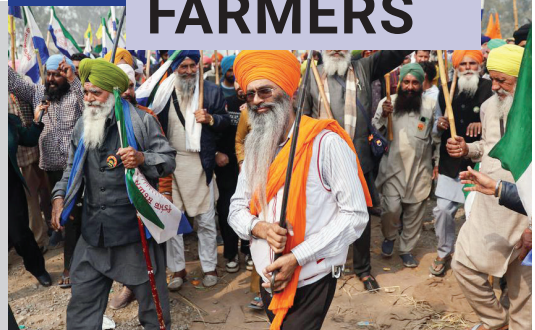
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The forest surrounds the eastern face of the Sigiriya rock.

Sri Lanka has protected all the historical sites mentioned in epic Ramayana. There are temples for goddess Sita and Hanuman. You can still take a walk around Ashoka Vana, where Sita was held captive by Ravana.

📍 NV Kamath

The Ramayana holds deep significance for the people of Sri Lanka as well. Respect for Rama, Sita, and Hanuman is evident throughout the country. Several temples dedicated to these figures stand as testaments to this reverence. Daily pujas (prayers) are performed in these temples, reflecting the devotion these characters inspire. One such temple, dedicated to Sita, is believed to mark the site of her captivity by Ravana.



SRI LANKA RAMAYANA

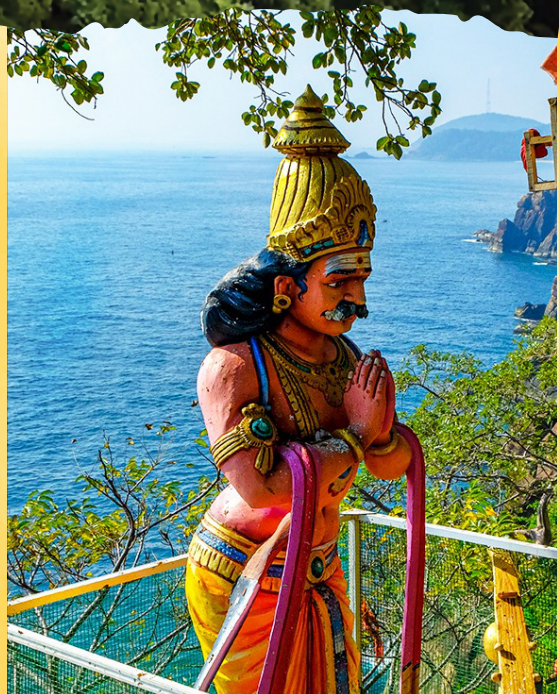


This rich cultural heritage, intertwined with the Ramayana, fuels the interest in exploring historical places in Sri Lanka associated with the epic. Understanding these locations provides valuable insight into the story's interpretation and its lasting influence on the region.

Lord Rama, the revered king of Ayodhya in India, and Ravana, the powerful ruler of Lanka (present-day Sri Lanka), are central figures in the epic Ramayana. While Rama is an idol for Indians, known for his righteousness, Ravana was a devotee of Shiva and a respected leader in his own land.

The Ramayana narrates a great war, but it transcends the concept of mere victory or defeat. It reflects the values that have shaped these neighboring countries for centuries. Despite the conflict, the relationship between India and Sri Lanka has strengthened over time.

After centuries of longing, millions of Indians witnessed the dream of a temple in Ram Janmabhoomi come true. This momentous occasion signifies a renewed connection to India's rich cultural heritage, a legacy that flows from the





Sita matha court - Kotuwa - Gurulupotha

Sita Mata, known for her profound connection with nature, reveled in the abundance of natural resources. The presence of the Ashoka tree in Ashoka Vatika, where Sita was held captive, echoes Valmiki's vivid descriptions. Ravana held her hostage in this lush and enchanting forest in an attempt to win her favor.

Ramayana to the present day. The epic is not just a story; it's a biography of Lord Rama and an integral part of the history of the Indian subcontinent, encompassing present-day India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

Ayodhya, in modern-day India, is the epic's center. While Sita, Rama's wife, finds her roots in Janakpur (Nepal), the antagonist Ravana hails from Sri Lanka. The Ramayana's narrative meticulously details locations visited by Rama during his exile and search for Sita, many of which remain significant historical sites today. Places like Ayodhya, Chitrakoota, Nashik, Bhadrachalam, Lepakshi, Rishyamooka Parvata, Kishkindha, Rameswaram, Ramanathapuram, and Rama Setu all stand as testaments to the enduring legacy of the Ramayana.

Sita Kotua: A Place Steeped in Legend

The name "Sita Kotua" translates to "Sita's Fort" and local tradition suggests it was once a palace of Ravana, king of Lanka, built for his wife Mandodari. This captivating location, nestled in Sri Lanka's Central Province, boasts stunning waterfalls, steaming vents, and diverse

flora and fauna. Some believe this very site was the location of Ravana's legendary city. Today, the archaeological site at Gurulupotha, near Hasalaka, is a popular destination for those interested in Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage.

Sri Lankan interpretations of the Ramayana offer unique perspectives on the epic. According to some versions, Gurulupotha, which translates to "place of bird parts," was where Ravana maintained a repair station for his mythical flying machine, Pushpaka Vimana. This fantastical vehicle, often depicted as resembling a giant peacock ("Dhandu Monara" in Sinhala), played a significant role in the Ramayana. Locals say Sita was held captive here for a time before being moved to the Ashoka Vatika gardens.

Ashoka Vana

The Ramayana narrates the abduction of Sita by Ravana and her subsequent captivity in Ashoka Vatika (Vana). This Vana is preserved even to this day, and is known as Hakgala Botanical Garden. Local tradition holds that Sita resided here for eleven months. A temple dedicated to Sita now stands beside a picturesque stream, believed to be on the location of the Ashoka Vatika.

Interestingly, some years ago, granite idols of Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita were reportedly unearthed within the Ashoka Vatika area. Believed to be Swayambhu (self-manifested) idols, they now reside within the temple complex. The temple architecture reflects a style similar to those found in Tamil Nadu.

Nestled amidst the verdant mountains roughly five kilometers from Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka's "City of Lights," lies the popular Sita Amman Temple. This captivating location, shrouded in dense green forests, is believed to be linked to Sita's captivity during the Ramayana era.

Local tradition suggests Sita may have been held in the Ishtripur cave here, a location known for its challenging darkness. Several surrounding caves are also associated with the story. One such cave, with its captivating light filtering

The Ramayana stands as a monumental historical narrative connecting India and Sri Lanka. Various sites in Sri Lanka, such as Sita Kotua and Ashoka Vana, provide insights into the events depicted in the Ramayana. Exploring these locations facilitates a deeper understanding of the country's heritage and roots.

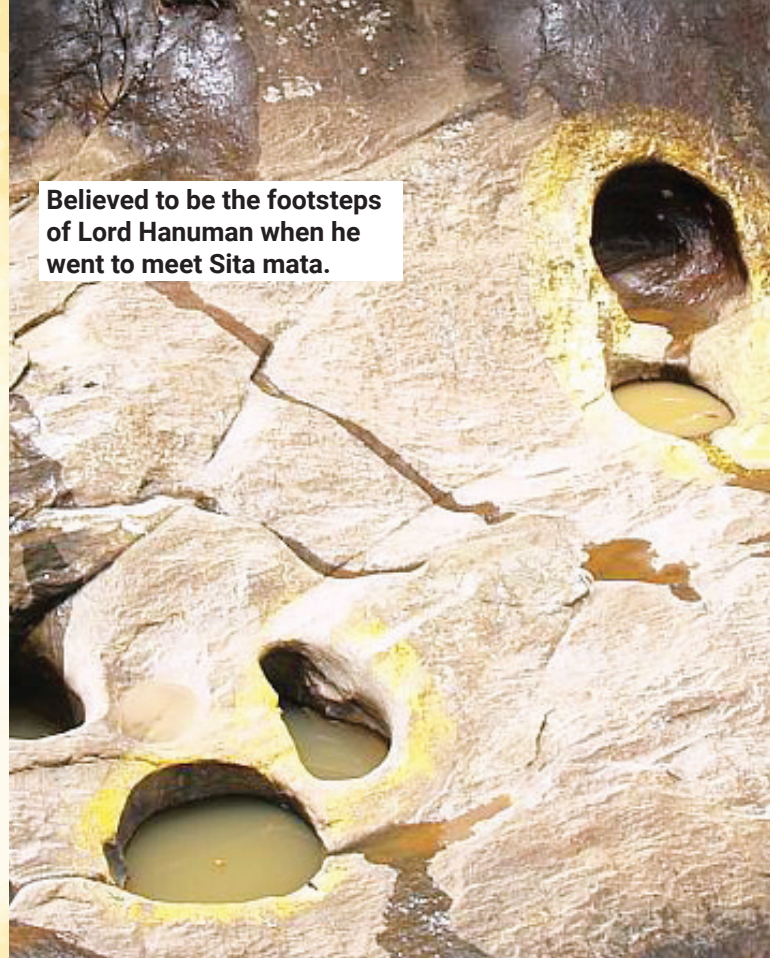
through, might explain the origin of the name "Nuwara Eliya," translating to "City of Lights." Visitors to the site can explore these limestone caves, some adorned with stone carvings and featuring intriguing tunnels.

Echoes of the Ramayana

The presence of Ashoka trees within the temple complex resonates with Valmiki's description of Ashoka Vatika. Legends suggest Ravana, aware of Sita's affinity for nature, used this beautiful forested area to gain her favor. The temple attracts devotees not just from Sri Lanka and India, but also from across the globe.

This location is revered as the potential meeting point between Sita and Hanuman, the loyal emissary of Lord Rama. Indentation marks on nearby rocks are believed to be Hanuman's footprints, further strengthening the connection to the Ramayana narrative. A dedicated rock formation, "Hanuman Padam," adds to the site's significance. The temple itself enshrines idols of both Sita and Hanuman. The surrounding mountainous landscape, veiled in emerald green mist, offers a breathtaking panorama for nature enthusiasts. Many visitors report a sense of positive energy within the temple grounds, further enriching the spiritual experience.

According to some interpretations of the Ramayana, Hanuman revealed his true, cosmic form to Sita at this very location, solidifying her faith in his mission as Rama's envoy. The nearby



stream, revered as the "Sacred Ganga of Sita," adds another layer of significance, believed to be the site where Sita bathed during her time here.

Bhakta Hanuman Kovil: A Spiritual Abode

The Bhakta Hanuman Kovil, a temple dedicated to Lord Hanuman, stands within the grounds of the Chinmaya Mission in Ramboda, Sri Lanka. Located at an elevation of approximately 3200 feet, Ramboda boasts a captivating 110-meter waterfall, adding to its scenic charm.

Ramboda lies within Sri Lanka's Central Province, roughly 35 kilometers from Nuwara Eliya. The region is predominantly Tamil, with families working in the surrounding tea plantations for generations. The area itself is a haven for nature lovers, brimming with diverse flora and fauna. Spectacular mist formations, cascading waterfalls, and flowing rivers create a truly breathtaking landscape. The serene and tranquil atmosphere makes Ramboda an ideal location for relaxation and meditation, perhaps echoing the legend of Hanuman seeking respite here.

Seetha Amman Kovil



Local tradition suggests that Ramboda served as a resting point for Rama's monkey army during the epic battle with Ravana. The imposing Ravana Boda mountain, overlooking the temple, is believed to have been Ravana's army camp. A nearby pond, known as Sita Kol, is said to have been formed by Mother Sita's tears. The Mahawali Ganga river acts as a natural border between Ramboda and Ravana Boda. Legends claim that the climactic battle between

Rama and Ravana unfolded here. Interestingly, the peak ridge of Ravana Boda resembles a reclining Hanuman with folded arms.

Konda Kattu Gala (Ishtripur)

Konda Kattu Gala, located in Sri Lanka's Welimada region, translates to "Hair Clip Rock." Local lore suggests this site, also known as Ishtripur ("Place for Women"), is where Ravana held Sita captive after Hanuman's arrival. A unique rock formation here is believed to be where Sita clipped her hair after bathing, and a nearby pond is said to have been used by her for bathing.

Manavari Ramalingam

Manavari Ramalingam, situated in Sri Lanka's North Western Province, is the first of five locations where Rama is believed to have established a Shiva Lingam. The story goes that Rama, seeking atonement for killing Ravana, a Brahmin, was directed by Shiva to install and worship Shiva Lingams. The Shivalinga here, named "Ramalingam" after Rama, is unique as one of the few in India outside Rameshwaram to bear Rama's name.

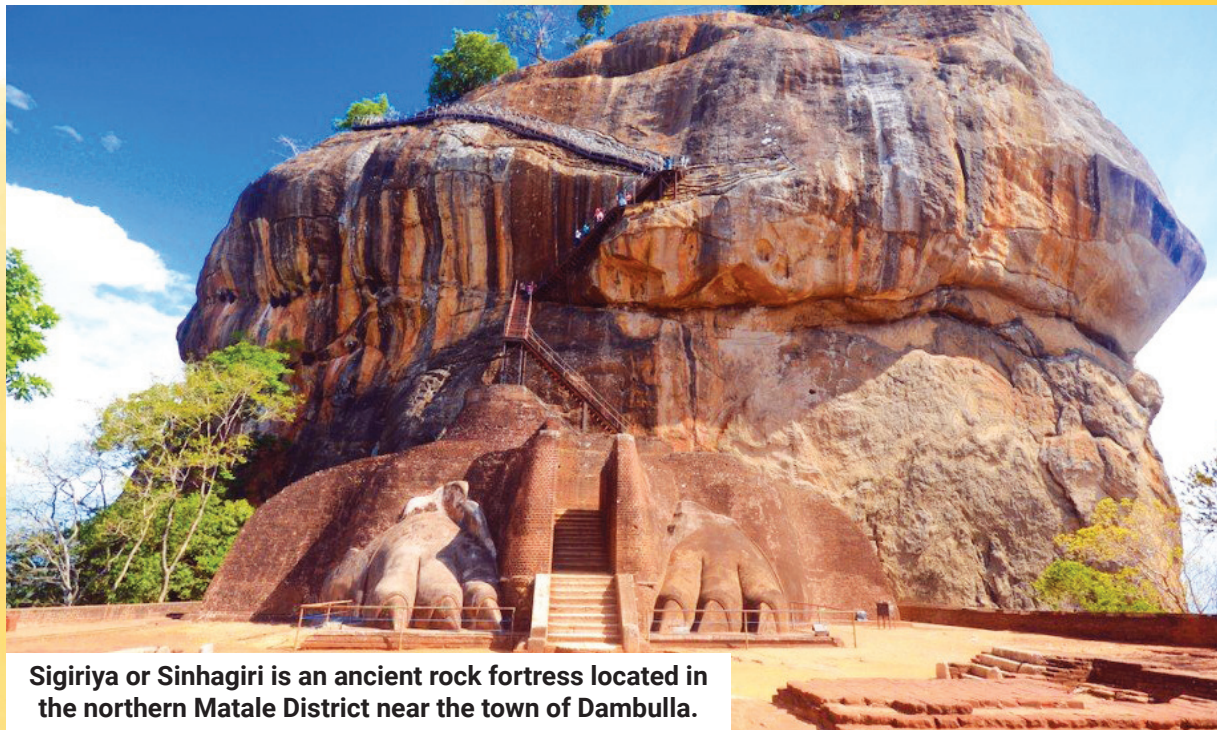
Mannar, in Sri Lanka's northern province,



is believed to be the landing point for Rama's army after crossing the sea using the Rama Setu bridge constructed by the monkeys. Limestone formations reminiscent of the bridge described in the Ramayana are still visible along the seashore. The Tiruketeswaram temple here is said to have been built by Ravana's father-in-law, Mayasura, and enshrines a Shivalinga believed to be established by Maharishi Brighu. Following Shiva's advice, Rama is said to have erected a third Shivalinga here as penance for killing Ravana.

Munneswaram Temple

The Munneswaram Temple in Chilaw is one of the five Shiva temples associated with the Ramayana in Sri Lanka. Legend suggests this is where Rama prayed to Lord Shiva for absolution from the sin of killing a Brahmin (Brahmahatya). A Shiva Linga was subsequently installed here, and Rama is believed to have worshipped Lord Shiva.



Sigiriya or Sinhadgiri is an ancient rock fortress located in the northern Matale District near the town of Dambulla.



IS LAKSHADWEEP SIMILAR TO MALDIVES

🕒 **Wing Commander Sudarshan**

Vacations are around the corner and it is almost time that people start yearning to embrace the sun, the sand, and the sea. It is not unusual that we want to experience the enchanting realm where time slows down, and worries dissolve into the horizon.

If the azure waters of the idyllic islets offering a sanctuary of pure bliss and unbridled happiness are beckoning you, then your thoughts must be running to either the Maldives or Lakshadweep. And, if





After Prime Minister Modi's visit, Lakshadweep is drawing thousands of tourists every day. Neighboring Maldives, whose economy is heavily dependent on tourism, is seriously concerned. So the question is whether you can enjoy in Lakshadweep what you could in Maldives?



choosing one of the two is becoming difficult, we've got your back.

While both the Maldives and Lakshadweep are located in the Indian Ocean and have similarities in terms of being island destinations known for their natural beauty, they do not share a common history in the traditional sense and have their own unique characteristic identity. Let's explore what is common and what's different about the two places.

Maldives

The Maldives, an independent island nation, has a distinct history that includes periods of Buddhist rule, Islamic influence, and colonisation by European powers such as Portugal, the Dutch, and Britain. The Maldives gained independence from Britain in 1965 and has since developed its own unique cultural identity and political system. President Ibrahim Nasir is credited with having started tourism in the Maldives in 1972 to diversify the economy and help in his vision of modernising the Maldives.

Ever since the launch of the first resort in the Maldives in 1972, tourism in the Maldives has flourished. Tourism infrastructure in the Maldives started with only two hotels, now – there are more than 100 operational resorts. The unique condition of the Maldives is that one island is one resort, meaning that one hotel occupies the whole island. By doing so, resorts provide more privacy and more luxury for their visitors.

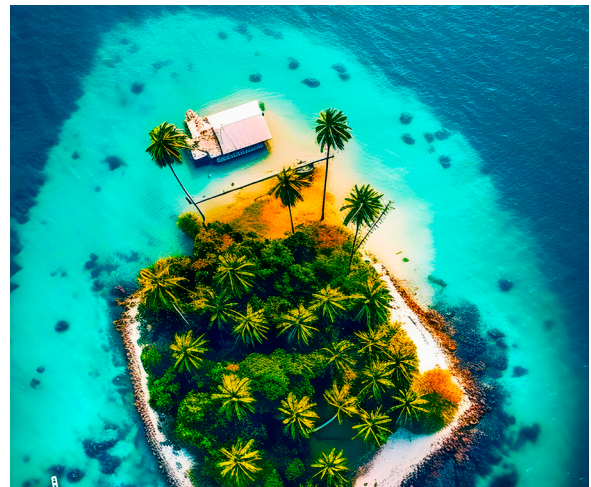


Maldives

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The Maldives are also trying to stay eco-friendly and use more solar energy rather than diesel. The Maldives provide facilities and services, entertainment and telecommunication services, they also provide numerous resorts, hotels, and guest houses. The Maldives, an archipelago of 26 atolls in the Indian Ocean, southwest of Sri Lanka, is renowned for its stunning coral islands and crystal-clear turquoise waters.

Serving as one of the world's top tropical destinations, the Maldives is celebrated for its overwater bungalows, vibrant coral reefs teeming with marine life, and luxurious resorts. Male, the capital, is a bustling city with colourful markets and historical sites. With a strong emphasis on sustainable tourism, the Maldives attracts visitors seeking a luxurious and eco-friendly retreat amid its breathtaking natural



One of the main challenges that are seen is regarding to the tourism as Lakshadweep is not globally known where as Maldives is a major tourist destination for international travelers. Cultural heritage and the history of Lakshadweep need to be made popular in order to attract more tourists.



beauty and warm hospitality.

Lakshadweep

On the other hand, Lakshadweep is a group of islands that form the smallest union territory of India. Its history intertwines with that of India, with influences from the Malabar kingdom of Kerala, Arab traders, and European colonial powers. The islands have been inhabited for centuries, with a predominantly Muslim population and a cultural heritage that reflects Indian and Arab influences. While there may be some cultural and historical connections between the two regions due to their geographical proximity and shared maritime trade routes, their specific histories are distinct.

Nestled just off Kerala's picturesque coastline in the west, the Lakshadweep islands form a radiant gem in the azure waters of the Arabian Sea, north of the Maldives. With its collection of 36 pristine islands, Lakshadweep is a testament to nature's unparalleled artistry and a mosaic of cultural diversity. The region's charm is woven from the translucent waters that reveal a mesmerizing world beneath, adorned with vibrant coral reefs and teeming marine life. Among these islands, Minicoy stands as a majestic sovereign, with its tranquil lagoons, untouched ivory beaches, and a kaleidoscope of

Lakshadweep or Maldives?

The best choice for you depends on your priorities.

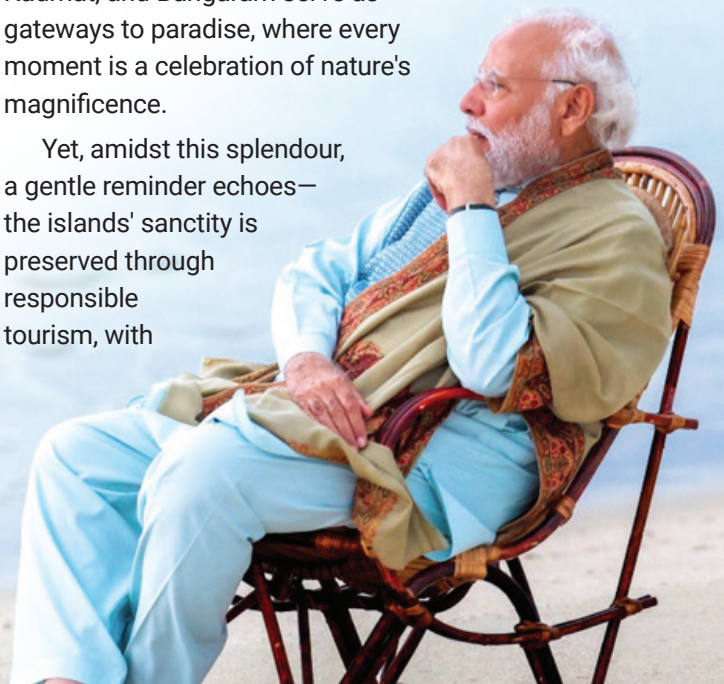
If you are looking for a luxurious, all-inclusive resort experience with plenty of activities, the Maldives may be the better option. If you are on a budget and prefer a more secluded and authentic experience, Lakshadweep could be a perfect fit.

marine wonders—mantas, rays, sea turtles, and dolphins gracefully dance in its crystalline embrace. Agatti, with its welcoming airstrip, beckons travellers to explore its hidden treasures, while Amini pulsates with the vibrant rhythm of local life, fishermen casting their nets amidst the whispers of coconut palms.

Kadmat, Kavaratti, Kiltan, Kalpeni, Andrott, Bitra, Chetlat, and Cheriyam each offer a unique glimpse into Lakshadweep's enchanting

tapestry, inviting travellers to immerse themselves in its untamed beauty. For those fortunate enough to visit, the government's beach resorts in Kavaratti, Kalpeni, Minicoy, Kadmat, and Bangaram serve as gateways to paradise, where every moment is a celebration of nature's magnificence.

Yet, amidst this splendour, a gentle reminder echoes—the islands' sanctity is preserved through responsible tourism, with



special permits granted by the Society for Promotion of Nature Tourism and Sports (SPORTS) ensuring a harmonious coexistence with the natural world, where the rhythm of life beats in harmony with the ebb and flow of the tide.

The Comparison

Lakshadweep and the Maldives, both island chains in the Indian Ocean, offer stunning beaches and turquoise waters. But as tourist destinations, they have some key differences:

Maldives: A global tourist hub, the Maldives boasts luxurious resorts with overwater bungalows, a wide range of restaurants, and various activities. This popularity comes with crowds, especially during peak season.

Lakshadweep: Less developed than the Maldives, Lakshadweep offers a more secluded and pristine experience. Homestays and government-run accommodations are the norm, with fewer restaurants and shops.

Maldives: Luxury comes at a price. Resorts in the Maldives can be very expensive, with limited budget options.

Lakshadweep: Lakshadweep is a much more affordable destination, with homestays and guest houses at a fraction of the cost of Maldivian resorts.

Culture

Maldives: The Maldives has a distinct Maldivian culture, with influences from Arab and Sri Lankan traditions. However, the focus for most tourists is on the resorts and beaches.

Lakshadweep: Lakshadweep offers a unique blend of Indian and Maldivian culture. Tourists can experience the local way of life in traditional fishing villages and mosques.

Activities

Maldives: The Maldives is a haven for water sports enthusiasts, with world-class diving, snorkeling, and surfing.

Lakshadweep: While Lakshadweep also



Lakshadweep is poised for significant development under the plans proposed by the Modi Government, particularly in Kavaratti. A budget of approximately Rs 1150 crores has been allocated for these developmental initiatives.

offers water activities, they are less developed than in the Maldives. However, Lakshadweep offers opportunities for kayaking, canoeing, and exploring uninhabited islands.

Visas

Maldives: Most nationalities require a visa to visit the Maldives, although it is typically obtainable on arrival.

Lakshadweep: Indian citizens do not require a visa to visit Lakshadweep. Foreign tourists need a special permit, which can be a lengthy process.

Developmental Spree

India and the Maldives have been experiencing a diplomatic rift since early 2024. It started after Narendra Modi vacationed on the beaches

VISITOR ARRIVALS

Foreigner Lakshadweep data is updated yearly, averaging

798.000

Person from Dec 1997 to 2022, with 26 observations.

Government's Effort to Boost Lakshadweep's Tourism Future

Looking ahead to 2030, the government envisions Lakshadweep as a thriving and sustainable tourism destination that offers unique experiences while preserving its natural and cultural heritage. This vision encompasses holistic development initiatives focused on infrastructure, connectivity, promotion, and environmental conservation, aimed at unlocking the full potential of Lakshadweep as a jewel in India's tourism crown. With concerted efforts and strategic planning, Lakshadweep can emerge as a

model for responsible tourism that balances economic growth with environmental stewardship, ensuring a brighter future for generations to come. Recently in the southernmost island Minicoy, a second naval base INS Jatayu was inaugurated to provide security to the island. It will develop as a net maritime security provider in the entire Indian Ocean Region. In the future, the dual-use airport and jetties will be constructed to improve the connectivity to Lakshadweep.

of Lakshadweep. This sparked criticism from Maldivian officials, as they interpreted this as an attempt to promote Lakshadweep as a rival tourist destination to the Maldives. This ignited a social media firestorm, with calls for boycotts on both sides.

After this incident, several development projects worth over Rs 1150 crores are in the pipeline in Kavaratti, Lakshadweep, by Modi, underscoring the government's commitment to catalysing growth and prosperity in the region. These projects, spanning various sectors such as technology, energy, water resources, healthcare, and education, signify a comprehensive approach to addressing the diverse needs of the Lakshadweep community.

To support the growing tourism industry, major Indian hotel chains are exploring opportunities in Lakshadweep. Furthermore, the local administration is actively promoting cruise tourism in the picturesque Arabian Sea archipelago. While Lakshadweep holds immense potential as a tourist destination, several challenges must be addressed to realize its full potential as a vibrant tourism hub.

The challenges

Despite its stunning natural beauty, Lakshadweep

remains relatively unknown on the global stage. A concerted effort is needed to promote the islands internationally, showcasing their unique attractions and cultural heritage to attract a wider audience of tourists. Limited connectivity poses a significant barrier to tourism development in Lakshadweep. Improving air and sea connections, including the expansion of airport facilities and the enhancement of maritime infrastructure, is crucial to facilitating easier access for visitors.

As tourist numbers increase, there is a pressing need to develop infrastructure that can accommodate the influx without compromising the delicate ecological balance of the islands. This includes the construction of eco-friendly resorts, the enhancement of transportation networks, and the preservation of natural habitats. Balancing tourism development with environmental conservation is essential for the long-term sustainability of Lakshadweep. Investing in cost-effective measures such as renewable energy initiatives, waste management systems, and sustainable tourism practices can help mitigate the impact of tourism on the environment while ensuring economic benefits for local communities.





jaffer sadiq

FILMS, POLITICS & NARCOTICS THE TAMIL NADU STORY

Jaffer Sadiq looks like
DMK's Sheik Shahajahan

Nobody gave a look at Sadiq when he suddenly grew from a humble perfume salesman to a movie producer. Nor did they bother much when he even became a politician. Truth has finally emerged. Police now say he was in fact selling drugs. Sadiq has become DMK's nightmare as Sheik Shahajahan has become for Mamata's Trinmool Congress.

📍 Balaji Subramanian

Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) Director General (Operations) Gyaneshwar Singh confirmed Sadiq's arrest and stated that he is the kingpin of the India-Australia-New Zealand drug trafficking network. He spearheaded a network that sourced Pseudoephedrine in India and trafficked it to Australia, New Zealand, and Malaysia in the guise of food-grade cargo.

Sadiq's role came to the fore after the NCB raided a large warehouse in west Delhi on February 15 on input from authorities in Australia and New Zealand. The raid yielded 50 kg of pseudoephedrine, with authorities busting an international network involved in the smuggling of 3500 kg of the drug.

Drug Bust and Political Slugfest

Soon after the arrest, the DMK sacked Sadiq from his position as its NRI wing, Chennai West District Deputy Organiser, and from the party's primary membership, claiming a breach of party discipline and bringing disgrace to the party. The statement, however, did not specify the reason behind the action.

The involvement of Sadiq in the international drug cartel shocked not just DMK but also other

M. K. Stalin



The DMK seems to have lost the narrative already in this issue and is now finding it difficult to distance and disassociate itself from the scandal. According to the Narcotics Control Bureau, Sadiq, who was on the run for weeks when taken into custody, said he gave Rs seven lakh to the CM's son and DMK Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin. For MK Stalin, the proximity of Sadiq to his son and their dealings are now turning into a huge election liability.

political parties. BJP State President Annamalai took potshots at the ruling party, claiming that images had surfaced on social media of Sadiq presenting Chief Minister M.K. Stalin with a donation for the Chief Minister's Public Relief Fund as Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin looked on.

The BJP is cleverly referring to the DMK as the "Drug Marketing Kazhagam" and asking them to clarify Chief Minister MK Stalin's connection to Sadiq.



Udhayanidhi Stalin with jaffer sadiq



M. K. Stalin with jaffer sadiq

DMK in Tight Spot

The DMK seems to have lost the narrative already in this issue and is now finding it difficult to distance and disassociate itself from the scandal.

According to the Narcotics Control Bureau, Sadiq, who was on the run for weeks when taken into custody, said he gave Rs seven lakh to the CM's son and DMK Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin. For MK Stalin, the proximity of Sadiq to his son and their dealings are now turning into a huge election liability.

Sadiq was once a small-time perfume salesman, and in a very short period, he became a film producer. He also allegedly produced a film directed by Udhayanidhi Stalin's wife, Kiruthiga Udhayanidhi. This connection is now creating a lot of problems for the ruling party as it heads towards a crucial general election in April and May this year.

Already the scion of the DMK is in trouble with the law after he made irresponsible statements against Sanatana Dharma, and the

arrest of Sadiq is only adding to the pangs of the ruling DMK.

Sadiq's Deep-rooted Syndicate

The drug syndicate operated by Sadiq, whose social media pages flaunt his connections with the top DMK leadership, is understood to have sent 45 consignments containing about 3,500 kg of the drug material in the past three years. The US is already facing a massive drug problem with fentanyl, which is a very addictive drug that has already claimed many lives in that country. With foreign agencies providing more inputs, the scope of this drug operation run by this now-suspended DMK functionary is unraveling.

What is even more distressing is that the National Investigation Agency (NIA) officials are also investigating Sadiq and his siblings. The financial aid given by them to former professors and students of an Arabic college that may have links with the Islamic State is also under the scanner.

A witness told the Bombay High Court that Sadiq and his brothers exported 38.687 kg of

ketamine to Malaysia. Although ketamine is used as a horse tranquilizer, cartels often use it to boost the amount of other banned narcotics, like heroin and cocaine, and to give users more of a stimulant.

Another alarming development is that Sadiq and his brothers used their newfound wealth to furnish counterfeit identification documents.

Film-Underworld Nexus

In Tamil Nadu, politics and cinema have always been synonymous for decades. Its three longest-serving CMs were leading figures in the Tamil film industry. But with the arrest of Jaffer Sadiq not only politicians but many in the Tamil film industry are now feeling the heat. Sadiq has revealed that he has earned a huge amount of money from his illicit drug trafficking operations and has invested the same in legitimate businesses in industries like film, construction, and hospitality. This revelation brings the said industries under the scanner.

One such person, who will feel the pinch is film producer, director, and actor Ameer Sultan,

who is also a key Dravidian propagandist whose film "Iraivan Miga Periyavan" was produced by Sadiq.

Ameer and Jaffer Sadiq inaugurated a coffee shop named 4AMCoffee and Kitchen at ECR near Chennai under the incorporation of Mahyan Pvt Ltd. Abdul Basith, the managing director of this establishment, is also a co-director at Zuko Overseas Pvt Ltd alongside Jaffer Sadiq. Interestingly, Ameer Sulthan, also known as Director Ameer, holds a directorial position at Zuko Overseas Pvt Ltd.

It is an open secret that the underworld would finance films in Bollywood. The likes of globally designated Islamic narco-terrorist Dawood Ibrahim, who was responsible for the 1993 Mumbai serial bomb blast was always close to many producers and actors. Incidentally, Jaffer Sadiq was nabbed by the sleuths in Jaipur, Rajasthan, which shares borders with Pakistan. According to the NCB, it is also investigating Sadiq's links with the Telugu film industry and Bollywood.

Drug mafia gang arrested by the police with the smuggled drugs.



Former DMK leader Jaffer Sadiq arrested by Narcostic department





The NAB, Enforcement Directorate, and other intelligence and security agencies are now looking into Jaffer Sadiq's involvement in the film industry and real estate.

TN's Massive Drug Menace

Already, this southern state has a massive alcohol abuse problem and now substance abuse is also on the rise leading to both social and national security issues.

News of drug busts in this state is now becoming a piece of common news. On March 11, 100 kilograms of hashish valued at Rs 110 crore and 876 kilograms of ganja worth ₹1.05 crore were apprehended in Mimisal, Tamil Nadu's Pudukottai district. This seizure follows the bust of drugs worth ₹100 crore from the Rameswaram Coast in Tamil Nadu with serious national security issues.

In Tamil Nadu, the availability of cheap and illicit alcohol is in abundance and ironically the sale of alcohol in Tamil Nadu is controlled by government-run liquor retail outlets called TASMAC (Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation), which are the sole legal vendors of alcohol in the state, earning the state thousands of crores in revenue. As per official government data, TASMAC sold liquor worth Rs 44,098.56 crore in 2022-23 compared to Rs 36,050.65 crore in the previous financial year.

The Sadiq case is still unfolding itself to reveal some shocking details, and the authorities are now trying to figure out how this one-time perfume salesman became one of the biggest drug smugglers to emerge from Tamil Nadu in such a short time and how far he has spread his tentacles.





TRICKED INTO TROUBLED WATERS

Dubai-based YouTuber sends
Indian boys to fight for Russia

📍 Parikshit Dhume

When Mohammed Asfan, 30, left his home in Hyderabad last November, he was sure that his job as “army helper” with the Russian forces was going to change his family’s fortune. As a salesman in a local garment shop, earning a meagre amount and struggling to make ends meet, Asfan saw this opportunity as a game-changer.

Lured by a YouTube video posted by a Dubai-based recruiting agency that promised a high salary and permanent residency in Russia after six months, Asfan knew that this move in his life could build a beautiful future for his family. He took a plunge only to realise that it was a death trap.

Around late December, a disillusioned Asfan had called his



mohammed afsan



Dozens of Indian Muslim boys ended up on the frontlines of Ukraine recently. In fact, they believed that they would not be pushed into the battleground but they would be paid for doing some supporting work. A few of them died fighting. That's when the conspiracy came out in the open.

family from the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don and revealed that he had to undergo weeks of military training before going to the frontlines. A few weeks after this conversation, the family was notified that he was dead. Asfan was the second Indian citizen to be confirmed dead while serving for the Russian army and his dead body was flown to India on March 16.

Asfan was not the only youth who had fallen prey to such dubious plans of greedy recruitment agencies. Hamil Mangukiya, 23, from Gujarat, was killed on February 21 in the embattled Donetsk region of Ukraine, his family confirmed adding that Mangukiya traveled to Russia after to work as a security guard, but he was taken to the front line and was forced to take part in the war.

These deaths blew the lid over a can of worms, and the Indian authorities discovered that there was a well-laid nexus that was working towards tricking gullible youth into joining the Russian army to fight against Ukraine. Estimates of the number of Indians caught up in the war

against their will range as high as 100.

Soon, taking cognizance of the same, the Ministry of External Affairs plunged into action and has assured that it is pressing very hard with the Russian authorities for the early discharge of youth stranded in such a situation in Russia.

MEO Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal recently assured that efforts are also on to help the Indians stranded in Russia and that around 20 Indian nationals have approached the Indian Embassy in Moscow for help after fraudulent travel agents tricked them. These young men have been working as support staff to the Russian army.

Masterminds Tracked

Following Asfan's death, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) cracked the whip and tracked down a few fraudulent agents. Among the agents named in the CBI's FIR, Dubai-based Faizan Khan, also known as Baba, stands out. Khan, who ran a popular YouTube channel called 'Baba Vlogs,' played a significant role in enticing individuals to Russia. In one of his videos, Khan is seen in St. Petersburg, Russia, praising the city's beauty and how it is unharmed by the conflict. He falsely promised lucrative jobs as delivery boys or helpers with the Russian army, ensuring no direct involvement in combat. Khan claimed that individuals would receive training, a monthly salary of rupees 40,000 initially, increasing to 1 lakh rupees, and benefits like a government official card, which could lead to

30-year-old Mohammed Afsan from Telangana was reportedly killed on the frontlines of war





Inspired by a YouTube video promising lucrative overseas recruitment, Mohammed Asfan ventured to Ukraine seeking employment as an army assistant. However, he unexpectedly found himself thrust into frontline combat, ultimately sacrificing his life.

permanent residency in Russia.

The CBI's First Information Report (FIR) against the companies further corroborates these claims, indicating that some Indians were also seriously injured in the warzone. The Ministry of External Affairs echoed these concerns in a recent briefing, acknowledging the trafficking and associated risks.



mohammed afsan

Agents & Middlemen

Officials have revealed that the CBI has filed a First Information Report (FIR) against various visa consultancy firms and agents involved in the trafficking scheme. During the searches, several individuals have been detained, and an amount of Rs 50 lakh has been seized.

The CBI is conducting searches across Delhi, Trivandrum, Mumbai, Ambala, Chandigarh, Madurai and Chennai. The officials said the agency has registered FIRs against various visa consultancy firms and agents. The MEA spokesperson added that a case of human trafficking has also been registered against individuals who were operating a trafficking network across several Indian cities. The statement comes a day after the CBI busted a major human trafficking network, targeting young people with promises of lucrative jobs abroad, including in Russia and Ukraine, and then allegedly sending them off to fight on the front lines of the war between those countries. It identified at least 35 instances of victims sent abroad by the alleged traffickers.

Government's Response

The government has been appealing to Indian nationals to not get swayed by offers made by agents for support jobs with the Russian Army, saying it is fraught with danger and risk to life.

"Several Indian nationals have been duped to work with the Russian Army. We have strongly taken up the matter with the Russian government for early discharge of such Indian



nationals," he said.

The MEA spokesperson said strong action had been initiated against agents and unscrupulous elements who recruited the Indians on "false pretexts and promises".

"The CBI busted a major human trafficking network conducting searches in several cities and collecting incriminating evidence. A case of human trafficking has been registered against several agents," he said.

We once again appeal to Indian nationals to not be swayed by offers made by agents for support jobs with the Russian Army. This is fraught with danger and risk to life," he said.


A rare rift

The request for the release of Indian nationals fighting for Russia pits New Delhi at rare odds against Moscow. Defying the U.S., India has adopted a staunchly neutral position following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, abstaining from voting on successive resolutions put to the U.N. Security Council, U.N. General Assembly and U.N. Human Rights Council that denounced Moscow.

India has also offered a rare outlet for

A significant development in the investigation by the CBI uncovered numerous recruitment agencies exploiting vulnerable youths. This revelation shed light on deceitful agents and agencies, serving as a cautionary tale for those pursuing opportunities abroad.

Russian seaborne crude volumes, bereft of EU and G7 buyers since sanctions prohibiting its purchase were enforced in late 2022. The two countries also share close ties as partners in the BRICS economic coalition of emerging markets.

The trafficking of Indian nationals for war purposes is a grave issue that demands immediate attention. The Indian government is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of its citizens and is taking decisive action to address this issue. Awareness is the key. Individuals must remain vigilant and cautious  of such deceptive schemes to avoid falling victim to exploitation.



BATIK AIR FLIGHT MAKES HEADLINES AS PILOTS BRIEFLY FALL ASLEEP MID-AIR

A Batik Air flight from Indonesia made headlines after both pilots reportedly dozed off for approximately 28 minutes during the journey. The incident, which occurred on January 25th, involved a 32-year-old captain and a 28-year-old co-pilot.

News reports suggest the younger co-pilot's lack of sleep might have been a contributing factor. He had recently become a father to twin babies and was reportedly sleep-deprived due to childcare responsibilities.

The initial takeoff and climb appear to have been uneventful. Later, at cruising altitude (around 36,000 feet), the 32-year-old pilot handed over control to his copilot for a short rest. Unfortunately, the younger pilot, likely due to fatigue, also fell asleep. This resulted in a period of approximately 28 minutes where neither pilot was actively monitoring the aircraft.

Air traffic control in Jakarta repeatedly



Two Pilots of Batik air sleeping during the flight.

attempted to contact the cockpit during this time but received no response. Thankfully, the senior pilot eventually awoke, roused his copilot, and corrected the flight path. The plane landed safely with all passengers and crew unharmed.

This incident highlights the critical importance of pilot well-being and fatigue management in aviation safety. An investigation is likely underway to determine the full scope of the situation and implement preventative measures to avoid similar occurrences in the future.





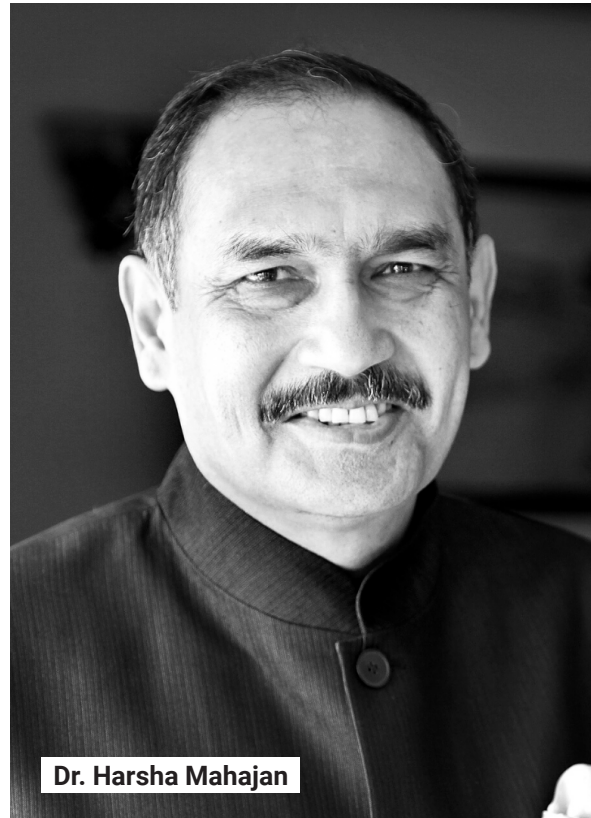
Congress Rally

CONGRESS PARTY'S HIMACHAL FORTRESS BROKEN

Advocate and Congress Party's leading spokesperson Abhishek Manusinghvi has lost the chance to re-enter Rajya Sabha. But it is not the worry of Congress. The age-old party is now struggling to hold its netas together. The internal strife has almost destroyed the party's fortune in Himachal Pradesh.

© Kunal Chatterjee

Harsh Mahajan of the BJP and Abhishek Manusinghvi of the Congress sought the seat of the only Rajya Sabha seat that Himachal Pradesh can elect. Despite the Congress's numerical advantage, Singhvi lost because six of the party's MLAs crossed-voted. Following this, the budget was presented, and these six MLAs did not support the finance bill either. As a result, the Speaker disqualified six MLAs. BJP took advantage of the state's political instability by transporting them to the neighboring state of Uttarakhand, along with six Congress and three non-party MLAs who had voted in their favor, and ensuring their safety.



There were early signs of a crisis. Five more MLAs have now joined the rebel group, bringing the total to eleven from the Congress party in Himachal. According to sources, all eleven have taken refuge in BJP-ruled Uttarakhand. Due to this, political pundits believe the Congress government led by Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu is on the verge of collapse.

Reports indicate that details were received about the MLAs staying at a luxury hotel in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand. They are reportedly using a bus with Haryana license plates, another BJP-ruled state. The presence of some BJP MLAs and leaders at the hotel has further fueled speculation.

A worried Himachal Pradesh CM Sukhu held talks with Delhi high command leaders and hinted at withdrawing disqualification petitions against the six original rebel MLAs. "If someone realizes their mistake, they deserve another chance," he suggested.

Defiant all along

Ravi Thakur (Lahul-Spiti), Rajendra Rana (Sujanpur), Sudhir Sharma (Dharmashala), Indradutta Laxmanpal (Barsar), Chaitanya Sharma (Gagaret), and Devendra Bhutto (Kuteleha) ignored party orders. Both parties received 34 votes apiece in the 68-member legislature, with the winner and loser determined by lottery. The incumbent, Manusinghvi, lost, while Harsh Mahajan won. Until then, three non-party MLAs who had previously supported the Congress had voted in favor of the BJP nominee.

Following this, on February 29, Himachal legislature Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania voted against the finance bill relating to Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu's government's budget plan in the legislature. As a result, the Speaker removed six dissident MLAs from their positions under the 'Anti-Defection Act'.

Loyalists of Congress President

Incidentally, the majority of those MLAs are believed to be 'close' to resigned minister



Himachal Pradesh CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu with Rahul Gandhi & Priyanka Gandhi.

Had **Congress** Sensed the Brewing Anger Long Before?

Since Congress high command Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu became chief minister, the fire of resentment has been raging. The late Congress leader and former Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh's wife Pratibha Singh and son Vikramaditya Singh were the front-runners in the leadership campaign. In addition, he belongs to the Himachal Pradesh royal dynasty. Although Priyanka Gandhi played a key role in winning Himachal, the election was contested under the name Virbhadra Singh.

Virbhadra Singh died in 2021. He became the focal point of all subsequent party campaigns. So Pratibha Singh expected to be appointed Chief Minister. However, it was not. His son, Vikramaditya Singh, became a cabinet minister in the government. After 14 months in control, there is now pushback.

Harsh Mahajan of the BJP defeated Congress candidate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, sparking heated debate. The roles of Pratibha Singh and Vikramaditya Singh are being questioned.

According to insiders, the six Congress legislators who voted against Singhvi were 'close' to the royal family. The late Virbhadra Singh's family is claimed to be linked to Amarinder Singh, the previous Punjab Chief Minister. Amarinder Singh is currently with the BJP. According to one source, Pratibha Singh and Vikramaditya Singh had a "special role" in resolving their issues with the BJP. Pratibha Singh expressed her discontent with Sukhu on the morning of the Rajya Sabha elections, saying, "A group of Congress MLAs has remained silent on the current government's acts."

It was obvious that Himachal Pradesh Congress president Pratibha Singh's 'judgment' was correct. According to several political observers, "From the start, the Congress high command did not place much emphasis on this resentment. They covered it up. As a result, the schism has become wider, and the BJP has been able to woo several legislators. Overall, the BJP is gaining from internal divisions in Congress.



Congress Rally



Vikramaditya Singh and Pratibha Singh

Vikramaditya Singh and his mother, Himachal Congress president Pratibha Singh. Following the Rajya Sabha elections, Vikramaditya Singh resigned as minister in response to Sukhu's serious allegations.

According to sources, Vikramaditya Singh visited Delhi last week and met with Priyanka Gandhi and Mallikarjuna Kharge.

After that, he stated that efforts are underway

to mediate with the renegade MLAs. However, the most recent event clearly demonstrates that it did not work. The Congress held 40 of the 68 seats in the Himachal Legislative Assembly. Apart from that, five independent MLAs supported the Sukhu government. However, like the six breakaway MLAs from the Congress, they voted for the BJP candidate in the Rajya Sabha elections.

The 'magic number' for the majority in the Himachal Legislative Assembly is 35. Six MLAs were dismissed, bringing the total to 62. As a result, the majority number decreased to 33. Congress had 34 MLAs after removing six. However, five of them have jumped to Uttarakhand and are alleged to have joined the dissident six MLAs. As a result, the Congress MLA strength in the Assembly will be reduced to 29. The BJP has 25 MLAs. Currently, assuming the BJP receives the backing of three independent MLAs, its strength will be 28. Even if the six rebels are not allowed to participate in the vote of confidence, the Congress can overthrow the BJP.





PROHIBITION ORDERED



WHEN VILLAGES VOTE TO BAN LIQUOR SHOPS

Some villages in Rajasthan are shuttering liquor shops through voting. As many as four villages have enforced prohibition so far. Rajasthan boasts the unique distinction of being the only state in India where villagers hold the power to vote out booze. This begs the question – could other states follow suit and draft laws that empower communities to decide their own drinking destiny?

📍 Purush Bhat

In a remarkable display of citizen-led change, two villages in Rajasthan's Rajsamand district have slammed the shutters on liquor sales permanently.

This decision follows a relentless campaign spearheaded by local women who have long sought to curb alcohol consumption in their communities.

The power of collective action was undeniable. More than 90% of villagers in both locations turned out to vote under the provisions of the Rajasthan Excise Rules (1975). This overwhelming mandate, exceeding a simple majority, forced the closure of existing liquor shops.

The high voter turnout and decisive outcome stand as a testament to the effectiveness of established legal mechanisms in empowering communities to address local concerns. The Rajasthan Excise Rules act as a





VOTING AGAINST LIQUOR SHOPS

2016

RAJESH MEHTA STATED THAT
Our fight began in 2016

2019

ASHOK GEHLOT agreed to initiate a ban on liquor sales

2024

90% of villagers in both locations turned out to vote under the provisions of the Rajasthan Excise Rules (1975)

90%



powerful tool, granting gram panchayats the authority to close liquor shops with a majority vote.

This development adds fuel to the fire of the ongoing prohibition movement in Rajasthan, a state that shares a border with the completely dry state of Gujarat. Public sentiment against alcohol sales has simmered for some time, with agitations and demonstrations erupting across the state.

Ragini, a community worker, paints a grim picture of the impact of alcohol abuse in her community. "Women are left in tears," she explains, "as their husbands squander their earnings on liquor. Homes are fractured, with women and children bearing the brunt of the burden. Education for children and basic necessities become dependent on the whims of an intoxicated spouse."

This struggle for a better life spurred the

women of Rajsamand into action. Their fight echoes a broader movement within Rajasthan. In 2019, the then Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot, acknowledged public sentiment and initiated a ban on liquor sales. A committee led by Additional Excise Commissioner Chhoga Ram Dewasi was formed to study the implementation, visiting the neighboring dry state of Bihar for insights. While the report advocated for a ban, the COVID-19 pandemic put the issue on hold.

However, the women of Rajsamand refused to be deterred. They rallied their communities and actively campaigned for the vote. The jubilation after the overwhelming results spoke volumes. Anita describes the eruption of joy – firecrackers, DJ music, dancing in the streets. It was a celebration of unity and a hard-won victory. Sweets were shared, faces smeared with celebratory gulal, and congratulations exchanged.





Women casting her vote to ban the liquor shops in one of the village in Rajasthan.

Rajesh Mehta, the then Sarpanch (village head), reflects on the long road leading to this moment. "Our fight began in 2016," he says, recalling sit-in protests, hunger strikes, and formal complaints lodged against the liquor vend. The closure of the shops marks the culmination of years of unwavering determination.

Possibility of Bootlegging

While the vote to close liquor shops represents a significant victory for Rajsamand, a senior official from the Excise Department raises a cautionary note. "Past data," he explains, "indicates a trend of illegal liquor sales emerging in gram panchayats that have voted for shop closures." Essentially, the void left by licensed vendors might be filled by a black market.

This concern is substantiated by departmental records. Seizures of illegal liquor have reportedly increased in areas that have banned sales through voting, compared to pre-ban levels.

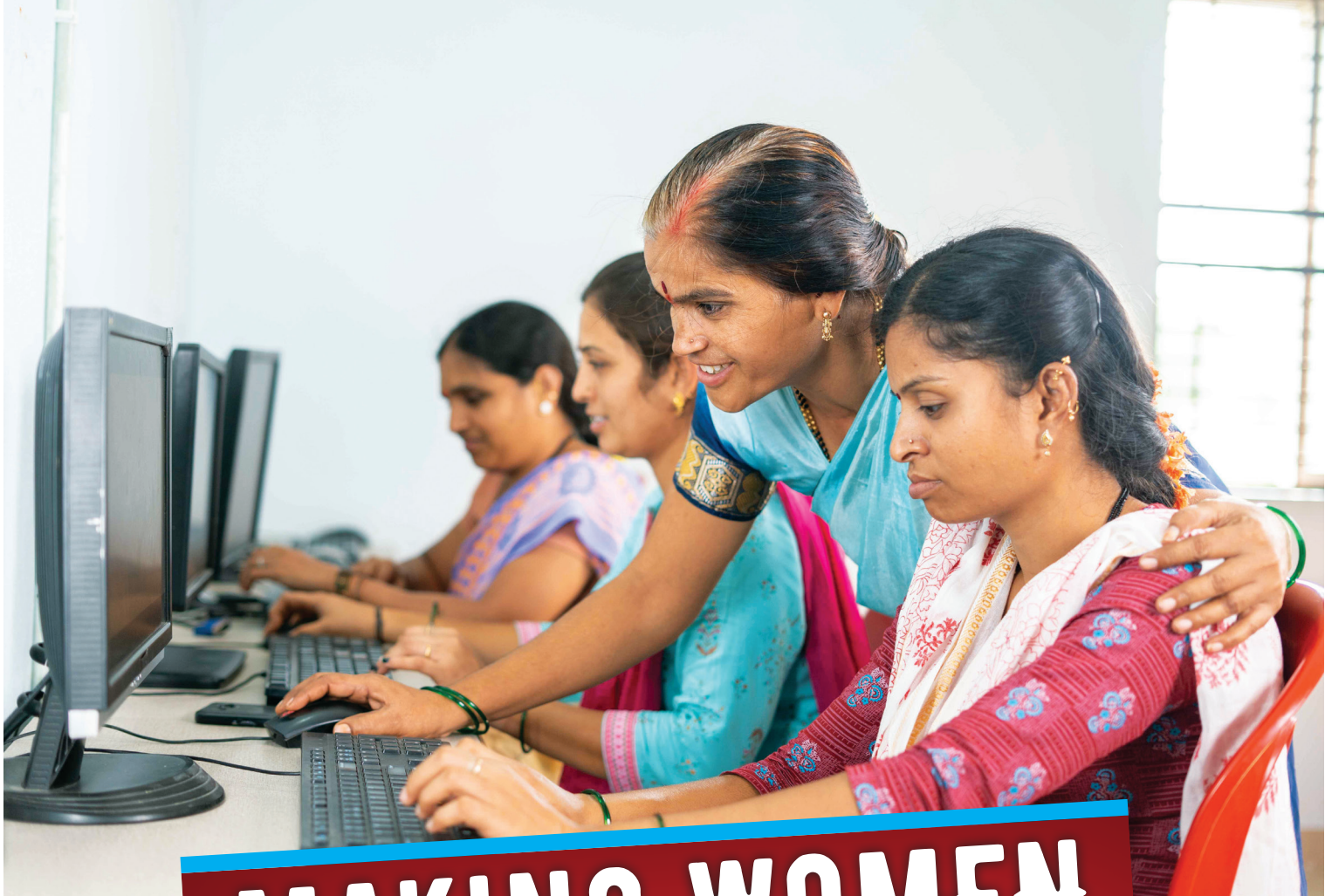
The specter of illegal liquor sales doesn't faze the young men of Rajsamand. When questioned about the possibility, a young villager expresses



unwavering determination. "We, the youth, will stand guard," he declares. "Since the villagers have collectively chosen prohibition, we will ensure it's upheld. We will work with the police and administration to maintain vigilance."

This spirit of community ownership and responsibility is a powerful counterpoint to the potential dangers of an illegal market. The young man's statement reflects the commitment required to sustain the hard-won victory. It's a testament to the collective will of Rajsamand's people to create a better future for their communities.





MAKING WOMEN MILLIONAIRES

Now, Here is a startup program for Women exclusively

Reena Pillai

The Central Government has launched one of its most ambitious schemes: Lakhpati Didi. The scheme's purpose, as stated in the name, is to encourage women to start businesses and become millionaires. The Prime Minister has long stated that if a woman is financially empowered, her entire family will benefit. Lakhpati Didi is all about empowering women to take the lead and not rely solely on their male partners.

A pilot of this program was launched in Rajasthan by the Department of Rural Development in 2023. It was a big hit, with nearly 1 crore women signing up. The Union Government has a goal of creating three crore women Lakhpati Didi over the next five years.

This scheme strives to empower women associated with Self-Help Groups to have an annual household income exceeding Rs. 1,00,000 through adopting sustainable livelihood practices.

Benefitted from Lakhpati Didi scheme women have started their own small business.



The Lakhpati Didi program looks similar to 'startup India' program. Its goal is to pave a path for women to become entrepreneurs or earn a livelihood on their own. Government gives 5 lakh rupees in seed money and they can also undergo skill training on their way to become Lakhpatis.

The Lakhpati Didi program isn't just about giving women money, it's about giving them the power to succeed. By offering training in everything from traditional crafts to cutting-edge tech like drone manufacturing and coding, the program equips women with the skills they need to be financially independent in today's world.

"A core element of the Lakhpati Didi program is the strategic provision of interest-free loans up to 5 lakh rupees. This financial aid directly addresses a significant barrier for aspiring rural entrepreneurs: access to capital. By offering this

crucial support, the scheme fosters a nurturing environment where women can translate their business ideas into thriving enterprises," says Ranjini Swamy, a social worker at an NGO that works with several self-help groups.

The Lakhpati Didi program's arrival in Tamil Nadu signifies a crucial step forward in India's tapestry of women's empowerment initiatives. This program builds upon the successes of similar schemes implemented in states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan. These earlier programs have demonstrably empowered women entrepreneurs through the support they provide.

"Looking ahead, the Lakhpati Didi scheme holds immense potential to catalyze women's economic empowerment across India. With its holistic approach encompassing skill development, financial assistance, and business support, the scheme has the capacity to unlock opportunities for women from all walks of life. As more states recognize the transformative impact of such initiatives, it is expected that the Lakhpati Didi scheme will garner wider



adoption, paving the way for a more inclusive and prosperous future for women entrepreneurs nationwide,” adds Rajini.

Alongside financial aid, the Lakhpati Didi scheme offers various benefits:

Training for all women: The scheme ensures comprehensive training opportunities for women, enhancing their skills and empowering them economically.

Connection with Self-Help Groups (SHGs): Women are connected with SHGs, enabling them to receive training in areas such as making LED bulbs, plumbing, repairing drones, fostering financial independence.

Introduction to self-help groups: Lakhpati Didi facilitates the entry of 20,000 new women into self-help groups, encouraging them to initiate and manage their businesses.

Drone provision for agriculture: Women SHGs will receive drones for agricultural activities, marking a technological shift to enhance the rural agricultural sector and empower women. Approximately 15,000 women's SHGs will undergo training in drone operation and repair. The integration of drones holds the potential to revolutionize agriculture, enabling precision farming, crop monitoring, and pest control.

Additional benefits of the scheme

The scheme provides various additional benefits, including financial literacy workshops, credit facilities, vocational training, insurance coverage, talent development, financial incentives, virtual monetary inclusion, self-belief construction, work teaching, and empowerment.

The application process for the Lakhpati Didi Yojana involves joining self-help groups. Interested women can obtain further details from their nearest Anganwadicentre.

Applying for the scheme entails submitting relevant documents and gathering information from the Anganwadi center. To apply for the Lakhpati Didi Yojana, applicants need to provide essential documents such as domicile certificate, aadhar card, ration card, income certificate, and bank account information.

Monthly camps will be set up in the neighbourhood areas to present loans to eligible women, especially the ones who have less income.

Training periods will be held to give women the capabilities needed to make the ability people need. Training will also be provided to women at the district and local levels to ensure that the initiatives are carried out properly.



HE WAITED FOR 20 YEARS TO REVENGE

A decade-long manhunt has revealed a chilling motive behind a series of attempted murders in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu. Police have linked the attacks to a 1994 suicide, uncovering a 20-year quest for revenge.

The investigation began in 2014 following the brutal machete attack on Velayutham, a resident of Thamrankottai village. Sadly, Velayutham succumbed to his injuries at the scene. Velayutham's wife, Vairav Meenakshi, was subsequently targeted by two assailants on a motorcycle. Though seriously injured, she fortunately survived. Last year, another resident, Kartika, narrowly escaped a similar attempt on his life.

Through meticulous investigation, police discovered a common thread connecting these seemingly isolated incidents. All three attacks were meticulously planned and executed by the same individual, who had managed to evade capture for a staggering ten years.

The investigation took a surprising turn when police unearthed a suicide that occurred in 1994. Velayutham had a brother, Balasubramaniam, who was married to Kalachevi at the time. Marital discord led to Kalachevi, then 25 years old, returning to her parents' home. Although the couple reconciled, Kalachevi tragically committed suicide shortly after.

During Kalachevi's ordeal, her brother, Balchander, was working in Singapore. Consumed by grief and blaming Velayutham for



his sister's death, Balchander embarked on a two-decade-long mission for revenge.

New evidence revealed Balchander's meticulous planning. In 2014, he entered Sri Lanka using a Canadian passport and then traveled illegally by sea to Rameshwaram, India. From there, he drove to Pattukottai, carried out the attack on Velayutham, and returned to Sri Lanka via the same route.

The investigation suggests Balchander enlisted an accomplice to aid in his elaborate revenge plot, which spanned two decades.

While the motive behind the attacks is now understood, Balchander remains at large. Police are actively pursuing all leads and hope to bring him to justice soon.





The Gympie-Gympie A Plant with a Stinging Reputation

The natural world holds wonders both beautiful and bizarre. One such oddity is the Gympie-Gympie plant, a contender for the title of "world's most dangerous plant." Found primarily in rainforests of Australia and Indonesia, a recent discovery suggests it may also be present in the United Kingdom.

The Gympie-Gympie has two unsettling characteristics. First, its sting is notoriously potent, described as a simultaneous sensation of being electrocuted and set on fire. Second, and perhaps more concerning, it has been linked to suicidal thoughts in victims.

Given its hazardous nature, the Gympie-Gympie is typically confined to botanical gardens. In the UK, it's kept under lock and key at the Alnwick Garden's Poison Garden in Northumbria to ensure public safety.

Historical accounts detail the plant's potency. One such record from 1866 describes a horse stung by the Gympie-Gympie becoming frantic and dying within two hours. Even more disturbing is a reported case of a man who took his own life after encountering the plant.



According to the Poison Garden's lead tour guide, the Gympie-Gympie's danger lies in its microscopic needles lining its surface. These needles inject a venom that triggers excruciating burning pain throughout the victim's body. The initial agony can last for 30 minutes, followed by months of persistent discomfort. The expert aptly compares the sensation to being electrocuted and set ablaze simultaneously, emphasizing that even a fleeting touch can cause significant suffering.



GYANVAPI

SAMAJAVADI'S NIGHTMARE

🕒 Parikshit Dume

The dawn of February 1, 2024, was unlike any other because, after a thirty-year break, the sounds of aarti and puja reverberated from “Vyasji Ka Tehkana,” the cellar of the disputed Gyanvapi mosque complex in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.

Until 1993, these rituals took place at the very same place, however, the then Mulayam Singh Yadav government put an end to it. As far as the cellar is concerned, it bears the name of the

Former Uttar Pradesh CM Mulayam Singh had ordered to stop puja at the cellar of Gyanvapi Mosque in the name of maintaining law or order, despite knowing that the puja was going on for more than 200 years. The court has now reversed Mulayam's order. Thus, Gyanvapi has now become a nightmare for Samajavadi Party.



Puja performed inside Gyanvapi mosque complex

Vyas family who performed rituals in the cellar for over 200 years and today, because of the legal battle waged by the Vyas family members, the Allahabad High Court upheld the legitimate rights of the Hindus and termed the decision to put an end to the prayers at the Tehkana as illegal.

In its observation, the High Court said that the worship rituals were stopped by "illegal action of state without there being any order in writing."

"The act of the State Government since 1993 restraining the Vyas family from performing religious worship and rituals and also by the devotees was a continuous wrong being perpetuated," the High Court said.

Chronology

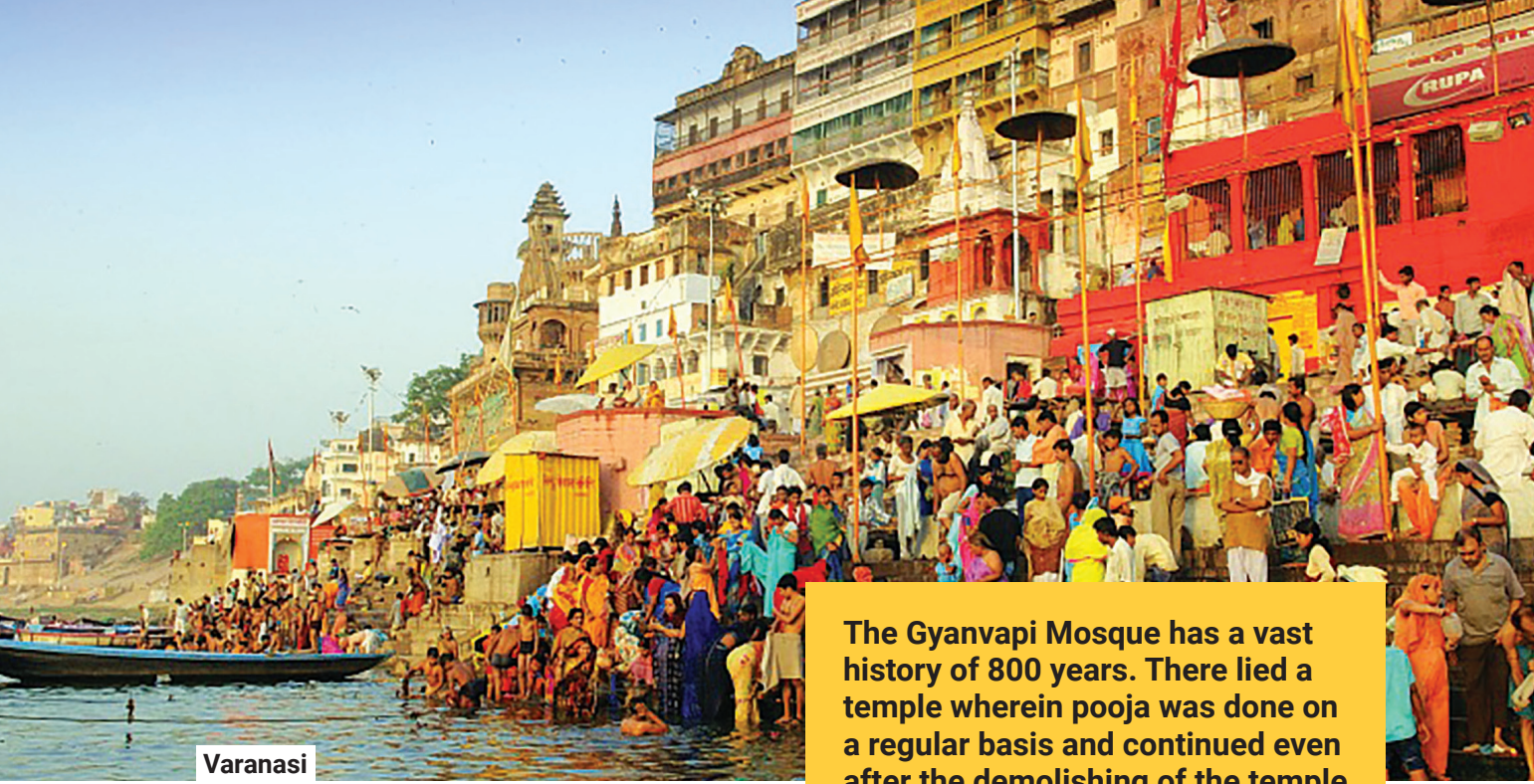
Dismissing the appeals filed by the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee, which manages the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, the Allahabad High Court, on Feb 26 said the move of the state government in 1993 restraining puja in the southern cellar of the mosque complex, adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple was "illegal".

The Mosque Committee had filed appeals challenging two orders of the Varanasi District

The puja order had come on a petition filed by Shailendra Kumar Pathak, the head priest of Acharya Ved Vyas Peeth temple, who claimed that his grandfather Somnath Vyas, also a priest, performed prayers in the complex until December 1993 when it was stopped through oral orders of the state government. He claimed the cellar had been in the possession of the Vyas family since 1551.



Mulayam Singh Yadav



Varanasi

The Gyanvapi Mosque has a vast history of 800 years. There lied a temple wherein pooja was done on a regular basis and continued even after the demolishing of the temple and construction of the mosque. The existence of the temple was proved by the Archaeological Survey of India.

Judge's court on January 17 and January 31. On January 17, the District Judge had appointed the Varanasi District Magistrate as receiver of the southern cellar, which the Hindu plaintiffs call "Vyasji ka tehkhana".

The second order on January 31 allowed puja in the cellar. The same night, the priests performed prayers in the cellar. The Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee, which oversees the mosque, had approached the Supreme Court challenging the order of the district court but was asked to move the Allahabad High Court. On February 2, the High Court asked the mosque committee to amend its plea.

The puja order had come on a petition filed by Shailendra Kumar Pathak, the head priest of Acharya Ved Vyas Peeth temple, who claimed that his grandfather Somnath Vyas, also a priest, performed prayers in the complex until December 1993 when it was stopped through oral orders of the state government. He claimed the cellar had been in the possession of the Vyas family since 1551.

Dismissing the Mosque Committee's appeals, HC Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal in his order said, "The worship and rituals which continued to be performed in the cellar by Vyas family till 1993 was stopped by illegal action of

State without there being any order in writing."

"Article 25 of the Constitution of India grants freedom of religion. The Vyas family, who continued the performance of religious worship and rituals in the cellar could not be denied access by an oral order. A citizen's right guaranteed under Article 25 cannot be taken away by arbitrary action of State," he said, allowing the puja in the cellar.

"Prima facie, I find that act of the state government since the year 1993 restraining Vyas family from performing religious worship and rituals and also by the devotees was a continuous wrong being perpetuated," the order said.

'Prima facie proof'

After multiple hearings in the matter between February 2 and 15, the court maintained that the mosque committee failed to establish prima facie the right over the disputed property, while the plaintiff, the Vyas family, had succeeded in building up a strong prima facie case negating the stand of the appellant.



Varanasi Morning Aarti

Gyanvapi Mosque has an extensive history spanning 800 years. Within its premises once stood a temple where regular worship was conducted, a tradition that persisted even after the temple's demolition and the mosque's construction. The temple's existence was corroborated by the Archaeological Survey of India.

The court added that the existence of Vyas tehkhana (cellar) owned by Vyas family in 1937 is prima facie proof of the possession claimed by the plaintiff till 1993. Responding to the challenge of the mosque committee against the court's appointment of the District Magistrate as Receiver to ensure that puja is performed in the cellar, the HC said that being an ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees under the Temple Act, 1983, there is no conflict in the function of Varanasi DM while performing the duty as Receiver.

The functions to be performed by the Receiver, the District Magistrate, are consistent with the duties of the Board of Trustees under Sections 13 and 14 of the Temple Act, 1983, the court added.

"Mulayam Singh Yadav government in December 1993 erected a steel fence without



Gyanvapi Vyas family

any judicial order, thus stopping the puja," Shailendra Pathak said in a court petition.

The Mosque Committee, however, said that no worship took place in the cellar located between the Nandi statue and the Wazukhana (an ablation pond where worshippers wash themselves before praying) of the mosque.

Debate on History

Hindus claim that the Gyanvapi Mosque was built on the site of the temple. The location has a history spanning more than 800 years, filled with conflicts, devastations, and attempts at reconstruction. A large Hindu temple existed at the Gyanvapi mosque complex too, advocate VishnuShankarJain, representing the Hindu side in the Gyanvapi case, said on January 25, while reading out a survey report by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

According to Yugeshwar Kaushal, a scholar specialising in South Asian Studies, Maharaja Jayachandra constructed a grand temple at the



Upon assuming office as CM in 1993, Mulayam Singh Yadav prohibited the worship conducted by the Vyas family in the cellar of the mosque. Citing concerns over law and order, he deemed the practice necessary to cease immediately.

site after his coronation around 1170-89AD. Mughal emperor Aurangzeb is believed to have destroyed the Kashi Vishwanath temple in 1669 and built the present-day Gyanvapi mosque atop its ruins. There are four cellars in the compound and one of them is still with the Vyasfamily, according to reports.

ASI survey

The Gyanvapi mosque was the site of a sizable Hindu temple, stated a scientific survey report of the Gyanvapi Mosque submitted to the court in December 2023, by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The ASI conducted the survey in accordance with the July 2023 order of the Varanasi District judge to determine if the mosque was constructed over a pre-existing structure of a Hindu temple. The ASI survey was a part of the main suit of Gyanvapi mosque and Shri Adi VishweshwarVirajmaan.

Mulayam Singh's Blunder

After becoming the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in December 1993, Mulayam Singh Yadav put an end to the Vyas family's practice of worshipping in the cellar and cited a threat to law and order to justify his move. In October 1990,

the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) organized a massive 'karseva' for the construction of the Ram Mandir at the then-disputed Ram Janmabhoomi site in Ayodhya. In response, then-CM Mulayam Singh Yadav deployed around 28,000 personnel of the Uttar Pradesh Armed Constabulary in Ayodhya, on October 30, 1990, to thwart VHP's Ram Mandir 'karseva'.

Mulayam Singh Yadav claimed, "Ayodhya mein parindabhi par nahi maar sakta," suggesting that Ayodhya had been transformed into a stronghold that not even a bird could breach. The VHP volunteers succeeded in reaching the site of the disputed Babri Masjid, smashing past police barriers and decorating the mosque with saffron flags. Although official records state that 20 people died because of police firing on Mulayam's orders on October 30 and November 2, eyewitness sources place the death toll much higher.

After months, in 1991, election results came in favour of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh and Kalyan Singh came to power. About a year later, on December 6, 1992, the Babri Masjid was demolished, following which the Union government of P V Narasimha Rao dismissed the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh. The state remained under the President's rule for a year and in the following elections, Mulayam Singh returned to power. And then in 1993, just years after ordering the police to open fire on Ayodhya Ram Mandir karsevaks, Mulayam Singh got the worship at the Tehkana.

The judgement on the cellar petition comes as a major positive development in the legal battle around the 17th-century mosque.





Farmers Protest

HIJACKING FARMERS

🕒 KV Kamath

Farmers, mostly from Punjab, are once again blocking road traffic on the way to New Delhi, demanding resolution to their old issues.

The present strike is no doubt a reminiscent of the 2020-21 strike in terms of both its timing and modus operandi. The timing of the protests seems to have been deliberately chosen a few months before the elections in both instances. While the 2020-21 strike was called just a few months before the elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, the present one appears strategically similar with its timing just a few months before the General Election.

When the Uttar Pradesh elections were looming, the strike posed a formidable challenge for the government, as it seemed intended to create chaos and lead to a law and order problem. Any government in such a delicate situation must deal with the problem with utmost patience. The Central government and the state governments deserve appreciation for their patience in this regard.

It is not out of context here to mention the way in which some parts of the international media have broadcast rumors and fake narratives about human rights violations in India. This has reached a nauseating level.

Furthermore, some political parties in the country are jumping to the forefront as saviors of the farmers' rights. By politicizing the movement solely to create an anti-Modi wave in view of the fast-approaching Lok Sabha elections, they are adding fuel to the fire.

Farmers from Punjab and Haryana are once again on the road to Delhi, carrying a new list of demands. It is not clear why they are protesting at this moment of time, as they are aware that parliamentary elections are round the corner. It seems politicians have hijacked farmers.

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN FARMERS AND THE GOVERNMENT

Four rounds of discussions between farmer leaders and the central government haven't yielded a definitive resolution. Here's a breakdown of both sides' positions:

Government Proposals:

- **MSP for Crop Diversification:** The government is offering a Minimum Support Price (MSP) to farmers who diversify their crops to include cotton, pigeon peas, black matpe (moth beans), and red lentils.
- **Guaranteed Prices for Select Crops:** A five-year contract with guaranteed prices is proposed for specific crops like maize, pulses (grain legumes), and cotton.

Farmer Demands:

- **Doubling Farmer Income:** Farmers are urging the government to fulfill Prime Minister Modi's promise of doubling their income.
- **Loan Waiver:** Complete farm loan waiver is a key demand.
- **Profit Guarantee:** Farmers seek a minimum 50% profit margin above their overall production costs.
- **Free Electricity:** Free electricity supply for agricultural use is a major request.
- **MSP Law:** Enacting a law that guarantees a minimum purchase price for 23 crops is a crucial demand.
- **Dropping Charges:** Withdrawal of legal cases filed against participants in the 2021 strike is desired.

Exploiting the farmers' protest, international media has seized the opportunity to propagate unfounded allegations, further tarnishing India's image. Accusations of human rights violations, including the use of tear gas and water cannons against farmers, have exacerbated the situation.



Elaine Pearson, Asia Director of Human Rights

This has removed all doubt that the protest is politically motivated.

The United Farmers Front had organized a rally at Ramlila Grounds, Delhi. While the leaders have consistently declared the protest as non-political, the opposition, especially the Aam Aadmi Party, the Congress, and the Communists, have used the protest for their own cheap political gains by parachuting in to join hands with the protesters.

Human Rights Watch

Let's examine the statement of Elaine Pearson, Asia Director of Human Rights Watch. She said, "The Indian authorities have an obligation to uphold the right to peaceful protest, whoever is taking part and whatever the issue."

It's strange that Elaine, like people sitting in the US, teaches about democracy and human rights. Indians know how the US, the so-called largest democracy in the world, has been reacting to human rights issues in its own country as well as elsewhere in the world. The US left Afghanistan to its own fate amidst its very grave human rights violations, leaving the common people in the lurch.

Last time when the farmers went on strike, the government showed utmost patience despite the fact that some protesters were armed with swords and lathis, creating chaos and disturbing traffic for months. The way in which provocation came from the protesters

Farmers in Punjab and Haryana

It is estimated that about 60% of the country's population depends on farming either directly or indirectly. No doubt, the population of farmers in Punjab, Haryana, and neighboring states is a large proportion, but it's not at all a mystery that this farmers' movement hasn't sent any alarming waves to other parts of the country since the farmers there have come to know the alleged ulterior motives of the protests. This shows that farmers by and large in the country are not in favor of unnecessary, politically motivated protests. There are, as in other professions, rich, middle-class, and poor farmers in the country. It is estimated that approximately more than two-thirds of farmers have less than a hectare, or about two and a half acres, of land. That's why the call for the strike has not made much impact on farmers as a class in the country. More than anything else, the Modi government and other state governments have successfully

implemented many beneficial schemes for the amelioration of farmers' sufferings. The movement is limited to two or three places near the Punjab-Haryana border. Although farmers reached these places by trains and buses, they could not move forward as the highways were heavily barricaded using large cement blocks and barbed wire. The call by farmer leaders to their brethren in other parts of the country to participate in the protest by organizing tractor rallies, burning effigies of ministers, and participating in the "Delhi Chalo" movement has not gotten the expected response. It is evident that the people of this country cannot be fooled by fake narratives and rumors. This shows that the common people cannot be taken for granted as they know every move played by the political parties. No doubt there was an unfortunate incident of an SUV ramming in Lakhimpur Kheri in 2021 involving Ashish Mishra, son of Ajay Mishra, a minister in the central government.

Despite concerted efforts to deceive the public, both citizens and participants in the farmers' protest have dismissed media fabrications and political manipulation. It has become evident that such tactics are merely a desperate ploy by certain political factions.

raised doubts about their genuine intention to get the problems solved. The opposition played its conspicuous role in the protest to take advantage of maligning the central government. Somehow bringing down Modi seemed to be their aim. Now, the movement also seems to be a weapon to influence the Modi wave adversely.

Elaine Pearson also says, "The authorities may not threaten or use force against the farmers to deny their rights to express their views in a

peaceful movement."

Here, the question arises as to who is threatening whom. The government in India is so tolerant as not to use any extreme measures. But there is a limit to everything. Do they expect the government to be a silent spectator when the protesters break the rules and destroy public property? No country worth its salt would tolerate such anti-social methods in any movement.

While setting out for Delhi, the protesters came prepared in trucks and tractors. They came with sufficient food and bedding, which is enough for months. This shows their real intention!

Democracy is a two-way process. The protesters should concentrate on their genuine demands. The farmers face a dilemma because of their leaders dancing to the tune of their political godfathers. Continuous strikes by creating chaos have affected the rights of millions of citizens of the country. Does this mean the rights of other citizens are not at all important?



RAHUL GANDHI WHEN FRIEND BECOMES FOE

CPI(M) and Congress find themselves pitted against each other in Kerala.

🕒 Purush Bhat

Last time Rahul Gandhi lost the election in Amethi but won in Wayanad, Kerala. This time round, he looks set to lose Wayanad as well. That's because CPI(M) has fielded its own candidate against Rahul, violating the norms of alliance. Shashi Taroor is also facing the same fate in Thiruvananthapuram.

Amethi, Uttar Pradesh, once served as the iconic stronghold of the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty. Despite its historical significance, the Congress failed to hold onto it. In a stunning turn of events in 2019, Rahul Gandhi, the Congress Party's heir apparent, suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the BJP's Smriti Irani.

Perhaps foreseeing the impending loss in Amethi, Rahul Gandhi strategically contested and secured victory in the Wayanad constituency of Kerala. However, his journey in Wayanad this time isn't a walk in the park. The Left has thrown its hat into the ring, announcing their contender for the coveted seat.

CPI(M) luminary Brinda Karat took to the media to reveal that CPI had just unveiled its nominee for the



CPI(M) luminary Brinda Karat

Wayanad constituency. Enter Comrade Annie Raja, a pivotal figure in the women's movement, who will now champion the cause under the banner of the Left Democratic Front (LDF).

"Rahul Gandhi and the Congress need to ponder," remarked Karat. "He contends that his battle is against the BJP. But what message does it send if he lands in Kerala and finds himself clashing with the Left instead of the BJP? Hence, a reevaluation of his constituency choice is warranted."

In a curious twist, the CPI(M) and Congress, both part of the India Alliance, now find themselves pitted against each other for Rahul Gandhi's seat.

Rahul Gandhi secured victory in the Wayanad constituency of Kerala with a substantial margin, garnering over four lakh votes. The Congress attributed its success in securing 15 out of the 20 seats in Kerala to Rahul Gandhi's candidacy in Wayanad.

The question arises: will Rahul Gandhi opt to contest from the Wayanad constituency again in the upcoming election? The Congress has remained silent on this issue thus far. However, CPI leader Binoy expressed his view that Rahul Gandhi's candidacy in Wayanad would be an unwise political move.

CPI's presence is felt in four out of the 20 electoral battlegrounds, as declared by CPI State Secretary Binoy Vishwam earlier this week.

The Fate of Shashi Taroor

Shashi Tharoor, the stalwart representing Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram in Parliament since 2009, now faces a formidable opponent in senior CPI leader Paniyan Raveendran for the upcoming elections.

All eyes are on Suresh Gopi, anticipated to carry the BJP torch in Thrissur. Meanwhile, CPI has greenlit VS Sunil Kumar's ticket for the same seat.

When Brinda Karat unveiled the Wayanad candidate and urged Rahul Gandhi to reconsider, Shashi Tharoor chimed in. He delved into why the Left is taking on Congress in Kerala's BJP-dominated constituencies.

In his recent remarks to The Hindu daily, Tharoor highlighted the intricate dynamics of electoral alliances. He pointed out how in Thiruvananthapuram, where the BJP secured the second spot in the last two elections, the majority of anti-BJP votes landed with the Communist candidate, paving the way for a Left challenge.

Tharoor also shed light on the disparities in seat-sharing dynamics, contrasting Kerala's situation with the collaborative efforts seen in Tamil Nadu among various political entities.

Annie Raja weighed in, stressing that the ball lies in Congress's court regarding candidate selection. She reminded that Rahul Gandhi's encounter with a CPI contender isn't unprecedented, citing the 2019 face-off.



However, she emphasized that the repercussions of this decision on India's broader political landscape rest squarely with Congress.

It's worth noting that Congress leaders in Karnataka and Telangana have already extended invitations for Rahul Gandhi to join the electoral fray in their respective states.

In an interview with The Indian Express, Annie Raja shared insights into her campaign strategy.

"In Kerala, the electoral landscape has traditionally been dominated by the contest between LDF and UDF," Annie remarked. "There's no 'India' alliance here. I trust that pragmatism will prevail. With our candidate roster announced, one must question the rationale for Congress or Rahul Gandhi to engage in electoral battles in Kerala."

Addressing the national political landscape, Annie emphasized, "At the national level, the Congress and Left parties are united against the BJP. In light of this, Congress has ample options to secure electoral victories for its leaders. These opportunities extend beyond Kerala to states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, or Telangana. If our aim is genuinely to combat these authoritarian forces, there needs to be reflection. We're essentially squabbling over a handful of seats."

When pressed further on the matter, Annie Raja declined to provide a direct response. "I choose not to address this by name," she asserted. "It's incumbent upon Congress to clarify its political stance. Are they committed to defeating the BJP or sidelining the Left? This isn't solely the responsibility of CPI. Congress had also pledged two seats in the Telangana elections. However, at the eleventh hour, we were offered just one."

Who is Annie Raja?

Annie Raja is a prominent figure within the CPI (M), serving as a member of the National Executive. She is known not only as the spouse of party general secretary D Raja but also as the General Secretary of the National Federation of




Annie Raja member of the National Executive, CPI (M)

Indian Women. Annie's political journey traces back to her formative years, marked by activism since her school days.

Her father, Thomas, a farmer and a committed communist, influenced her early engagement with political activism. Joining the All India Students Federation during her youth, Annie emerged as a vocal advocate for student issues.

Under the mentorship of CPI leader and former CM VK Vasudevan Nair, Annie transitioned into a more significant role within the party, assuming various responsibilities. She ascended to the position of district secretary of the women's wing of CPI in Kannur and, at the age of 22, earned a spot on the CPI State Executive Committee.

In 1990, Annie tied the knot with D Raja, subsequently relocating to Delhi. There, she diversified her professional portfolio, undertaking roles such as teaching alongside pursuing her B.Ed. degree.

As her career progressed, Annie increasingly focused on women's issues, amplifying her advocacy in this domain. Notably, in 2022, she took a principled stand against objectionable remarks made by CPI (M) MLA MM Mani towards pro-UDF MLA KK Ram, emphasizing the importance of upholding  the party's ethical standards.




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