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Question Corner

Cramped muscles

What are muscle cramps?

A cramp is a sudden, involuntary tightening of a muscle or a group of muscles that a person can't immediately relax.

Because the muscle locks up all at once, it often feels like a sharp knot and can hurt for a while.

Muscle cramps occur in parts of the legs or hands as a result of dehydration, exercise or low potassium or magnesium levels.

Menstrual cramps in the uterus are hormone-driven contractions to expel the uterine lining. Stomach cramps occur due to gas, infections and/or in people with irritable bowel syndrome.

In all cases, a cramp occurs when muscle cells have become stressed and start to misfire. People are at greater risk of cramped muscles if they have diabetes, thyroid problems or kidney disease or if they're taking particular drugs. To relieve a cramped muscle, doctors have advised pausing the stress-causing activity and gently stretching the muscle, massaging the area, applying heat to relax the tightness, and drinking lots of water. It also helps to warm up before the activity to prepare the muscles.

Readers may send their questions / answers to
questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

Large genetic map of Indians flags hidden disease risks

Using mutations as genetic clocks, the study also confirmed that present-day Indians descend primarily from a single out-of-Africa migration around 50,000 years ago

Anirban Mukhopadhyay

India's vast linguistic, cultural, and social diversity has long been evident, but only now are scientists beginning to uncover the genetic richness underpinning it. In a new study in *Cell*, researchers reported sequencing the genomes of 2,762 Indians from 23 States and Union Territories. The data captured variation across caste, tribal groups, language, geography, and rural-to-urban settings, offering the most comprehensive genomic map of India to date.

The findings are striking. The study reaffirmed the three primary sources of Indian ancestry and explored how this layered history, along with entrenched social practices, continues to shape health and disease risk today.

Using mutations as genetic clocks, the study confirmed that present-day Indians descend primarily from a single out-of-Africa migration around 50,000 years ago. Although archaeology suggests earlier human presence in the subcontinent, "those populations may not have survived or left lasting genetic traces," said Elise Kerdoncuff, the study's first author.

The researchers modelled Indian ancestry as a blend of three ancient populations: indigenous hunter-gatherers known as Ancient Ancestral South Indians; Iranian-related Neolithic farmers, best represented by fourth millennium BCE herders from Sarazm in present-day Tajikistan; and Eurasian

Past continuous

India's deep genetic past is still shaping contemporary Indians' health

- Scientists sequenced the genomes of 2,762 Indians in 23 regions, revealing a detailed genetic map of India

- Most Indians mix hunter-gatherer, Iranian farmer, and Steppe herder roots, with eastern groups adding East Asian ancestry

- Strict marriage within communities increases shared genes, boosting chances of recessive diseases like dangerous anaesthetic reactions

- Indian genomes hold diverse Neanderthal and Denisovan segments, including a chromosome 3 piece that raises COVID-19 risk



- Researchers discovered 2.6 crore new variants, many altering proteins and tied to thalassemia, deafness, and metabolic disorders

- Scientists call for bigger, more community-focused studies so precision medicine fairly serves India's immense genetic diversity

Steppe pastoralists, who arrived around 2000 BCE and are associated with the spread of Indo-European languages. While most Indians fall along a genetic spectrum reflecting different proportions of this admixture, individuals from East and Northeast India, and a subset from Central India, carry East Asian-related ancestry, with levels reaching up to 5% in West Bengal. This likely entered around 520 CE, after the Gupta Empire's decline or with an earlier spread of rice farming.

India's population structure reflects long-standing practices of marriage within communities. This has produced strong founder effects, where a small ancestral gene pool gets amplified over generations. As a result, Indians, especially in South India, have 2-9x more homozygosity than Europeans or East Asians,

making them more likely to inherit the same version of a gene from both parents. Every individual in the study had at least one genetic relative, indicating levels of relatedness far exceeding those seen elsewhere. This tight-knit structure may make recessive disorders caused by inheriting faulty copies of the same gene from both parents more common than currently recognised.

One example is a pathogenic *BCHE* variant linked to severe anaesthetic reactions found enriched in Telangana.

Like all non-Africans, Indians carry traces of ancient interbreeding with other hominins, with Neanderthal or Denisovan segments covering up to 1.5% of the genome in some Indians. They also have the widest variety of Neanderthal segments. "Multiple waves of migration, fol-

lowed by caste-based endogamy, likely fixed archaic segments within specific groups, contributing to this high diversity," Lomous Kumar, population geneticist at the Centre for Anthropobiology and Genomics of Toulouse, France, said.

Neanderthal-derived sequences are enriched in immune system genes. A region on chromosome 3 (linked to severe COVID-19) is especially common in East and Northeast India. Denisovan variants appear in immune-related pathways and regions such as the MHC, a key genomic region involved in detecting and fighting infections. "Enrichments in *TRIM* and *BTNL2*, involved in mounting immune responses to viruses, suggests that some variants were retained because they conferred an adaptive advantage," Dr. Kerdoncuff said. "As humans moved into new envi-

ronments, inheriting these variations from archaic populations likely helped them adapt to unfamiliar pathogens."

The researchers uncovered 2.6 crore undocumented genetic variants. Of these, over 1.6 lakh were protein-altering variants absent from global databases and about 7% were linked to thalassemia, congenital deafness, cystic fibrosis, and metabolic disorders. "This highlights how neglected Indians are in genomic surveys," Dr. Kerdoncuff said, "limiting scientific discovery and reducing the accuracy of risk predictions. The promise of precision medicine for underrepresented populations ultimately suffers." Dr. Kumar added: "Within India as well, population-specific rare and unique variants continue to make the scenario complex," emphasising localised efforts are also imperative.

To help close this gap, Dr. Kerdoncuff said, the team is expanding the study to include more genetically isolated communities. They're also studying proteins and metabolism to better understand how genes influence health outcomes. In parallel, they're developing new tools to trace the origins of disease-linked genes in Indian populations.

To make medicine truly inclusive, India's vast genetic diversity must be central to global research and matched by deeper, community-level efforts at home.

(Anirban Mukhopadhyay is a geneticist by training and science communicator from Delhi)

Excavating the past

Keeladi

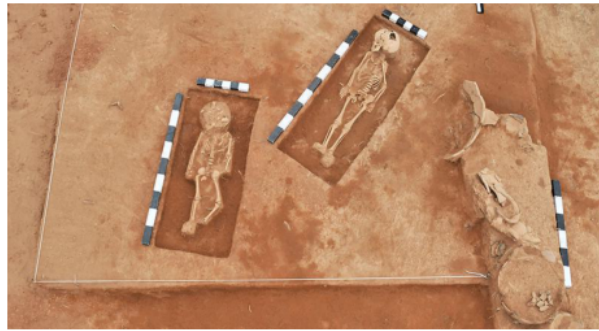
Findings at the excavation site in Sivaganga district offer compelling evidence that urban civilisation existed in Tamil Nadu during the Sangam age

B. Kolappan

A newly laid road runs through Keeladi, a village in Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu, that has now earned a significant place on India's political and cultural map. A steady stream of visitors, particularly students, flock to the state-of-the-art museum established by the Tamil Nadu government which showcases the findings from the Keeladi excavation site.

On the other side of the village, nestled among coconut groves, workers under the supervision of archaeologists continue to excavate land once believed to have been a thriving industrial hub. Square-shaped trenches reveal remnants of furnaces containing soot and ash, confirming that Keeladi was a centre for manufacturing beads made from quartz, carnelian, glass, agate, and other materials. Carbon dating of charcoal discovered at the site in February 2017 established that the settlement dates back to 6th century BCE. These excavations offer compelling evidence that urban civilisation existed in Tamil Nadu during the Sangam age. The findings also indicate trade and cultural exchange with the Indus Valley Civilisation.

For Tamil Nadu politicians, particularly the lead-



ers of the ruling DMK, the findings provided the much-needed grist for their political narrative. Chief Minister M.K. Stalin in January this year announced a \$1 million prize for experts or organisations that succeed in deciphering the script of the Indus Valley Civilisation, pointing out that 60% of the graffiti marks found in Tamil Nadu had parallels to the symbols found on Indus seals.

Long-standing divide

The findings also fuelled the long-standing Aryan-Dravidian divide, and some expressed reservations about accepting the findings from Keeladi. This was followed by the transfer of archaeologist Amarnath Ramakrishna of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), who led the first two phases of the excavation, to Assam in 2017. The third phase was overseen by another archaeologist, P.S. Sriraman, who reported that there was no

continuity in the brick structures. Excavations resumed only after the intervention of the Madras High Court. The Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology also took up the project and, in its report, asserted that Keeladi was once a site of urban civilisation, a claim that remains a point of contention among archaeologists.

Those who dispute the claim of an urban settlement point to sites such as Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, and others in Gujarat, which, they argue, "bear testimony to the existence of an urban civilisation," whereas Keeladi, they contend, is just another excavation site without sufficient evidence to qualify as an urban centre.

The return of the 982-page report by Amarnath Ramakrishna of the ASI, with instructions to provide further evidence and rewrite it, stirred yet another controversy. In Tamil Nadu, this move is perceived as indicative of the

BJP-led NDA government's bias against discoveries emerging from the South.

The current dispensation at the Centre is seen as reluctant to accept anything projected as superior to the Indo-Aryan heritage. Given the Centre's stance on Indian culture, language, and religion, the ASI's directive to Mr. Ramakrishna and his subsequent transfer is viewed with suspicion – even if there is a genuine academic basis for it.

Mr. Ramakrishna, rather than pursuing the matter through academic channels, has joined the chorus of Tamil Nadu politicians, though many believe the Centre's motives are clear for all to see. Mr. Ramakrishna, from the beginning, has been maintaining that there has been no evidence for religious worship.

What remains undisputed is the need for extensive excavation in Keeladi and surrounding areas. Madurai and its neighbouring regions along the banks of the Vaigai are undeniably ancient settlements. It is crucial to have excavations on the scale of those at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro to substantiate the claim of a flourishing urban civilisation in Tamil Nadu. The ASI has the responsibility of undertaking this effort with the support of the Tamil Nadu government.

Where does India lag in gender metrics?

What is India's standing in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index for 2025?

Priscilla Jebaraj

The story so far:

India dropped two places in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index for 2025, slipping to the 131st rank out of 148 countries. While the gender gap has narrowed or remained stable in the case of three categories – economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival – it has worsened in the case of political empowerment. At a time when rising numbers of women are voting in elections, the number of women in the highest halls of power remain stubbornly low. This is set to change in 2029, when mandatory 33% reservation for women in State and national legislatures is set to kick in, but steps need to be taken to ensure the benefits of this law extend to the long term.

What led to the drop?

The Index uses three indicators to assess political empowerment, with India falling in two – the percentage of women in Parliament, which dropped from 14.7% (78 MPs) in 2024 to 13.79% (74 MPs) in 2025 after the general election for the 18th Lok Sabha; and the percentage of women in ministerial positions, which dropped from an already abysmal 6.45% in 2024 to just 5.56% in 2025.

What will change after women's reservation?

The legislation for 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and in State legislatures was passed after a long wait in 2023, but as it is tied to a new Census and delimitation exercise, it can only be implemented from the 2029 general election at the earliest. Women's representation

While more women may become MPs in India, it remains to be seen if ruling parties also appoint them to ministerial roles in higher numbers

in the Lok Sabha has ranged from 3.4% in 1977 to 14% in 2019. At the time of the passage of the women's reservation legislation in 2023, women accounted for only 9% of MLAs in State Assemblies, with Chhattisgarh having the highest representation (18% women MLAs), while Himachal Pradesh had just one woman MLA and Mizoram had none. Jacking these figures up to at least 33% will give a significant boost to India's political empowerment scores.

The catch is that reservation is only valid for 15 years from the time the law passes, meaning that it is likely to be implemented in only two general election cycles, 2029 and 2034, raising concerns about the sustainability of gains women would make in this period. Also, while more women may become MPs, it remains to be seen if ruling parties also appoint them to ministerial roles in higher numbers, increasing their representation in actual governance.

Despite the three-decade old 33% reservation for women at the panchayat and municipality level, which has been increased to 50% in most States, there is no clear pipeline to draw such local leaders into State-level politics.

Does the rise in women voters matter?

Back in 1952, 28 lakh women were excluded from voting in the general election as they were listed on the electoral rolls only as someone's mother or wife, with their own names missing. The gender gap among voters has narrowed steadily since then, from 17 percentage points in 1962 to less than two percentage points in 2014. In fact, in the last two general elections, women voters have actually overtaken men, though this can also be partially attributed to rising male migration for employment, leaving men unable to vote in their home States. The rising numbers of women voting has led to political parties wooing women as a votebank, with a slew of welfare schemes aimed at women, ranging from free bicycles for girls to a monthly allowance for poorer women.

How to increase women candidates?

The trend with respect to women voters, however, has not translated into an increase in women's representation. "Political parties continue to give lower representation to women candidates in so-called 'good seats', often citing a lack of winnability," says Rahul Verma, a political scientist at the Centre for Policy Research, noting that many parties field women in seats reserved for Scheduled Caste/Tribe candidates, in a bid to offset that quota.

"Women voters do not automatically vote for women candidates. Gender is not like caste, where voters may vote on the basis of identity. Women are much more practical, looking for actual programmatic delivery," says Tara Krishnaswamy of Political Shakti, a non-partisan group working to improve women's representation in politics. However, she dismisses parties' excuses that women candidates are not winnable. "In every general election since 1952, women candidates have had a higher winning percentage in comparison to men. The problem is that women do not make it to the candidates list... Women candidates in the lists of recognised parties average about 8% or 9%," she says.



What are the issues around deportation?

Why is there a distinction to be made between people who are being deported and those who are being pushed back? What are the different laws that deal with immigration and foreigners in India? What is the situation on the ground in border States such as Assam and West Bengal?

Vijaita Singh

The story so far:

At least seven West Bengal residents who were pushed to Bangladesh by the Border Security Force (BSF) on suspicion of being Bangladeshis were brought back to India after the intervention of the State government. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on June 25 that residents speaking in their native Bengali language are being branded as Bangladeshis in some Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-ruled States. Several people who were pushed from Assam to Bangladesh also returned as they were found to be Indians or that their citizenship cases were sub-judice.

Why have matters escalated?

After the regime change in Bangladesh in August 2024, the police across the country were asked by the Union Home Ministry to detect Bangladeshis who had illegally entered the country and were living here on forged documents. The drive assumed momentum after the Pahalgam terror attack in April and the subsequent 'Operation Sindoor'. The Ministry has issued instructions to States to deport undocumented migrants but in most cases pushbacks are happening. Around 2,500 suspected Bangladeshis have been pushed back so far. On May 10, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the government has decided to implement the "pushback" mechanism to check infiltration instead of going through the legal route which is a long-drawn process. Home Minister Amit Shah has asked top intelligence officials to make an example of "infiltrators" by detecting, detaining, and deporting them. In 2022, at an Intelligence Bureau meeting, Mr. Shah had asked officials to

Assam is likely to enforce a 1950 law to identify and evict illegal foreigners

identify around 100 illegal migrants in each State, check documents and arrest and deport them. He asked them to continue with the crackdown even if neighbouring countries do not accept the undocumented migrants.

What is the difference between deportation and pushback?

Deportation is a legal process which involves detaining and arresting a foreigner suspected to be living in India without documents or who has entered the country illegally. The case is presented before a court and after exhaustion of all legal avenues, which includes conviction by the court, the country which the foreigner belongs to is contacted and the deportation takes place once the identity is confirmed. Pushbacks are not a legal procedure and there are no stated rules. They happen when a foreigner has been caught by the border security force on the international border and, depending on the intensity of the case or the discretion of the border personnel, they are either arrested, made to face the law here or pushed back. Since citizenship and foreigners are Union List subjects, it is the Home Ministry which delegates powers to deport foreigners to State governments. In 2024, the Ministry told the Jharkhand High Court that since the "Central Government does not maintain a separate federal police force exclusively dedicated to the task of detection and deportation of illegally staying foreigners, action in this regard has been entrusted to the State police."

What is the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950?

On June 9, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the State government was likely to enforce a 1950 law to identify and evict illegal foreigners, adding that under the law, district commissioners are empowered to declare individuals as illegal immigrants and initiate eviction proceedings. The 1950 Act was passed by Parliament amid communal disturbance and violence following the Partition of India in 1947 and creation of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) bordering West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. The Act says that "it extends to the whole of India", but has Assam-specific provisions. Section 2 of the Act says that if the Union government is of the opinion that any person or class of persons, having been ordinarily resident in any place outside India are detrimental to the interests of the general public of India or any Scheduled Tribe in Assam, the Union government may by order, "direct such person or class of persons to remove himself or themselves from India or

Assam within such time and by such route as may be specified in the order"; and "give such further directions in regard to his or their removal from India or Assam as it may consider necessary or expedient".

What are the laws for foreigners?

Till April this year, matters relating to foreigners and immigration were administered through "pre-Constitution period" laws enacted during the First and Second World Wars, which were the Foreigners Act, 1946, Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939 and the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000. In April, Parliament enacted the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025 repealing the old laws.

Unlike Pakistan and Bangladesh borders, the rules for movement of people along Nepal and Myanmar are different. Nepal has a free-border agreement with India, and a Free Movement regime (FMR), allowing movement of people residing within 10-km on either side, exists along the India-Myanmar border. Following the May 2023 ethnic violence in Manipur, the Ministry in 2024 decided to fence the entire 1,643-km Myanmar border in the next 10 years. Post the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, over 40,000 refugees from Myanmar belonging to the Chin ethnic group who are closely related to the Mizo community crossed over to Mizoram. On March 10, 2021, the MHA sent a letter to the State governments of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram that the refugees should be identified and deported and that the State Governments have no powers to grant "refugee" status to any foreigner as India is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol. The refugees continue to live here.

What is behind this recent drive?

Since the April 22 terror attack at Pahalgam, the police has intensified the drive to detect undocumented migrants. Initially, they were taken by trains to border districts and then pushed to Bangladesh by the BSF. In some instances, migrants after being up picked from Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra, were flown by planes to Agartala in Tripura and transported to the Bangladesh border by BSF personnel. The police and the BSF record biometrics and photographs of the undocumented migrants. It is to be noted that the BSF has never acknowledged any of the pushbacks. The Ministry has asked the States to verify the claims of undocumented migrants who claim Indian nationality after which District Magistrates are to send a report within 30 days, failing which the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer would deport them. In 2022, the Unique Identification Authority of India was asked to maintain a "negative list" to stop undocumented migrants from procuring identity documents in the future.



No due process: BSF women personnel patrol along the fence on the Bangladesh border at Golakganj in Dhubri district in Assam on May 26. AFP

Secondary pollutants, especially ammonium sulphate, constitute a third of PM2.5 pollution

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Secondary pollutants, particularly ammonium sulphate, that results from the reaction between sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and ammonia (NH₃) in the atmosphere, are responsible for nearly one-third of India's fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) pollution, said a study from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA).

Primary pollutants are those that result from the burning of fossil fuels from automobiles, coal plants and organic matter. These pollutants, once they climb into the atmosphere, react with each other or other gases or water vapour in the atmosphere to form more complex particles – some of which are harmful. These are called secondary pollutants.

The CREA findings emerge from a combination of satellite-data imagery and modelling analysis.

“This widespread pre-



Health hazard: Ammonium sulphate concentration is 2.5 times higher within 10 km of coal-fired power plants. AP

sence of ammonium sulphate has been observed in several cities, irrespective of their proximity to major emission sources, due to the trans-boundary nature of pollution,” an accompanying press release noted.

CREA's study says the nationwide average concentration of ammonium sulphate is 11.9 microgram per cubic metre, accounting for approximately 34% of the PM_{2.5} mass. The main driver of ammonium

sulphate formation and more than 60% of SO₂ emissions in India originate from coal-fired thermal power plants.

“This makes them a critical target for reducing secondary PM_{2.5} pollution through the implementation of flue gas desulphurisation (FGD) systems,” the report notes.

Though it is mandatory for Indian coal thermal plants to install such units, only about 8% have installed them, and the go-

vernment is also considering doing away with such a requirement altogether.

Ammonium sulphate concentrations constitute a greater proportion of particulate matter nearer to coal plants and fall with distance. It is 2.5 times higher within 10 km of coal-fired power plants (15 microgram per cubic metre) compared to areas beyond 10 km (6 microgram per cubic metre).

While the contribution to PM_{2.5} is 36% near coal-fired thermal power plants, it remains significant at 23% in other areas, indicating both local and trans-boundary impacts of SO₂ emissions.

Across the 130 National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) cities, concentrations ranged from 3.9 to 22.5 microgram per cubic metre, with the share of PM_{2.5} from ammonium sulphate ranging between 20% and 43%.

Notably, ammonium sulphate made up more than 30% of the total PM_{2.5} levels in 114 out of

130 NCAP cities. These are cities marked out as having a considerable level of air pollution and required to reduce pollution by a certain percentage by 2025-26.

In addition to ammonium sulphate, other secondary pollutants like ammonium nitrate also contribute significantly, up to 50% of PM_{2.5} mass.

‘Follow emission norms’

“Alongside targeted strategies such as deploying flue-gas desulphurisation in coal-fired thermal power plants to reduce sulphur dioxide and promoting efficient fertilizer management to reduce ammonia, it is essential that all polluting sectors fully comply with existing emission norms. Ensuring both source-specific actions and regulatory compliance is critical for reducing precursor gas emissions and tackling the growing burden of secondary PM_{2.5} pollution in India,” said Manoj Kumar, Analyst at CREA.



World is borderless... India is much larger than shown on maps: Shukla

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, the first Indian on the International Space Station (ISS), spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday and described his view of earth as “borderless” and India as looking “much larger” than how it is projected on maps.

“India looks beautiful and much larger than how it appears relative to other countries on a map. The one-ness of the world – a sentiment that we endorse even in India – is very evident from here. No countries exist, and ultimately, we are all part of humanity. The earth is our home and we are all its citizens,” he told the Prime Minister in a conversation that was also broadcast for public viewing on YouTube.

Mr. Modi told the astronaut that his space travel marked the beginning of a



A celestial call: Narendra Modi during a video-interaction with Shubhanshu Shukla on Saturday. PTI

new era and was the first step towards Mission Gaganyaan, India’s own human spaceflight project. “Shubhanshu, today you are the farthest from the land of India, but the closest to the hearts of every Indian,” he said.

In a roughly 20-minute conversation, Group Captain Shukla who appeared on a screen with the tricolour in the background and string of paper flags from other countries festooned around him, answered questions from Mr. Modi on the food he had carried along, the experience of

weightlessness, the experiments he would be performing and what message he had for Indians on the earth.

“Right now, I have tied my feet to the ground to be able to speak to you, else I’ll just float upwards,” Mr. Shukla said, eliciting an amused chuckle from Mr. Modi. “Eating, drinking... everything feels different, and despite all the training and being fully prepared for what to expect, it takes some time to get used to everything.”

Mr. Shukla told the Prime Minister that he had

brought with him *gajar ka halwa*, *moong dal halwa* and *aam ras* and that they were relished by his fellow astronauts on the space station.

The Prime Minister told the Lucknow-born astronaut that his historic journey was not just limited to space, but would add fresh momentum to the march towards *Viksit Bharat* (developed India). “We have to take Mission Gaganyaan forward. We must build our own space station. And we must ensure that an Indian astronaut lands on the Moon.

“Your experiences will play a crucial role in all these future missions. I am confident that you are diligently recording every bit of your experience,” he added.

Mr. Modi conveyed his wishes and said he was looking forward to Mr. Shukla’s safe return to earth.

(With PTI inputs)



V-P Dhankhar calls 1976 Preamble change a 'sacrilege' to the spirit of *Sanatana*

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

In response to the controversial comments by senior Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leader Dattatreya Hosabale that "secularism" and "socialism" were not part of the Preamble to the Constitution drafted by B.R. Ambedkar, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar said here on Saturday that the words were added to the Preamble during Emergency as an "ulcer", and were a sacrilege to the spirit of "*Sanatana*".

Speaking at an event to release *Ambedkar's Messages*, a book compiled by former Karnataka MLC D.S. Veeraiah, Mr. Dhankhar said the Preamble to any Constitution was its soul.

"The Preamble of the Indian Constitution is unique. Except Bharat, [no other] Constitution's



Jagdeep Dhankhar

Preamble has undergone change, and why? Preamble is not changeable. Preamble is not alterable. Preamble is the basis on which the Constitution has grown. Preamble is the seed of the Constitution. It is soul of the Constitution, but this Preamble for Bharat was changed by 42nd Constitutional Amendment of 1976, adding the words 'socialist', 'secular', and 'integrity'," he said.

During Emergency, the "darkest period of Indian democracy", when people were behind bars, funda-

mental rights were suspended. "In the name of those – 'We, the People' – who were enslaved, we just go for what? Just a flourish of words? It is to be deprecated beyond words," Mr. Dhankhar said. The founding fathers thought it befittingly wise to give us that Preamble, he said. "First, we change something which is not changeable, alterable – something that emanates from 'We, the People' – and then, you change it during Emergency. When 'We, the People' were bleeding – in heart, in soul – they were in darkness," he added.

"Addition of these words during Emergency signals betrayal of the mindset of the framers of the Constitution. It is nothing but belittling the civilisational wealth and knowledge of this country for thousands of years. It is sacrilege to the spirit of '*Sanatana*'," he said.

Parag Jain, who had key role in Sindoor, appointed RAW chief

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

The Union government on Saturday appointed senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Parag Jain as the new chief of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's external intelligence agency.

A 1989-batch IPS officer from the Punjab cadre, Mr. Jain will succeed incumbent RAW chief Ravi Sinha, who is due to retire on June 30.

Mr. Jain will assume office on July 1 for a fixed two-year term.

At present, Mr. Jain heads the Aviation Research Centre (ARC), a key wing of RAW. He is said to have played a pivotal role in Operation Sindoor by providing intelligence inputs that enabled precision missile strikes on terrorist hideouts in Pakistan.

Mr. Jain has previously served in various capacities in Punjab during its terrorism crisis, including



Parag Jain

as Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) and Deputy Inspector-General (DIG). His past assignments also include significant responsibilities on the Pakistan desk of RAW, and he was posted in Jammu and Kashmir during the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019.

Additionally, Mr. Jain has had diplomatic and intelligence stints in Sri Lanka and Canada, where he monitored Khalistani terror modules.

Over the course of his career, he has held several sensitive posts relating to national security and foreign intelligence.

Bihar becomes first State to vote using mobile app

E-SECBHR was made available for elderly, disabled persons, pregnant women to vote in municipal bypolls and election in six Nagar Panchayats; East Champaran native cast country's first e-vote

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

In a first, voters exercised their franchise through mobile phones in Bihar on Saturday. The voting was part of the municipal bypolls and election in six Nagar Panchayats in the State. The districts where the polls were held include Patna, Buxar, Rohtas and East Champaran.

While voting continued through the usual method of electronic voting machines at all the polling booths, some voters were able to cast their vote from home through a mobile phone app.

The facility was made available for senior citizens, disabled persons, and pregnant women who may find it difficult to visit the booths. Polling was held across 489 booths for



Tech adopter: Senior citizens in Rohtas district after e-voting for the Bihar municipal polls on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

538 candidates. People were also able to use the State Election Commission website to vote.

"Mrs. Bibha Kumari cast the country's first e-vote creating new history with e-voting in local body elections. A symbol of convenience, security, and empowered participation," Bihar's State Election Commission (SEC) posted on X.

She is a resident of Pakri-dayal in East Champaran district. Munna Kumar from the same district was the first male voter to cast an e-vote.

Bihar State Election Commissioner Deepak Prasad had earlier said that eligible voters could install the E-SECBHR app and link the mobile number added in the voters' list.

The app was developed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).

Mr. Prasad, however, did not disclose whether this facility would be available during the upcoming Assembly election due in October-November.

Tampering concerns

Allaying concerns around the risk of tampering of e-votes. Mr. Prasad asserted that efforts have been made to maintain transparency and the voting process would be smooth and fair.

Only two registered voters are allowed to log in using one mobile number and verification of each voter is done by entering the voter identity number. The other security measures include blockchain technology, face-matching and scanning.



Turmeric Board headquarters to be opened in Nizamabad today

R. Ravikanth Reddy
HYDERABAD

The headquarters of the National Turmeric Board will be formally inaugurated in Nizamabad by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday, fulfilling a demand that shaped the politics of Nizamabad district in Telangana involving two prominent politicians.

The ceremony will feature the unveiling of the official logo of the Board, symbolising a new era of farmer innovation and global competitiveness. Earlier this month, Mr. Shah was invited by Arvind Dharmapuri, Nizamabad



The agriculture market yard in Nizamabad district, which is one of the largest producers of turmeric in India. NAGARA GOPAL

MP, and National Turmeric Board Chairperson Palle Ganga Reddy.

The event holds a significant political hue as the issue in 2019 led to the defeat of Bharat Rashtra

Samithi (BRS) candidate K. Kavitha in Nizamabad when her father K. Chandrashekhara Rao was the Chief Minister of Telangana.

The country's focus turned to the BJP candidate Arvind Dharmapuri, who was a first-time contestant and that too from a seat which the BJP had never won.

His promise to establish a Turmeric Board – reinforced by a signed bond paper he distributed to turmeric farmers – had a significant impact on the campaign. Though delayed, the dream of the turmeric farmers is now being realised.



T.N. govt. not to extend Rosewood Conservation Act

Geetha Srimathi
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu will no longer have specific legislation to regulate rosewood exploitation, as the State government has decided not to renew the Tamil Nadu Rosewood Trees (Conservation) Act, 1994, allowing the legislation to lapse after its extended term ended in February 2025.

A recent Government Order (G.O.) issued by Supriya Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Forests, said the legislation was enacted in 1995 to protect *Dalbergia latifolia*, commonly known as rosewood – a rare and valuable tree species whose numbers were declining due to illegal felling and trade.

Initially passed for 15 years, the legislation was renewed in 2010 for another 15 years. However, the government has decided that continuing the Act is no longer necessary. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Head of Forest Force) noted that prolonged restrictions on felling rosewood trees on *patta* lands have discouraged farmers from cultivating the species, despite its high market value. “If the restrictions are lifted, farmers will be greatly benefited by getting competitive and remunerative prices for the rosewood trees grown on their *patta* lands,” the G.O. noted.

The State government is currently pursuing the ob-

jective of bringing 33% of its total land area under green cover, in line with the National Forest Policy. According to the G.O., incentivising rosewood cultivation on private lands aligns with this goal.

Srinivas R. Reddy, PCCF (Head of Forest Force), said existing environmental laws, such as the Tamil Nadu Preservation of Private Forests Act, 1949, and the Tamil Nadu Hill Areas (Preservation of Trees) Act, 1955, were sufficient to regulate the removal of rosewood from areas outside forest limits.

Experts, however, say the two Acts are not designed to address the conservation of individual species, like rosewood, in a targeted manner.

Notably, *Dalbergia latifolia* is listed as a “vulnerable” species in the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species and in Appendix II of the CITES list.

While the G.O. states farmers will benefit from cultivating rosewood, experts say that these trees take around 30 years to reach a substantial size.

Moreover, mature rosewood trees are important genetic resources for plant breeding, and their continued depletion could seriously impact the species’ gene pool. As large trees have already been heavily harvested for commercial use, experts stress the need for a comprehensive inventory to assess the current population.



Mullaperiyar dam's shutters to be opened today: officials

Water level at the dam stands at 135.9 ft as of 6 p.m. on Saturday; the district administration compiled a list of 3,220 people for relocation to the relief camps, but people refuse to move

The Hindu Bureau
IDUKKI

Tamil Nadu PWD officials have said that the Mullaperiyar dam's spillway shutters will be opened at 10 a.m. on Sunday. A maximum of 1,000 cusecs of water will be released from the dam.

As Tamil Nadu announced the likely opening of the dam shutters on Friday, the district administration compiled a list of 3,220 individuals for relocation to the relief camps. However, the people refused to move to the camps and continued to remain at their homes.

Shaji Kurishummood, a resident of Vallakkadavu, says that for people living in the downstream areas of



When shutters of the Mullaperiyar dam are opened, the water first reaches Vallakkadavu through the Periyar river. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Mullaperiyar, shutter opening of the dam has now become a regular scene during the monsoon. "Now, people here have accepted that there will not be any permanent

solution for their issues," he says.

P.N. Sebastian, another resident of Vallakkadavu, says that no families here have moved to the relief camps after the announce-

ments. "The shutter opening and the unavoidable flooding has all become a routine for us now. When there is any announcement of shutter opening, there will be a surge of sympathy wave for people living in the downstream areas like Vallakkadavu and Vandiperiyar. However, as the water recedes, the sympathy wave also will disappear," he says.

The water level on Saturday at 6 p.m. was 135.90 ft. The average inflow was 3,867 cusecs, and the tunnel discharge was 2,117 cusecs.

The Tamil Nadu PWD officials had on Friday announced that the dam is likely to be opened on Saturday when the water level reaches 136 ft.

