

## Indiramma housing scheme shock: Thousands of Kothagudem families set to miss out on Rs 5 lakh aid

Kothagudem: Even as the State government is carrying out a survey for sanctioning Rs 5 lakh to the poor for constructing houses under Indiramma Housing Scheme, many of the eligible families in the district are unlikely to benefit from it. The reason for this is lack of pattas for the piece of land on which the poor families built either sheds or huts as the lands fall under the 1/70 Act (AP Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation Act 1959-Amendment 1/1970), which regulates transfer of tribal land to non-tribals in agency villages. Similarly the poor who are in occupation of SCCL lands in areas like Kothagudem, Yellandu and Manugur could not get the lands registered as they are owned by the company.

According to officials, as many as 2.73 lakh applications were submitted for Indiramma houses across the district and the survey of 37, 000 applications completed so far. In Kothagudem municipality over 12, 000 applications were submitted while over 2, 500 applications were from seven municipal wards in Ramavaram area. Nearly 90 per-

cent of the applicants, who have land, lack pattas making them ineligible for the scheme. Kothagudem municipal chairperson, Kapu Seethalakshmi with reference to Ramavaram said the applicants living in the area for years only have power bills and municipal tax receipts. But the officials are asking them to provide D-Form patta (issued for land assigned to the poor on government or assigned lands) and registration deed to accept their applications. The officials, who are fully aware of the facts related to the land possession, carried out surveys in the area and then denied their applications. If the poor in Ramavaram are not eligible why the officials did carry out surveys just to create false hopes of owning a house, she posed while asking the government to take steps to address the issue. During the YSR regime around 1, 800 Indiramma houses were sanctioned in the area; now why the Congress government imposing restrictions on sanctioning Indiramma houses in the area, she sought know while demanding the government to give a clear assurance to the appli-



cants on accepting their applications and then proceed with the survey. A former municipal floor leader, M Venkateshwarlu wanted the local MLAs and MP to take the matter to the notice of the government to get it resolved.

A tribal activist, Bhukya Ramesh also asked the government to consider the applications submitted by non-tribals for Indiramma houses in agency areas and in Ramavaram as a special case to sanction the houses.

## Indo – Euro Synchronization, IUN Group express interest to establish European universities in Hyd



Hyderabad: Indo – Euro Synchronization and IUN Group from Germany proposed to establish European universities off campus in Hyderabad to address the shortage of skilled workforce in Germany. A delegation from Indo – Euro Synchronization and IUN Group who met TGCHC Chairman Prof. V Balakista Reddy expressed their keenness on setting up a quality cutting campus, which will enhance capacity building and lead to a pathway progress in Hyderabad.

The delegation including Prof. Dr. Christian Werner, CEO – IUN Group and Univer-

sity of Applied Management (Ismaning/Munich), Dr. Banga Raju, SRVP and Board, German Varsity and Indo Euro Synchronization and others shared their ideas of introducing UG programs with minor and honors components in the proposed varsity to accommodate 1,000 students, with an investment of 12 million Euros. Students pursuing these programmes will be sent to Germany to pursue the final year. Prof. Reddy urged the visiting team to bring in innovation and not confine to the hitherto conventional business school and technological campus model.

## Top 5 Family Cars with Spacious Boots for a Road-Trip this Holiday Season

Hyderabad: The holiday season is upon us, and this is a perfect time to create a shared and memorable family experience. The right car can be your perfect companion for a comfortable and stress-free road trip. Whether you are planning a beach getaway, mountain retreat, or countryside exploration, the right set of wheels can ensure your family travels in comfort, style, and importantly, without compromising on luggage space. One of the biggest hurdles of a family road trip is ensuring all the luggage fits neatly into the car's boot! From suitcases and duffel bags, a cramped boot can quickly turn the excitement of a getaway into a game of luggage arrangement. Having a vehicle with ample boot space is not just a convenience, it's a pragmatic requirement that allows your family to travel stress-free and fully enjoy the adventure ahead. Here is a curated list of vehicles of different segments that offer ample boot space for an ideal road-trip. MG Hector: The MG Hector stands out with its striking design and cutting-edge features, led by an advanced in-built PM 2.5 Air Purifier and Ionizer system for a consistently fresh cabin environment. It has a boot space of 587 litres that can fit up to 5.87 cabin baggage. The SUV boasts India's largest 35.56 cm (14-inch) HD Portrait infotainment screen, complemented by innovative features like a Digital Bluetooth key with sharing function, wireless charging, and ventilated front seats. Safety and intelligence merge with Traffic Jam Assist among a host of ADAS features, while the i-SMART technology offers over 75 connected car features. Adding to its premium appeal, the Hector is

available at the starting price of 13.99 Lakhs and delivers exceptional value as the best-priced SUV with a panoramic sunroof in India. MG Windsor: India's first intelligent CUV, the MG Windsor, offers a perfect blend of innovation, style, and comfort. It offers a boot space of 604 Litres and has ample of space for the luggage. With its 2700 mm wheelbase which is longer than many (ICE) vehicles with superior dimensions, it maximizes space, providing an unmatched cabin experience. The Windsor offers an infinity-view glass roof, aerodynamic design, and spacious, opulent interiors, ensuring luxurious business-class comfort. Reassuring safety, smart connectivity, and driving comfort are enhanced by its hi-tech features. Built on the 'Pure EV Platform,' the MG Windsor starts at INR 13,49,800 (Ex-Showroom). Under the unique Battery as a Service (BaaS) program, it is available at INR 9.99 Lakhs + ₹3.5/Km for battery\*. Offering a range of 332\* km ARAI certified with a 38-kWh battery and four driving modes, the Windsor's zero-emission powertrain helps significantly reduce air pollution, promoting a greener future. Honda City Sedan: The Honda City redefines sedan excellence with its sleek design and remarkable 506-liter boot space. Engineered with Honda's renowned reliability, this sedan offers a perfect blend of performance and comfort. Its powerful yet fuel-efficient engine ensures economical long-distance travel, while advanced safety features provide peace of mind for family journeys. The sophisticated interiors boast premium leather seats and a 8-inch touchscreen infotainment system.

# Germany's move to freeze Syrian asylum applications clouds celebrations of Assad regime's fall

Imad Al Suliman, 37, did not even catch a wink between December 7 and 8. As news emerged that the 54-year dictatorial regime led by the Assad family was brought to an end by militant forces led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Mr. Suliman expressed his happiness through quiet tears rather than loud cheers. "Those were not just tears of happiness but also tears for those who could not witness this day, those lost to prisons, to the bombs, to the Mediterranean Sea. The celebration was for the resilience of people who refused to give up their humanity in the face of a dictator intent on stripping it away," said Mr. Suliman. The louder celebrations would carry on for the rest of the day. In the Kreuzberg district of Berlin, Syrian nationals converged at Oranienplatz in the thousands to celebrate the fall of Bashar al-Assad on December 8. Happy faces painted in green-white-black, honking cars, celebratory songs, people forming groups to do the traditional Dabka folk dance, and countless independence flags of Syria were seen all around despite the temperatures hovering around 2C. Mr. Suliman who is an author and human rights activist, was forced to flee Syria because the regime made it difficult for him to live safely. His family, who he has not seen since 2015 but has been in constant touch with, still lives in Syria. "My father passed away last year due to injuries from an earthquake. Unfortunately, I lost him without seeing him. I am hoping to see my family soon. Before December 8 this kind of hope was unthinkable, but I am glad that I will get to fulfil that dream soon," said Mr. Suliman. No sooner had the Syrian capital, Damascus, been declared free than news emerged that Mr. Assad had fled with his family and was provided asylum in Moscow, Russia.

Mohammad al-Bashir has been appointed as the head of the transitional government till March 1, 2025. While HTS emerged from the al-Qaeda terrorist network, it claims it has broken all ties with al-Qaeda since 2016. HTS is still considered to be a terrorist group by the UN, the U.S., the EU, and Turkiye. But its leader Abu Mohammed al-jolani is presenting a moderate face by reaching out to the Western media. Since the start of the civil war in Syria in 2011, close to a million Syrian refugees have come to Germany. Of this, around 2,00,000 were able to obtain German citizenship. From January to November 2024, asylum applications from Syria once again topped the list at 75,000, followed by 34,300 from Afghanistan and around 29,600 from Turkiye, according to the German Federal Statistical Office. Following the developments in Syria, on December 9, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) decided to pause all asylum applications from Syrians.

"There are currently 47,000 pending asylum applications from Syria that will not be decided. The decision does not only impact Syrians who arrive and ask for asylum since the fall of Assad, but it applies to everyone in the asylum procedure that has not received a decision before December 8," said Wiebke Judith, legal spokesperson for PRO Asyl, a pro-immigration advocacy group. Austria, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Belgium, and the United Kingdom have also announced simi-

lar measures. Politics over human rights?

While German Chancellor Olaf Scholz expressed solidarity with Syrians celebrating the fall of the Assad regime, he hoped law and order prevailed in Syria. "All religious communities, all ethnic groups and minorities must enjoy protection. All Syrians must be given the opportunity to live life in dignity and self-determination. We will judge the next Syrian government by this," said Mr. Scholz. Politicians from the conservative opposition Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), currently leading the polls in Germany at 32%, called for the return of Syrians living in Germany. Former Health Minister and senior politician Jens Spahn from the CDU even called for offering incentives for Syrians to leave Germany. "How about the German government saying: anyone who wants to go back to Syria, we'll charter planes for them and give them a starting payment of €1,000", he told a local TV news network. The anti-immigrant far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) that is polling second in Germany at 19%, has been calling for closing Germany's borders to outsiders. It's head and Chancellor candidate, Alice Weidel wrote on X, "Anyone celebrating 'free Syria' in Germany obviously no longer has a reason to flee. They should return to Syria immediately." The political reactions are not surprising for Diba Mirzaei, a doctoral researcher at German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) with a focus on West Asia. She noted that it was too early for talks about sending Syrians back. "We do not know what the future will look like. It is still not safe to be in Syria, especially when you are based in the northeast (the Kurdish areas) or close to the border areas with Israel. We do not know if the future of Syria will be an Islamic dictatorship or democracy or whether women and religious and ethnic minorities will have freedom or not," said Ms. Mirzaei. The Kurds, Christians, and Alawites are among some of the minorities in Syria. Zuhair, 35, who has Syrian parents, was born in Germany. But post-2011, a large part of his family members who were based in Aleppo, Syria, were compelled to leave their homes for other countries due to the destruction caused by the Assad regime. Zuhair (who only gave his first name) feels the German government's decision to halt asylum applications is horrific. "A lot of Syrians are euphoric right now and dreaming. But we are not naive. We know that the situation is still violent in a lot of parts of Syria. The future is still unclear for a lot of minorities in Syria, so stopping asylum applications is a dangerous signal. It does not reflect the reality in Syria," said Zuhair. Mr. Suliman concurs. "Amid all the celebrations, I cannot escape the knowledge that this is just one step in a long journey. The scars of war, fractures within the society, lingering shadows of authoritarianism would demand years of work. Freezing asylum applications at this critical juncture risks sending the message that the world is turning its back on Syrians just as they begin the difficult journey of rebuilding their nation," he said. From pro-refugees to anti-immigrant

Germany wasn't always like this. In the 2015/16 era, under the leadership of Angela Merkel, the country took in the most number of Syrian refugees escaping the civil war. Ms. Merkel's *Wir schaffen das!* (we'll manage it!) slogan ensured that Syrian refugees



fleeing the civil war were welcomed. "When I arrived in Germany in July 2015, I was met with warmth, hope, and the chance to rebuild my life. Germany has been a beacon of hope for many Syrian refugees and it offered us a chance of safety and rebuilding our lives shattered by war and oppression," said Mr. Suliman. But things have changed drastically since. As Germany prepares for elections next year, migration has become a top political issue. Leaders from Ms. Merkel's party, the CDU/CSU, have been the loudest voices among mainstream parties, for sending Syrians back. Ms. Mirzaei, being a citizen with a migration background, first noticed a difference in attitude towards migrants post 2017. "2017 is when the AfD entered the German parliament or the Bundestag. There was a shift in the society after that. Some things that could not be previously said out loud can now be said without any repression. Racist language has become more widespread in the mainstream," said Ms. Mirzaei.

Mr. Suliman who felt welcomed in 2015 has also noticed this shift. "Over the years, I have witnessed a shift toward anti-immigrant sentiment, rise of populism fuelled by political rhetoric that frames refugees as burdens rather than contributors. This has created division and uncertainty for many migrants, overshadowing the initial spirit of solidarity," said Mr. Suliman. AfD is the second most popular party nationally and is the most vocal on anti-immigration narratives. AfD either won or came in second in three State elections this year. Last year, an investigation revealed that AfD had a secret meeting to discuss plans for "remigration" of non-Germans. Talks of sending Syrians back to their home country remind many of this narrative. According to Ms. Judith, the demands to send Syrian refugees back are unrealistic, dangerous, and irresponsible. "It lacks any legal or factual basis, both with regard to German asylum and residence law and the situation in Syria. It is also very narrow minded, shows how internal politics often weigh over human rights and foreign policy in the German debate, especially in a year of rising populist debates on asylum and migration, shortly ahead of new elections," said Ms. Judith. Syrians filling a critical gap

Ms. Mirzaei feels if Germany proceeds with its plans to send Syrians back, it could end up setting a precedent for asylum seekers from other countries. "This will have a tremendous impact on the economy and

healthcare sector. Many villages in Germany have hospitals that heavily rely on Syrian doctors and nurses. What will happen to the healthcare sector if there is a Syrian exodus?" questions Ms. Mirzaei. According to German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach, more than 6,000 Syrian doctors are working in Germany, and they are fully integrated and indispensable for healthcare. This is one sector where Germany is always short on qualified candidates. "Instead of conducting an internal discussion about asylum procedures, the German government should concentrate on supporting Syria on its path towards respect for human rights, the rule of law, and security," said Ms. Judith.

Mr. Suliman feels measures like freezing asylum applications will impact integration and community cohesion. "It creates a climate of uncertainty and fear among the Syrian community. Those awaiting family reunions or with pending applications are left in a limbo. This impacts their mental health and makes it harder for refugees to contribute positively to the communities that have welcomed them," said Mr. Suliman. "Even if Syria becomes independent and stable, it is not clear if many Syrians who have moved here will return. Many have German citizenship and residency permits. Legally, they cannot be forced to return," said Ms. Mirzaei. The eight-point plan On December 11, Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock came up with an eight-point plan on Syria which included establishing an international consensus, dialogue with HTS, German diplomatic presence in Syria, reconstruction of Syria and returning Syrian refugees, among other proposals. Ms. Mirzaei feels Ms. Baerbock's eight-point plan should be followed with action as technically it is in line with German policy in West Asia. "Germany's actions in West Asia leave a lot to be desired. Two of its allies - Turkiye and Israel - are the biggest roadblocks for peace and security in Syria. Turkiye has been committing massacres against the Kurdish people in Syria and we saw how Israel attacked the defence bases immediately after Assad fell. Germany needs to talk to its allies and apply pressure on them to stay away from Syria," said Ms. Mirzaei who feels Germany has little leverage in West Asia as compared to Russia, Turkiye, or the U.S. Mr. Suliman has not lost hope and believes that Germany still has the potential to lead with empathy and build stronger and more unified communities."

# SBI MEGA PROPERTY SHOW – 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2024



State Bank of India, Hyderabad Circle is organizing the Biggest Mega Property Expo, a 3 day event on 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2024 at Hitex Exhibition Hall-4, Madhapur, Hyderabad. For the last 4 years, SBI has been conducting this mega event bringing together a host of prominent builder fraternity on one platform. The programme was inaugurated by Shri Rajesh Kumar, CGM, Hyderabad Circle, joined by Smt. Manju Sharma, Chief General Manager REHBU, Corporate Centre, Mumbai, General Managers Shri. Prakash Chandra Baror and Shri Ravi Kumar Verma of Hyderabad Circle and other senior dignitaries of the Bank. From Builders fraternity Shri V Rajasekhar Reddy, President CREDAI, Hyderabad, Shri. Shekar Reddy, Vice President IGBC also graced the occasion.

Shri R. Balanand, DGM, REHBU Hyderabad Circle in his welcome address, mentioned that the confidence and trust reposed by the Builders fraternity and customers in SBI is immense. He said wide Publicity has been given to this event and many builders have evinced keen interest being a

part of Mega property show. More than 50 top builders from the city are taking part in the event.

Shri Rajesh Kumar, CGM Hyderabad Circle in his inaugural address welcomed all the dignitaries. He said that SBI has been awarded as the 4<sup>th</sup> most trustworthy bank globally. This is possible only because of committed service rendered by SBI. SBI will shortly surpass the 8 trillion mark in Home loans. This is possible only because of continued support and patronage from the builders and customers. Hyderabad is known for its infrastructural facilities viz. education, pharma, health and climate and demand for Real estate in terms of residential housing, commercial space and investment market is immense. Government's focus on developing RRR, Tourism and other industries paves the way for increase in demand for the housing sector. Growth is also visible in Ultra/ Mid and affordable segments as IT & Commercial space continue to flourish. He appealed to all the Customers visiting Property show to utilize waiver in processing fee and interest concession, discounts given by

the builders.

Smt Manju Sharma, CGM REHBU, Corporate Centre Mumbai in her address said Real Estate is a game changer in terms of contribution of GDP. At present Real estate growth rate is 7% and by 2047 it is expected to reach to 17% at CAGR of 10% and mentioned that SBI is achieving 14 % growth every year. Premiumisation of the real estate is happening because of rising demand and increase in the income level of the public. One lakh units were sold in the last 3 years. Hyderabad contributes 12 % of India's total Housing stock. Hyderabad is growing at 2.2 times in the last 5 years and 3.3 times in last 10 years in housing sector. She also explained about new products viz. SBI Combo loan, Maxgain – Hybrid.

Shri Rajasekhar Reddy, President CREDAI in his address, appreciated SBI conducting a property expo of this magnitude. He explained the concerns raised by the industry were taken up by CREDAI with the government and the positive outcome will aid the growth of Real Estate in the state. He also mentioned that Hyderabad city attracts

35000 cr investments by 115 companies and generated employment of more than 51000 from Nov'23 to Dec'24. He appealed to all the customers to repose confidence in the Hyderabad Real Estate and utilize the Mega Expo to choose their dream home.

Shri Shekar Reddy, Vice President IGBC in his address appreciated the Mega Property expo being conducted by mega banker. He suggested that with the increase in Land Rates and construction material, reduction in Interest Rates by Banks, GST by State Government would provide an impetus to the growth in the affordable housing segment. He requested for considering an additional concession of 20 bps besides offering 5 bps for IGBC properties. Finally, the event was concluded by offering vote of thanks by Prakash Chandra Baror, General Manager NW-II. He thanked all the dignitaries, SBI officials, Builders, Customers who have come all the way to receive in-principal sanction letters. He also thanked office bearers of the Real Estate Industry CREDAI, & IGBC for their outstanding support from time to time.

# Signify celebrates a record-breaking success for its latest campaign 'Hum Raaton Mein Sooraj Ugaate Hain' starring Rahul Dravid

Hyderabad :Signify, (Euronext: LIGHT) the world leader in lighting, is celebrating the resounding success of its recent television commercial 'Hum Raaton Mein Sooraj Ugaate Hain' featuring the Indian cricket legend, Rahul Dravid. Power packed with an energetic anthem, the TVC, which was launched ahead of the festive season, has struck a chord with the customers, surpassing expectations as they continue to shower Signify with their trust, love, and appreciation. Bringing in a health mix of digital and traditional marketing initiatives, the campaign garnered over 200 million impressions. Rolled out with a launch teaser on 22 news channels, followed by a high-impact, 60-day TV campaign across social media, leading news channels, outdoor advertisements and POSMs. It also had a prime-time presence on popular shows like KBC, Big Boss and during the India/NZ test series.

Commenting on the success of the campaign, Nikhil Gupta, Head of Marketing, Strategy, Govt. Affairs & CSR - Signify, Greater India, said, "We are immensely proud of the significant impact our campaign has created. The performance metrics speak volumes about the reach and engagement we have achieved. Our association with Rahul Dravid has indeed been a game-changer, helping us connect more with millions across the country. We have received incredibly positive feedback from our audience, which reaffirms our belief in the power of innovative lighting solutions to transform lives. This campaign has set a new benchmark for us, and we look forward to building



on this momentum with more innovative and impactful campaigns in the future. "Commenting on the success of the campaign, Rahul Dravid, Former Captain and Coach of the Indian National Cricket Team, said, "The success of Hum Raaton Mein Sooraj Ugaate Hain campaign is a testament to Signify's leadership, legacy and innovation. The cam-

campaign beautifully captures how light empowers us to overcome challenges. Just like in cricket, where consistent practice illuminates the path to victory, Signify's commitment to a better world inspires me. I'm proud to partner with them on this journey."The campaign has received extremely positive feedback from audiences across India. The associa-

tion with Rahul Dravid has helped amplify the brand's engagement with the Indian consumer leading to a measurable increase in brand awareness, consideration, and favourability. Building on the momentum of this successful campaign, Signify plans to roll out more innovative and impactful campaigns going ahead.

## Micromax and Phison Partner to Launch MiPhi, Powering India's Next-Generation of NAND Storage Technology

Hyderabad : Micromax Informatics, India's home-grown consumer electronics brand and Phison, a leading innovator in NAND controller and NAND storage technologies, have launched MiPhi, a strategic joint venture poised to revolutionize India's technology landscape. As India emerges as a global economic hub, this partnership supports the nation's vision of 'Making AI in India,' aligning with its ambition to become a global leader in artificial intelligence. The strategic partnership announcement demonstrates this commitment by combining the key differentiators of two industry leaders to drive innovation, expand product offerings, and bolster India's ambitions as a global AI superpower. With a vision to enhance GPU efficiency and deliver advanced NAND storage solutions, MiPhi will introduce the world's lowest per-token cost and energy consumption for AI use cases.

"We are thrilled to announce our joint venture with Phison, uniting our capabilities to drive a new wave of innovation in the Indian technology landscape," said Rahul Sharma, Co-founder, Micromax Informatics. "By combining our local market expertise with Phison's critical technological prowess, we are poised to deliver breakthrough solutions. The joint venture kicks off a new chapter with an aim to harness the full potential of emerging technologies and contribute to the future of digital transformation across industries. With this venture, we aim to bring down the cost of GPU by 1/10th by bringing

the lowest per token cost in the world. This will help us in disrupting the AI landscape not only in India but also in specific agreed-upon regions." "India has been a hub for technological growth, and now the vision set forth from the government further enables home-grown companies to innovate at an exponentially higher rate," said K.S. Pua, CEO of Phison. "Phison is delighted to partner with Micromax. Together, we are committed to leveraging our combined resources and expertise to establish MiPhi as a leading force in India's NAND storage ecosystem. By uniting Micromax's local market understanding with Phison's world-class storage technologies, we're well-positioned to create impactful solutions across SMBs, automotive, IoT, AI, enterprise workloads, and beyond."Through MiPhi, the joint venture aims to empower the Indian market with cutting-edge NAND storage solutions, providing unparalleled convenience and technological advantages. The collaboration leverages Micromax's deep-rooted customer relationships within India and Phison's expertise in NAND storage

technology to foster a strong, synergistic partnership that expands opportunities and business growth across enterprise, con-

will position MiPhi as a key innovation hub in India. Phison's impressive portfolio, with over 2,000 patents and a legacy of industry-



sumer, embedded, AI, and security applications within India's burgeoning tech ecosystem and specific agreed-upon regions. The collaboration between Micromax, leading Indian electronics brand renowned for its expertise in manufacturing and marketing tech products, and Phison, a global pioneer in NAND storage solutions and technology,

first innovations, coupled with its commitment to R&D—investing 80% of its OPEX (Operating Expense)—equips the company to provide vital technical insights to MiPhi's operations. This strategic alliance will drive MiPhi's contribution to India's technological future, harnessing local manufacturing and sales channels to accelerate the growth of the country's storage economy.

# Reality check on Sri Lanka's Tamil question



Many in Sri Lanka closely tracked their President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's recent visit to India. The ceremonial red carpet welcome he received from Indian President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his various engagements, and, importantly, the joint statement issued by the two governments, drew much notice in the local media. It was Mr. Dissanayake's first state visit abroad, after he won the presidency in September this year, and the ruling National People's Power (NPP) won a spectacular two-thirds majority in the general election in November. India was hosting not just one of Sri Lanka's most powerful Presidents but also a leftist leader from a party (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna – JVP or the People's Liberation Front) that once furiously opposed India and its perceived "interventionist" role in Sri Lanka. Much has indeed changed in India, Sri Lanka, and in India-Sri Lanka relations. The JVP is not the same today, as the story of its rise to state power reveals. Neither is Sri Lanka, whose political landscape stands radically altered in ways few imagined possible two years ago. Analysts are yet to fully decipher the astounding victory of the JVP-led NPP, especially in the island nation's north, east, and the hill country that are home to the country's Tamil, Muslim and Malaiyaha Tamil minorities. India's priorities, too, have seen a marked shift, as New Delhi remains preoccupied with countering Chinese influence in the neighbourhood.

Changing Indian interests While every-

thing else changes, Sri Lanka's long-pending national question remains, with all past governments in Colombo failing to deliver a definitive political settlement. India's past involvement as an arbiter of Tamil rights, for many in Sri Lanka, set high expectations for its influence in more recent decades, including the post-war years since 2009. In an interview to this daily in 2022, late Tamil leader R. Sampanthan said "India has a special duty" in ensuring that the spirit of the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987, and the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution born out of it, are fully implemented. Except, Indian interests today are evidently different. The joint statement issued by New Delhi and Colombo on December 16, 2024, offers a reality check. The 34-point document, titled 'Fostering partnerships for a shared future', and spanning political, economic, and strategic cooperation, makes no reference to the pending political solution, or post-war reconciliation, or Tamil aspirations. The only power sharing that finds mention is in a proposal for a high-capacity grid interconnection between India and Sri Lanka.

However, in his remarks at the joint press conference, Mr. Modi said, "We hope that the Sri Lankan government shall fulfil the aspirations of the Tamil people. And that they shall fulfil their commitment towards fully implementing the Constitution of Sri Lanka and conducting the Provincial Council Elections." He did not reference the 13th Amendment. Mr. Dissanayake framed the

issue differently. He said, "People from all the Provinces — North, South, East, and West — representing diverse communities and various walks of life contributed to this mandate. As a leader entrusted with such an important responsibility by my people, I clearly understand that the essence of democracy lies in the coexistence of diverse political views and groups." The NPP's poll manifesto includes an assurance to hold elections to the provincial councils, now defunct for over five years, and enact a new Constitution based on wide public consultations. President Dissanayake, too, has made the pledge more than once. But his government is yet to spell out its own vision for a durable political solution. The NPP has consistently avoided the language of the "13th Amendment" that till date carries the baggage of "Indian imposition" for the country's Sinhala-Buddhist majority, and likely triggers discomfort for the JVP party base. In a recent column, 'NPP in Power: Possibilities for Post-War Reconciliation through Civic Nationalism', Sri Lankan political scientist Jayadeva Uyangoda observed that the NPP shuns both the "devolution discourse" introduced by India, and the "liberal peace discourse" of conflict resolution, reconciliation, and peacebuilding, promoted by agencies of the United Nations, global and local rights groups. He wrote, "The NPP does not seem to want its agenda for inter-ethnic peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka to be seen as a continuation of what it sees as 'failed' past attempts."

Contentious amendment The controversial 13th Amendment continues to evoke mixed, and often strong, reactions among Sri Lankans. Even the Tamils are divided over whether it is a necessary but insufficient measure of power devolution, or a problematic legislation that tamed historic demands for federalism. The last time that the 13th Amendment went out of focus was when the Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe administration (2015-19) attempted drafting a new constitution. The effort failed, but Mr. Dissanayake has said his government would build on the draft. It is true that two main formulations of the past have not proved successful for the Tamil people. It is also not hard to see why the JVP may be wary of using either discourse. But the Tamils who contributed significantly to the NPP's big win are justified in seeking greater clarity on what the government has in mind for them. Fifteen years after the end of the civil war, they are still doggedly chasing the truth about their forcibly disappeared loved ones. They are still fighting to reclaim their land held by the military. They are still struggling to rebuild their livelihoods shattered in those years of bloodshed and mass destruction. They still do not have a say in how their provinces, setback by a devastating war, should be reconstructed. The government's promise of national integration or a unified "Sri Lankan identity" can be evaluated only based on its specific policies to address war-time accountability, political agency, and meaningful development in the north and east.

# Kozhikode-Wayanad road project: Light at the end of the tunnel?

Jassim Peroor, 31, a small-time restaurant owner from Wayanad's Meppadi village, turns emotional as he recalls the heart-breaking departure of his 60-year-old father hit by COVID-19 in 2021. A two-hour-long snarl-up on the hairpin curves of the 14-km Thamarassery ghat road was spoiling the golden hour intervention for the elderly man, who later succumbed to the illness at a hospital in Kozhikode. Jassim points out that he represents thousands of such hapless villagers in Wayanad who are waiting for the proposed 8.11-km-long four-lane twin tunnel road linking Kozhikode district's Anakkampoyil in Thiruvambady panchayat with Wayanad district's Kalladi in Meppadi panchayat. "We will fight for it as we will not be able to survive such tormenting experiences again," he says, greeting the customers at his restaurant near the proposed project area.

Light at the end of the tunnel?

0 seconds of 5 minutes, 36 secondsVolume 0%Wayanad, prone to natural disasters such as the landslides early this year, does not have specialty medical care facilities. This forces the people to travel to Kozhikode for treatment. Even as a section of environmentalists opposes the multi-crore project that passes through the environmentally sensitive areas of the Western Ghats, the villagers on either side of the proposed project consider it a lifeline for their survival. The main attraction for them is the drop in the travel distance between Anakkampoyil and Meppadi from 42 km to just 20 km. They also say that this will cut short the distance between Kozhikode town and Kalpetta, the district headquarters of Wayanad, from the present 85 km to 54 km. Travel along the narrow ghat road that winds up its way to Wayanad is time-consuming, they maintain. An approach bridge will have to be constructed across the Iruvazhinji river to access the proposed tunnel from Muthappanpuzha, near Anakkampoyil, in Kozhikode district.

Ashraf Pulikkalath, a Gulf returnee living at Kalladi in the proposed project area, has no qualms about giving up his 1,100-sq. ft. house that he built with the savings from his 30 years of expatriate life for the project. "My wife and three children also support my stance. We have trust in the government's rehabilitation package as several people have already received it," the 55-year-old explains. His neighbour, tourism entrepreneur Jabirsha Vellathoor, is also firm in his decision to give up his house and land for the tunnel project estimated to cost ₹1,500 crore. "We have no other practical option to bypass the nine hairpin curves on the Thamarassery ghat road. The completion of this project will definitely help our people to quickly access various hospitals, educational institutions and the Calicut International Airport," he points out. People who live on the other side of the proposed tunnel at Muthappanpuzha, near Anakkampoyil, in Kozhikode district see it as a golden opportunity to boost domestic tourism enterprises. A.J. Johny, a settler-farmer from the village, says the project comes as a blessing for poor farmers, who have been going through an acute financial crisis with falling agricultural production and prices. A growth in tourism ventures coupled with better value for



land is sure to save the farmers from the looming financial crisis, he argues.

Xavier Pattaparambil, another local resident, recalls the olden days when the villagers from Anakkampoyil and Muthappanpuzha trekked through an interior forest road for kilometres to reach Kalladi. "Though there were proposals to develop the same path as a bypass road for the Thamarassery ghat road, it was resisted by the State Forest department as it would have entailed losing vast swathes of forest land. Now, the tunnel road is the only practical option," he reasons. Jassim Peroor, a native of Meppadi, shows the area proposed for the twin tunnel at Kalladi in Wayanad district.

The project, proposed between the scenic Chembra and Vellarimala hill ranges on the Western Ghats, has grabbed attention now as the Bhopal-based Dilip Buildcon Limited has secured the ₹1,341-crore contract for the construction of the twin-tunnel, which received stage-1 clearance from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in 2023. The Kolkata-based Royal Infra Construct is the winner of another contract for the construction of an approach bridge across the Iruvazhinji river to the tunnel at a cost of ₹80.4 crore. The project, fully funded by the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board [KIIFB] and billed to be the third longest underpass in the country, is expected to be ready in four years. The construction of a 17.1-km approach road from Thiruvambady to Marippuzha is also in full swing now apart from the electrification works to support the related civil works. This ₹108-crore road project will be completed by the Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society. Field-level inspections to carry out work at the other end of the tunnel at Kalladi in Wayanad are also progressing with the support of local administrators. Officials of the State Public Works department say it is one of the 30 projects being monitored directly by the Chief Minister. The project will see the acquisition of 34.30 hectares of forest land and 16.175 hectares of private holdings, in-

cluding 8.0525 hectares under Kodenchery and Thiruvambady taluks in Kozhikode district and 8.1225 hectares under Vellarimala village in Wayanad district. As much as 17.26 hectares spread across Chullikkad, Kollivayal, Madapparamba and Manalvayal villages under the Wayanad South Division will be used for afforestation in line with the Centre's guidelines issued while giving preliminary sanction to the project in 2023. But environmentalists see the project as a harbinger of disaster.

Ever since the official launch of the sub-surface work for the project by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on October 5, 2020 the Wayanad Prakruthi Samrakshana Samiti (WPSS), a collective of environmentalists for Wayanad, has been at the forefront of intensified agitations citing its ecological impact on the Western Ghats and the safety of the people living at the foothills. In two recent petitions to the MoEFCC, they have sought to repeal the stage-1 clearance accorded to the project. They argue that the State government furnished "misleading information" about the "high hazard zone" before the Union government and did not dwell on the question of the feasibility of the project across such a vulnerable terrain. Any evaluation of the project, they insist, must be in view of its impact on human settlements, particularly because the landslides in Wayanad's Chooralmala early this year had claimed over 230 lives while 130 remained missing. They dub the project area, comprising mountain slopes, as landslide-prone during monsoons. Citing a stability study done by the State government itself, they say several locations along the project site could witness overburden slides. The plantation village of Puthumala, which witnessed a massive landslide in 2019, is approximately 0.85 km from the proposed tunnel road. Moreover, Thiruvambady village in Kozhikode and Vellarimala village in Wayanad have been categorised as ecologically sensitive areas, they say.

N. Badusha, an environmentalist who leads the WPSS, believe that modernisation and strengthening of the already existing five ghat roads — Nadukani, Thamarassery, Pakramthalam, Periya and Boys Town — will go a long way in providing a sustainable solution to the traffic-related issues in Wayanad. "We have decided to move a writ petition in the Kerala High Court seeking the cancellation of the stage-1 clearance granted to the project. If implemented, this project will destroy the biodiversity of our 'camel hump' mountains like Vellarimala, Puthumala, and Chembra hills in Wayanad," Badusha argues. He also complains that the Union government is yet to give any reply to a series of petitions submitted by the environmentalists along with supporting facts and figures to expose the State's "misleading claims".

Kerala Forest Minister A.K. Saseendran, however, maintains that the State government has complied with all legal requirements to secure sanction for the project. "A tunnel road is the only practical option before us because all the earlier proposals related to the development of bypass roads to Wayanad have been opposed by the Union government from time to time. For us, the success of similar tunnel projects in other parts of the country is a confidence-building factor to proceed with our plan," he says. "Since 1994, we have been seriously thinking of various viable alternatives to bypass the ghat road. There is no going back now as we have complied with all the regulations in the way it has been done by other States to get the Centre's go-ahead for such projects," the Minister insists. Thiruvambady MLA Linto Joseph says the project is expected to secure stage -2 clearance soon from the Central government as procedures for the same are in the final stages. "We hope to secure the crucial final environmental clearance as well from the Union government which will enable us to sign the final agreement for constructions," he adds. Joseph, a strong advocate of the project.

# How does La Niña affect India's climate? | Explained

La Niña, a phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), occurs when the region of the Pacific Ocean between Indonesia and South America is cooler than usual. Its counterpart, El Niño, represents a warming of the same region. These two phases significantly influence global atmospheric circulation and weather patterns. During La Niña years, India receives normal or above-normal rainfall during the monsoon season. Yet the same phenomenon causes droughts in Africa and intensifies hurricanes over the Atlantic Ocean. Conversely, the El Niño brings extreme summers and droughts in India while increasing rainfall in the southern United States. While the La Niña was expected to emerge by July this year, it is yet to. The India Meteorological Department now expects a La Niña to set in by late 2024 or early 2025, plus a milder winter due to this delay. This decade began with three consecutive La Niña events (2020-2022), a rare occurrence known as Triple Dip La Niña, followed by an El Niño in 2023. Climate change may increase the frequency and intensity of both La Niña and El Niño events, as rising sea and land temperatures disrupt the Pacific's balance. This could also amplify extreme La Niña events, which generally lead to harsh winters in India.

Will a La Niña emerge this winter?

2024 is different; the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in fact called it "spooky". The La Niña has not emerged as expected. Historically, the La Niña has usually formed during the monsoon or the pre-monsoon period, and it has formed only twice between October and December

since 1950. Global forecasts had also predicted its emergence this monsoon. But in December, there remains only a 57% chance of it forming in 2024. It will be weak if it still does but it could affect global weather. The onset of La Niña or El Niño can be declared on the basis of many indices. For instance, the oceanic Niño index (ONI) compares the three-month average sea surface temperatures in the East-Central Tropical Pacific with the 30-year average. When the difference between the two is  $0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  or higher, it is an El Niño, and when it is  $-0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  or lower, it is a La Niña. Currently, it is around  $-0.3^{\circ}\text{C}$ . To be classified as a full-fledged La Niña or El Niño, ONI values need to exceed the thresholds at least five times consecutively. Meteorology of a La Niña winter: Cities in southern India like Bengaluru and Hyderabad are experiencing a colder than usual winter this year, while north India is witnessing a delayed winter with above-normal temperatures. Some reports have linked the southern chill to a La Niña, but the current ONI values suggest otherwise. Had a La Niña developed already, north India would likely be experiencing a colder winter than usual. An analysis of meteorological data over 35 years by researchers at the Council on Energy Environment and Water, New Delhi, has revealed that while La Niña winters feature colder nights compared to El Niño, daytime temperatures tend to be higher. Meteorological parameters like wind speed and planetary boundary layer height (PBLH) — the lowest atmospheric layer directly influenced by land-atmosphere interactions — also vary during ENSO phases, affecting air quality. The team found the av-



erage wind speed is higher throughout the day during La Niña winters. Faster winds help reduce air pollution by transporting pollutants away. They also found that the average PBLH is slightly lower during La Niña winters. If La Niña sets in, lower temperatures in north India may lead people to burn more biomass for heating, worsening air pollution. A lower PBLH could also trap more pollutants near the ground. But higher wind speeds could disperse the pollutants, potentially leading to better air quality. La Niña and the monsoons: El Niño summers are relatively harsher, as was the case in April this year, when India experienced intense, record-breaking heat waves. If a La Niña arrives and persists into the summer of 2025, it may offer relief from high heat. Additionally, an El

Niño often disrupts monsoons, with India historically receiving below-average rainfall during at least half of all El Niño years since 1871. But the same figures also indicate evolving patterns since 1980. Both north and south India, for instance, have received less rainfall during more intense El Niño events while central India has been barely affected. A La Niña, on the other hand, promotes robust monsoons as evidenced by the "normal" or "above-normal" rainfall in the La Niña years of 2020, 2021, and 2022. There were "below normal" rains in the El Niño year of 2023. Thus it would be a welcome development if a La Niña forms now or early next year and continues until the monsoon season. This would mean a less intense summer and more rains for India.

## Private finance for ecosystem-based adaptation through nature-based solutions

Nature-based solutions (NbS) harness the benefits of nature to address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and land degradation while creating pathways for sustainable development. While NbS could generate substantial economic benefits, current private finance flows remain insufficient due to market and information failures. This brief makes a case for increased private investments in NbS, highlighting their cost-effectiveness and sustainability. Implementing comprehensive reforms in data sharing, financial mechanisms, and capacity building is crucial for unlocking large-scale NbS financing.

The impacts of the climate crisis are becoming increasingly evident, and societies are facing massive threats from rising temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns, and frequent extreme weather events. Additionally, natural resources are deteriorating at an alarming rate, and human-induced biodiversity loss is escalating. Approximately 40% of the planet's land is already degraded, and more than half of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of approxi-

mately \$44 trillion is at immediate risk due to nature loss. By 2030, this loss of natural capital could reduce global GDP by 2.3% annually (to \$2.7 trillion), with poorer countries bearing the brunt of this decline due to their low adaptive capacity, dependence on climate-sensitive sectors, and already fragile ecosystems. These issues are exacerbated by the impact of changing weather patterns on natural ecosystems.



# What is the procedure for removing judges? | Explained

The story so far: Fifty-five MPs of the Rajya Sabha have submitted a motion, for removing Allahabad High Court Judge, Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, to Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

What is the procedure for removal?

Articles 124 and 217 of the Constitution provide that a judge of the Supreme Court/High Court shall be removed by the President, on the grounds of 'proved misbehaviour' or 'incapacity' after a motion is passed in each House of Parliament by a majority of the total membership of that House and by a majority of not less than two thirds of the members of that House present and voting (special majority) in the same session. The Constitution does not define the terms 'proved misbehaviour' or 'incapacity.' The Supreme Court has opined in various cases that wilful misconduct in office, corruption, lack of integrity or any other offence involving moral turpitude would constitute misbehaviour. Incapacity here means a medical condition that may include physical or mental incapacity. The detailed procedure for removal is provided in the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. It stipulates that a notice of motion for removal should be signed by not less than 50 members in the Rajya Sabha and 100 members in the Lok Sabha. The Chairman or Speaker may after due consideration and consultation admit or refuse to admit the motion. If admitted, a three-member committee will be constituted consisting of Supreme Court/High Court judges and a distinguished jurist. If the Committee, after investigation, absolves the judge of any misbehaviour or incapacity, the motion pending shall not be proceeded with. If found guilty of misbehaviour or suffering from incapacity, the committee report will be taken up in the Houses of Parliament which would then need to pass the motion with special majority.

What is the current issue?



Justice Yadav made communally-charged remarks while speaking at an event organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. He is reported to have said the country would be run according to the wishes of the majority. The 'Reinstatement of Values of Judicial Life' adopted by the Supreme Court in 1997, and followed by all the High Courts, mandates that behaviour and conduct of members of the higher judiciary must reaffirm people's faith in the impartiality of the judiciary. The judges should not commit any act of omission or commission that is unbecoming of the high office they occupy. Notably, though the Judges (Inquiry) Bill, 2006 was

not passed by the Parliament, it defined 'misbehaviour' to include violation of code of conduct for the judges. This bill proposed imposition of 'minor measures,' like issuing warnings, public or private censure, withdrawal of judicial work for a limited time etc., for misconduct that does not warrant removal.

What is required?

The Blackstone's ratio in criminal jurisprudence that 'it is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer' can be applied even when it comes to the removal of judges. The stringent process with the requirement of special majority in

both houses has resulted in the non-removal of judges even after having been found guilty of misbehaviour by the inquiry committee. This is nevertheless essential to protect the independence of judges while discharging their duties. The Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, against whom himself a notice of motion for removal has been submitted, is unlikely to admit the present motion. The Supreme Court has issued a notice seeking details of the controversial speech made by Justice Yadav. The Judge is likely to appear before the Supreme Court Collegium to explain his stand. It is cardinal that Judges display behaviour that behoves the high constitutional office they hold.

## Avian conservation, protection, and diversity in Indian cities

Birds provide multiple benefits to the world's ecosystems. In recent years, experts have raised the alarm about deteriorating bird populations, with some species becoming extinct and others threatened to dangerous levels. This decline in avian populations is primarily attributed to urbanisation. Concerted efforts are required to conserve birds and their habitats in cities. The government of India, state governments, urban local bodies, non-government organisations, bird welfare organisations, and the urban community will all play a vital role.

There are more than 11,000 species of birds globally, populating every country across all regions, displaying behaviours shaped by their unique ecological challenges, and equipped with the ability to adapt. For example, while some species have evolved to adapt to extreme climates, others can fly long distances to more suitable climates.

Bird species contribute to the preservation of rural and urban ecosystems through pollination, seed dispersal, forest regeneration, scavenging, and weed and pest control. Around 5% of the plants used by humans for food and medicine are pollinated by birds. Bird droppings also contribute to nutrient distribution. In this context, the role of sea birds is especially crucial. These birds eat fish and other sea creatures on the high seas and nest in large colonies on land. The excrement of the birds provides concentrated nutrients to the soil at their coastal breeding grounds, enabling plant and grass growth.

Additionally, many birds consume pests in large quantities, thereby rescuing crops threatened by pests. Barn swallows consume up to 60 insects an hour, and western bluebirds are known to prevent damage to grapes in vineyards by feeding on invertebrate pests.

