Introduction

Currently, ionic liquids have attracted significant attention in green organic synthesis owing to their unique properties such as low vapor pressure, wide liquid range, good conductivity and large electrochemical window. In addition to these, the gold benchmark for green chemistry is functional ionic liquid-mediated synthesis (FILMs). Nowadays, FILMs has become a novel approach representing an attempt to describe design capacity of ionic liquids, which makes them an accurate working system rather than simply novel media, and their properties can be altered to suit the requirement of a particular process. This unique property of the materials obtained by FILMs gives them ability to serve as catalysts. For example, ILs with acidic groups have been used in Fischer esterification, alcohol dehydrdimerization, pinacol rearrangement, and Mannich reactions; with basic groups, they have been utilized in Markovnikov addition, Michael addition, and absorption of CO₂ and SO₂.

The 3,4-dihydropyrano[c]chromene and tetrahydrobenzo[b]pyran units are privileged, heterocyclic motifs that form the core of a large family of natural products with strong bioactivity profiles. Multicomponent methods have been reported for the synthesis of 3,4-dihydropyrano[c]chromenes employing l-proline–melamine, magnetic nanoparticle-tagged ionic liquid, SiO₂/H₃PW₁₂O₴₀ nanohybrid material, [DBU][Ac], ammonium acetate, visible light, thiourea dioxide, silica-grafted ionic liquids, crown ether complex cation ionic liquids (CECILs), SDS, [TETA]TFA, and starch solution as catalysts. Some studies on the multicomponent entry to tetrahydrobenzo[b]pyran motifs have reported employing H₂O/PEG-400, sulfonic acid-functionalized magnetic Fe₃₋ₓTiₓO₄ nanoparticles, l-tyrosine, Fe₃O₄@SiO₂-lmid-PMAn magnetic nanocatalyst, inorganic–organic hybrid magnetic nanocatalyst and magnetite-dihydrogen phosphate as catalysts.

Despite the availability of these methods, ionic liquid-mediated syntheses of 3,4-dihydropyrano[c]chromenes and tetrahydrobenzo[b]pyrans are still less explored and there remains enough scope for an efficient, high yielding, and mild approach to achieve such systems. With increasing concerns about environmental protection, synthesis of ILs from non-toxic materials is desirable. As a part of our attempt to develop synthesis of biologically important heterocycles via green methodology, we herein report a saccharine-based ionic liquid-mediated protocol for the synthesis of 3,4-dihydropyrano[c]chromene and tetrahydrobenzo[b]pyran (Fig. 1). The saccharin group was chosen as it is less toxic than other ionic liquids.

Results and discussion

[Bmim]Sac was synthesized by the reported procedure, as shown in Fig. 2. Initially, the reaction between benzaldehyde, malononitrile and 4-hydroxycoumarin was employed as the model reaction to screen ILs in water, ethanol
and other common solvents to develop appropriate reaction conditions.

As evident from the results summarized in Table 1, the [Bmim]-based ionic liquid with different anions could catalyse the reaction. However, the reaction of [Bmim]Sac anions proceeded very well as compared to that with others in neat as well as in water and afforded the product 7a with moderate to excellent yield (82% and 95%), respectively. The results are summarized in Table 1. The use of water as solvent improved the yield of the desired product slightly and also reduced the amount of catalyst from 20 mol% to 5 mol% effectively (Table 1, entries 11 and 14). Higher amount of [Bmim]Sac was needed for proper mixing of reactant only in the absence of water. In the presence of imidazole, saccharine and sod saccharinate as catalysts, no product was observed (Table 1, entries 7, 8, and 9).

The influence of the reaction temperature and the amount of the ionic liquid on the catalysis performance was also studied. The reaction proceeded slowly at room temperature, and the reaction yield increased with increasing temperature to 80 °C. To show the merit of our procedure, we have compared our result for the synthesis of 3,4-dihydropyrano[c]chromenes using [Bmim]Sac with the result of some other ionic liquids reported in literature for the same transformation. The results are summarized in Table 1 (entry 15–21). As can be clearly seen from Table 1, the best result was obtained at 80 °C in the

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**Table 1 Optimisation conditions for 3,4-dihydropyrano[c]chromenes**

| S. no. | Catalyst/IL \(^a\) | Condition | Time (min) | % yield \(^c\) | Ref. |
|-------|---------------------|-----------|------------|----------------|-----|
| 1     | [Bmim]Br            | 80 °C, water | 75         | 56             |     |
| 2     | [Bmim]Cl            | 80 °C, water | 80         | 59             |     |
| 3     | [Bmim]OH            | 80 °C, water | 90         | 65             |     |
| 4     | [Bmim]BF \(_4\)     | 80 °C, water | 120        | 70             |     |
| 5     | [Bmim]SO \(_4\)\(_3\) | 80 °C, water | 100        | 75             |     |
| 6     | [Bmim]PF \(_6\)     | 80 °C, water | 120        | 62             |     |
| 7     | Imidazole           | 80 °C, water | 24 h       | NR             |     |
| 8     | Saccharine          | 80 °C, water | 24 h       | NR             |     |
| 9     | Sod saccharinate    | 80 °C, water | 24 h       | NR             |     |
| 10    | —                   | Water, 80 °C | 24 h       | NR             |     |
| 11    | [Bmim]Sac           | 80 °C     | 10         | 82             |     |
| 12    | [Bmim]Sac           | Ethanol, 80 °C | 45         | 75             |     |
| 13    | [Bmim]Sac           | Methanol, 65 °C | 60         | 50             |     |
| 14    | [Bmim]Sac           | Water, 80 °C | 10         | 95             |     |
| 15    | [Sipim]HSO \(_4\)   | 100 °C, 0.08 mmol | 30         | 94             | 10h |
| 16    | [TETA][TFA]         | Ethanol–water, reflux (5 mol%) | 20         | 86             | 10k |
| 17    | Starch solution     | 50 °C, 4 ml | 25         | 95             | 10l |
| 18    | [18-C-6K][OAc]      | EtOH, reflux (30 mol%) | 15         | 90             | 10i |
| 19    | NH\(_2\)OAc         | EtOH, reflux (15 mol%) | 3          | 94             | 10c |
| 20    | Thiourea dioxide    | Water, 70 °C (10 mol%) | 13         | 93             | 10g |
| 21    | SDS                 | Water, 60 °C (20 mol%) | 120        | 85             | 10j |

\(^a\) Reaction conditions: benzaldehyde (1 mmol), malononitrile (1 mmol), 4-hydroxy coumarin (1 mmol), water (2 ml), catalyst (20 mol%). \(^b\) Catalyst (5 mol%). \(^c\) Isolated yield.
presence of 5 mol% of catalyst. Similar optimizations were performed for products 7b and 9a; in all cases, 80 °C and 5 mol% of catalyst were the optimum conditions.

Using these optimized conditions and to show the generality and scope of this methodology, reactions were explored for the synthesis of a wide variety of 3,4-dihydropyrano[c]chromene and tetrahydrobenzo[b]pyran derivatives using aldehydes, malononitriles and different 1,3-dicarbonyl compounds (4-hydroxy coumarin, 5,5-dimethyl-1,3-cyclohexanedione/1,3-cyclohexanediine and 1,3-cyclohexanediine, respectively) in the presence of [Bmim]Sac (5 mol%) in an aqueous medium under reflux conditions. The results have been summarized in Tables 2 and 3. Indeed, there is no difference in reactivities among 5,5-dimethyl-1,3-cyclohexanedione/1,3-cyclohexanediine, 1,3-cyclohexanediine and 4-hydroxycoumarin. The effect of electron-withdrawing substituents, electron-releasing substituents and halogens of the aromatic ring of aldehydes on the reaction results was investigated. The reaction time of aromatic aldehydes having electron-withdrawing substituents and halogens produced higher yield of products and faster reactions than that observed for their electron-rich counterparts (Table 2, entry 2).

The attempt to synthesise 3,4-dihydropyrano[c]chromene and tetrahydrobenzo[b]pyran derivatives using aliphatic aldehyde (n-butyraldehyde) was successful, and the results are summarized in Table 2 (entry 10) and Table 3 (entry 24 and 25). To expand the scope of the present catalytic system, we used substrate 4-hydroxy-6-methyl-2-pyrene as the cyclic 1,3-dicarbonyl compound for the synthesis of 4,5-dihydropyrano[4,3-b]pyran derivatives. As expected, the reaction proceeded smoothly, giving the corresponding products in good to excellent yields with aliphatic as well as aromatic aldehydes (Table 2, entry 11-14).

A mechanism for the probable sequence of events is given in Fig. 3. The reaction proceeds via three steps: Knoevenagel condensation, Michael addition, and then intramolecular cyclization, as presented in Fig. 3. The Knoevenagel adduct formed from the ionic liquid-catalyzed condensation of aldehydes and malononitrile subsequently undergoes Michael reaction with carbonyl compounds possessing a reactive methylene group (4-hydroxycoumarin, 4-hydroxy-6-methyl-2-pyrene, 5,5-dimethyl-1,3-cyclohexanediine and 1,3-cyclohexanediine); after cyclization, it affords pyran annulated heterocyclic systems.

Bmim cations of ionic liquids activate electrophiles by the proton in the 2-position of the imidazolium ring through hydrogen-bond interaction with the carbonyl and nitrile groups of aldehyde and malononitrile. Simultaneously, anions of ionic liquids activate nucleophiles by accepting the hydrogen bond. The dual activation of nucleophiles and electrophiles by the cations and anions of ionic liquids is crucial to promote the reaction in high yields. As can be seen in Fig. 3, saccharinate anions also play an important role in the dual activation of 1,3-dicarbonyl intermediate nucleophile. It is proposed that an “electrophile nucleophile dual activation” phenomenon of [Bmim]Sac through “dual hydrogen bond formation by

### Table 2  Synthesis of 3,4-dihydropyrano[c]chromenes

| S. no. | R<sup>a</sup> | Product | Time (min) | Yield<sup>b</sup> | Melting point | Literature melting point<sup>c</sup> |
|-------|--------------|---------|------------|----------------|---------------|------------------------------------|
| 1     | Ph           | 7a      | 10         | 95             | 262–263       | 260–261                            |
| 2     | 4-MeOC<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 7b      | 50         | 85             | 252–253       | 250–251                            |
| 3     | 4-NO<sub>2</sub>C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 7e      | 35         | 90             | 264–265       | 261–263                            |
| 4     | 4-OC<sub>2</sub>H<sub>5</sub> | 7d      | 75         | 81             | 266–267       | 267–269                            |
| 5     | 4-ClC<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 7e      | 45         | 85             | 265–267       | 266–268                            |
| 6     | 4-FC<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 7f      | 45         | 84             | 257–258       | 258–259 (ref. 10d)               |
| 7     | 3-NO<sub>2</sub>C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 7g      | 30         | 93             | 255–256       | 250–251                            |
| 8     | 4-BrC<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 7h      | 40         | 89             | 257–258       | 255–258                            |
| 9     | 2-C<sub>3</sub>H<sub>7</sub>OS | 7i      | 70         | 70             | 226–230       | 228–230 (ref. 19)                |
| 10    | CH<sub>3</sub>(CH=CH<sub>2</sub>) | 7j      | 50         | 85             | 195–200       | 193–195 (ref. 17)                |
| 11    | 4-BrC<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 11a     | 45         | 87             | 239–242       | 240–242 (ref. 11d)              |
| 12    | CH<sub>3</sub>(CH=CH<sub>2</sub>) | 11b     | 40         | 90             | 218–220       | 220–222 (ref. 10i)              |
| 13    | Ph            | 11c     | 15         | 93             | 236–238       |                                    |
| 14    | 4-MeOC<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 11d     | 45         | 88             | 222–224       | 223–225 (ref. 10m)              |

<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions: aldehyde (1 mmol), malononitrile (1 mmol), 4-hydroxy coumarin/4-hydroxy-6-methyl-2-pyrene (1 mmol), water (2 ml), [Bmim]Sac (5 mol%).  <sup>b</sup> Isolated yield.
saccharinate anions and charge–charge interactions” occurs (Fig. 3).16

The reusability of ionic liquid [Bmim]Sac was also investigated using the reaction between benzaldehyde,

malononitrile and 4-hydroxycoumarin as a model system. Ionic liquid can be recovered from the reaction system and it is interesting to note that the recovered IL was reused for five successive batches of reactions to afford pure products after crystallization (Fig. 4). Therefore, it can be concluded that this catalytic system has great potential in industrial applications (Fig. 4).

Conclusions
We have introduced a green domino Knoevenagel–Michael multicomponent reaction procedure for novel and highly efficient synthesis of 3,4-dihydropyran[2]chromene and

Table 3  Synthesis of tetrahydrobenzo[b]pyrans

| S. no. | R<sup>a</sup> | Product | Time (min) | Yield<sup>b</sup> | Melting point | Literature melting point<sup>18</sup> |
|-------|-------------|---------|-------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| 15    | Ph          | 9a      | 10          | 96             | 238–240      | 227–228                             |
| 16    | 4-MeOC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 9b      | 25          | 82             | 201–203      | 194–196                             |
| 17    | 4-NO<sub>2</sub>C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 9c      | 20          | 91             | 179–181      | 178–180                             |
| 18    | 4-OHC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 9d      | 75          | 80             | 269–270      | 265–266                             |
| 19    | 4-ClC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 9e      | 45          | 88             | 212–213      | 207–209                             |
| 20    | 4-FC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 9f      | 25          | 92             | 195–197      | 191–193                             |
| 21    | 3-NO<sub>2</sub>C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 9g      | 15          | 94             | 209–211      | 208–211                             |
| 22    | 4-BrC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 9h      | 35          | 90             | 200–201      | 196–198                             |
| 23    | 2-C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub>OS | 9i      | 60          | 88             | 226–228      | 230–231 (ref. 19)                   |
| 24    | CH<sub>2</sub>(CH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>2</sub> | 9j      | 45          | 89             | 193–194      | 192–193 (ref. 11h)                  |
| 25    | C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>5</sub>CH=CH | 9k      | 60          | 80             | 200–202      | 205–207 (ref. 11h)                  |
| 26    | 4-ClC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 12a     | 40          | 90             | 223–225      | 224–226 (ref. 11g)                 |
| 27    | Ph          | 12b     | 15          | 92             | 219–221      | 220–222 (ref. 10k)                 |
| 28    | 4-BrC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 12c     | 40          | 89             | 196–200      | —                                   |
| 29    | 4-MeOC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 12d     | 30          | 86             | 189–191      | 186–189 (ref. 10k)                 |
| 30    | 4-MeC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 12e     | 30          | 90             | 200–205      | —                                   |
| 31    | CH<sub>2</sub>(CH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>2</sub> | 12f     | 25          | 92             | —           | —                                   |
| 32    | 4-FC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub> | 12g     | 30          | 93             | 198–201      | —                                   |

<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions: aldehyde (1 mmol), malononitrile (1 mmol), 5,5-dimethyl-1,3-cyclohexanedione/1,3-cyclohexanedione (1 mmol), water (2 ml) [Bmim]Sac (5 mol%).<sup>b</sup> Isolated yield.
tetrahydrobenzo[b]pyran derivatives in the presence of [Bmim] Sac as a non-toxic and green ionic liquid in aqueous media. This procedure also offers other significant advantages including simple operation, excellent yield, short reaction time, atom economy, scaling up to multigram quantities, and ease of separation. Also, the catalyst can be easily recovered and reused for five consecutive reaction cycles without significant loss of activity.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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