

SC refuses to stay release of Bihar caste survey data

The top court refuses to order status quo even as petitioners flag data was collected unlawfully; dismisses notion that its compilation and publication affects privacy; State told to file its response

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to stay the Bihar government from publishing data collected from its caste-based survey.

A Bench headed by Justice Sanjiv Khanna refused to be bothered by the fact that the State had released the data when petitions challenging the legality of the survey was pending before the Supreme Court.

"You cannot stop a State government or any government from taking a decision... Yes, if there is an issue with regard to the data, that will be considered," Justice Khanna addressed the petitioners.

The Bench posted the case for next hearing in January 2024, while issuing



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JUSTICE SANJIV KHANNA



notice to the State to file its response to the petitions.

'Unlawfully collected'

"The main issue here is that the data was collected unlawfully and cannot be acted upon," advocate Aparajita Singh, who led the petitioners' side, argued.

"You will be in some difficulty on that... we have read the Patna High Court judgment [which upheld the survey] and made a *prima facie* view. The High

Court judgment is fairly detailed," Justice Khanna observed.

Justice Khanna said the cardinal issue was "how much breakdown of data would be made available to the general public for the sake of transparency". The court further dismissed the notion that the compilation and publication of data affects privacy.

"Privacy is not an issue as names, etc., are not published," Justice Khanna

orally remarked.

Ms. Singh persisted that the court should order status quo as the State would publish more data by the next hearing in January.

"We are not staying this at the moment," Justice Khanna replied, though at one point asking Mr. Diwan why the State had published the data when the case was still pending.

Senior advocate Shyam Diwan, for Bihar, said the petitions were at a pre-admission stage when the court was still deciding whether or not to issue formal notice. He said the data received was extensive and voluntary from the people, and needed to be analysed in detail to help identify welfare areas.

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SC refuses to stay caste survey data release

Earlier, the Supreme Court had refused to stay the uploading of data collected in the caste-based survey. The Bihar government had argued that the exercise was a "social survey". The Patna High Court, on August 1, had upheld the legality of the survey. The petitioners had argued that Bihar had no authority to conduct such a survey, which was an attempt to usurp the powers of the Centre.

The Union government had maintained that only the Centre and "no other body" was entitled to conduct "either census or any action akin to census" in its reply to the Supreme Court on the Bihar government's caste-based survey.

The affidavit said the Centre was "committed to take all affirmative actions for the upliftment of SCs/STs/SEBCs and OBCs in accordance with the Constitution and the applicable law".

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Nobel Peace Prize 2023 goes to jailed Iranian activist Narges Mohammadi

Associated Press

Imprisoned Iranian activist Narges Mohammadi won the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday in recognition of her tireless campaigning for women's rights and democracy, and against the death penalty.

Ms. Mohammadi, 51, has kept up her activism despite numerous arrests by Iranian authorities and spending years behind bars. She has remained a leading light for nationwide, women-led protests, sparked by the death last year of a 22-year-old woman in police custody.

"This prize is first and foremost a recognition of the very important work of a whole movement in Iran

with its undisputed leader, Narges Mohammadi," said Berit Reiss-Andersen, the chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee who announced the prize in Oslo.

She said the committee hopes the prize "is an encouragement to continue the work in whichever form this movement finds to be fitting." She also urged Iran to release

Ms. Mohammadi in time for the prize ceremony on December 10.

In a statement to *The New York Times*, Ms. Mohammadi said the

"global support and recognition of my human rights advocacy makes me more resolved, more responsible, more passionate and more hopeful".

'Victory is near'

"I also hope this recognition makes Iranians protesting for change stronger and more organised," she added. "Victory is near."

Ms. Mohammadi, an engineer by training, has been imprisoned 13 times and convicted five times, according to Ms. Reiss-Andersen. In total,

she has been sentenced to 31 years in prison. Her most recent incarceration began when she was detained in 2021 after attending a memorial for a person killed in protests sparked by an increase in gasoline prices. She has been held at Tehran's Evin Prison. Her brother, Hamidreza Mohammadi, said he has not been in touch with his sister but that the prize "means a lot to her".

Ms. Mohammadi is the 19th woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, and the second Iranian woman, after human rights activist Shirin Ebadi won the award in 2003.

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Cycles of protests show change in Iran is 'irreversible': Mohammadi

The Nobel Peace laureate, who was first arrested 22 years ago, has spent much of the past two decades in and out of jail over her unstinting campaigning for human rights in Iran; she has most recently been incarcerated since November 2021

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Rights campaigner and 2023 Nobel Peace laureate Narges Mohammadi said in a September interview that she retained hope for change in Iran, despite having no prospect of release from prison and enduring the pain of separation from her family.

In the interview, where Ms. Mohammadi gave written answers to AFP from Evin prison in Tehran, she insisted the protest movement that erupted one year ago in Iran against the Islamic republic is still



The weakening of the religious element has created a vacuum that the government has not been able to fill, Mohammadi says.

alive.

First arrested 22 years ago, Ms. Mohammadi, 51, has spent much of the past two decades in and out of jail over her unstinting

campaigning for human rights in Iran. She has most recently been incarcerated since November 2021 and has not seen her children for eight years.

While she could only witness from behind bars the protests that broke out following the death on September 16, 2022 of Mahsa Amini – who had been arrested for violating Iran's strict dress rules for women – she said the movement made clear the levels of dissatisfaction in society.

Noting that Iran had even before September 2022 seen repeated protest outbreaks, she added: "We have seen cycles of protests in recent years and this shows the irreversible nature of the situation and the scope for the expansion of the protests."

She said that after "44 years of oppression, discrimination and continuous repression of the government against women" the protests had "accelerated the process of realising democracy, freedom and equality in Iran".

Ms. Mohammadi said the protests had involved people "beyond urban areas and educated classes". "The weakening of the religious element has created a vacuum that the government has not been able to fill with other economic and social factors, as the government is essentially ineffective and corrupt."

Saint-Gobain plans to invest ₹3,400 cr. more in Tamil Nadu

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Friday assured Saint-Gobain of his government's support for the firm's plan to make an additional investment of ₹3,400 crore, which will provide employment to 1,150 people.

A release by the company said the proposed green and brownfield investments would take its total investments in the State to over ₹8,000 crore.

Interacting with the company's board of directors here, the Chief Minister said the 25-year-long relationship between Tamil Nadu and the firm started in 1998 when late Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi laid the foundation stone for the company's facility in Sriperumbudur. The company has since invested around ₹5,000 crore in the State and provided employment to 5,000 people through its manufacturing facilities in Sriperumbudur, Tiruvallur, and Perundurai, the Chief Minister said and recalled that he inaugurated another facility

of the company in Sriperumbudur last March.

He said the company's proposed facility in Oragadam and expansion of its existing facilities in Sriperumbudur, Perundurai, and Tiruvallur were testament to the good governance and the conducive environment for businesses prevailing in the State.

B. Santhanam, CEO, Asia Pacific and India region and chairman, Saint-Gobain India, in a release, said: "We are investing ₹3,400 crore across different businesses – glass-wool, gypsum plasterboard, plaster, acoustic ceiling, float glass, solar glass, adhesives, sealants, mortars and ceramics – in our next phase of expansion in Tamil Nadu. As pioneers in light and sustainable construction, we are well-poised to provide building material solutions that combine performance, aesthetics, and sustainability."

Minister T.R.B. Rajaa; Saint-Gobain's chairman Pierre-André de Chalendar; CEO Benoit Bazin; and others took part in the meeting.

Revenue riddles

Amid broadly healthy GST inflows, some trends need greater scrutiny

Halfway through the financial year, India's gross revenues from the Goods and Services Tax (GST) stand at over ₹9.92 lakh crore, marking an 11.1% increase over collections between April and September 2022. The average monthly revenues in 2023-24 are a healthy ₹1,65,418 crore, with four of the six occasions that the GST kitty has crossed ₹1.6 lakh crore occurring in this fiscal. At almost ₹1.63 lakh crore, September's GST collections were a tad below the average, but 2.3% over August's inflows that had marked a three-month low. With the festive season kicking in, collections over ₹1.6 lakh crore may persist through this quarter. The government appears comfortably placed regarding GST revenues in the fiscal context, with room to spare for some moderation in inflows during the January-March 2024 quarter when the central bank expects real GDP growth to slow to 5.7% from 7.8% in the first quarter. Beyond the macro resilience that these numbers indicate, a few areas of concern deserve closer scrutiny from policymakers and the GST Council which convenes today.

One, there is a discernible slowdown in the growth of GST inflows, which dropped to 10.2% in September, the slowest uptick since July 2021. The average growth between July and September dipped to 10.6% in the second quarter from 11.5% in the first. Growth from domestic transactions and services imports has slowed to 14% over the past two months, from 18% in June. It is important to note that revenues in September, based on transactions undertaken in August, also include pending dues from businesses since the start of the GST regime in 2017-18 as the deadline to remit them was September 30. Moreover, e-invoicing became mandatory for all firms with a turnover of over ₹5 crore since August 1, so there was another compliance push at work. Distilling these effects is necessary to gauge the extent of growth that stemmed from actual consumption and production upticks. That a record 9.34 crore e-way bills generated during August did not translate into the highest-ever revenues may suggest that transaction sizes have shrunk, for instance. Another puzzling trend is seen in revenues from goods imports that have shrunk four times this year. Of course, the lower goods import bills recorded this year will reflect in lower GST intakes. However, imports hit a nine-month high of \$58.6 billion in August, 10.75% over July's import bill. Yet, revenues collected in September were 5.7% below the previous month's kitty. This does not add up. Authorities must dig deeper to check for revenue leakages from imports.

Two out of five amphibians are facing extinction threat due to climate change: study

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

A new paper analysing two decades of data from around the world has found that climate change is emerging as one of the biggest threats to frogs, salamanders, and caecilians.

The study titled 'Ongoing declines for the world's amphibians in the face of emerging threats' was published on October 4 in the scientific journal, *Nature*.

The study is based on the second global amphibian assessment coordinated by the Amphibian Red List Authority, a branch of the Amphibian Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Species Survival Commission and managed by Re:wild, a wildlife conservation group.

The assessment evaluated the extinction risk of more than 8,000 amphibian species from all over the world, including 2,286 species evaluated for the



Ichthyophis garoensis, a species of caecilian.

first time. More than 1,000 experts across the globe, including scientists and researchers from Assam-based biodiversity conservation organisation, Aaranyak, and other Indian institutions, contributed their data and expertise.

The data revealed that two out of every five amphibians are threatened with extinction. These data will be published on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Between 2004 and 2022, a few critical threats have pushed more than 300 amphibians closer to extinction, according to the study. Climate change was the primary threat for

39% of these species. This number is expected to rise as better data and projections on species' responses to climate change become available. Climate change is especially concerning for amphibians in large part because they are particularly sensitive to changes in their environment, the study said.

"As humans drive changes in the climate and to habitats, amphibians are becoming climate captives, unable to move very far to escape the climate change-induced increase in frequency and intensity of extreme heat, wildfires, drought and hurricanes," Jennifer Luedtke Swandby, Re:wild's manager of species partnerships said.

Habitat destruction and degradation affect 93% of all threatened amphibian species, the authors pointed out while underlining the importance of expanded habitat and corridor protection in the places important for biodiversity.

Indian men seal Paris 2024 berth with gold medal

The dominant performance in the summit clash was the stamp of self-approval the team needed and gave itself after the loss in the Jakarta edition in 2018

ASIAN GAMES HOCKEY

Uthra Games
HANGZHOU

Captain Harmanpreet Singh got his second, and India's fifth goal in the 50th minute and finally allowed himself a smile. The result was sealed, gold assured and an Olympic ticket confirmed as the Indian men's hockey team registered an emphatic 5-1 win over defending champion Japan to reclaim the Asian Games title here on Friday.

The title assured India will now have the rest of the period up to the 2024 Olympics to prepare without worrying about the qualification process or planning around the qualifiers. With the likes of Belgium, Germany and Britain yet to qualify, the qualifiers would be a slip-

pery road the team has done well to avoid.

It was also a moment of finally laying the spectre of 2018 to rest. Despite the Tokyo Olympics bronze and a gradual rise in rankings since then, the loss in Jakarta has been an albatross around the team's neck.

The dominating performance in the final was the stamp of self-approval the team needed and gave itself.

It started on a fast note and stayed so till the end. India, ranked 12 places above Japan, was the favourite. The Indians kept going up and into the circle. Everyone in the forward line - Abhishek, Shamsheer, Mandev, Sukhjeet - tried but were unable to get a shot at the goal or break the Japanese defence.

Abhishek produced a

brilliant chance from nothing in the 11th minute, stealing the ball at halfline and running away with it before crossing inside but Manpreet was unable to control it.

Two PCs went waste too but the former captain made amends, slotting in a rebound from the top of the circle in the 25th minute to break the deadlock and Japan's resilience.

That was the opening India needed and even though the scoreline only read 1-0 at half time - hardly a lead in modern hockey - the proceedings on field had India written all over it.

The World No. 3 side was fitter, stronger, more skilled and clearly better prepared for the big game.

Harmanpreet finally converted a PC in the 32nd minute soon after resumption, Amit got one of his

own four minutes later and the first time Japan reached anywhere close to the Indian 23-yard circle was in the last 30 seconds of the third quarter.

Hardik was again the lynchpin but every time he moved up - or down - Vivek Sagar Prasad and Sumit seamlessly stepped in to the role.

Nilakanta Sharma, as always, was the untiring beating heart of the team, everywhere all at once. The Indian goalkeepers kept themselves busy screaming instructions from the back but had little to do otherwise. And when Abhishek stuck a brilliant one in the 48th after being put through by Hardik from just outside the circle, it was all but over.

The result: India 5 (Manpreet 25, Harmanpreet 32, 59, Rohidas 36, Abhishek 48) bt Japan 1 (Tanaka 53).



Moment to cherish: The Indian players, led by Sreejesh, pose for a selfie showing their gold medals. *ANI*

Sikkim flood toll rises to 25; search on for 143 missing

Press Trust of India
GANGTOK/JALPAIGURI

Army and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams have recovered 25 bodies, including those of seven Army men, from the slush and debris of the flash flood which swept through the Teesta river in Sikkim, officials said on Friday.

The flood, which was triggered by a cloud burst in the early hours of Wednesday, also resulted in a large number of people going missing. Officials said 143 are still missing though some 2,413 people have been rescued, and are in shelters.

Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang announced ex-gratia compensation of ₹4 lakh to the families of those who died in the flash flood.

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Sikkim flood toll rises to 25; search continues

He also declared an immediate relief of ₹2,000 each to all those who are being sheltered in relief camps. "There has been damage worth thousands of crores of rupees... Our first priority is to save those who are stranded and provide them immediate relief," he told *PTI*. "Road connectivity between districts has been cut off and bridges have been washed away. Communication in North Sikkim has been severely affected," Mr. Tamang said.

Of the 23 Army personnel who had gone missing from Bardang area, the bodies of seven have been recovered from different areas downstream while one had been rescued earlier. Search for the rest of the personnel is continuing both in Sikkim and the neighbouring northern part of West Bengal through which the Teesta river flows, he said.

The Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority (SSDMA) said in its latest bulletin that 25 people have died so far and 143 have gone missing.