DIA, DEOGHAR IAS ACADEMY

Daily News Feed

D.N.F

08.12.2024

Sabaijor Complex, Near Jamunajor Pul, Castair Town
Deoghar, Mob:-9162500508

16-year-old Gout betters Bolt, smashes 200m record

Australian sprint prodigy Gout Gout clocked the fastest time ever by a 16-year-old to smash the national 200m record on Saturday and do something even Usain Bolt never achieved. The teenager ran 20.04 at the Australian All Schools Athletics Championships at his home track in Brisbane, breaking Peter Norman's national record of 20.06 from the 1968 Olympics. Gout also now holds the second-fastest time in history for athletes under 18, overtaking Bolt's 20.13.

Question Corner

Not a straw

How do hummingbirds drink nectar at frenetic speed?

Hummingbird bills look a little like drinking straws. The frenetic speed at which they get nectar out of flowers and backyard feeders may give the impression that the bills act as straws, too. But new research shows just how little water or nectar, that comparison holds. The team discovered that a drinking hummingbird rapidly opens and shuts different parts of its bill simultaneously, engaging in a highly coordinated dance with its tongue to draw up nectar at lightning speeds. By analysing the footage and combining it with data from micro-CT scans of hummingbird specimens, researchers discovered the intricate bill movements that underlie drinking – 1) to extend its tongue, the hummingbird opens just the tip of its bill, 2) after the tongue brings in nectar, the bill tip closes, 3) to draw nectar up the bill, the hummingbird keeps the bill's midsection shut tightly while opening the base slightly, and 4) then it opens its tip again to extend the tongue for a new cycle.

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

Why can't the world agree on a plastic ban?

How much plastic waste is produced now? What is the most common type of plastic waste found in the environment? Why are several countries averse to tackling plastic pollution? Why did talks fail at Busan? Is another round of negotiations likely?

Jacob Koshy

The story so far:

The 5th Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5) on plastic pollution was a conclave of delegations from about 170 countries mandated to establish a legally binding treaty to end plastic pollution, informally called the Global Plastics Treaty. Despite a week of meetings, the INC-5 failed to meet its mandate.

What is the Global Plastics Treaty?

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolved in March 2022 to 'end plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.' To that end, INC committees were constituted and tasked with negotiating a treaty before the end of 2024. Over the last two years, countries met five times, and attempted to bridge divergent views on how to end plastic pollution. Several countries are enthusiastic about ways and means to encourage recycling and prohibit certain plastics that lead to littering – India for instance has banned single-use plastic since 2022 – but many of them are reluctant to limit plastic production. Several countries are either petro-states or those that have significant industries that manufacture plastic polymers. Before the latest, and what was expected to be the last round of negotiations, began in Busan, South Korea, the Chair of the INC-5, Luis Vayas Valdivieso, circulated a draft text called a 'non paper.' This was roughly a synthesis of the views of all countries on managing plastic production but in the end, it turned out that despite long negotiations, the chasm between countries who viewed addressing plastic pollution as a waste management problem, and those that saw it as unachievable without cutting its production at source, was one that was too wide to bridge.

Currently, the world produces about 400 million tonnes of plastic waste every year

Complete ban: An environmental activist wears a banner reading "No plastic" during a campaign to reduce plastic use in Seoul on December 3. AFP

How bad is the problem of plastic pollution?

According to a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) factsheet, plastic waste generation nearly trebled from between 1970 and 1990. In the early 2000s, the amount of plastic waste generated rose more in a single decade than it had in the previous 40 years. Currently, the world produces about 400 million tonnes of plastic waste every year. If historic growth trends continue, global production of primary plastic is forecasted to reach 1,100 million tonnes by 2050. There has also been a worrying shift towards single-use plastic products, items that are meant to be thrown away after a short use.

Approximately, 36% of all plastics produced are used in packaging, including single-use plastic products for food and beverage containers, of which 85% ends up in landfills or as unregulated waste. On top of that, about 98% of single-use plastic products are produced from fossil fuel, or "virgin" feedstock. The level of greenhouse gas emissions associated with the production, use and disposal of conventional fossil fuel-based plastics is forecast to grow to 19% of the global carbon budget by 2040. Of the seven billion tonnes of plastic waste generated globally so far, less than 10% has been recycled. Millions of tonnes of plastic waste are lost to the environment, or sometimes shipped thousands of kilometres to destinations where it is mostly burned or dumped. The estimated annual loss in the value of plastic packaging waste during sorting and processing alone is $80-$120 billion. Cigarette butts – whose filters contain tiny plastic fibres – are the most common type of plastic waste found in the environment. Food wrappers, plastic bottles, plastic bottle caps, plastic grocery bags, plastic straws, and stirrers are the next most common item.

What is India's position on the treaty?

India said that it would be "unable" to support any measures to regulate the production of primary plastic polymers as it has larger implications in respect of the right to development of member States. Indian delegation leader, Naresh Pal Gangwar, of the Environment Ministry, said at the concluding plenary session India had always been "committed" to the principle of consensus in decision-making in respect of substantive matters under multilateral environmental agreements. This principle reiterated collective decision-making and reflects shared responsibilities and commitment. Elaborating on these points, India's position was that it had banned 22 kinds of single-use plastic and put in place an Extended Producer Responsibility regime. This means that companies had to ensure a certain percentage of their plastic-packaging waste was recycled and that the littering of some of the most common kinds of plastic waste was banned. However, virgin polymer production is one of India's major products and exports, with conglomerates such as Reliance having significant stakes in the industry. India viewed calls to cut plastic production and regulate its supply as akin to introducing barriers to trade. Its position was closer to that of China, Saudi Arabia and several other oil and petrochemical-refining states. At the talks, 85-100 of the gathered countries were supportive of cuts to plastic production, year-wise targets to achieve them and restrict supply and trade. Finally, India has strongly opposed proposals for countries to vote on propositions in draft texts that were produced at negotiations such as INC. In INC-like negotiations – like the Conference of Parties talks in climate – every single word and punctuation has to be agreed upon by all countries. This inevitably leads to deadlock that can take years to resolve. There have been proposals to include voting rights to engineer progress but countries have opposed this, on the ground that it violates the principle of equity.

Is this the end of the road?

By no means. It is expected that an "INC 5.2" will likely be convened sometime later next year to resume conversation and find common ground to firm a treaty. The final treaty, if agreed to, will lead to the beginning of a periodic Conference of Parties (COP) – just like in the climate talks. The UN talks in Rio de Janerio, in 1992, was where countries decided to address carbon dioxide emissions. It took three years until the first COP was organised in Berlin and in the 29 years since, the world has moved at a glacial pace to address CO_2 emissions.

According to an analysis by the Center for International Environmental Law, multilateral environmental agreements have taken varying amounts of time to negotiate treaty text due to a range of factors, ranging from just over a year to nearly five years between the start of negotiations and treaty adoption. In addition, depending on the number of countries required to ratify, it is not unusual for several years to pass between adopting the treaty and its entry into force. For example, the Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally-binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction held five sessions over five years. It met seven times by holding a "resumed" fifth session and a "further resumed" fifth session.

The Hindu journalist wins accolades at IPI India Awards for reporting on Manipur

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Hindu journalist Vijaita Singh's reporting on Manipur's ethnic strife, raging for over 18 months now, won accolades at the International Press Institute India Award for Excellence in Journalism, 2024 on Saturday.

The IPI, in a statement, said that there were several entries in the print, digital, and broadcast categories, covering different angles of the strife in Manipur and as a result, the jury had decided to recognise the five best entries for cash prizes and citations as a "mark of appreciation and acknowledgement of the media's efforts to bring out the various facets of the human tragedy caused by the civil strife".

The citation for Ms. Singh, Deputy Editor at *The Hindu*, came along with recognition of the reporting done on the conflict by other journalists and newsrooms, which included *The Print*, *The Caravan* (Greeshma Kuthar), *Scroll.in* (Arunabh Saikia and Tora Agarwala), and *India Today* (Ashutosh Mishra).

The IPI India Award for Excellence in Journalism, 2024, was awarded to photojournalist Bhanu Prakash Chandra for his account of the war in Ukraine – Sunflower fields and no man's land end – published in *The Week*.

This award comes with a cash prize of ₹1 lakh, a trophy and a citation.

The jury was headed by former Supreme Court judge Madan B Lokur. The members included Riyad Mathew, Chairman, IPI-India and Chief Associate Editor and Director, *Malayala Manorama*; Shobhaa De, columnist; and Vijay Joshi, Editor-in-Chief, *Press Trust of India*.

Human tragedy

Ms. Singh's reporting on the ethnic conflict in Manipur has spanned the length and breadth of the issues facing the north-eastern State – from the granular details of the brutality of the conflict to the broader themes of how it began and has been playing out over the past 18 months, including covering the human tragedy faced by tens of thousands of civilians across communities in the strife-torn State.

Ever since the conflict began on May 3, 2023, over 250 people have been killed, thousands more injured, and over 60,000 people have been left internally displaced.

After the awards were announced, Ms. Singh said, "I am very grateful to *The Hindu* for consistently providing space to report on an issue that I believe ought to be etched in public memory." The IPI added, "The Jury was unable to select any entry in the broadcast category deserving the award."

The award was instituted in 2003 and has been given to 20 media organisations and journalists in print and electronic media so far.

Indu Chandhok passes away

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

Indu Chandhok, the doyen of Indian motorsports, with which he was actively associated for over six decades, passed away on Saturday.

He was 93.

Born in Kolkata on July 22, 1931, and then moving to Chennai (erstwhile Madras) in 1932, Chandhok was one of the founder-members of the Madras Motor Sports Club (MMSC) in 1953 and later the Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI) in 1971, of which he was also the president during 1978-79.

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‘UPI led to significant expansion of credit among underserved’

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has brought in a significant expansion of consumer credit among the underserved borrowers who had no credit history, a study said.

Since its launch in 2016, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has transformed financial access in India, enabling 300 million individuals and 50 million merchants to perform seamless digital transactions.

By October 2023, 75% of all retail digital payments in India were through UPI, according to a study titled Open Banking and Digital Payments: Implications for Credit Access.

UPI is a payment system built as an interoperable protocol that allows third-party vendors to build apps to provide payments as a service to all customers of participating banks.

It enabled underserved groups, including subprime and new-to-credit borrowers, to access formal credit for the first time.

Coffee wilt disease linked to gene transfer from fungus

Researchers compared the genomes of 13 historic strains and multiple disease outbreaks of coffee wilt disease to investigate how the pathogen *Fusarium xylarioides* has adapted to coffee plants. They found that *F. xylarioides* is made up of at least four distinct lineages, and also found evidence that these strains had repeatedly received segments of DNA from another fungal pathogen, *F. oxysporum*, which enhanced *F. xylarioides*'s ability to infect coffee plants.

A new catalyst can turn methane into useful polymer

Although less abundant than carbon dioxide, methane gas contributes disproportionately to global warming because it traps more heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide. MIT engineers have now designed a new catalyst that can convert methane into useful polymers, which could help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The new catalyst works at room temperature and atmospheric pressure, which could make it easier to deploy at sites of methane production, such as power plants and cattle barns.

Preventing malaria using genetically modified parasites

Genetically modified malaria-causing parasites do not cause disease; they instead prime the immune system during the initial stage of their life cycle in the liver

R. Prasad

Two vaccines against malaria have been rolled out in some countries in Africa. Besides vaccines, scientists have been using genetically altered mosquitoes to stop the spread of malaria. One is the release of radiation-sterilised male mosquitoes to prevent eggs from hatching.

Another is engineering mosquitoes that slow the growth of malaria-causing parasites in the gut thereby preventing transmission of malaria to humans. The other method is using genetically modified mosquitoes that can spread resistance to malaria-causing parasites by thriving and mating with wild mosquitoes.

Now, in a radical approach, scientists have shifted their focus from genetic modification of malaria-causing mosquitoes to malaria-causing parasites. They have genetically modified malaria-causing parasites so that the parasites do not cause disease. Instead, they prime the immune system during the initial stage of their life cycle in the liver and before they enter the bloodstream. Malaria-causing parasites cause infection and symptoms begin to show only when they move into the bloodstream from the liver stage.

The priming of the immune system, like in the case of vaccines, by the genetically modified malaria parasites shields the individuals when malaria-causing parasites by completely arresting their growth on day six during the liver stage (late-arresting parasite), the parasites have sufficient time to prime the immune system far more effectively than when the parasites are killed on day one (early-arresting parasite) of entering the liver.

Focus shifts to GM parasites

Mosquitoes are used to deliver genetically modified parasites

- Genetically altered parasite in the liver stage primes the immune system
- The genetic modification kills the parasites by completely arresting its growth on day one (early-arresting) or day six (late-arresting) during the liver stage
- Nine participants were bitten by mosquitoes carrying late-arresting parasites, eight by early-arresting parasites, and three belonged to the placebo group
- All participants were exposed to controlled human malaria infection three weeks after the third immunisation session

Genetic frontiers: Till now, scientists have been genetically altering the mosquitoes to stop the spread of malaria

- The late-arresting parasite group had 89% immune protection compared with 13% for the early-arresting arm
- The amount of antibody produced was the same immaterial of parasites being killed on day one or day six in the liver
- Parasites killed on day six produced certain T cells that were not seen in participants bitten by mosquitoes carrying parasites that died on day one

In a small trial, researchers exposed nine healthy adults who had not had malaria to 50 bites by mosquitoes that carried the genetically modified late-arresting parasites that were designed to die on day six of the liver stage, eight healthy adults with the early-arresting parasites, and three adults in the placebo group who were bitten by uninfected mosquitoes.

The 50 mosquito bites were considered as one immunisation session, and the participants were exposed to three such sessions.

Three weeks after the third immunisation session, all participants were exposed to controlled human malaria infection by means of five bites from mosquitoes infected with the genetically unaltered *P. falciparum* parasite. This was to test the efficacy of genetically modified malaria parasites in priming the immune system.

As per the results published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the efficacy results were striking. While eight of nine (89%) participants primed by late-arresting parasites were protected from malaria when exposed to mosquitoes carrying unaltered *P. falciparum* parasite, only one of eight (13%) participants who were primed by early-arresting parasites was protected from malaria. No participants in the placebo group and did not differ between participants in the two intervention arms. This suggests that the vastly different timings of killing the parasites in the liver did not affect the amount of antibodies produced.

However, there were differences in the cellular immunity in the two intervention groups. Though the overall cellular frequency T-cell lineages remained similar, certain *P. falciparum*-specific T cells were seen only in participants who were primed by mosquitoes carrying the last-arresting parasites. "This suggests an important independent role of late-liver-stage antigens in targeting key *P. falciparum* antigens in both the early-arresting and last-arresting parasite groups were far higher than those observed in the

are the infective stage of the malaria parasite, when attenuated by radiation also offer protection against malaria. In contrast to the genetically modified parasites used in this study, the protection offered by radiation-attenuated sporozoites against malaria ranged between 50% and 90%.

However, administration of radiation-attenuated sporozoites by means of mosquito bites requires higher doses (approximately 1,000 mosquito bites) to reach levels of protection similar to the level offered by last-arresting parasites used in this study.

"Our findings suggest that parasites arresting late during the liver stage offer improved protection, as compared with early-arresting sporozoites, and provide a step toward a next-generation malaria vaccine," they write. However, they also caution that the conclusions from the trial are limited by the small sample size, and urge that studies with greater numbers of participants be done for better understanding of both the efficacy and the safety profile of genetically modified last-arresting parasites. They also note that the "immunologic assessments were exploratory, and the relevance of the variables associated with last-arresting-induced protection needs confirmation". Also, the durability of immune protection offered by last-arresting parasites needs to be assessed especially against

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UN declares December 21 as World Meditation Day

Press Trust of India
UNITED NATIONS

India was a member of the core group of countries including Liechtenstein, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Mexico and Andorra that guided the unanimous adoption of the resolution titled World Meditation Day in the 193-member UN General Assembly on Friday.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said in a post on X that India's leadership in overall human wellbeing stems from "our civilisational dictum of #VasudhaivaKutumbakam – the whole world is one family".

Rajnath to oversee commissioning of *Tushil* in Russia

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

The first of two stealth guided missile frigates, *Tushil*, under construction in Russia, is set to be commissioned during the three-day visit of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh beginning on Sunday for the 21st meeting of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-M&MTC).

Mr. Singh and his Russian counterpart, Andrey Belousov, will co-chair the 21st meeting of the IRIGC-M&MTC in Moscow on December 10, a Defence Ministry statement said. "The two leaders will review the entire range of multi-faceted relations between the two countries in the field of defence, including military-to-military and industrial cooperation. They will also exchange views on contemporary regional and global issues of mutual interest."

Mr. Singh will travel to Yantra Shipyard in Kaliningrad for the commission ceremony of the frigate during which he will be accompanied by Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi.


Rajnath Singh

In addition, he will pay tributes at 'The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier' in Moscow to honour the Soviet soldiers killed during the Second World War. He will interact with members of the Indian community.

Tushil is an upgraded Krivak III class frigate of Project 1135.6 of which six are already in service – three Talwar class ships, built at Baltisky shipyard, St. Petersburg, and three follow-on Teg class ships, built at Yantar shipyard, Kaliningrad. The ship's construction was closely monitored by an Indian team of specialists from the Warship Overseeing Team stationed at Kaliningrad, under the aegis of the Embassy of India, Moscow, the Navy said in a statement.

Their unique architecture gives mosques in Kashmir Valley a place in the sun

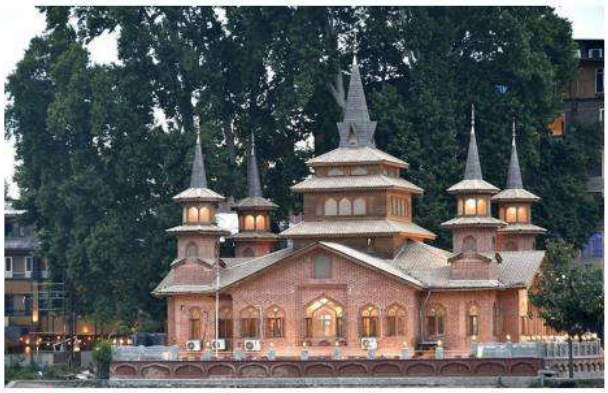
Broad-sloped roofs of these places of worship are ideal for tapping solar energy; Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo has given the nod to include religious places under PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

The uniquely multi-tiered and broad-sloped roofs of mosques in Kashmir are set to be part of an ambitious project to generate renewable energy in the Valley.

J&K Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, at a meeting held in Srinagar recently, gave the nod to include religious places, especially mosques in Kashmir, under the flagship 'PM Surya Ghar (sun house)-Muft Bijli Yojana (free electricity scheme)' to boost the generation of electricity in a region that faces long power cuts throughout the year.

Reyaz Ameen Malik, an electrical engineer, feels the initiative could be a game-changer. "It has huge potential, given that there are mosques with wide roof surfaces in every locality in the Kashmir Valley. Religious sites have no load requirement at night, can easily become self-sufficient in the summers, and supply surplus electricity to the Power Department with an on-grid system. They can generate 3 KW (kilowatt) to 5 KW of electricity," he said.



Ambitious plan: With there being a mosque in every locality, Kashmir has a great potential for solar generation. IMRAN NISSAR

Most mosques in Kashmir are registered as domestic consumers. Several vendors registered with the J&K government are petitioning caretakers of mosques to install rooftop solar panels.

However, many of them told *The Hindu* that mosque caretakers were reluctant due to the low subsidy. "Mosques are not income generating units. It needs handholding from the government to install solar panels," Ejaz Ahmad, a caretaker in Hawal, said.

"The government should either increase the subsidy components for mosques, or hire a third party to invest in sharing and selling surplus energy," Mr. Ahmad added.

'Healthy India, Happy India' campaign begins

Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin launching the campaign on Saturday. Also seen are N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group; G.V. Sampath, Founder and Chairman, Naruvi Hospitals; Ministers Ma. Subramanian, Duraimurugan and R. Gandhi; L.V. Navneeth, CEO, The Hindu Group. C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

The Hindu Bureau
VELLORE

"Healthy India, Happy India", a joint initiative of *The Hindu* and Naruvi Hospitals, Vellore, to build awareness on preventive healthcare, was inaugurated by Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Saturday.

He appreciated the partnership to take the message on health to people. G.V. Sampath, founder and chairman, Naruvi Hospitals, explained the genesis of the project, while N. Ram, director, The Hindu Group, highlighted Tamil Nadu's leadership in healthcare initiatives.

The partnership will feature a series of 15 webinars on a variety of topics emphasising prevention and holistic health, to build awareness among people and start them on a journey of prioritising their health. These will be anchored by *The Hindu*'s editorial team, with participation of experts from Naruvi Hospitals, and specialists.

The webinar series kicked off with an offline event at the hospital in Vellore, featuring experts, including pulmonary and respiratory medicine specialists, who weighed in on the twin burden of stress and sleep.

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Special Bench to hear Places of Worship Act case

Three-judge SC Bench headed by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna to look into petitions seeking to 'reclaim' places of worship allegedly 'encroached' by 'fundamentalist invaders'; first hearing fixed on Dec. 12; 'grievances' against Mughal rulers not a valid ground to challenge validity of a legislative enactment, says group representing Gyanvapi mosque

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna has constituted a Special Bench to hear petitions challenging the validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991, a statute that has protected the identity and character of religious sites as they existed on August 15, 1947.

The three-judge Bench will be headed by Chief Justice Khanna, and also include Justices Sanjay Kumar and K.V. Viswanathan. The first hearing of the case is scheduled for 3.30 p.m. on December 12.

The listing of the case before the newly formed Special Bench was shown in the causelist published by the court on Saturday.

The case involves a slew of petitions challenging the legality of the 1991 Act.

The petitioners, including advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, blame the 1991 law for barring Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs from approaching courts to "re-claim" their places of worship which were allegedly "invaded" and "encroached" upon by "fundamentalist barbaric invaders".

Muslim organisations such as the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) and the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, however, have countered it.

They say that these petitions, in the guise of public interest petitions, cannot challenge a Central law which has guarded the spirit of fraternity and secularism, virtues from the Preamble of the Constitution, as well as parts of the "Basic Structure" of the Constitution, through protection of the religious character of religious places.

Ayodhya verdict

The AIMPLB pointed out that even the Ayodhya judgment had observed that the 1991 Act spoke "to our history and to the future of the nation... In preserving the character of places of public worship, Parliament has mandated in no uncertain terms that history and its wrongs shall not be used as instruments to oppress the present and the future".

The Gyanvapi mosque management committee has also sought to intervene in the challenge against the 1991 Act in the top court.

The Gyanvapi mosque is at the centre of multiple civil suits by Hindu plaintiffs claiming the presence of a temple under the mosque, and their right to worship.

The Anjuman Intezamia Masajid Varanasi, which represents the Gyanvapi mosque, has argued that rhetorical claims and "purported grievances" caused by ancient rulers of the Mughal period cannot be grounds for challenging the validity of a legislative enactment like the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act.

Centre stays silent

The Union government has chosen to remain tight-lipped so far, promising to file a counter-affidavit in the pending challenge against the 1991 Act.

The constitution of the Special Bench and listing of the case on a specific day by the top court has come amidst frenetic judicial interventions by local courts in States like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in civil suits challenging the origins and character of mosques.

Act's ambit

The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 lays down the rules to prevent the conversion of religious places

SECTION 2(C) defines 'place of worship' to include "temple, mosque, gurudwara, church, monastery or any other place of public religious worship..."

SECTION 3 prohibits the conversion of any place of worship

SECTION 4 imposes a positive obligation to maintain the religious character of every place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947

PHOTO: R. V. MOORTHY

Eye of the storm: The Gyanvapi mosque committee has also sought to intervene in the challenge against the 1991 Act.