

HARERA Registration No.: RC/REP/HARERA/GGM/772/504/2023/116 dated: 18.12.2023
HARERA Website: <https://haryanarera.gov.in>
Promoter: M/s DLF Limited
Project Name: DLF Privana South

DLF

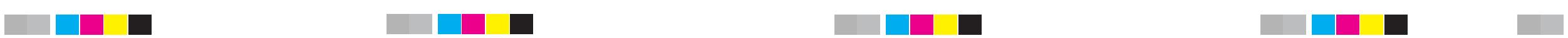
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Artistic impression of the proposed project.

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Behind Jammu terror attacks, small units of Lashkar and Jaish

DEEPTIMANT TIWARY
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

AFTER A CAREFUL study of all the attacks since October 2021, security forces now believe that not more than two groups — comprising militants from Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad — have been involved in ambushes that have killed about 25 personnel in the last two-plus years.

Sources in the security establishment said while one of the groups is suspected to have just two men, including a Pakistani terrorist, the other may have three-five members led by a highly-trained commander. Overall in the Jammu-Poonch-Rajouri region, the sources sus-



Security forces patrol an area in Poonch after the Dec 21 terror attack. File

pect a presence of around 15-20 Pakistani terrorists.

While the Army has killed around 30 terrorists — majority of them Pakistani — during the period since October 2021, it has also lost about 30 personnel, including officers.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

OFFENSIVE REMARKS AFTER PM's LAKSHADWEEP PHOTOS

Maldives suspends 3 ministers after row over their remarks against Modi

Muizzu govt faces backlash at home; Solih, Nasheed flag age-old India ties

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

UNDER FIRE and grappling with a situation fast turning into a diplomatic row, the Maldives government of President Mohamed Muizzu, whose party rode to power last year on an 'India Out' poll campaign, suspended three ministers Sunday for making derogatory remarks about Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the people of India.



President Muizzu's govt distanced itself from the ministers' remarks. File

Ministers Mariyam Shiuna, Malsha Shareef and Mahzoom

Majid were suspended with immediate effect, hours after the Maldives government distanced itself from the remarks made by the ministers and MPs who joined a social media spat over Lakshadweep vs Maldives in the wake of Prime Minister Modi's photographs from Lakshadweep.

On Sunday, the Indian High Commission in Male, sources said, raised the matter with the Foreign Office there and expressed concern over comments about the Prime Minister by certain ministers of the Maldives government. President Muizzu was leaving for China Sunday on

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

E Choppo waters

THIS ROW comes at a time when all eyes are on what Muizzu does next. Unlike his predecessors, India has not been his first stop after entering office — he has been to Turkey, UAE, and now China. He has asked India to withdraw its military from Maldives, and decided not to renew a pact for a survey of Maldivian waters.

ALLEGED PLOT TO KILL PANNUN

Czech govt moved Gupta to solitary after US input on life threat

Last October, Prague prison official flagged security concerns to local court

RITIKA CHOPRA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

NIKHIL GUPTA(52), the Indian national arrested in Prague six months ago based on US inputs alleging his involvement in a plot to kill Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun at the behest of an Indian government official, was transferred to solitary confinement in Pankrác prison after Czech authorities were alerted by the US to a threat on his life, *The Indian Express* has learned.

A recent plea before the Supreme Court by a member of Gupta's family had highlighted his solitary confinement as a "grave violation of his fundamental rights." The plea, claiming Gupta's arrest as a case of mistaken identity, urged the court to direct the Union government to intervene in his extradition proceedings in the Czech Republic based on a US request.

However, the top court rejected the plea last week, citing

the sensitivity of the matter and emphasising that it is the "government's responsibility to take action."

The threat to Gupta's life was disclosed in an email written by Rudolf Sedlacek, the head of the prison guard department of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic, to the municipal court in Prague. The email was sent in the last week of October 2023 when the municipal court was considering arguments regarding the US government's request for Gupta's extradition.

In the email, Sedlacek requests the court's permission for Gupta to participate in a hearing scheduled for November 9, 2023, via video conference. He explained that the request was based on information from the Czech government that Gupta could face serious security risks.

This information, Sedlacek informed the municipal court, was conveyed to Czech authorities by the US government.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



HASINA WINS 4TH STRAIGHT TERM

Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina votes in Dhaka on Sunday. Her party won a landslide victory in the general elections amid a boycott by Opposition parties. AP REPORT, PAGE 10

BUSINESS AS USUAL
BY UNNY

This is no way to handle ED when you can easily switch to BJP and back in Bengal.

INDIA bloc running out of ideas, Cong has to show urgency: JDU

Crucial to counter BJP's temple build-up, says Tyagi

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, JANUARY 7

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Mallikarjun Kharge's statement on Saturday that the INDIA alliance would meet "10 to 15 days" to make decisions about key posts has not gone down well with the JD(U) that has been pushing to get its party chief and Bihar CM Nitish Kumar appointed the bloc's convener.

The JD(U) on Sunday said the Congress chief's statement was disappointing and claimed that the INDIA alliance was "running out of time and ideas" to outthink the BJP-led NDA. "The way the Congress chief responded to media questions on Saturday on this (convener question) did not go down well with us. We are running out of time and ideas. We still have time to catch up. But it is Congress that has to show urgency to see a vibrant INDIA bloc," JD(U) chief national spokesperson K C Tyagi told *The Indian Express*.

Tyagi asked why the Congress was organising a yatra of its own — referring to the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra that begins on January 14 — instead of turning it into an

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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GAURAV GOGOI, KANIMOZHI N V SOMU & JOHN BRITTAS CONGRESS DEPUTY LEADER IN LOK SABHA; DMK MP; CPI(M) MP

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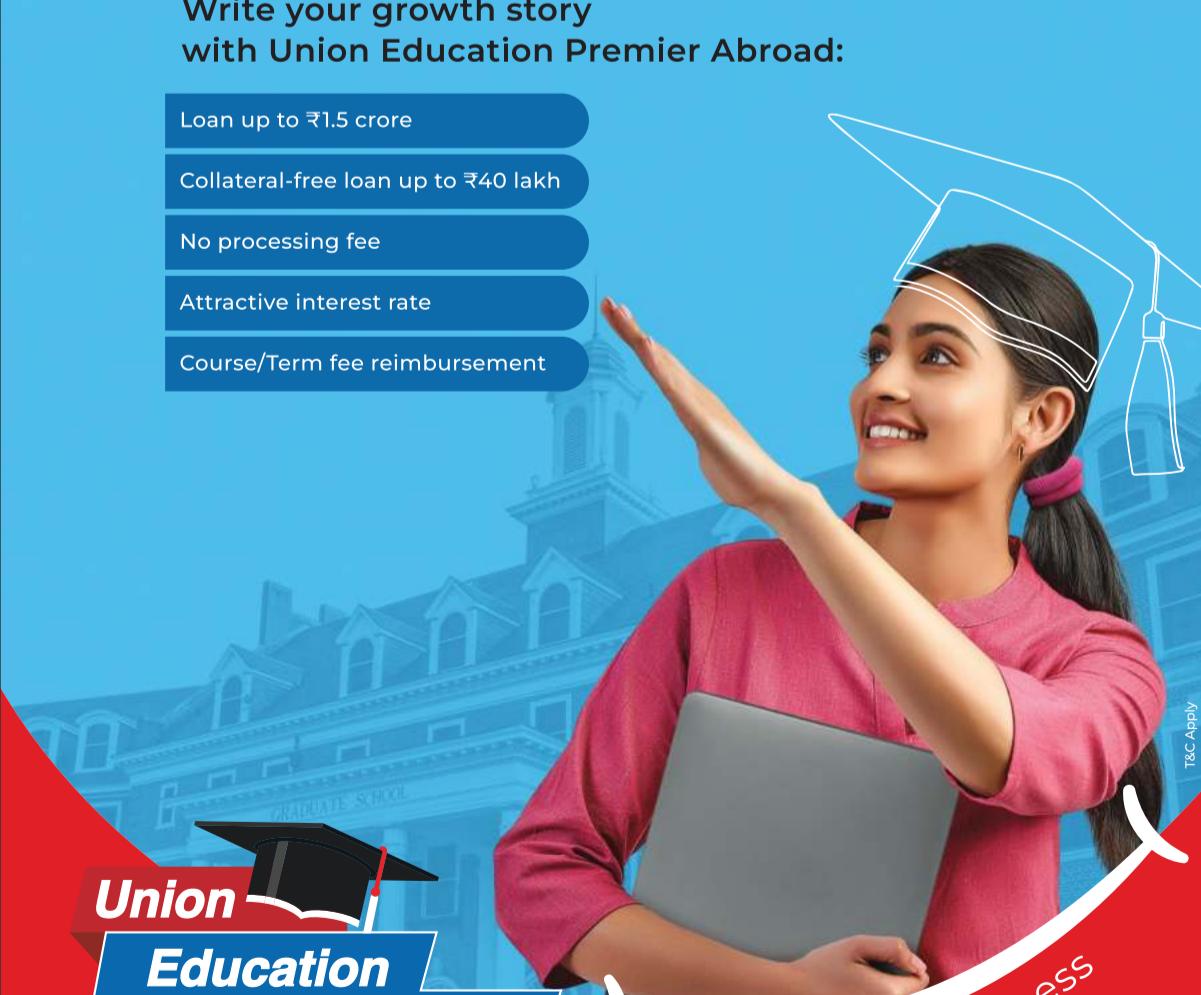
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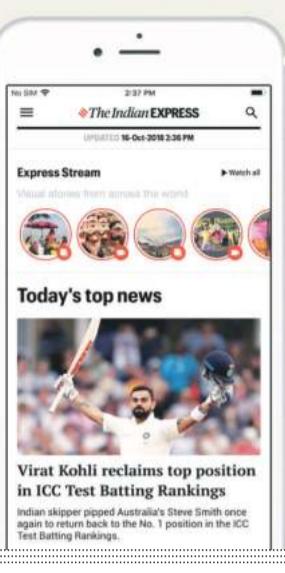


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EXPRESS AUDIO

Choosing to be a child-free woman in India

Being a mother often seems to be the inevitable and most desirable role a woman can have in India. The question is never if, but when and how many children a woman will have. But why is this considered the "natural" destiny? On Love Matters host Leela Mangaldas and writer Dr Amrita Nandy unpack this sensitive subject

India, Saudi sign Haj agreement, this year pilgrim quota 1.75 lakh

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

INDIA AND Saudi Arabia on Sunday signed a bilateral agreement under which New Delhi has been allocated a quota of 1,75,025 pilgrims for this year's annual Haj pilgrimage.

Minority Affairs Minister Smriti Zubin Irani accompanied by MoS for External Affairs V Muraleedharan signed the Bilateral Haj Agreement 2024 with Tawfiq bin Fawzan Al Rabiah, the Saudi Minister for Hajj and Umrah, at Jeddah.

According to an official statement, a total quota of 1,75,025 pilgrims from India has been finalised for Haj 2024 with 1,40,020 seats being reserved for pilgrims to proceed through Haj Committee of India whereas 35,005 pilgrims would be permitted to proceed through private operators.

According to the statement, the Saudi side appreciated the Indian Government's digital initiatives in facilitating and promoting ease and convenience for Haj pilgrims by providing last mile information.

The Government's initiative for encouraging participation under the Ladies without Mehram (LWM) category was also discussed and lauded, it added.

TELLS UNCLE TO RETIRE

Ajit warns quota activist against Mumbai protest

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 7

MAHARASHTRA DEPUTY Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Sunday warned Maratha social activist Manoj Jarange Patil over his threat to hit the streets in Mumbai from January 20 demanding Kunbi (OBC) status to Marathas, saying that the government will not tolerate anyone trying to break the law.

Pawar also taunted his uncle and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar saying that an 84-year-old person should retire from politics.

"Today, with 10 per cent EWS reservation, total reservation has gone up to 62 per cent. Marathas can get reservation in the remaining. Nobody will oppose.

But some people are making extreme demands. Talking about reaching Mumbai... we follow the Constitution given to us by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. If anyone tries to take law into their hands, it will not be tolerated. Nobody is above the law," said Pawar, without naming Jarange Patil. He was speaking at the party program in neighbouring Kalyan tehsil of Thane district.

Without naming his uncle Sharad Pawar, Ajit Pawar said, "One should stop after a certain age. This tradition has been running for years. But some people refuse to follow. They act stubborn. State employees retire at 58. Some at 65, others at 70 or 75. Now you are not stopping even after 84. We are here to work. Tell us if we do wrong. We have the capacity."

Sharad Pawar and his nephew parted ways in 2023 after Ajit Pawar chose to join hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and staked claim on the party name as well as the symbol. At present, the Election Commission of India (ECI) is hearing the case between the two.

Pawar said that three parties have come together in Maharashtra to make Narendra Modi India's Prime Minister for the third time. "We must send as many MPs as possible from Maharashtra to ensure that Narendra Modi becomes the country's Prime Minister for the third time," he said.

Pawar said that the support of state and central governments is necessary if one wants to solve the problems and eye development. "Today, there is no leadership like that of Narendra Modi."

FIR against SP leader over call to 'burn' minister

Meerut: A case has been registered against a Samajwadi Party leader in Meerut for allegedly giving a call to "burn" a UP minister Somendra Tomar and his house, a police official said.

SP leader Mukesh Siddharth, former vice-chairman of the UP Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Commission, reportedly made the statement while talking to journalists during a protest in Meerut on Saturday.

His threat followed a recent clash where Siddharth said Dalit corporators from opposition parties were allegedly thrashed in a board meeting of the Meerut Municipal Corporation.

A video had surfaced on social media which purportedly showed him making the controversial statement.

FROM PAGE ONE

FULL REPORTS ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Maldives suspends 3 ministers after row over remarks on Modi

a State Visit at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The Maldives government, in a statement, without naming its ministers or Prime Minister Modi, said: "The Government of Maldives is aware of derogatory remarks on social media platforms against foreign leaders and high-ranking individuals. These opinions are personal and do not represent the views of the Government of Maldives."

It said the government believes "freedom of expression should be exercised in a democratic and responsible manner, and in ways that do not spread hatred, negativity, and hinder close relationships between the Maldives and its international partners".

"Moreover, the relevant authorities of the Government will not hesitate to take action against those who make such derogatory remarks," it stated.

Later in the day, the three ministers were suspended by the government.

After photographs of Modi's visit to Lakshadweep gained traction on social media and the Internet, and many promoted the chain of Indian islands over the Maldives as a tourist destination, Zahid Rameez, a Maldivian MP, said, "The move is great. However,

the idea of competing with us is delusional. How can they provide the service we offer? How can they be so clean? The permanent smell in the rooms will be the biggest downfall."

Besides him, minister Shiuna made derogatory remarks about Modi, calling the Prime Minister a "clown" and a "puppet". Shiuna, Deputy Minister at the Maldives Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Information, and Art, as well as the spokesperson for the Male City Council, later deleted her disparaging social media posts.

Shareef's posts on Modi were also derogatory in nature. Majid flagged the "challenges India faced in competing with Maldives in beach tourism" and tagged Modi in a post that spoke about open defecation in India. Most of these posts have now been deleted.

Outrage over the posts mounted not just in India but also within the Maldives. Many in the island nation, including former Presidents, condemned the remarks against a friendly country and its leader.

Former President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, in a post on X, said "I condemn the use of hateful language against India by Maldivian government officials on social media. India has always been a good friend to Maldives

and we must not allow such callous remarks to negatively impact the age-old friendship between our two countries."

Former President Mohamed Nasheed said, "What appalling language by Maldives Government official Mariyam Shiuna towards the leader of a key ally, that is instrumental for Maldives' security and prosperity. Dr Mohamed Muizzu government must distance itself from these comments and give clear assurance to India they do not reflect govt policy."

Abdulla Shahid, former Foreign Minister of Maldives, called the remarks by the ministers odious, and described India as a time-tested friend.

"Derogatory remarks made by 2 Deputy Ministers of the current Maldives Government, and a member of a political party in the ruling coalition, towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the people of India in social media is reprehensible and odious. It is a host of Indian actors and celebrities too took to social media to criticise the derogatory remarks. Actor Akshay Kumar said, "Came across comments from prominent public figures from Maldives passing hateful and racist comments on Indians. Surprised that they are doing this to a country that sends them the maximum number of tourists. We are good to our neighbours but why should we tolerate such unprovoked hate? I've visited the Maldives many times and always praised it, but dignity first. Let us decide to explore Indian Islands and support our own tourism."

Salman Khan, John Abraham, Shraddha Kapoor and Sachin Tendulkar also posted photographs from their time in Lakshadweep or other Indian beach destinations.

Salman Khan said, "It is so cool to see our PM Narendra Modi

at the beautiful clean and stunning beaches of Lakshadweep, and the best part is that yes hamare India mein hain." Tendulkar, on the other hand, posted photographs from his recent trip to Sindhudurg, saying, "India is blessed with beautiful coastlines and pristine islands. With our "Atithi Devo Bhava" philosophy, we have so much to explore, so many memories waiting to be created."

"Boycott Maldives" also trended on social media with many users talking about cancelling their hotel bookings and flight tickets to Maldives over "the insult to PM Modi".

According to statistics of the Maldivian Tourism Ministry, India held the top position as the primary source of tourists for the Maldives, with 209,198 visitors as of December 2023, while Russians constituted the second largest group exploring the island country.

Former Maldivian sports minister Ahmed Maloof, while expressing concern "about the escalating situation regarding the sensitive comments about our closest neighbour", said in a post on X: "Indians boycotting the Maldives would have a huge impact on our economy. It would be hard for us to recover from such a campaign."

• Gupta in solitary confinement

tactical reasons, the Prison Service of the Czech Republic does not provide any further information in relation to the security measures taken for any particular individual."

Gupta's lawyer in Prague, Petr Slepicka, confirmed that the Pankrác prison had moved his client to solitary confinement after inputs were received on the threat to Gupta's life.

"Yes, he is now in a cell all by himself. Two prison guards always accompany him whenever he moves outside his cell. Even when I have to meet him now, there is a glass wall separating him and me," Slepicka said.

Czech authorities had arrested Nikhil Gupta on June 30 last year at the request of the US government. US prosecutors have charged Gupta with attempting to hire a hitman to assassinate Khalistan separatist Gurpartwan Singh Pannu, a US citizen designated as a terrorist under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in India.

This alleged plot was said to be orchestrated by an Indian intelligence official, yet unnamed by the US government. Notably, the hitman Gupta attempted to hire was an undercover agent from the Drug Enforcement Administration of the US government. Gupta's arrest unfolded upon his arrival at Václav Havel Airport in Prague, where he was allegedly scheduled to meet the undercover agent.

Kharge's remarks that irritated the JD(U) came a week after Nitish took over the reins of the JD(U) in the party's national executive meeting, where a resolution projecting him as the "sutradhar (facilitator)" of the INDIA bloc was passed while underlining only a few leaders were "as experienced" as him. The JD(U) also praised Nitish for his role in bringing the Opposition parties together and said bigger parties in the bloc had a "larger responsibility" to ensure its success and must "show a big heart".

With inputs from Lalmani Verma in New Delhi

Classifieds

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Be it known to all concerned on the behalf of my client SH. RAJEEV KAPOOR S/O SH. OM PRAKASH KAPOOR, R/O 44, APNA GHAR SOCIETY, PITAM PURA, DELHI 110034, that he has severed all his relations with his son Sh. SAHIL KAPOOR, HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN and has disowned and disinherited them from all her movable and immovable properties & assets. Anyone dealing with them shall do so on their own risk and consequences.

Muzammil (Advocate)

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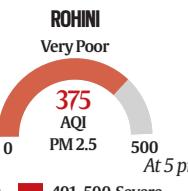
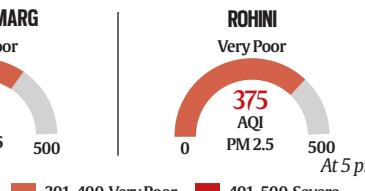
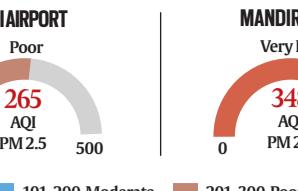
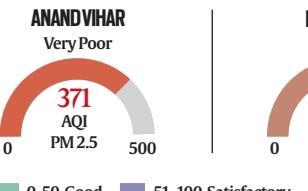
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S K Y W A T C H
FORECAST: January 8
Partly cloudy sky. Shallow fog in the morning.
AQI: Very poor
MAX: 19 normal
MIN: 09 2.1°C above normal

BRIEFLY

L-G hails temple for removing shed

New Delhi: Two days after his intervention led to the removal of one of its gates to aid pedestrian movement, L-G VK Saxena said the Mata Jhandewalan Mandir management had taken another step to improve mobility in its vicinity. Taking to X, Saxena announced the management's decision to remove sheds encroaching the road: "In another commendable voluntary move, the Mata Jhandewalan Mandir management is now removing the sheds encroaching the road beside the Temple. With this the connecting road between Rani Jhansi Marg & DB Gupta Road becomes free. Will bring marked improvement in congestion & mobility." On Friday, Saxena had said that after his intervention, the ancient Jhandewalan Mandir on Rani Jhansi Marg had voluntarily brought down its gate beside the foot over bridge.

AAP begins 'Main Bhi Kejriwal' meets

New Delhi: After the door-to-door campaign, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has begun its Jansamvad (Public Dialogue meeting) "Main Bhi Kejriwal" in every ward with senior party leaders including cabinet ministers Saurabh Bharadwaj and Atishi addressing the public in their respective constituencies. Atishi stated that one after another, leaders of the AAP are being sent to jail, adding a conspiracy is being hatched to arrest CM Arvind Kejriwal. Calling, BJP's allegations against the AAP leader "false and baseless", Atishi said Kejriwal has worked honestly for the past eight years, resulting in numerous facilities for Delhi residents, including "excellent education, world-class healthcare, free electricity and water, affordable bus travel, and free pilgrimage trips for senior citizens".

Gurgaon: 'Cow smugglers' chased

New Delhi: A group of cow vigilantes chased a pick-up vehicle for 12 kms after they received a tip-off that a group of men were allegedly transporting cows for slaughter to Mewat area in the early hours of Friday. Videos of the incident showed the group chasing the truck from Pachgaon Chowk on KMP Highway and cows being purportedly disposed of on the road as the vigilantes close in. An FIR was registered on the complaint of a cow vigilante against the alleged smugglers. The FIR stated that the driver of the pick-up was injured and taken to hospital. ENS

WERE ALLEGEDLY OPPOSED TO INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIP

Ankit Saxena murder: Court convicts friend's parents, kin

JIGNASA SINHA AND NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

A DELHI court recently convicted three people for the murder of Ankit Saxena — a case which rocked the capital in 2018.

Ankit was in a relationship with the daughter of two of the accused — Akbar Ali and Shehnaz Begum who were allegedly opposed to the match as the two belonged to different faiths. The third accused was the woman's uncle.

The court of Additional Sessions Judge Sunil Kumar Sharma, relying on scientific evidence and testimony of eyewitnesses, ruled on December 23, 2023 that the prosecution had proved the motive of all the accused persons for committing Ankit's murder.

All three were accused under Section 302 (murder) read with 34 (common intention) of the IPC. The court additionally convicted Begum under Section 323 (voluntarily causing hurt). The court will decide the quantum of punishment on January 15.

It was on February 1, 2018, when 23-year-old photographer Ankit was waylaid by the family of his 20-year-old girlfriend and

CASE TIMELINE



FEB 1, 2018: 23-year-old photographer Ankit Saxena was waylaid by the family

members of his 20-year-old girlfriend and his neck was slit. His mother Kamlesh tried to save him but she was also assaulted while her father was manhandled.

FEB 3, 2018: The woman's parents and uncle were arrested while her younger brother was detained. A knife was recovered from their possession which, police said, was used to kill Ankit

APR 2018: A chargesheet was prepared against Akbar Ali, his wife Shehnaz Begum and their relative Mohd Salim

MAY 3, 2018: The court took cognizance of all the offences against the accused

MAY 25, 2018: The court framed charges against the accused

DEC 9, 2023: Arguments concluded

DEC 23, 2023: Judgment announced after five years of the crime

killed in full public view in Raghbir Nagar of Khylala area in West Delhi. Police said Ankit was beaten for 10-15 minutes by Ali, Begum, their minor son and their relative, Mohd Salim. Police also said that while the accused were arguing with Ankit, the latter's parents and friends came to his rescue. However, his mother was manhandled by the accused. The police took cognizance of the statements of the parents who alleged their son was killed in front

of them. They tried to take him to the hospital in an e-rickshaw but he was declared "brought dead".

According to the investigation, the relationship had come to light when the woman's family found her texts and call logs indicating her communication with Ankit.

Soon after the murder, the woman was sent to Nari Niketan as she claimed that her family might try to kill her as well. She was later sent to her aunt's house. Her uncle, parents and brother

were caught within days.

Relying on the testimony of a doctor who conducted the post-mortem examination, the court said that the prosecution was able to prove that the death was caused by "a sharp-edged weapon and the manner of the death was homicidal". It was also noted that Begum and Ali had changed their residence with the motive to end Ankit's relationship with their daughter.

As many as 28 witnesses were relied upon by the prosecution. Key witnesses included Yashpal Saxena, complainant and father of the deceased, Kamlesh, the mother of the deceased, and Nitin and Anmol Singh – Ankit's friends.

According to the court, the testimony of the prosecution witnesses also suggested that the accused had hurled abuses and threats at the deceased and his parents. Relying on six witnesses, the defence submitted before the court that there were various flaws in the prosecution's case.

The defence also told the court that Ankit's parents made false statements as they were "tutored" by the Investigating Officer.

Rejecting the arguments, the court said that the entire defence of the accused persons is "tutored" and "guided".

A DISCUSSION on seat sharing between the Aam Aadmi Party and Congress as part of the INDIA bloc is scheduled to take place in Delhi on Monday. According to sources, the discussion will be limited to Delhi, and seat-sharing in Punjab, Goa or Gujarat is not on the agenda.

With AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann campaigning in Gujarat, and AAP Rajya Sabha MP Raghubrachandra not in the country, the meeting will be attended by national general secretary (organisation), Sandeep Pathak, and Delhi ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj.

"Around seven senior leaders, including Salman Khurshid, the AICC observer for Delhi, Deepak Bararia, Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely, Chhattisgarh's former CM Bhupesh Singh Baghel and Rajasthan's ex-CM Ashok Gehlot along with Mukul Wasnik will attend the meeting," a Congress leader said.

There are seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. Both AAP and Congress, as per insiders, are keen on parting with only two, which means that Monday's discussions could get heated. During a meeting of the party's national executive and council, Kejriwal had said

that AAP was part of the alliance to save India and the Constitution, adding that in places where it will not field candidates, its cadre will support the INDIA bloc leader.

"We are clear we want an alliance, and taking a look at vote share... is very important. AAP has won the 2015 and 2020 assembly polls, and the recent MCD polls and that should reflect in the seat matrix," said a senior AAP leader.

Congress sources, meanwhile, said the party was likely to stake claim to five of the seven LS seats in Delhi based on its performance in the 2019 polls. The party's senior leadership was in a huddle with representatives from Delhi among others on Sunday evening.

The five seats were likely to include Chandni Chowk, Northeast Delhi, East Delhi, New Delhi and West Delhi where the Congress was in second place in terms of vote share compared to the AAP.

"Our negotiation regarding seat-sharing will be strictly based on the vote share secured by our candidates on each of the five seats; the Congress will stick to campaigning on these seats and leave the rest to the AAP," a senior Congress leader said.

Leaders in the Congress's Delhi unit have spoken against an alliance between the two parties in the past. Like in Punjab, concerns have been raised about the impact an alliance at the national level will have at the assembly level.

WAS LURED AWAY BY A WOMAN

12-yr-old gangraped, 3 minors among accused

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

A 12-YEAR-OLD girl was allegedly gangraped by a 36-year-old man and three minors in North Delhi on Tuesday. The police said the victim was lured by a woman who was allegedly paid by the accused to "arrange for the girl". Delhi Police said they have arrested the man and the woman, and apprehended the minors.

According to officers, the minor girl and the woman work as rag-pickers in the area. The accused man is a tea stall owner and the three minors – aged 12, 14 and 15 – work for him.

"The accused are being interrogated," said an officer.

On January 1, the accused allegedly approached the woman asking her to "arrange" a girl. The

accused even built a temporary shelter using a tarpaulin inside a sealed building in the area to carry out the crime, said an officer.

Police said the accused offered money and food to the woman following which, on January 2, she asked the girl to accompany her on the pretext of some work. "The minor girl followed her to a building. She was told that she would have to collect some garbage from the rooftop but when she reached there, the accused were already waiting for her. They pulled her inside and raped her," said a senior police officer.

DCP (North) Manoj Meena said, "Two-three days after the incident, the minor came back to the area for work. She confided (about the incident) in her cousin who lives there. The cousin told the family who then reported the incident to us."



ARMED AGAINST COLD

A labourer carries wood sticks to be used to light bonfire, in New Delhi Sunday. Abhinav Saha

200 complaints a day: Online scams keep cops busy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

WITH OVER 200 cyber complaints received in the national capital every day, the Delhi Police's hands in 2023 remained full with online scams – ranging from sextortion to OTP and work-from-home frauds. Police said cyber cases have surpassed murder incidents, kidnapping, and thefts in Delhi. While two murders, 32 kidnapping cases, and 1.7 theft cases are reported in Delhi every day on an average, the police on Sunday said they receive at least 200 cyber complaints every day. The data has been accessed from Delhi Police's cyber stations, social media, and National Crime Reporting

Portal (NCRP).

Officers said their job is not just restricted to catching the accused behind the 200 complaints as they also have to analyse the additional 9.6 lakh complaints and calls received on the Ministry of Home Affairs' NCRP portal. Most of the perpetrators in the cases are not from Delhi but the police have to take cognizance of "emerging trends" in cybercrime and make further arrests, they added.

An officer posted at Delhi Police's IFSO (Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations) unit said they look at all organised cyber fraud, adding that there were different kinds of gangs for each type of cyber crime. "We have found that most gangs operate from Mewat. Our teams are on the con-

stant lookout for Mewat-based gangs so that more cases can be solved as gangs are busted," said the officer.

Talking about their modus operandi, police said the gangs mainly target people using OTP scams. "They either pose as technical staffers and take OTPs from people or lure people to invest in fake mobile applications.

The gangs are also involved in job scams as they offer fake jobs to students and later steal all their information. Mewat-based gangs are also involved in several sextortion cases. They hire two or three women who make video calls to retired government officers or doctors. They then trap the victim into extorting..." added the officer.

One of the most recent and popular scams, the 'WFH-Like

videos, get rich' scam is mainly operated from Delhi, UP and Haryana, police said, adding small gangs are "copying" the infamous modus operandi as it is easy to find targets by employing the method.

"We have had complaints where people have lost more than Rs 20 lakh. The accused made a proper Telegram group and a fake website to show that they were offering a real job. They target women and unemployed people who are desperate for a job. They tell them (their targets) to put money into their company to enable them to access the website and earn more money. Initially, people do earn some amount by liking videos or doing similar tasks," said another officer.

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DEMOLITION CLOUD OVER STRUCTURE LEAVES HISTORIANS, LOCAL POPULATION WORRIED

This Lutyens' area mosque is a testament to a new Delhi coexisting with old

UPASIKA SINGHAL
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

WHEN EDWIN Lutyens and Herbert Baker set out to build the new capital of British India in Delhi in the first half of the 20th century, they were clear what they did not want it to replicate: The Gothic-Victorian style buildings in Mumbai, then Bombay.

According to Robert Grant Irving, in his book *Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker, and Imperial Delhi*, several discussions took place on where exactly the site of the new capital should be. Some suggested the old seat of the Mughals at Shahjahanabad while others thought the northern part of

the city was especially scenic, considering that it overlooked the Ridge and the Yamuna.

However, Lutyens and Baker preferred the "open, virgin land" to the South of Delhi. Besides being large in expanse, the location could also give the British a chance to break away from the Mughal mould and cement their own identity into the architecture of the buildings. However, the first step they had to take was to remove the villages that had existed there for generations.

A little research exists regarding this but local, oral history suggests that the erstwhile villages in Lutyens' Delhi and in the Raisina area were Muslim-dominated areas. According to the Sunehri Bagh

Mosque's Imam Abdul Aziz, the villagers reached a deal with the British: The latter could take the land as long as they left their graveyards, tombs and religious places alone. One of the places to benefit from the move was Sunehri Bagh Masjid. It was decided that the British would let it remain on its grassy knoll while constructing a convergence of roads around it, making it a roundabout for easy commute.

The move isn't a matter of surprise, since, according to historian Swapna Liddle, the British had also planned Connaught Place and other parts of Delhi around Jantar Mantar, Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj, Zabita Ganj mosque, Hanuman

lar people to pray in. According to the Imam, the structure is humble and quaint because it used to be a simple, village mosque where the villagers would convene for prayer or social events.

But besides the local residents, the Sunehri Bagh Mosque also housed freedom fighters such as Syed Faiz ul-Hasan, known by his pen name Hasrat Mohani who was a celebrated poet credited with coining the slogan *Inqilab Zindabad* – Long live the revolution.

"Maulana Hasrat Mohani used to reside at the mosque whenever he was in Delhi to attend sessions of the Constituent Assembly. He was a simple man who used to travel to places on a bicycle or

Tonga – this is the same Hasrat Mohani who had moved the resolution for complete Independence from the British rule which was accepted by the Indian National Congress in 1921. He coined the famous slogan *Inqilab Zindabad*, which was later adopted by revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh," according to heritage conservationist Sohail Hashmi.

Today, the mosque stands in the eye of a storm. While the building is a gazette notified Grade-III heritage site, according

to the Delhi government, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) recently sought public opinion on its proposed demolition with officials arguing that the structure causes traffic snarls.

Although the status of Sunehri Bagh Masjid's demolition is presently under a cloud, historians, heritage enthusiasts and the local population are holding their breath.

"With the demolition of the mosque, a legacy of a nationalist, the history associated with it will also get destroyed," said Hashmi.



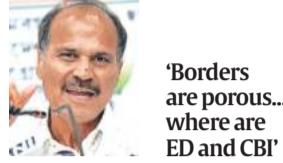
Sunehri Bagh Masjid was built 150 years ago. Amit Mehra

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GOVT & POLITICS

ED itself an idiot, TMC protecting criminals: Adhir

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, JANUARY 7

'Borders are porous... where are ED and CBI'

WHY TMC LEADER NOT HELD YET: GOVERNOR

Kolkata: Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose Sunday sought a report from the state government explaining why a TMC strongman accused of orchestrating an attack on ED officials had not been arrested yet. A statement read: "The Honourable Governor has asked the state government to report on action taken in the ration scam, explain why the accused Sheikh Shahjahan has not been arrested so far, clarify whether he is in India or crossed the border..." ENS

asked the Centre to strengthen border security in Bengal.

The borders (India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal) are porous. There is no problem travelling from this side to the other side. Where are the ED and CBI? That's why they should not make tall claims, be it the BJP, ED or CBI," he said.

"The BJP talks about the Rohingya issue. Now they have started politics of polarisation... They should do something against those who look after," the MP said, referring to the TMC government in the state.

On Friday, when an ED team reached Shahjahan's residence in North 24 Parganas district to conduct searches in connection with an alleged ration scam case, they were attacked by a large mob. The ED said three of its officers sustained serious injuries.

On Saturday, ED issued the lookout circular against Shahjahan, following apprehensions that he might flee the country. On this, Chowdhury



DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



PRESENT, FUTURE

AT A TIME Samajwadi Party is against the Bahujan Samaj Party joining the INDIA bloc, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav attended the wedding of ex-BSP MP Afzal Ansari's daughter. This has sparked speculation that Afzal may contest Lok Sabha polls on an SP ticket. In 2019, when SP and BSP contested together, Afzal – the brother of jailed gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari – was elected from Ghazipur on a BSP ticket. Last year, he was disqualified as MP after being convicted in a kidnapping-murder case. The top court later suspended the conviction.

COURTESY VISIT

UNION AGRICULTURE Minister Arjun Munda, who was in Bengaluru Sunday, paid a courtesy visit to ex-PM and JD(S) patriarch HD Deve Gowda at latter's residence, where former Karnataka CM and Gowda's son HD Kumaraswamy was also present. The JD(S) has allied with the BJP for the Lok Sabha elections. Issues related to tribal affairs and agriculture concerning Karnataka were discussed in the meeting, it is learnt.

Cong starts INDIA seat-sharing talks; names coordinators for key LS seats

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

THE CONGRESS Sunday formally began INDIA bloc seat-sharing talks and, in an unusual move, appointed several senior leaders – including Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, ministers in Telangana, Karnataka and Jharkhand governments and many former state ministers and MPs – as coordinators for specific Lok Sabha constituencies.

Members of the Congress's national alliance committee met senior RJD leader Manoj Kumar Jha for preliminary talks on seat adjustments in Bihar. The JD(U) has already conveyed to the Congress that it wants to contest in 16 or 17 seats and that the RJD, Congress and the Left can reach an agreement on the rest of the seats.

According to sources, the RJD offered five seats – four Lok Sabha and one Rajya Sabha – to the Congress. The state unit of the Congress is insisting on eight

Don't stake claim to seats before formal talks: Deora to Sena UBT

Mumbai: Congress's Milind Deora Sunday targeted Shiv Sena (UBT), saying if the ally continues to stake claim to LS seats without completing formal seat-sharing talks, Congress, too, will have to declare the name of its candidates. "I request the allies

to not make any statement... I hope the message has reached the right people in Delhi and Mumbai," he said. It is seen as a reply to MLA Aaditya Thackeray's rally Saturday in South Mumbai where he sounded the poll bugle. ENS

seats. According to sources in the RJD and JD(U), the parties can look at two options – 17 seats to RJD and JD(U) each, four to Congress and two to CPI(ML); or, 16 seats each to RJD and JD(U), five to Congress, two to CPI(ML) and one to CPI.

Sources said the Congress alliance committee will meet AAP leaders Atishi, Sandeep Pathak and Saurabh Bhadrawaj on Monday.

Meanwhile, the Congress appointed Parliamentary coordinators for 539 Lok Sabha constituencies but has roped in senior leaders

in states where it will go alone. So in Telangana, Chief Minister Reddy has been made coordinator of Chevella and Mahabubnagar seats, both of which are with the TRS now. Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu would be in charge of Secunderabad and Hyderabad, the former represented by union minister G Kishan Reddy and the latter by AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi. All state ministers have been made coordinators of one Lok Sabha seat each.

In Karnataka too, barring Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and

Deputy CM D K Shivakumar, all state ministers have been made coordinators. The Congress won only one of the 28 Lok Sabha seats in the state in 2019.

In Jharkhand, the party appointed state ministers Badal Partalekh, Banna Gupta, Rameshwar Oraon and Alangir Alam as coordinators of Koderma, Dhanbad, Singhbhum and Godda seats.

In Maharashtra, the coordinators include former CMs Ashok Chavan and Prithviraj Chavan and Leader of the Opposition Vijay Wadettiwar.

Among the coordinators in Gujarat are Rajya Sabha MP Amee Yajnik, Naranbhai Ratwa and senior leader Tushar Chaudhary. The other senior leaders who figure in the list include Mahesh Joshi (Rajasthan) Jaiwardhan Singh (Madhya Pradesh) and Ganesh Godiyal (Uttarakhand). Senior Congress leaders said the idea is to ensure that the leaders take ownership of these seats.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Rajasthan Governor Kalraj Mishra in Jaipur on Sunday. ANI

DGPs' CONFERENCE

Police need to work with data, not 'danda': PM

Modi says new criminal laws in spirit of 'Citizen First, Dignity First, Justice First'

MAHENDER SINGH
MANRAL
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

STATING THAT the new criminal laws were framed with the spirit of "Citizen First, Dignity First and Justice First", Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday said police now need to work with data instead of "danda" (stick).

On the concluding day of the All-India Conference of Director/Inspector Generals of Police in Jaipur, the PM said that the enactment of the new laws was a paradigm shift in the criminal justice system. "In line with the improving global profile and increasing national strength of the country, the Indian police should transform itself into a modern and world class police force to realise the vision of a developed India by 2047," he said.

Suggesting that the police should organise various sports events as a way to strengthen connect with the citizens, the Prime Minister also urged government officials to stay in border villages to establish better connect with local populace as these border villages were the "first villages" of India.

Highlighting the success of India's first solar mission – Aditya-L1 – and the swift rescue of 21 crew members from the hijacked vessel in Arabian sea by the Indian Navy, the Prime Minister said that such achievements show that India is emerging as a major power in the world.

He said that Aditya-L1 success is similar to the success of Chandrayaan-3 mission. He also exuded pride in the Navy's successful operation.

Baig back, Mehbooba says all forgotten for 'coming times'

BASHAARAT MASOOD
SRINAGAR, JANUARY 7

Baig with party chief Mehbooba Mufti in Anantnag, Sunday

EXPLAINED **E** He returns, but fuels debate

BAIG'S RETURN to the party is being seen in context of the upcoming parliamentary polls in the UT. While some expect it to give the PDP a shot in the arm, particularly in north Kashmir, others feel it may harm the party, particularly due to his earlier stand on Article 370.

The 77-year-old Baig had been associated with the PDP since 1998. After the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, the PAGD, a seven-party grouping, in

October 2020 resolved to contest the District Development Council (DDC) elections together. Baig was said to be upset over seat distribution. Sources said Safeena wanted to contest from Wagoora DDC seat as a PDP candidate. The seat, however, went to the NC, leaving the Baigs unhappy. He quit the party in November 2020 and, in March 2021, formally joined Sajad Lone's Peoples Conference, only to be expelled months later.

Baig was awarded the Padma Bhushan in January 2020. He accepted it even as most of his party's leadership was behind bars and booked under the stringent Public Safety Act.

Baig, sahib received the Padma award that is seen as celebrating the disempowerment of people. How can the two meet again?" said one leader.

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BRIEFLY

ODISHA

Boat with Union minister gets stuck in Chilika

Bhubaneswar: A boat carrying Union minister Parshottam Rupala got stuck in Odisha's Chilika Lake for around 2 hours Sunday evening. While earlier it was suspected that the boat might have gotten stuck in a net laid by fishermen, Rupala clarified they lost their way in the blue lagoon. The administration sent another vessel which rescued Rupala, who was accompanied by BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra. The incident took place when the minister and was on his way to Satapada in Puri district. PTI

UTTAR PRADESH
ASP booked for rape, criminal intimidation

Lucknow: An additional SP was booked in UP for allegedly raping a 23-year-old woman, officials said Sunday. The complainant claimed she has evidence and demanded the ASP's suspension who also faces charges of forced abortion and criminal intimidation, officials said. The case was lodged after the woman shared the incident on social media. The woman alleged that the ASP, posted in the ATS, sexually abused her for years and forcibly got her abortion done when she became pregnant in April 2023. PTI

JAMMU & KASHMIR
Suspended cop among two dismissed

Jammu: Two policemen – a suspended constable and a special police officer (SPO) – were dismissed from service for prolonged absence from their duties in J&K's Samba district, police said Sunday. Samba SP Benam Tosh ordered the removal from service of suspended selection grade constable Jaginder Singh and disengagement of SPO Bachan Lal, a police spokesman said. He said the under-suspension constable was also involved in a case last year at Kathua police station. ENS

CHHATTISGARH
BJP leader shot dead in Kanker

Kanker: A BJP leader was killed in Kanker district Sunday evening, an official said. The incident took place at around 8.30 pm in Purana Bazar area of Pakhanjpur town when Asim Rai was riding a two-wheeler, the official said. Rai (50) was the corporator and vice president of the district BJP unit. He was rushed to a hospital where doctors declared him dead, the official said. A doctor has confirmed a bullet wound on Rai's head. PTI

PAVNEET SINGH CHADHA
PANAJI, JANUARY 7

BASILIO PIRES was out for a stroll last week when he noticed a familiar face walking towards him – his neighbour Milagres Gonsalves, who "died" two months ago.

Pires rushed to the village panchayat office in disbelief.

"I was shocked. It was like seeing a ghost. I thought...how is a dead man...alive?" said Pires, panchayat secretary, Agassaim. His funeral was held at the local church. "The return of 60-year-old Gonsalves from the dead has left many in North Goa's Agassaim village confused."

Gonsalves, who lived alone, had gone for a walk near his house in Malwara in Agassaim on September 19 and subsequently went missing. Four days later, his niece Sheron Fernandes reported him



YES, THIS IS GULMARG

Amid a prolonged dry spell in Kashmir, the ski resort of Gulmarg, which normally would be covered with snow at this time, is wearing a barren look. The Kashmir Valley, going through the harsh winter period 'Chilla-i-Kalan', has seen a 79% rainfall deficit in December. Met office has forecast mainly dry weather until January 12. Shuaib Masoodi

Kozhikode: Six students put up pro-Palestine posters at Starbucks, held

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN 7

THE KERALA Police Sunday arrested six student activists after they allegedly put up pro-Palestine posters at a Starbucks outlet in Kozhikode. The students, who were charged with deliberate provocation with intent to cause a riot, were later released on bail.

They are students of Farook College in Kozhikode, and activists of the Fraternity Movement – the student wing of the Welfare Party of India. According to the FIR, they went into the cafe Thursday and put up posters that read "Free Palestine" and "Caution, contents may fund genocide".

Police booked the 6 students under IPC sections 448 (trespassing), 153 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause a riot), 427 (causing damage) and 34 (crime committed with common intention). The case was registered following a complaint from Starbucks staff.

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Fearing protests, over eight Panchayat Samiti employees of Parbhani district on December 28 wrote to the district collector, highlighting that villagers were asking them the reason behind

VIKSIT BHARAT SANKALP YATRA

'Modi Sarkar or Bharat Sarkar? Voters seek answer, stop chariot

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 7

ON DECEMBER 13, a video of a young man questioning Maharashtra government employees accompanying a chariot under the Central Government's Vicksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra at Soniyachi Shiroli village in Kolhapur district's Radhanagar tehsil went viral on social media where he objected to the name "Modi Sarkar" on the chariot and insisted that it should either be "Bharat Sarkar" or "Government of India".

The video since has inspired villagers in different parts of the state, who have been either stopping the chariot from entering the village or bombarding officials with questions forcing the event to get wound up in few minutes. It is all being done without a banner of a political party.

Fearing protests, over eight Panchayat Samiti employees of Parbhani district on December 28 wrote to the district collector, highlighting that villagers were asking them the reason behind

writing "Modi Sarkar" on the chariot and questioning if they are "campaigning for Modi". The employees had requested police protection.

It started with Rajyaibhav Shobha Ramchandra, a 30-year old Ambedkarite activist. "I stood in front of the grampanchayat and asked the motive behind the chariot and the yatra," Rajyaibhav told *The Indian Express*.

"The Constitution says, 'India, that is Bharat'. It could either be 'Bharat Sarkar' or 'Government of India'. If a person is replacing country's name, then it is the violation of constitutional principle of sovereignty. It is as good as a treason," he said.

As the discussion progressed, he was joined by villagers who too stood in his support. He later realised that the person who was debating with him was not a government employee, but a functionary of the BJP.

Hamara Sankalp Vicksit Bharat is a nationwide campaign to raise awareness through outreach activities to achieve saturation of schemes of government of India across the country.

In Buldhana district's Palshi Jhashi village of Sangrampur tehsil, former sarpanch Abhayshin Marode was served a notice under section 149 of the IPC by local police.

"I have no objection against Narendra Modi. But shouldn't we highlight the failures of Central government's schemes? ... am merely asking questions on doubling farmer's income, hunger index, growing expenditure of farmers. Shouldn't we get answers," said Marode, who is also the director at the Sangrampur Agriculture Produce Market Committee.

The route of the chariot was later changed after Marode persisted with his questioning, joined by villagers and friends.

Similar peaceful questioning and protest videos were also seen in Ahmadnagar, Nasik, Satara, Jalna, Parbhani, Akola, Hingoli, Nanded, Ratnagiri and Buldhana districts where villagers are asking the chariot various questions on implementation of the schemes as well as use of phrase Modi Sarkar.

The Daulat Beg Oldi ALG is located close to the LAC at an altitude of 16,700 feet and is known as the highest airfield in the world. Temperatures in Daulat Beg Oldi plunge up to minus 40 degrees Celsius during harsh winters.

It is especially boosting infrastructure at the Daulat Beg Oldi Advanced Landing Ground (ALG) as well as the Nyoma airstrip, located at a height of around 13,000 feet.

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THE IDEAS PAGE

Growth and its discontents

Decline in multidimensional poverty is good news. But it is crucial to address income poverty, which is still very high



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI AND SHYMA JOSE

AS WE ENTER 2024, there is optimism on the macro-economic front. The NSO has estimated GDP growth for 2023-24 at 7.3 per cent in its first advance estimates. The Sensex is booming, having crossed the 72,000 mark first time in history. Foreign exchange reserves have crossed \$620 billion as on December 22, 2023. Inflation has been contained within the RBI's desirable band of 4 plus/minus 2 per cent. All this points to India being the best performer among G20 countries in 2023. And as per IMF projections, India is likely to outperform most G20 countries even in 2024.

All this cannot be achieved without policy playing a critical role. In this context, the RBI Governor and his team, along with the Ministry of Finance, deserve credit for having worked in tandem to spur growth, contain inflation and provide financial stability. No wonder, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has been honoured with the Governor of the Year award at the Central Banking Awards in London.

However, this does not mean that all is well on all fronts. The RBI Governor himself has flagged increasing risks in unsecured loans in the banking industry. Many bankers keep cribbing about stifling regulation. Politically, opposition parties point to high unemployment, high inflation, loss of democratic values, and so on. Yet, the juggernaut of the Narendra Modi government keeps moving forward with renewed confidence towards the 2024 parliamentary elections. The Ram temple in Ayodhya may provide extra steam during the elections.

But as dispassionate economic analysts, we look at the performance of the Modi government over 10 years and compare it with the preceding 10 years of the UPA government. This may give us an indication of where India is headed economically over the next decade or so. Looking at the GDP growth, we find that the average annual growth during the UPA period (2004-05 to 2013-14) was a notch higher at 6.8 per cent than during the Modi government at 5.8 per cent (from 2014-15 to 2023-24). This is as per the latest revised series data with the 2011-12 base. However, it is worth noting that the GDP growth stood at 7.7 per cent during the UPA period as per the older series (with 2004-05 base at factor cost). This was revised downwards to 6.8 per cent in 2018 when the older series was replaced with the new one with a 2011-12 base at market prices. The agri-GDP growth was 3.5 per cent during the UPA period, and marginally higher at 3.7 per cent under the Modi government. Agricultural performance is critical for the well-being of the masses as it still engages about 45 per cent of the workforce, and provides basic food security to the country.

However, the record of the UPA government was not good on the inflation front. The

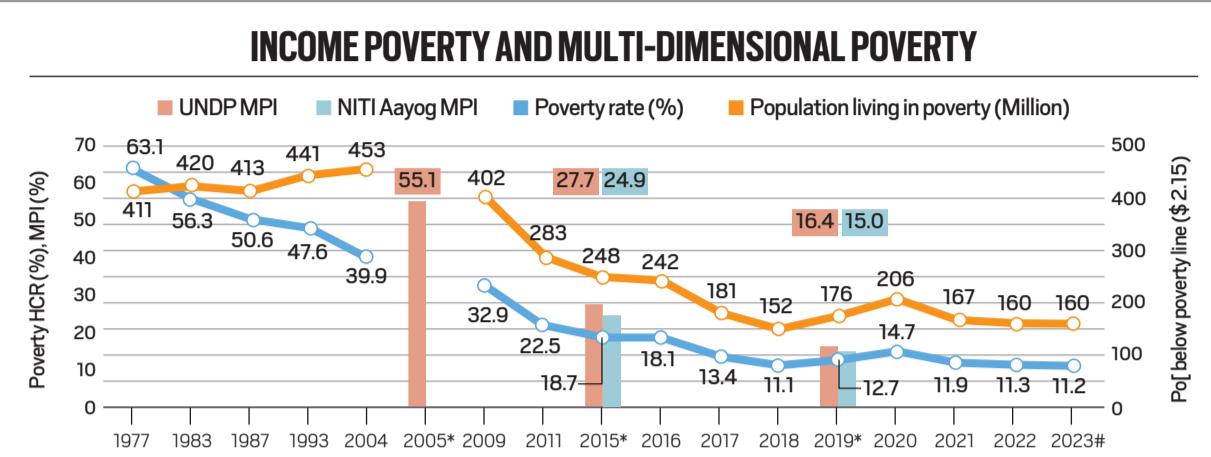


Illustration: CR Sasikumar

average annual inflation (measured by the Consumer Price Index, CPI) was 8.1 per cent during the UPA period compared to 5.1 per cent during the Modi period. In terms of food inflation, the UPA record was even worse at 9.2 per cent compared to 4.9 per cent during the Modi period.

But GDP growth and inflation are only two major macro-variables to gauge economic performance. For us, the litmus test is how the two governments have done in terms of reducing poverty, which should be the first and foremost task of any government. The data on income poverty from the World Bank is available from 1977, unfortunately, not on a continuous yearly basis. Measured in terms of the World Bank's definition of extreme poverty at \$2.15/day/per capita (in 2017 constant purchasing power parity, PPP), India's headcount poverty level declined from 63.1 per cent to 39.91 per cent between 1977 and 2004. But despite this, the absolute population living in extreme poverty increased from 411 million to 453 million due to rapid population growth (2.1 per cent).

As population growth was contained, absolute poverty numbers also came down in subsequent years. Interpolating the discrete poverty data as shown in the infographics, it would be safe to say that during the UPA-1 period, 2004-05 to 2008-09 (interpolated), extreme poverty declined by 1.12 per cent per annum (from 39.9 per cent to about 34.3 per cent). But during UPA-II, 2009-10 to 2013-14 (interpolated), poverty declined faster at 2.46 per cent per annum (32.9 per cent to 20.6 per cent). During the Modi-I period, poverty fell but at a declining rate, from about 19.7 per cent in 2014-15 (interpolated) to 11.1 per cent in 2018-19, that is, a 1.72 per cent decline per year. Surprisingly, during the Modi-II period, 2019-20 to 2023-24, poverty

Surprisingly, during the Modi-II period, 2019-20 to 2023-24, poverty declined very meagrely at 0.3 per cent per annum. Covid-19 seems to have given a big shock and even in 2023, India had the highest number of people (160 million) in extreme poverty, marginally up from 152 million in 2018. The stunted decline in headcount poverty during the Modi-II period is not only puzzling but also concerning. It is also corroborated by the decline in the rate of growth in real farm wages for men. During the two terms of the UPA, real farm wages grew by 4.1 per cent compared to just 1.3 per cent during the Modi government's 10-year period.

declined very meagrely at 0.3 per cent per annum. Covid-19 seems to have given a big shock and even in 2023, India had the highest number of people (160 million) in extreme poverty, marginally up from 152 million in 2018. The stunted decline in headcount poverty during the Modi-II period is not only puzzling but also concerning. It is also corroborated by the decline in the rate of growth in real farm wages for men. During the two terms of the UPA, real farm wages grew by 4.1 per cent compared to just 1.3 per cent during the Modi government's 10-year period.

However, the UNDP's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), computed using 10 indicators under three dimensions – health, education and standard of living – halved from 55.1 per cent to 27.7 per cent between 2005-06 to 2015-16. That means about 271 million people moved out of poverty. Similarly, NITI Aayog's national MPI (similar to UNDP's MPI with 12 indicators) dropped from 24.85 per cent to 14.96 per cent between 2015-16 and 2019-21, indicating that about 135 million people were lifted out of multi-dimensional poverty. It was largely a result of improved access to sanitation, schooling, cooking fuel, etc. While this is very much welcome, it is crucial to address income poverty which is still very high and has remained defiant over the last five years. For that, policy needs to focus on spurring employment-intensive growth. Skill formation in rural areas to enable people to move out of agriculture to higher productivity jobs in urban areas, coupled with direct income transfers to the most vulnerable (antyodaya) can help.

Gulati is Distinguished Professor and Jose is Research Fellow at ICRER. Views are personal

Not just a mosque

Demolition of Sunehri Masjid would be a blow to a heritage of shared values



FIROZ BAKHT AHMED

SITUATED AT THE traffic hotspot of Sunehri Bagh Road, Motilal Nehru Marg and Kamraj Marg, Sunehri Masjid, the 150-year-old heritage mosque, has suddenly been thrown into the communal cauldron. A petition has been filed in the Delhi High Court by Abdul Aziz, the Masjid's imam, after the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) displayed an ad in a newspaper regarding the demolition of the monument as it is deemed to be a traffic hazard.

There's no dearth of voices of sanity and reason amongst all communities to save any place of worship – whether a temple, gurdwara, church or synagogue – that faces the same predicament. After all, these structures, intimately connected with the lives of the masses, hold great importance for them and need to be preserved.

Truly, the Sunehri Masjid matter has no Hindu-Muslim agenda, as argued by some politicians on either side. It has nothing to do with the coming elections, and is not an attempt to woo a particular vote bank – as has also been stated by the Opposition regarding the January 22 inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

As per the NDMC notice, the matter concerns traffic snarls in the area, and seems more of an unnecessary enforcement than an actual need. A similar notice had been served at the Mamun-Bhanja shrine at Faiz Road, Paharganj, which was demolished on August 20, 2023, in the dark, at 2:30 am.

Before that, on April 23, two mazars (sacred tomb-shrines) near the Sunehri Bagh mosque were removed as part of an anti-encroachment drive. As these had encroached upon the footpath, their removal could be condoned. However, as per the statement of the "illegal" occupants, they had been there for the last 120 years. The present roads, pathways, crossroads etc, were built later on and the structures were bulldozed without notice. Similarly, some time ago, part of another historical mosque at Bengali Market, just adjacent to Modern School, was demolished.

Unfortunately, if such action is initiated against the Sunehri Masjid, it would constitute a grave loss to our shared heritage and values. The Masjid is valued not only for its architectural magnificence but also for the religious, spiritual and historical values it represents. It is evidence of our pluralistic ethos and harmonious coexistence. Even India's first education minister, Bharat Ratna Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, had stated in his famous Jama Masjid address that if he was given the choice between independence and Hindu-Muslim amity, he would go for the latter because, for India, that was more important than anything else and Independence would come anyway.

The manner in which the local body has tried to pulverise the Sunehri Masjid, has sent a negative message to the world, one that is the opposite of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's positive slogan of "Sabka Saath, Sabka

Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas".

So far, thankfully, nobody has found a temple beneath Sunehri Masjid. In this regard, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat had once very rightly said that people should stop digging underneath every mosque. He has also stated that it is impossible to imagine India without the contribution of Muslims in all walks of life, and that they share the same DNA as Hindus.

Regarding India, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), had said, "Thandi haweyen uati hein Hind kijanib se" – cool and refreshing draughts of air blow from India. Additionally, Islam teaches the lesson of "Hubbul watan/ Nisful iman!" meaning that a Muslim must be loyal to his homeland, wherever it is on the globe.

The Imam of Sunehri Masjid has very sensibly asked the court to intervene. Whether it is the HCC (Heritage Conservation Committee), NDMC or even the court, certain things have to be kept in mind. Firstly, the mosque has been carrying out prayers on all occasions, without any disturbance in the management of traffic around it as the devotees don't pray on the roads. Secondly, any further disturbance at Sunehri Masjid could cause the calm and composed Muslim community to be disgruntled. The Kashi and Mathura mosques have already dragged on and Sunehri Masjid's fate too seems in question. Truly, Muslims have been wondering at what point this series of the "infamous"

Muslim monuments would end.

The petition of the imam identifies the mosque as Waqf property, duly notified in the Delhi Gazette and under the control of the Delhi Waqf Board. It is not on government land, as falsely claimed by the NDMC and is mentioned among the 123 Waqf properties in a denotification case currently pending before the Delhi High Court. In that ongoing case, the court directed the Union government to inspect the properties while taking care that there's no disruption in their daily routine. This mosque has also been accommodated as a Grade-III heritage building in the list of 141 such structures in the NDMC area by the Heritage Conservation Committee. Maulvi Zafar Hasan, who had prepared a list of Delhi's monuments in his voluminous book, *Monuments of Delhi*, had once written in an Urdu daily about the stay of the celebrated scholar-cum-intellectual, Maulana Hasrat Mohani, at Sunehri Masjid while attending Parliament sessions. He had refused government accommodation and the salary and allowances given to the MPs.

What is troubling about this episode is the attempt by some politicians to fan the fires.

In the words of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, India is a bewitching and beautiful bride, whose two glorious eyes are the Hindus and Muslims.

We, the people of India, understand this well.

The writer is the former chancellor, Maulana Azad National Urdu University

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"BNP had been campaigning and appealing to voters to not vote, which we did not protest. However, to call a hartal on election day is simply unacceptable. Ruling party men have been harassing, threatening and intimidating voters to cast their ballot... We strongly condemn both these actions." — THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Politics as seva

BJP recognises role of service in drawing women to politics – it downplays disruption because of increased political agency



ANIRVAN CHOWDHURY

its political fabric. This goes together with the party's attempt to frame itself as a social service organisation interfacing between the state and society. For instance, in a letter lauding party workers' Covid relief efforts in January 2021, JPNadda noted how the BJP machine could be used as a tool for social service.

The emphasis on seva goes beyond political gestures; it trickles down to ground-level operations. Women's wings, like the Mahila Morcha are at the forefront of these activities. From organising medical camps, blood donation and cleanliness drives, tree plantation and wildlife conservation initiatives to religious and cultural celebrations, these activities are carefully aligned with local cultures and historical figures.

Crucially, these seva-based initiatives bridge the gap between traditional gender roles and women's increasing involvement in politics. In a context that views party politics as "dirty" and not appropriate for women, framing political engagement as a form of service allows the BJP to render political participation acceptable to families that might otherwise be impossibly to women's transition into the public sphere.

Intriguingly, the BJP has seemingly shed its traditional image embodying a muscular and masculine form of Hindu nationalism to gain a significant edge among women voters. The BJP's success story among women is not confined to the ballot box. It extends to active participation in electoral events, rallies, and engagement between elections with survey data documenting a substantial increase in women's active involvement with the BJP. So, what sets the BJP apart in its appeal to women?

Prevailing explanations primarily centre on campaign promises and new welfare measures involving public expenditure on private goods. The Ujjwala cooking gas subsidy set the template for this strategy, creating a new constituency of women beneficiaries or *labharthis*. Yet, as Praveen Chakravarty argued previously, neither are campaign promises always effective nor is credible delivery. In fact, political science research highlights some inherent limitations of campaigns in mobilising and persuading voters. One reason for this is that parties frequently adopt similar promises, diminishing the uniqueness of the original pledge.

This is not to say that campaigns are ineffective – just that attributing success (or failure) solely to a campaign runs the risk of occluding the incremental work parties and grassroots organisations do in between elections. In my research in Rajasthan over the last five years, I found marked differences in the mobilisation rhetoric deployed by political parties, their recruitment preferences, as well as the nature and frequency of their organisational activities.

In addition to conventional political tools, the BJP has strategically embraced the concept of seva or selfless service, as a central theme in its political narrative. This unique approach championed by Modi permeates the party's messaging, events, and grassroots activities. From celebrating Seva Saptah/Pakhwara (Service Week/Fortnight) to naming Covid-relief programmes as Seva hi Sangathan (Organisation as Service), the BJP has embedded the concept of seva into

The history of women's mobilisation then holds important lessons for understanding the present moment and women's rising alignment and activism with the BJP. Campaigns and welfare schemes will continue to be important. Considering how political communication and organisational outreach can be used to overcome domestic barriers to women's ability to enter the political sphere is critical not only for the prospects of political parties in 2024, but for larger questions of women's political agency and representation in the future.

The writer is a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University. His research examines how political parties mobilise women

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FARCE OF DEMOCRACY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Democracy's year of reckoning' (IE, January 6). The writer appears to be rhetorical about India's democratic standing while deriding all of its inadequacies and frailties as just a cribbing of "cry-babies".

What counts most in demonstrating our democratic credentials to the rest of the world is not the population strength but the quality of democratic functioning. We are only blowing our own trumpet when we claim India's democracy is a "shining example" while trailing 65 out of 112 in the quality of democracy ranking and 161 out of 180 in press freedom ranking. The threat of terrorism from Pakistan is far from "neutralised" as indicated by unceasing terror attacks on our security forces in J&K, and in terms of other border issues, we have practically given up on insisting that China must retreat to the pre-2020 border status quo.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

BITTERSWEET WIN

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A special victory' (IE, January 6). These days, the five-day cricket test matches generally last for two or three days. So, the second match in Cape Town can be crowned as the shortest test match in history. Test matches are historically known to cali-

bate the capability, fitness, technique and perseverance levels of players. Pitch and weather conditions also factor into the results. Except for Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and KL Rahul who gave good performances, other players – especially those meant to be the future of Indian cricket – were erratic and crumpled much before their expected contribution. Much has to be done to obtain consistent results if we have to stand well in the world rankings. Extensive practice may be exercised in all departments of the game and the opportunities offered must not be lost.

Subhash Vaid, New Delhi

NO ACCOUNTABILITY
THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Cowboy legislation' (IE, January 5). The Modi government is in a habit of bulldozing bills without any discussion, simply because it can. For all its talk of shedding the colonialist

How AI is being harnessed in the treatment of cancer

RUPSA CHAKRABORTY
MUMBAI, JANUARY 7

RESEARCHERS AT Mumbai's Tata Memorial Hospital, India's largest cancer hospital, have used data from 60,000 patients to establish a bio-imaging bank for cancer, laying the ground to build a targeted algorithm to help detect the disease at an early stage.

The hospital has also started to use artificial intelligence (AI) to reduce radiation exposure for paediatric patients during computed tomography (CT) scans, showcasing the use and impact of this world-changing technology in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

Dr Sudeep Gupta, director of the Tata Memorial Centre, expects the incidence of cancer to double from around 13 lakh to 26 lakh cases annually over the next decade. While many cancers can be cured if detected and treated early, the shortage of specialists poses a significant challenge in reducing cancer-related fatalities in India.

What is the Tata Memorial Hospital's AI-led cancer diagnosis initiative?

The goal of the bio-imaging bank is to create a robust repository of radiology and pathology images, linked with clinical information, outcome data, treatment specifics, and additional metadata. This resource is designed for the training, validation, and testing of AI algorithms to advance medical research and diagnostics.

The project is currently focused on head and neck cancers and lung cancers with a minimum 1,000 patients for each type, and aims to surpass the committed patient data for both cancer types upon completion of the project. Alongside the creation of the database, the project creation, the project involves the testing of several AI algorithms using the data to address medically relevant tasks such as screening for lymph node metastases, nucleus segmentation and classification, biomarker prediction – e.g., human papilloma virus (HPV) infection in oropharyngeal (throat) cancer, and epidermal growth factor

receptor (EGFR) mutation in lung cancer – and therapy response prediction.

The multi-institution project is funded by the Union government's Department of Biotechnology, in collaboration with IIT-Bombay, Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute and Research Centre (RGCI)–New Delhi, AIIMS–New Delhi, and PGIMER–Chandigarh. A live data submission portal allows investigators to submit, verify, and finalise the data for the development of AI algorithms.

How exactly does AI use clinical and imaging data for cancer detection?

AI emulates the human brain's information-processing capability, analysing radiological and pathological images, and learning from extensive datasets to recognise unique features such as tissue changes associated with various cancers.

Comprehensive imaging generates longitudinal patient data that helps in understanding behaviour, treatment response, disease

recurrence, and overall survival. AI and machine learning protocols utilise the data to develop predictive models for tumour survival and guide treatment aggressiveness, Dr Sushash Kulkarni, head of radiodiagnosis at Tata Memorial Centre, said.

The creation of a tumour image bank involves segmenting and annotating images, outlining tumours, identifying various features, and classifying them as malignant, inflammatory, or edematous (swollen with fluid). Biopsy results, histopathology and immunohistochemistry reports, and genomic sequences are correlated with images and clinical data to develop algorithms.

This assessment of treatment responses directly from images allows doctors to avoid unnecessary chemotherapy for predicted non-responders.

Is AI already being employed for the detection and diagnosis of cancer?

Yes, over the last year, data from 60,000

patients have been imbibed in the biobank, and the hospital has begun using AI to reduce radiation exposure for paediatric patients undergoing CT scans.

"We have achieved a 40% reduction in radiation by enhancing images with artificial intelligence algorithms. This ensures a significant decrease in radiation exposure for children, maintaining diagnostic quality without compromise – and is an example of the impactful algorithms we aim to develop," Dr Kulkarni said.

The department is also using, on a pilot basis, a specific algorithm in the ICU for thoracic radiology, which immediately provides a diagnosis that cross-checking by doctors has found to be 98% correct.

"We are currently validating diverse artificial intelligence algorithms, such as the thoracic suit. This specialised tool interprets digital chest X-rays, identifying pathologies like nodules and pneumothorax. When an MRI is conducted in the ICU, the AI algorithm automatically provides a diagnosis, validated by

our radiologists," Dr Kulkarni said. "It aids in early diagnosis," he added.

What role could AI play in the treatment of cancer in the future?

AI is expected to play a transformative role in cancer treatment, especially in mitigating fatalities in rural India. AI's potential lies in tailoring treatment approaches based on diverse patient profiles, optimising therapy outcomes.

Dr Gupta envisions a future where AI will be used to swiftly detect complex cancers without the need for extensive tests, by even general practitioners. "Through continuous learning, AI enhances accuracy, ensuring timely cancer diagnoses, improving patient outcomes, and aiding healthcare professionals in decision-making processes," he said.

However, the use of AI tools has triggered debates about the possible replacement of human radiologists, and faces both regulatory scrutiny and resistance from some doctors and certain health institutions.

THIS WORD MEANS

SUPREME COURT LEGAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

A mechanism to provide free and competent legal services to weaker sections of society

KHADIJA KHAN
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

JUSTICE B R GAVAI has been nominated Chairman of the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee (SCLSC), replacing the top court's seniormost puisne judge, Justice Sanjiv Khanna.

Why SCLSC is needed
Besides the SCLSC, several other bodies too carry out the task of dispensing free legal services to people across the country at different levels.

Article 39A of the Constitution states, "The State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice, on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities."

Articles 14 and 22(1) make it obligatory for the state to ensure equality before the law, and a legal system that promotes justice based on equal opportunity.

Although the idea of a legal aid programme had been floated since the 1950s, it was finally in 1980 that a committee at the national level was established under the chairmanship of SC judge, Justice P N Bhagwati. The committee was called the Committee for Implementing Legal Aid Schemes, and started monitoring legal-aid activities throughout India.

What is the SCLSC?
The Supreme Court Legal Services Committee was constituted to provide free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of society in cases falling under the jurisdiction of the top court.

The committee comprises a sitting SC judge, who is the chairman, and other members with experience and qualifications prescribed by the Centre.

Under the Act, the chairman and other members will be nominated by the Chief Justice of India (CJI), who shall also appoint the Secretary to the committee, having the prescribed experience and qualifications.

Rule 10 of the NALSA Rules lays down the number, experience, and qualification of SCLSC members. Under Section 27 of the 1987 Act, the Centre is empowered to make Rules in consultation with the CJI, to carry out the provisions of the Act.

Members of SCLSC

Under Rule 10 of the NALSA Rules, the SCLSC shall consist of not more than nine members, including ex officio members such as the Attorney General for India; Joint Secretary, Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice; Additional Secretary, Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, or his nominee; and the Registrar General of the SC.

Under the provision, the Centre can nominate, in consultation with the CJI,

The First Advance Estimates are the last GDP data released before the Union Budget is presented. They also provide the first complete picture of economic growth in the 10 years of the Narendra Modi government

UDIT MISRA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

INDIA'S GDP will grow by 7.3% in the current financial year (2023-24), slightly faster than the 7.2% growth in 2022-23, the First Advance Estimates (FAEs) released by the government on Friday showed.

How can GDP be estimated when there are still almost 3 months left in the year?

The FAEs are presented at the end of the first week of January every year. They are only the first estimates of growth for that financial year. By the end of February, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) will release the Second Advance Estimates and, by the end of May, the Provisional Estimates.

The GDP estimates continue to be revised as more and better data become available – and in the coming three years, MoSPI will release the First, Second, and Third Revised Estimates of this year's GDP before settling on the final number, which is called the "Actuals".

The FAEs are based on the performance of the economy over the first seven-odd months, and the data are extrapolated to arrive at an annual picture.

"The Advance Estimates of National Income are indicator-based and are compiled using the benchmark-indicator method, i.e. the estimates available for the previous year (2022-23) are extrapolated using the relevant indicators reflecting the performance of sectors," the official press release said.

But if the data are not yet final, what is the point of the FAEs?

The crucial significance of the FAEs is that they are the last GDP data released before the Union Budget for the coming financial year (which is presented on February 1) is finalised. As such, the FAEs constitute the base for the Budget numbers. However, since Lok Sabha elections will be held in April-May, a full-fledged Union Budget will not be presented this year.

This year's FAEs draw some additional significance from the fact that they provide the first complete picture of economic growth in the 10 years of the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

So what do the FAE data show?

The chart shows India's real GDP (GDP after stripping away the effect of inflation), both in absolute terms (in Rs lakh crore) and in terms of growth rate (in per cent).

By the end of March 2024, India's GDP is expected to rise to almost Rs 172 lakh crore. When Prime Minister Modi took charge for the first time, India's GDP was Rs 98 lakh crore, and it had reached almost Rs 140 lakh

crore when he began his second term.

On an annual basis, the 7.3% growth rate estimated for 2023-24 presents a substantial and pleasant upside surprise. Most observers, including the Reserve Bank of India, had expected growth to decelerate in the current financial year to somewhere between 5.5% and 6.5%. That the GDP growth rate is now expected to beat even the higher estimate by almost a percentage point underscores the strength of India's economic recovery.

However, there is a clear deceleration of growth in the second term of the government compared to the first. During 2014-15 to 2018-19, the economy grew at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.4%; in the second term (2019-20 to 2023-24), it was just 4.1%.

The big reason for this is the poor growth rate in the first two years of the current term of the government. The economy grew by less than 4% in 2019-20 (before the Covid-19 pandemic), and then contracted by 5.6% in 2020-21 (immediately after Covid struck).

Overall, the 7.3% growth rate in the current year suggests an optimistic picture because most of this momentum has little to do with the low base effect that bumped up GDP growth rates in FY22 and FY23.

What is contributing to India's growth?

India's GDP is calculated by adding up all kinds of spending in the economy – the demand side of the economy. As such, there are four main "engines" of GDP growth.

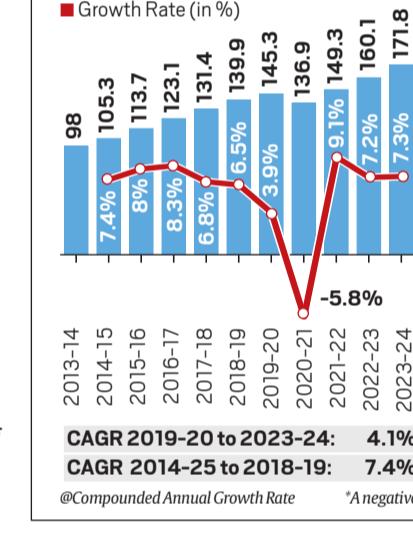
EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

What the GDP data show

CHART

INDIA'S REAL GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT

(Absolute level and Annual Growth Rate)



@Compounded Annual Growth Rate *A negative growth is good in India's case

TABLE

MAIN ENGINES OF INDIA'S GDP

Absolute level (in ₹ lakh crore) and Annual Growth Rate (in %)

Year	PFCE		GFCE		GFCF		Net Exports	Growth Rate in NX*
	Private spending	Growth rate	Govt spending	Growth rate	Spending for investments	Growth rate		
2013-14	55.6		9.8		31.9		-1.8	
2014-15	59.1	6.4%	10.5	7.1%	32.8	2.5%	-1.6	-11.8%
2015-16	63.8	7.9%	11.3	6.9%	34.9	6.1%	-1.4	-9.1%
2016-17	69	8.1%	12	5.7%	37.9	7.8%	-1.3	-5.7%
2017-18	73.3	6.2%	13.4	10.7%	40.8	7.2%	-4.8	257.6%
2018-19	78.5	7.1%	14.3	6.3%	45.4	10.1%	-4.4	-8.2%
2019-20	82.6	5.2%	14.9	3.8%	45.9	1.1%	-5.1	16.1%
2020-21	78.2	-5.2%	14.8	-0.9%	42.6	-7.9%	-3.1	-38.8%
2021-22	87	11.2%	15.8	6.2%	48.8	12.8%	-1.9	-39.6%
2022-23	93.6	7.5%	15.8	0.1%	54.3	10.2%	-3.4	79.7%
2023-24	97.7	4.4%	16.4	3.9%	59.9	9.3%	-8.2	144.2%
2019-20 to 2023-24@		4.5%			2.8%		5.6%	13.3%
2014-25 to 2018-19@		7.1%			7.9%		7.3%	19.6%

Source: MoSPI, CMIE, The Indian Express Research

rich) has grown quite fast while large sections of the economy (especially rural India) haven't yet recovered enough. While people should not consume more than their income, muted performance of the biggest engine of growth is a matter of concern.

INVESTMENT SPENDING: A high rate of investment spending is considered a salutary signal for the prospects of an economy because it shows businesses are optimistic about future consumption demand. On the face of it, investments

MAHARASHTRA LEADS WITH 926 BOGUS FIRMS DURING OCT-DEC

29,273 bogus firms, GST evasion of ₹44,015 cr detected since May '23

AANCHAL MAGAZINE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

GOODS AND Services Tax (GST) authorities have detected 4,153 bogus firms involved in suspected evasion of input tax credit (ITC) worth around Rs 12,036 crore during October-December 2023, the Ministry of Finance said in a statement Sunday. While Maharashtra is in the top spot among 36 states and union territories (UT) with the highest number of 926 bogus firms having undertaken suspected tax evasion of Rs 2,201 crore, the evasion incidence has turned out to be higher in Delhi with Rs 3,028 crore of suspected tax evasion by 483 bogus firms.

In terms of fake firms per lakh registered firms, Haryana leads among the states/UTs with 81 bogus firms per lakh registered firms, followed by Delhi with 61 fake firms per lakh registered firms, Rajasthan with 59 such firms per lakh registered firms and Maharashtra with 54 fake firms per lakh registered firms.

Out of the total 4,153 bogus firms detected during the October-December quarter, 2,358 were detected by Central GST authorities. "This has helped

ACTION AGAINST BOGUS FIRMS DURING OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2023

State/UT	Number of bogus firms detected	Tax Evasion suspected	ITC amount blocked/	Arrests Made recovered	Fake firms per lakh registered firms
Maharashtra	926	₹2,201 Cr	₹102 Cr	11	54
Rajasthan	507	₹197 Cr	₹31 Cr	1	59
Delhi	483	₹3,028 Cr	₹90 Cr	11	61
Uttar Pradesh	443	₹1,645 Cr	₹44 Cr	5	24
Haryana	424	₹624 Cr	₹76 Cr	3	81
Karnataka	223	₹397 Cr	₹59 Cr	2	22
Total*	4,153	₹12,036 Cr	₹1,317 Cr	41	29

*Total includes data for 36 states/UTs

Source: Ministry of Finance

protect revenue of Rs 1,317 crore, out of which Rs 319 crore has been realised and Rs 997 crore has been protected by blocking input tax credit," the Ministry statement said, adding that overall 41 persons have been arrested in these cases, of which 31 arrests were by Central GST Authorities.

GST authorities under the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) along with state/UT governments have been undertaking action against bogus firms to curb frauds and increase compliance. Tax authorities have undertaken special drives on the issue of non-

existent/bogus registrations and issuance of fake invoices without any underlying supply of goods and services.

The special drive against fake registrations under GST began in mid-May last year. *The Indian Express* had reported in April last year about several such instances of evasion by bogus firms such as a company showing manpower supply from Gujarat to Bihar for services, instead of supply of goods, to avoid generating e-way bills which are mandatory for inter-state transportation of goods worth at over Rs 50,000. There were also instances of Aadhaar of businesses

getting linked to mobile numbers of random individuals, who then started getting OTPs, multiple GST registrations originating from the same premise, with fake documents produced in many of these cases. These instances of frauds came under the radar of tax authorities under the GST regime, prompting them to initiate a special drive against registration-linked frauds in 2023-24 after discussions having taken place at the top level in the government.

Since then, a total 29,273 bogus firms involved in suspected Input Tax Credit (ITC) evasion of Rs 44,015 crore have been de-

tected, the Ministry said. "This has saved Rs 4,646 crore of which Rs 3,802 crore is by blocking ITC and Rs 844 crore is by way of recovery. So far, 121 arrests have been made in the cases," it said.

With no major GST rate tweaks expected before the general elections, which are likely to happen in the next few months, in a bid to bolster revenue collections, tax authorities have identified registration-linked frauds as one of the key focus areas for tighter scrutiny in the financial year 2023-24. The government has taken various measures for the GST registration process.

Pilot projects of biometric-based Aadhaar authentication at the time of registration have also been launched in the states of Gujarat, Puducherry and Andhra Pradesh.

The government has also taken measures to curtail evasion such as sequential filing of GST returns, system generated intimation for reconciliation of the gap in tax liability in GSTR-1 & GSTR-3B returns and of the gap between ITC available as per GSTR-2B and ITC availed in GSTR-3B returns, use of data analytics and risk parameters for detection of fake ITC among others.

Corporate investment stagnation: Bank credit to industries sees sluggish growth on weak demand

HITESH VYAS
MUMBAI, JANUARY 7

WITH FRESH investments by the corporate sector not taking off in a big way and demand for loans remaining lacklustre, bank credit to industries has seen a moderation in growth over the past few months.

In November 2023, bank loans to industries, which consist of micro and small, medium, and large segments, registered a lower year-on-year (y-o-y) growth of 6.6 per cent to Rs 36 lakh crore as compared to a growth of 13 per cent (Rs 33.77 lakh crore) in the same month of last year, according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data. On the other hand, the central bank has reported an overall non-food credit growth of 20.8 per cent as of November, aided by the 30.1 per cent growth in personal loans.

RBI data shows credit to industries in October 2023 moderated to 5.9 per cent from 13.5 per cent in October last year. Loans per cent in September 2023 as against 12.6 per cent, and at 6.7 per cent in August against 11.4 per cent in the same month of last year. In July, credit to industry rose by 5.8 per cent compared to 10.5 per cent last year in the same month.

In the total loans to industry, the large corporates accounted for the maximum share of around 72



Bank credit registered a 6.6 per cent YoY growth in November 2023 amid weak corporate investments. File

per cent. The share of bank credit to micro and small segments was around 19 per cent, and that of medium industries was close to 7 per cent.

"The large industry is the one which has been lagging because there is not much investment taking place from the private sector. It is more of a case of demand (for loans from large corporates) because there is no issue in terms of NPA or banks not willing to lend," said Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda.

Investments that are happening are very scattered, with very few industries making investments. So, when large corporates are not investing, they are not borrowing extensively from banks, he said. "Fresh investments that have been announced also take time to fructify. Even if banks have sanctioned loans, the time period of disbursing the project loan is two

or three years depending on the overall tenor," said a senior banker.

Corporates are either utilising their cash balances or are accessing domestic and also foreign markets to raise money, for making any investments, he said.

Credit to the infrastructure sector, which has a share of 35 per cent in the overall bank loans to industry, grew by 2.1 per cent in November 2023 compared to 11.1 per cent growth last year.

Within the infrastructure segment, credit to roads has fallen to 6.4 per cent in November from 14 per cent last year. Loans to the power sector grew 0.4 per cent in November compared to a growth of 8.6 per cent last year in the same month.

Bankers expect loan demand from corporates to remain subdued until the Lok Sabha elections later this year. **FULL REPORT ON** www.indianexpress.com

Investment bankers' fee income hits record in 2023

The fee income of investment bankers got a boost due to higher equity and debt issuance volumes, as per data collated by LSEG Deals Intelligence



Source: LSEG Deals Intelligence/PTI

FPIs infuse ₹4,800 cr in week one of Jan

New Delhi: Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) continued their buying spree and poured close to Rs 4,800 crore in the Indian equity markets in the first week of January driven by confidence in the country's robust economic fundamentals.

Additionally, they injected Rs 4,000 crore in the debt market during the period under review, data with the depositaries showed.

With expectations of a prolonged decline in US interest rates in 2024, there is an anticipation

that FPIs will likely escalate their purchase, particularly in the initial months of the New Year leading up to the general elections, V KV Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

Further, FPI inflows into debt will also see acceleration in 2024, he added.

According to the data, foreign investors made a net investment of Rs 4,773 crore in Indian equities till January 5. This came following a massive investment of Rs 66,134 crore in December and

Rs 9,000 crore in November.

The latest flow came amid investors waiting on the sidelines to get further cues on interest rates from the US Fed meeting minutes released last week, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

Overall, the total FPI flows for 2023 stood at Rs 1.71 lakh crore in equities and Rs 68,663 crore in the debt markets. Together, they infused Rs 2.4 lakh crore into the capital market. PTI

MARKET WATCH

M-CAP OF 6 OF TOP-10 COS FALLS

New Delhi: The combined market valuation of six of the top-10 most valued firms declined Rs 57,408.22 crore last week, with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and HDFC Bank taking the biggest hit, in-line with muted trends in equities. PTI

'Profitability is not at all-time high; valuations are away from mean, not at extreme'



government has been doing are very targeted and have an end game in mind. Performance-linked incentive (PLI) schemes, building world class infrastructure and connectivity which can enhance the efficiency of running the businesses. These are the right steps but the magnitude and continuity of that will determine how we get there.

What is the long term return one should expect?

It will be in line with the return on equity of corporate India and that fluctuates between 12-15 per cent depending upon different cycles. We are closer to 14 per cent right now.

So where should one be within equities?

Large caps are a better pocket of opportunity as in the last two years they have either been consolidating or flat. An year-on-year return of 6-7 per cent for the last two years is a slow return and that is the bucket of large caps.

On the other hand, the bucket of small caps has gone up by 40-45 per cent. So we have to be careful about the small cap segment. Also, SIP's should be the preferred way to invest. Wherever you are expecting a higher bout of negative volatility, SIPs do better.

Over the five year period starting 2007-08 when there was high volatility, the overall 5 year return was Zero, but the SIP return in a small cap fund would have earned 9.5 per cent. From the 2008 bubble of small caps to the one in current times, the lumpsum return of a small cap fund is 9.5 per cent but the SIP return is 22 per cent.

I would say two strategies for investing – focus on SIPs and focus on hybrid strategies.

We are at a high interest rate now and there is a possibility of inflation and interest rates coming down. How do you see debt as an investment opportunity?

When rates are at 7.5 per cent, you earn 7.5 per cent and with fall in interest rates, you earn capital gains.

So our view is that the rates will remain stable with a downward drift and so fixed income may give the carry and 1-1.5 per cent of capital gain which means around 9 per cent.

FULL INTERVIEW ON www.indianexpress.com

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

Care, Nihar and Livon, said the rural market offered "little to cheer" in the December quarter.

However, it remains optimistic about a gradual uptick in consumption trends in 2024 on the back of improving macroeconomic indicators, continued government spending, conducive consumer pricing across segments and other factors.

Marico also mentioned that "constraints on liquidity and profitability in the general trade (GT) channel remained an overhang for the sector, while alternate channels continued to fare well".

"In the given context, domestic volumes grew in low single digits on a year-on-year basis with a slight sequential improvement in our core portfolio," said Marico.

Its brand Parachute Coconut Oil registered a low single-digit volume growth while Saffola Oils had an optimally weak quarter owing to a high base and persistent cautious trade sentiment.

"Value added hair oils posted low single-digit value growth amidst sluggishness in the bottom of the pyramid segments of the portfolio. We stayed on course in our diversification journey as foods and premium personal care scaled up well in line with aspirations," it said.

Dabur India expects "to register mid to high single-digit growth during Q3 FY24" in its consolidated revenue.

"The quarter witnessed sequential improvement in demand trends although rural growth was still lagging urban growth," said Dabur.

BRIEFLY
RIL-Brookfield to open data centre next week

New Delhi: Billionaire Mukesh Ambani on Sunday said his firm Reliance Industries (RIL) in partnership with Canada's Brookfield will open a data centre in Chennai next week.

ONGC seeks premium over govt price for coal seam gas

New Delhi: State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is seeking a premium over the government gas price for the gas it plans to produce from coal seams in Jharkhand. PTI

IT firms expected to report soft Q3

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

Indian information technology (IT) companies are expected to report a "soft" third quarter with higher-than-usual furloughs weighing on revenue growth, industry watchers said cautioning that demand outlook commentary is likely to be unchanged as clients continue to scrutinise discretionary spends and prioritise cost optimisation.

The big earnings week for tech heavyweights is up ahead, with the top tier IT companies slated to announce their December quarter numbers this week.

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys will declare their Q3FY24 report card on January 11 (Thursday) and Wipro and HCL Technologies on January 12 (Friday).

Capital infusion for OMCs may be halved to ₹15,000 crore on improved finances



Retail fuel prices in India have been frozen since May 2022. File

(BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL)'s net profit stood at Rs 19,052 crore (-Rs 6,567 crore in H1FY23) and Rs 11,322 crore (-Rs 12,369 crore in H1FY23), respectively.

Crude prices, which declined to a comfort level for India in the initial months of FY24 before reversing, has thankfully again moderated after a few months," an official said.

OMCs are expected to con-

tinue making profit so far as oil price remains below \$85 a barrel, analysts have said. Due to the Russia-Ukraine war, the Indian basket of crude prices shot up by an average of 18 per cent in FY23 to \$93.15/barrel compared with \$79.18/barrel in FY22. The Indian basket averaged \$74.75/barrel in May and June 2023, \$8



Donald Trump

UNITED STATES

Trump seeks release of those jailed for 2021 Capitol attack

Iowa: Donald Trump on Saturday downplayed his role in the siege of the U.S. Capitol on the third anniversary of the attack, arguing that those prosecuted for storming the building should be freed. Speaking at a campaign event in Clinton, Iowa with the first Republican nominating contest little more than a week away, Trump called those jailed in the wake of the Jan. 6, 2021 attack "hostages" and said they had been mistreated by the Biden administration. "They've suffered enough. I call them hostages. Some call them prisoners."

SRI LANKA
Ranil pushes for India-Sri Lanka land connectivity

Colombo: President Ranil Wickremesinghe Sunday expressed his desire to have land connectivity between Sri Lanka and India as he visited the Tamil-dominated Northern Province capital of Jaffna to engage in a wide-ranging discussion on developing the war-tattered region. Wickremesinghe said he had discussed with Prime Minister Narendra Modi the idea to build the bridge between northeastern Mannar and south India. Jaffna holds great significance as it was the region where the LTTE had run a military campaign for a separate Tamil homeland for nearly 30 years before its collapse in 2009 after the Sri Lankan Army killed its supreme leader V Prabhakaran.

PTI

PAKISTAN
4 killed, 3 injured in attack in restive northwest

Peshawar: At least four people were killed and three others injured on Sunday when unidentified gunmen opened fire on two vehicles in Pakistan's restive Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, police said. District Police Officer (DPO) Muhammad Imran said that armed attackers with automated weapons targeted two vehicles en route from Parachinar to Peshawar, Dawn News reported. He said two security personnel were among those killed in the attack near Sadda Bazaar in Khurram district.

PTI

AFGHANISTAN
Islamic State says it's behind Kabul bus blast

Islamabad: The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a minibus explosion in the Afghan capital late Saturday that killed at least two people. Fourteen others were wounded in the attack in Kabul's western Shiite neighbourhood of Dashti Barchi, according to police spokesperson. The group said its members detonated an explosive device on the bus carrying Shiite Muslims.

PTI

THE WORLD

BANGLADESH: VOTER TURNOUT AROUND 40% AGAINST 80% IN 2018

PM Hasina gets 4th straight term in landslide win amid Opp boycott

Awami League wins two-thirds majority; sporadic violence mars polls

ANISUR RAHMAN
DHAKA, JANUARY 7



Polling officials count votes at a polling station in Munshiganj, outside Dhaka, on Sunday. AP

in the one-sided election.

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader claimed that the people have rejected the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami's boycott of the election.

Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader won the Rangpur-3 seat.

According to the initial estimates, the voter turnout was around 40 per cent but the figure could change after the final count, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal earlier said. The 2018 general election recorded a turnout of more than 80 per cent.

Earlier, the voting ended at 4

pm. An election commission spokesman said that other than some sporadic incidents of violence, the voting was largely peaceful in 299 of the 300 constituencies. The election commission cancelled the candidature of a ruling Awami League candidate in northeastern Chattogram at the fag-end of the voting hours as he "threatened" a police officer.

The usual election-day fervour was nowhere to be seen. Even in front of the election campaign booths, there was no presence of voters except the ruling party supporters and poll agents.

The Election Commission ordered the arrest of Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun's son on charges of electoral fraud in Narsingdi.

Four persons, including a child, were injured in crude bomb blast in Dhaka's Hazaribagh.

'India a trusted friend'

Prime Minister Hasina alleged that the BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami alliance does not believe in democracy. In response to a question, Hasina told reporters that India is a "trusted friend" of Bangladesh.

"During our Liberation War,

E EXPLAINED
Behind low voter turnout

THE VOTER turnout was low as the ailing jailed ex-premier Khaleda Zia's BNP stayed away from the polls asking people to boycott it. BNP alleged that no election under the current government would be fair. The 27 parties that contested the polls include the opposition Jatiya Party. The rest are members of the Awami League-led coalition, which experts dub as "satellite parties."

they supported us. After 1975, when we lost our whole family – father, mother, brothers, everyone (in a military coup) – and only we two (Hasina and her younger sister Rehana) survived... they gave us shelter," she told reporters.

To a question on how acceptable the poll will be while the BNP is boycotting it, Hasina said that her responsibility is towards the people. "Whether people accept this election or not it is important to me. So, I don't care about their (foreign media) acceptance. No matter what did the terrorist party say or not?" she said.

PTI

Papers of 76% of PTI candidates accepted: ECP to Pak apex court

Islamabad: Pakistan's top election body on Sunday told the Supreme Court that nomination papers of 76 per cent of candidates of jailed former premier Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party were accepted for the February 8 general elections.

The Election Commission of Pakistan submitted the data in response to a contempt petition filed by the PTI party that the electoral body had not followed a direction by the apex court to address its concerns.

Meanwhile, former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and PTI leader has been declared "ineligible" to contest the February 8 general elections by a poll tribunal, a media report said on Sunday.

PTI



FIRE AT ROHINGYA CAMP IN BANGLADESH

Fire engulfs a Rohingya refugee camp at Kutupalong in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, early Sunday. More than 1,000 shelters were destroyed in the fire, leaving thousands homeless, a United Nations official said. AP

Fund scam rocks ruling party in Japan, ex-minister arrested

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TOKYO, JANUARY 7

JAPANESE PROSECUTORS made their first arrest Sunday in connection with a major political slush funds scandal that has rocked Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's already unpopular government.

Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office apprehended former vice-education minister Yoshitaka Ikeda on suspicion of failing to report fundraising proceeds he received from his faction within the governing Liberal Democratic Party, according to

officials and local media reports.

Ikeda's faction, which used to be led by the late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who was assassinated in 2022, has remained the largest and most influential within Kishida's ruling party. Kishida said Sunday the arrest was "extremely regrettable" and that the party has decided to expel Ikeda. He reiterated his plans to set up an expert panel later to start discussing ways to strengthen fundraising regulations.

Kishida replaced four of his Cabinet ministers linked to the scandal in December in an attempt to mitigate the scandal.

Sunak pledges action in old post office scandal that hit many British Indians

ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, JANUARY 7

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER Rishi Sunak Sunday said that the government is reviewing the compensation process in an accounting scandal that wrongly accused hundreds of sub-postmasters of fraud, many of them of Indian heritage.

During an interview with the BBC, Sunak was asked about the historic scandal involving a faulty IT system named Horizon dating back to the late 1990s and confirmed that his justice minister is "looking at" how the

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak

process of overturning wrongful convictions and providing compensations can be speeded up.

The government, which formally owns Post Office Ltd, has paid out millions in compensation to many of the sub-postmasters impacted but there are many others still waiting for years.

"Obviously it's something that happened in the '90s but actually seeing it and hearing about

it again just shows what an appalling miscarriage of justice it is for everyone affected and it's important that those people now get the justice they deserve, and that's what the compensation schemes are about," said Sunak.

"The government has paid out about GBP 150 million to thousands of people already," he said. The issue has been brought back into focus again with a hard-hitting real-life TV drama series 'Mr Bates Vs The Post Office', which aired in the UK this month, and the Metropolitan Police confirmed after that it is investigating the Post Office over potential fraud offences.

PTI

The Foreign Ministry said the

AS STUDENTS FLOCK, CANADA IS LOOKING AT WAYS TO PROTECT THEM AGAINST LABOUR, FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

Canada's foreign student surge prompts changes, and anxiety

VJOSA ISAI
JANUARY 7

THE EDUCATION consultant in India didn't reveal to Maninderjeet Kaur, a Canada-bound student, where exactly, relative to Toronto, the college she had enrolled in was.

Kaur told my colleague, Norimitsu Onishi, that after a never-ending Uber ride — eight hours and 800 Canadian dollars later — she had ended up in Timmins, Ontario, a place she had never heard of. But, as Nori reported, finishing a degree in this remote city was perhaps less of an isolating experience given that 82

percent of students at Northern College in Timmins are foreign nationals, mostly from India.

Recruiting foreign students who pay higher tuition fees — roughly five times as much as Canadians to obtain an undergraduate degree, according to the census agency — has always been attractive to the country's institutions. It has also become increasingly important for the federal government, which is vying to hit a lofty goal of attracting 1.45 million immigrants between 2023 and 2025.

By announcing this record-breaking target in November 2022, as part of a strategy to plug national labor shortages, Canada



Students after taking a shuttle bus from downtown Timmins, Ontario, to the local Northern College campus. NYT

signaled that it was headed in the opposite direction from many Western governments that are curtailing migration.

In Canada, the surge of overseas students has fanned concerns about the readiness of university and college communities to adequately host them, and about efforts to ensure that their labor and their finances are not exploited. The immigration minister, Marc Miller, recently announced a handful of measures taking effect this month for foreign students.

For the first time since the early 2000s, the government has increased the savings threshold that foreign students must have to qualify for a study permit to

about 20,600 Canadian dollars, up from 10,000 dollars. And it will continue, until at least April, to allow international students to work more than 20 hours per week, a policy it had previously walked back.

Without providing details, Miller's ministry said it was also looking into ways that it could ensure colleges and universities, which are provincially regulated, accept only as many students as they can assist in finding housing.

"Ahead of September 2024, we are prepared to take necessary measures, including significantly limiting visas, to ensure that designated learning institutions provide adequate and sufficient stu-

dents," Miller said at a news conference in which he announced the changes. He accused some institutions of operating the "diploma equivalent of puppy mills," depriving those foreign students of a positive academic experience in the face of outsize hardships and a lack of intervention by provincial governments.

Pacing firm caps on student permits is not the answer, said Anna Triandafyllidou, a migration researcher and professor at Toronto Metropolitan University, but she added that the government should do a better job of regulating migrant flow to avoid stoking "cutthroat" competition to stay in Canada.

FOR PEACE-KEEPING, PREVENTING CONFLICT

FORM EU ARMY: ITALIAN MINISTER'S CALL

The European Union should form a combined army that could play a role in peace-keeping and preventing conflict, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said. Closer European cooperation on defence was a priority for Forza Italia party that he leads.



Palestinians inspect a destroyed house following Israeli airstrikes, in Khan Younis, Southern Gaza, on Sunday. AP

Blinken in West Asia, says focus on preventing spread of war in the region

REUTERS
AMMAN/CAIRO JANUARY 7

TOP US and European diplomats sought ways on Sunday to keep the Gaza war from spreading further in the volatile West Asia, but three months after the start of the conflict, more bloodshed underlined the difficulties they face.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the European Union's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, were on separate trips to the region to try to quell spillover from the war into Lebanon, the West Bank and Red Sea shipping lanes, where Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis have vowed to keep up attacks until Israel halts its war in Gaza.

"We have an intense focus on preventing this conflict from spreading," said Blinken, who was in Jordan on Sunday and will also travel to Israel, the West Bank, Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt during his fourth trip to the region. Jordan's King Abdullah urged Blinken to use Washington's influence over Israel to press it for an immediate ceasefire, a palace statement said, warning him of the "catastrophic repercussions" of the war in Gaza.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to continue the war. "The war must not be stopped until we achieve all the goals – the elimination

JOURNALISTS KILLED

Rafah: An Israeli airstrike killed two Palestinian journalists in southern Gaza on Sunday, including the son of veteran Al Jazeera correspondent Wael Dahdouh, who lost his wife, two other children and a grandson — and was nearly killed himself — earlier in the war.

"We hope that... Blinken looks at us with an eye of mercy, ends the war, ends the misery we are living in," said one woman, Um Mohammad Al-Arjan, standing by the tent where she is living.

'War in north Gaza over, focus on south, centre'

Israeli military spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagai said Israeli forces had completed dismantled Hamas' "military framework" in northern Gaza and had killed around 8,000 militants in that area.

"We are now focused on dismantling Hamas in the centre of and south," he said.

China sanctions five firms after US curbs, arms sales to Taiwan

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIJING, JANUARY 7

CHINA ANNOUNCED sanctions on Sunday on five American defence-related companies in response to US arms sales to Taiwan and US sanctions on Chinese companies and individuals.

The announcement was made less than a week ahead of a presidential election in Taiwan that is being contested in large part over how the government should manage its relationship with China, which claims the self-governing island as its territory and says it must come under its rule. The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not specify which companies deal or which US sanctions China was responding to, though spokesperson Wang Wenbin had warned three weeks ago that China would take countermeasures following the US government's approval of a USD 300 million military package for Taiwan in December.

US moves harmed China's sovereignty and security interests, undermined peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and violated the rights and interests of Chinese companies and individuals.

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Illustration: Suvajit Dey

LIZ MATHEW: We had a very eventful Parliament Winter Session 2023, with 146 MPs suspended. With the relationship between the ruling party and the Opposition seeing an unprecedented low, what do you think about the future of the Opposition as well as the BJP?

Dr Kanimozhi NVN Somu: The BJP does not want an Opposition. The current government will appreciate if the MPs in the Opposition don't hear, see, or speak because they don't allow us to talk. It's not only the ruling party that doesn't allow us to talk; it's also the chairpersons in the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha. There isn't any equal division between the Opposition and the ruling government. They are always in favour of the current government. In the Lok Sabha, it's worse as there is no Deputy Chairman. The term is almost over and the Opposition still hasn't appointed a Deputy Chairman. In Rajya Sabha, the Chairman – the Vice President of India, who's above all the parties – seems to be in support of the sitting government. For the Sansad TV broadcasts, the cameras are fixed only on one side of the new Parliament building. We are never shown. None of the Opposition members are shown even if they are speaking. They want a monarchy government.

Gaurav Gogoi: There is no other force challenging and questioning the BJP besides the Opposition parties. The media is unable to question this government and hold its ministers responsible for the flaws. Other forums, which are available to the public, such as the Right to Information, judiciary, and the bureaucracy are not on the side of citizens but are on the side of the government.

The Opposition is the last line of defence and is the only force available today, which is fighting this government and holding it accountable. Not for the sake of politics or our electoral future but for the people of India. For the farmers who deserve a better income, for the young people who deserve a better employment scenario, for women who need to feel safer, for the scheduled castes who need to have their self-respect and dignity no matter where they study or where they work or how they choose to marry and for the Scheduled Tribes to protect their forests, language and the indigenous culture. The trajectory that the BJP has taken is extremely dangerous. Don't look at the suspension of 146 lawmakers in isolation. If the BJP continues unchecked and unrivalled, things will only get worse for everyone. The way this government, under PM Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah is ruling, it is dangerous for India, Indian democracy, and the Indian Constitution. That's why the role of the Opposition has never been as important as it is today.

John Brittas: More than my future, I am concerned about the future of this nation and the future of all the facets of a parliamentary democracy. As somebody from the media, I've been seeing this Parliament since 1987. It is a pale shadow of the Parliament that I used to report on in the '80s or '90s. We may win an election or lose an election but just think about the country's plight. The tenet of parliamentary democracy simply means that the executive needs to be accountable to the Parliament and the

GAURAV GOGOI, DR KANIMOZHI NVN SOMU & JOHN BRITTAS

CONGRESS DEPUTY LEADER, LOK SABHA, DMK MP & CPI(M) MP

‘The BJP wants a monarchy... there is no force questioning it besides the Opposition parties’

Suspended MPs Gaurav Gogoi, Congress Deputy Leader, Lok Sabha, Dr Kanimozhi NVN Somu, MP, DMK and John Brittas, MP, CPI(M) on the mass suspension of the MPs, INDIA alliance and BJP mixing religion and politics with the Ram temple inaugural. The session was moderated by Liz Mathew, Deputy Editor, *The Indian Express*

MPs need to be accountable to people. Do you see any sort of accountability of the executive to the Parliament? The first tenet is completely in shambles. There used to be a synchronicity between the second pillar – the Parliament – and the fourth pillar – the media. Do you see any reflection of the media in the Parliament? The parliamentary democracy which we used to witness is nowhere in the picture. The future of the Opposition involves the

combined intellectual, organisational and ideological weight of the Opposition parties of India will provide a ray of hope in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections

Brittas: It is not the Opposition coming to power. It is not a question of the Congress forming the government, the CPI(M) having a bit of power, or the DMK being part of the government. The cardinal question is how to save the nation from an almost fascist situation, wherein the Constitution is protected. The Constitution can be protected not because a government is there. It is only by protecting democracy that you can protect the Constitution. There could be differences in opinion, but there is a realisation that has driven these Opposition parties to create an alliance, which would be effective enough to checkmate the BJP and the RSS.

LIZ MATHEW: Protecting the Constitution and democracy is significant but in any election, political parties have to first construct a narrative and then implement it to consolidate the votes. How far has the INDIA Alliance succeeded in it?

Kanimozhi: The INDIA Alliance is already on the dais and is ready to fight against the BJP. It has been constructed well and in the last meeting, we came up with the name of a PM candidate. Except for one person, rest of the parties have accepted it. All of us agree that the BJP

The cardinal question is how to save the nation from an almost fascist situation, wherein the Constitution is protected. It is only by protecting democracy that you can protect the Constitution

committees, what is the purpose of this parliamentary democracy? Do you think this will end there? Whatever is remaining, it will just evaporate.

LIZ MATHEW: What is the way forward?

Gogoi: I must give credit to all the Opposition parties because they've all spoken in one voice to say that we are here defending the idea of India. For that, our political interests take a backseat. There might be voices in our respective state units that have a different argument, but we've all gone ahead to forge a national consensus, which is the INDIA Alliance. I think that's a great sign of hope. That has already created ripples within the ruling party. The BJP does not know how to respond to the INDIA Alliance. Sometimes they make it an India versus Bharat debate. Then they stop calling us INDIA. They seem to have an allergy to the word INDIA. The PM and the BJP have not found an effective counter to the INDIA Alliance. So the Opposition, in a very short period, has sacrificed respective interests to come together for a national cause on a national consensus to build the INDIA Alliance. I'm quite confident that the

should not be ruling us again. The nation should be saved. This is a one-line motto. We already saw in the last parliamentary session that the three laws that have been passed, their names have been changed – the Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, and the Indian Evidence Act. We know what kind of repercussions it's going to cause because what was existing – the construction of law and the courts – was all going well. I

don't think there was any need to bring in such laws. When they can change these laws, tomorrow if they are going to sit in power, they will change the whole country and will say that this is what you need to be. To save the people from democracy fading away, we will all stand in line and gear towards the 2024 elections.

Manoj CG: You're going into an election against a party that has won two Lok Sabha elections while the Opposition parties have had individual successes in states. What is a credible counter-narrative to the BJP, apart from the fact that you have all come together to unseat the BJP from power?

Gogoi: Let us not underestimate the wisdom of the Indian voter. Indian people in the past, if you look at 2003, voted for the BJP in three state elections in north India, and then the BJP was voted out of power in 2004. Voices in the media and even the BJP would like to say that for 2024, the BJP has a strong narrative and the Opposition does not. Many people and voices in India are angry and frustrated. The passing of criminal laws has seen nationwide repercussions. You've had truckers and motorists on strike across the nation. In Assam, there has been a lot of angst and anguish related to the draconian provisions in the new

criminal laws. So there is a lot of resentment. This is a government that has created high inflation and high unemployment. It has created a record number of billionaires. It has created problems related to malnutrition and widened inequality. People can see that if anyone questions PM Modi, whether it's the media, the courts or civil society, there are draconian provisions that are used to crack down on any independent thinking. Therefore, people are rightly worried. Young people want to be in a country where the economic future is secure.

Remember that the India that was founded at the time of Independence was an India in which all religions, regions, languages and cultures fought together and stood united. That is the India that people want to see today – a united India. It is important for all parties in the INDIA alliance to introspect, look within themselves and strengthen their own cadres and organisations.

And that is what we are doing. Only a stronger Congress will help a stronger INDIA Alliance.

MANOJ CG: In Kerala, an alliance can't exist between the Left and the Congress. In Bengal, there is again very little chance of the Left entering a seat-sharing pact with the Trinamool Congress. Is it a political and not an electoral alliance for the Left?

John Brittas: This is how broad-thinking we are. We'll not be looking for more seats, but a situation wherein we need to defeat the BJP. We fought the Congress, and then we came to Delhi and supported them unconditionally to form a government. To keep away BJP. We are not looking at picking up one seat or two seats from here and there. We may not benefit from being part of the INDIA alliance but the nation will. We want our inputs given to this alliance, which needs to defeat the BJP.

LIZ MATHEW: According to the BJP, Ayodhya is not a political moment. But hasn't the Opposition, by delaying their decision to attend or not, walked into a trap? Now the BJP is calling the



WHY GAURAV GOGOI, DR KANIMOZHI NVN SOMU & JOHN BRITTAS

The winter session of Parliament witnessed unprecedented events with 146 MPs from both the houses suspended for their protest seeking the government's response for the security breach in the Lok Sabha on December 13. Gaurav Gogoi, Deputy Leader, Congress, Lok Sabha, Dr Kanimozhi NVN Somu, MP, DMK and John Brittas, MP, CPI(M) were among the suspended members

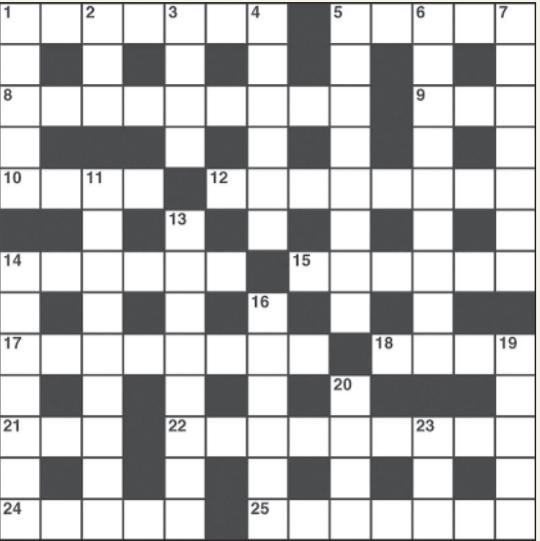
To visit the temple is a matter of deep personal faith. To put the entire significance of the temple and Lord Ram around this one particular event that the government is organising, we all need to introspect that

LIZ MATHEW: How does this suspension of the MPs affect the system of parliamentary democracy?

Brittas: More than 35 crore people are unrepresented. Kerala is completely unrepresented in Parliament. Think about the bills that have been passed – three criminal bills. There are important stages of vetting or perusal of a bill. And at least the Opposition

members will be in a position to raise points about the various clauses or provisions. I'm unable to spell these three bills because they are in Sanskrit and it might take a year or two to spell them. There are 1000 provisions. One provision, they would have talked about and that's why the truck drivers agitated over that. There are standing committees, and as a suspended member, I am unable to attend the IT standing committee. So the whole sort of Parliamentary discourse and to ensure the accountability of the executive to the Parliament, gets completely evaporated when the opposition is no longer part of the discourse there. Various pretexts are made to ensure that the Parliament is completely stalled. So it's not the Opposition, which is stalling the Parliament. It is the government precisely stalling and deserting the Parliament. Imagine if the passes were issued by an MP from the minority religion, wouldn't UAPA be invoked? Don't you think that particular MP who released the pass for those visitors should have been suspended? If Gaurav had issued the pass, what would have happened?

CROSSWORD 5255



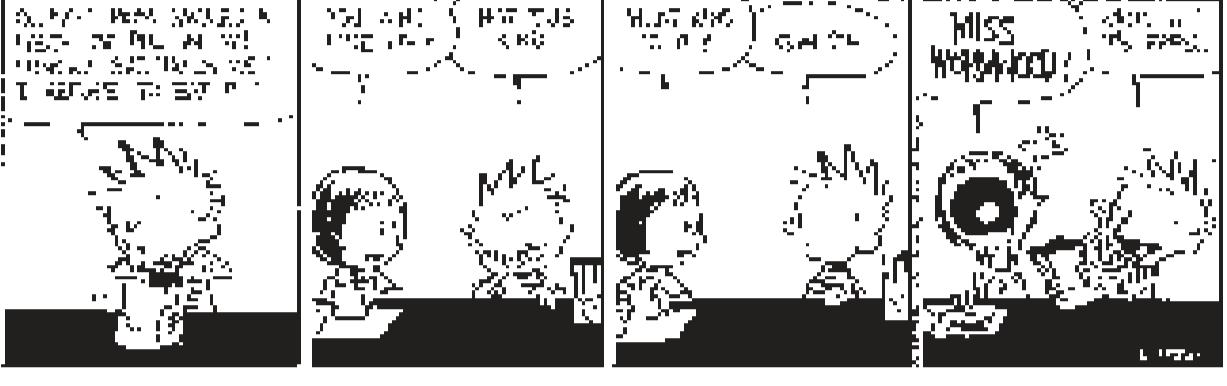
- ACROSS**
- Favour shown to the electorate (7)
 - Music a man has to work at (5)
 - Where noodles may end up? (2,3,4)
 - Backroom boy (3)
 - Swindle using some computers came to nought (4)
 - The stylist resigned in revolt (8)
 - Fat goat? (6)
 - Be leading the deer that's slow (6)
 - Makes closer agreements (8)
 - Observers usually working in pairs (4)
 - It's not in a mouthpiece (3)
 - What's the betting? Not a lump sum (4,5)
 - Grasping secret societies (5)
 - Sorrowful feeling when ace Quaker colonist is wrecked (7)
- DOWN**
- Tracks of birds (5)
 - Do one's hair for a party (3)
 - It's a lot older than you (4)
 - Runs away from Penelope Smith (6)
 - Went and put it right (7)
 - Ninety ton order, yet one of no account (9)
 - Arranged but not voluntarily (7)
 - Men of many parts perhaps (9)
 - They get what's left (8)
 - Welsh on promise to move car from the garage? (4,3)
 - Peter's involved with Meryl (6)
 - Pen has the French way of writing (5)
 - Sign displayed by topless females (4)
 - Dedicated female cellist? (3)

Solutions Crossword 5254 Across: 1 Twilight, 5 Alec, 9 Mused, 10 Leonine, 11 Self-portrait, 13 Nodded, 14 Chosen, 17 Horse thieves, 20 Radical, 21 Ratio, 22 Dash, 23 Nightcap Down: 1 Time, 2 Instead, 3 Indifference, 4 Hollow, 6 Lelia, 7 Cheating, 8 Cost the earth, 12 Anchored, 15 Sceptic, 16 Chili, 18 Rides, 19 Soup

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



Difficulty Level 2s

Instructions

To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

8			6		4			
7			4	3				
4		3	9		2			
1	7		4	5				
9					7			
						3		
			9	6	8	1		
1			7	6	8			
			2	4			5	
4	6				7			

Difficulty Level

1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy;
3s = Medium; 4s = Hard;
5s = Very Hard;
6s = Genius

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5434

7	9	2	4	5	6	3	8	1
3	8	4	2	1	9	7	5	6
5	6	1	8	7	3	4	9	2
1	7	9	3	8	5	2	6	4
8	2	3	1	6	4	9	7	5
6	4	5	9	2	7	1	3	8
4	1	6	7	9	8	5	2	3
2	5	7	6	3	1	8	4	9
9	3	8	5	4	2	6	1	7

DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

Underlying much that happens at the moment is your personal wish to succeed, a drive which affects you and your friends, whether or not you care to admit it. Today, you'd be advised to pay attention to a business matter, if only because other pressures have increased.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

This could be a week of change in a number of areas, and it will be absolutely necessary to raise your sights from the hurts and wounds of the past and focus on what you can do to better yourself in the future. Continue to check out a legal or ethical question.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

The golden rule is to stay one step ahead of planetary influences and to pre-empt imminent developments in financial arrangements. This may not be easy because you're still in the dark about someone's intentions. But even your plans are in a state of flux.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

A blow to your financial hopes will be softened by the intervention of a close friend over the coming days, yet something that seems like a loss now, will be to your advantage in the long run. It will take some time to get over a recent personal challenge, but in the end you will gain massively in experience and self-understanding.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

You may feel a lifting of tension, which will no doubt be a welcome development in view of recent personal pressures. Working relationships in particular are now ready for an improvement. A cash crisis will blow over, but might reappear after about eight weeks.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

Secret disputes have cost you dear in terms of peace of mind, yet shortly you'll be better able to stand up for yourself and turn the tables on someone who has got the better of you. You will have your reward very soon, but not just yet, so have patience.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

While the planets maintain their current formation, you can expect help and assistance in certain areas of your life, especially your career, but ultimately you won't achieve anything you haven't worked for. So, give yourself a pat on the back.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

By rights, you should now be feeling the beneficial results of all those past actions which helped create your present wealth, but life is rarely so simple. You may have received a financial shock. However, family concerns lie at the heart of all current uncertainty.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

You are entitled to spend some time recovering from events which may have shaken your confidence. Take your time and curb any tendency to act rashly. Also, remember that you have skills and experience which are highly valued, and you need to go out there and sell yourself.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

You are not by nature a resentful person, yet you may have every reason to believe that recent suspicions have been fully justified by events. Now you should really try to let bygones be bygones and make a fresh start. And there'll be plenty of new opportunities very soon.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

As long as confusing planetary conditions continue, there seems to be a definite connection between the possibility or actuality of a social clash and the likelihood that you're letting yourself in for a major expense. And it could be one which takes a very long time to pay off.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

It is when your ruling planets form stressful aspects that you may expect the sparks to fly in partnerships. Right now there is little to get in the way of a burgeoning personal relationship or a professional ambition. Bearing in mind this is a year of major opportunity.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

While the planets maintain their current formation, you can expect help and assistance in certain areas of your life, especially your career, but ultimately you won't achieve anything you haven't worked for. So, give yourself a pat on the back.

JUMBLE WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quiz.

... therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living. - John Dewey (9)

KNAEO
EKNSNU
CILIT
AEPSCL

Jiving - John Dewey
Bendragon - Bendragon is a process of living and not a preparation for future living and not a preparation for future living

SUDOKU 5435

8			6		4			
7			4	3				
4		3	9		2			
1	7		4	5				
9					7			
			9	6	8	1		
1			7	6	8			
			2	4			5	
4	6				7			

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5434

7	9	2	4	5	6	3	8	1
3	8	4	2	1	9	7	5	6
5	6	1	8	7	3	4	9	2
1	7	9	3	8	5	2	6	4
8	2	3	1	6	4	9	7	5
6	4	5	9	2	7	1	3	8
4	1	6	7	9	8	5	2	3
2	5	7	6	3	1	8	4	9
9	3	8	5	4	2	6	1	7

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e-TENDER NOTICE NO: GSEC/CE/P&P/Civil/03/2023-For Civil works
The Chief Engineer (P&P), Gujarat State Electricity Corporation Limited, Race Course, Vadodara invites on-line tender for the work of "EPC CONTRACT FOR CONSTRUCTION OF 1 MLD DESALINATION PLANT INCLUDING RAW WATER TUBE WELL, RAW WATER TRANSMISSION MAIN, DESALINATION PLANT, CLEAR WATER RESERVOIR, PUMPING AND TRANSMISSION MAIN AND REJECT WATER DISPOSAL SYSTEM INCLUDING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF ENTIRE SCHEME FOR 5 YEARS; FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY PARK AT KHAVDA". Estimated cost is Rs. 60,74,92,102.94/- The last date of submission of tender copy is 03/02/2024 upto 18.00 Hrs.
Interested contractor may please visit web site tender.npcure.com (for view, download and online submission) (**Tender ID: 33413**) and web sites www.gsec.in (for view & download only).
Chief Engineer (P&P)

"Save Electricity"
Madhya Gujarat Vij Co. Ltd.
Corporate office : 2nd Floor, Sardar Patel
Vidyal Bhawan, Race Course, Vadodara
TENDER NOTICE No : (ID: 32807)
MGVCL Web site: [www.mgvcl.com](http://mgvcl.com) Dept-GOG: <http://guj-epd.gov.in>
Online tender is invited for Request for Selection of SPG through 'On-line' mode for purchase of power from solar power Procurements through competitive bidding process (followed by reverse e-auction) for Solarization of 11kv Agricultural feeders emanating from selected 66/11kv Sub-stations in the supply area of MGVCL under Component-C of PM-KUSUM Scheme for Feeder level Solarization through RESCO Mode. Tender documents available on web site: <https://mgvcl.npcure.com> (for on line submission, view and download) and GUVNL/MGVCL web sites www.gseb.com & www.mgvcl.com (for view and download only). Interested vendors may surf the above web sites.
Note: Be in touch with our web sites till opening of tender.
Chief Engineer (Project)

यू.पी. प्रोजेक्ट्स कारपोरेशन लि.
(उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार की उमड़ा)
कार्यालय परियोजना प्रबन्धक, नियमण इकाई - 12, 129, छोड़े ०५ पुरी
आवाद विभाग भास्ती - 284003 ₹-में. pm12uppc@gmail.com
पत्रांक: 1022/पी.सी.एस./पीएस/इंडिया
दिनांक: 06.01.2024
कार्यालय-ज्ञाप
जनपद जालौन के जिला काशगार ज़र्दी के उप काशगाल आवास पर

BRIEFLY

Rybakina, Dimitrov take Brisbane titles

Brisbane: Elena Rybakina handed Aryna Sabalenka a harsh reality check on Sunday ahead of her Australian Open title defence with a crushing 6-0 6-3 victory in the final of the Brisbane International. The men's final that followed on Pat Rafter Arena was a much tighter contest with former world number three Grigor Dimitrov claiming his first ATP title in more than six years with a 7-6(5) 6-4 victory over Danish young gun Holger Rune. World number two Sabalenka came into the women's final, a rematch of last year's Melbourne title-decider, on a 15-match winning streak in Australia but was completely outplayed by former Wimbledon champion Rybakina. REUTERS

Srihari triumphs at Chennai Open chess

Chennai: LR Srihari secured a draw against Belarusian Alexei Fedorov in the final round to emerge champion in the Chennai Open International Grandmaster Chess Tournament 2023 here on Sunday. Srihari registered seven wins, and three draws on his way to the title. With an ELO rating of 2500, Srihari is now away from his third and final GM Norm. Nguyen Duc Hoa (Vietnam) took the second spot. PTI

PKL: Puneri Paltan beat Tamil Thalaivas

Mumbai: Puneri Paltan rode past Tamil Thalaivas 29-26 in a nail-biting meeting at the Pro Kabaddi League here on Sunday. Mohammadreza Chiyaneh Shadlou and Gaurav Khatri were the Paltan's best players, while Thalaivas' skipper Sagar was their star performer with seven tackle points. The opening 20 minutes saw an engaging battle between the two sides, as Narendar gave the Thalaivas a dream start, ensuring a 'Super Raid' to start the match, while the Paltan were immediately forced onto the back foot. As the half edged towards close, both teams traded the lead and neither could take control of the proceedings, both adopting a defensive approach. A strategic first half ended with the Paltan leading 12-11. PTI

Perry scores a boundary - four or six - one every 4.87 deliveries since last December, an impressive stat that makes her formidable

VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN
JANUARY 7

FALL OF early wickets, a lack of a definitive partnership, a significantly under-par score on a track that looked good for batting at a ground where run-chases are historically easier, and a flying start to the opponents in the second half. For about 65% of the night on Sunday - 26 of the 40 overs - the second T20I between India and Australia followed the script of the first match.

If Indian bowlers restricted Australia to 141 on Friday, it was the Australian bowlers' turn to keep the hosts to 130/8. To India's credit, they pushed Alyssa Healy's world champion side deeper in the chase, bouncing back well after the powerplay to stretch the match. But eventually, the visitors finished the game in the 19th over with six wickets to spare to level the series.

In the end, it was a fitting finish by a superstar of the game playing for Australia in her 300th international (cricket) match. Ellyse Perry's stature in the game is in no doubt, she will finish as one of the all-time greats just for the sheer number of trophies she has won (and a goal scored at a Fifa World Cup for Matildas, to go with it). But what's been incredible about the last couple of years in her storied career is how she has adapted her game and evolved to meet modern demands.

Elite Perry

A few years back it would have been unimaginable to use 'Perry' and 'dropped' in the same sentence. But in the first half of 2022 - even during Commonwealth Games when Australia added another title to their ever-increasing collection - she was not a sureshot pick in the batting order any more. The fact that she wasn't bowling as much meant as a pure batter her numbers were deemed less than ideal.

Perry's stature in the game is in no doubt, she will finish as one of the all-time greats just for the sheer number of trophies she has won (and a goal scored at a Fifa World Cup for Matildas, to go with it).

Elyse Perry's (left) 21-ball 34 guided Australia to a six-wicket win which helped them level the T20 series 1-1. PTI

Till October 2021, Perry's T20I numbers read: 76 innings, 1253 runs, 27.84 average, 105.47 strike rate. Not bad numbers for someone who used to bowl a lot as well in her early days as an allrounder but for a team that was pushing the envelope of batting in the women's game, it was not top drawer.

But Perry didn't step back, Perry stepped up. "Missing out on those games in retrospect ... it was a really nice opportunity and challenge for me to improve in a couple of aspects," she had told SEN Radio in February that year. And sure enough, she took up the challenge head-on. Brought back into the T20I side in December 2022 when Australia toured India, in her first innings on the tour, she smashed 75 off 47 balls

at a strike rate of 159.57.

It's a trend that has continued since, as Perry's numbers in T20Is since December 2022 read: 15 innings, 555 runs, 55.50 average, 152.05 strike rate.

Key to that change has been her boundary-hitting numbers. Till 2021, she scored a boundary-four or six - at a rate of one every 9.21 balls. Since December 2022, that number has skyrocketed to a boundary every 4.87 deliveries. The numbers are even more impressive for sixes hit. She had hit 23 sixes in her career till 2021, and she is one short of that mark in just the last two years. (The number has skyrocketed from 51.65 balls per six to 16.59 balls per six in these corresponding periods).

One of those sixes was the winning shot on Sunday as she made sure the match didn't enter the last over. But it was the first six that she hit that was more impressive. India, through Deepi Sharma and Pooja Vastrakar, had kept the run-rate in check and picked up regular wickets too. But with 32 needed off 24 balls,

Perry danced down the track against India's best spinner and deposited an 80m six over long on.

Harmanpreet's struggles

Earlier, on the other side of the fence, Harmanpreet Kaur's recent struggles with the bat continued. Before the T20I series, she had been bullish in the press conference about her personal form, suggesting that she was feeling good about her batting, was putting in the hours in the nets, and was just getting out in unfortunate ways. While luck is a tough factor in quantifying the Indian captain's struggles, her scores don't make for good reading. She was out for 0 in the Test against Australia, then followed it up with scores of 9, 5 and 3 in the three ODIs.

In the match on Sunday, with the top three out early, India needed their captain to step up but she struggled to get going, getting out playing her favourite sweep once more for a 12-ball 6. In a batting effort that

SCOREBOARD

(WOMEN) INDIA vs AUSTRALIA
DY PATIL STADIUM, NAVI MUMBAI
Toss: Australia Women, chose to field

INDIA (WOMEN)	
Shafali Vlb w Garth	1(6b)
Smriti M Perry b Sutherland	23 (26b, 2x4, 1x6)
Jemimah C Healy b Garth	13 (9b, 3x4)
Harmanpreet Kc Perry b Gardner	6 (12b)
Richa G lbw b Wareham	23 (19b, 2x4, 1x6)
Deepi S run out	30 (27b, 5x4)
Pooja Vlbw b Wareham	9 (12b)
Amanjot K McGrath b Sutherland	4 (2b, 1x4)
Shreyanka P not out	7 (8b, 1x4)
■ Extras (b 1, lb 5, nb 1, w 7)	14
■ Total (20 Ov)	130/8
■ FoW: 1-4 (Shafali Verma, 1.4 ov), 2-20 (Jemimah Rodrigues, 3.6 ov), 3-42 (Smriti Mandhana, 7.5 ov), 4-54 (Harmanpreet Kaur, 10.1 ov), 5-87 (Richa Ghosh, 14.1 ov), 6-102 (Pooja Vastrakar, 16.6 ov), 7-107 (Amanjot Kaur, 17.4 ov), 8-130 (Deepi Sharma, 19.6 ov)	
■ Bowling: Megha Schutt 4-0-29-0, Kim Garth 4-0-27-2, Ashleigh Gardner 4-0-33-1, Annabel Sutherland 4-0-18-2, Georgia Wareham 4-0-17-2	

AUSTRALIA (WOMEN)	
Alyssa H c Patil b Sharma	26 (21b, 4x4)
Beth M st Ghosh b Sharma	20 (29b, 2x4)
Tahlia M c Ghosh b Patil	19 (21b, 3x4)
Ellyse Perry not out	34 (21b, 3x4)
Ashleigh G c Ghosh b Vastrakar	7 (10b, 1x4)
Phoebe L not out	18 (12b, 3x4)
■ Extras (b 1, w 8)	9
■ Total (19 overs)	133/4
■ FoW: 1-1 (Alyssa Healy, 7.1 ov), 2-58 (Beth Mooney, 9.1 ov), 3-89 (Tahlia McGrath, 13.5 ov), 4-97 (Ashleigh Gardner, 15.4 ov)	
■ Bowling: Renuka Thakur Singh 4-0-22-0, Titus Sadhu 3-0-21-0, Shreyanka Patil 4-0-40-1, Deepi Sharma 4-0-22-2, Amanjot Kaur 2-0-19-0, Pooja Vastrakar 2-0-8-1	

never got going, Harmanpreet's struggles summed up India's day as they managed just 130 in their 20 overs.

The series is not over yet, and India can take heart from their bowling performances in both matches but the batting continues to be largely dependent on the top order to do the heavy lifting, as Shafali Verma and Smriti Mandhana managed to do in the opener. The series decider on Tuesday will be another chance for India to get their batting tactics right, and they could use a helping hand from their captain.

Double ton no. 17: Pujara shows light and fight not yet stubbed out of him

VENKATA KRISHNA B

JANUARY 7

WHEN SHAHZAB Nadeem slipped one down the leg-side, Cheteshwar Pujara gleefully accepted the gift. A gentle tap to the short fine-leg fielder, he ran a single that brought him his 17th double century in first-class cricket, putting him on par with the legendary Herbert Sutcliffe. Only Don Bradman (37), Wally Hammond (36) and Patsy Hendren (22) have more double centuries than Pujara, so long the immovable object in India's batting line-up.

Typically, there were no animated celebrations. He uttered a cuss word, nor did he point the bat towards the camera. He just smiled broadly and acknowledged the applause from the teammates and friends, who had assembled to watch him make history, that too in his hometown, Rajkot. Courtesy his unbeaten 243 and a century from Prerak Mankad (104 n.o.), Saurashtra declared at 578/4 in their first innings, pushing for an in-



Cheteshwar Pujara scored his 17th double century in first-class cricket. File

nings win over Jharkhand. The visitors put up a fight, ending the third day on 140/2 at stumps, but still trailing by 296 runs in the Elite Group A fixture.

In cricket, timing is everything. With the five-Test series against England ushering in, and the youngsters not passing the South Africa Test in flying colours, Pujara was filing a notice to the selectors that he is indeed making runs. The selectors might or not have overlooked him for good, but Pujara was doing Pujara things, batting long and deep, 356 balls to be precise, reinforcing the value of an anchor in this form of the game. It was a treatise on innings construction, from which the young crop could learn a lot.

A couple of years back, after being dropped from the Test team, Pujara went back to the domestic grind and made a comeback after scoring bucketfuls of runs in Ranji and County cricket. But the route back to Test cricket looks incredibly difficult this time. Even if he scores a mountain of runs, there is no guarantee his name would come up for discussion in the selection meetings. But his love for the game is

The selectors might or not have overlooked him for good, but Pujara was doing Pujara things, batting long and deep, 356 balls to be precise, reinforcing the value of an anchor in this form of the game.

the love of batting too."

Now Pujara seems to have embraced a new challenge, which is to show that Ranji Trophy still matters, that it is still the Holy Grail in domestic cricket. His intensity seldom drops. "I'm seeing him play with the same intensity and commitment that I saw when he got the Ranji cap," Arpit Vasavada, Pujara's teammate from age-group levels to Saurashtra, says. "He values the Ranji Trophy and for him every game is an opportunity to bat. Even when he used to play the odd game in between national commitments, he would play it with all the ser-

ousness. Even now, there is no change in that intensity. He is getting down and showing the youngsters how it is done and how to do it," Vasavada adds.

Level of intensity

This is what the selectors might have wanted from Pujara after he was dropped from the Test team. They wanted him to compete with the young generation and show the level of intensity that is needed at the top level. The current chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar did it, featuring in domestic cricket for nearly six years after his last international appearance. So has been Agarkar's colleague S Sharath, who never played for his country despite ridiculous consistency in first-class cricket.

He has a letter displayed in his drawing room, written by Sunil Gavaskar, who personally visited him to hand it over to him after he had retired.

It isn't an appreciation letter or one that shows sympathy for missing out on an Indian cap, but one of sheer gratitude for him continuing

to play the Ranji Trophy when there was no call-up in sight, thus helping to make the tournament stay relevant and strong.

Pujara seems to be one on one such journey. He is at a stage where he has nothing to prove. Barring New Zealand and the Caribbean, he has scored a century in every other nation he has set foot to play a Test. Even with Saurashtra, he has won two Ranji titles. Next summer as everyone in India is busy with the IPL, he would be playing county cricket.

For Indian selectors, VVS Laxman's 1415 runs in a single edition of Ranji Trophy in 1999/2000 has remained a sacred reference for two decades. From Dilip Vengsarkar to Kiran More, MSK Prasad to Chetan Sharma, it is something that selectors keep going back to. If Agarkar needs to pass a new message to the current crop, then he just needs to deflect their attention to Pujara.

BRIEF SCORES: Jharkhand 140 and 140/2 (Kumar Deobrat 74 batting) trail Saurashtra 578/4 declared (Cheteshwar Pujara 243 not out; Prerak Mankad 104 not out) by 296 runs.

Matthew's burst leaves Delhi in trouble

PRATYUSH RAJ

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

TILL THE AGE of 18, Abin Matthew was a reluctant cricketer. He played club cricket in Kochi, and by his own admission, he used to get picked just as an extra, who would carry on.

Abin's father, Mathai Matthew, was a daily wage labourer, while his mother, Daisy Matthew, a lab technician, had a conversation with him about his future, which forced him to decide what he wanted to do in life.

"I was never good at cricket. It was just for fun. I was just a squad player. After I turned 18, there was pressure from the family because of the financial duress. I casually told my parents 'okay I will play cricket.' Father was a bit upset, but my he said, 'Fine, play the game like your life depends on it,'" Matthew tells The Indian Express.

"I gave a try out at the Swanton Cricket Club, where former India pacer Tinu Yohannan has also played. My coach Tiju Francis was the first one who told me that I can be a good pacer. I had pace but I was always erratic. He worked on with me, and in a couple of years, I was playing for Kerala U-23," recalls Matthew.

Cut to the present, Matthew's 4/30 has left Delhi reeling in their second innings. The hosts are 126/8 with a lead of 30 runs, and



Abin Matthew's 4/30 has left Delhi reeling in their second innings.

Pondicherry are on the cusp of registering an outright win. Pondicherry, in their first innings, were bowled out for 244 runs with a healthy first innings lead of 96 runs.

Matthew bowled his heart out in the first innings but got unlucky as a couple of catches were put down on his bowling. The edges were not carried, but he kept it tight, and his economy was 1.65 after bowling 17 overs. He kept the pressure from one end and Gaurav Yadav reaped the rewards from the other end.

In Delhi's second innings, the table turned. Abin came as a first change and ran

second over. But it was his second spell burst which provided the sucker punch to Delhi. Matthew picked up the wickets of Lakshya Thareja, Himmat Singh and Kshitiz Sharma as Delhi lost five wickets for 14 runs.

"The moment we saw the pitch, we realised that it can be tricky, if we won't control our line. Plan was to make them play more and it worked. As a bowling unit, everything that we had chalked out has worked out perfectly," he says.

Although Matthew is not from Pondicherry, he is one of the homegrown talents of the new association. He moved to Pondicherry in 2019 and had to wait for two years as there were a few errors in his documents.

"The association showed their trust in me. Those two years, I was not part of the team because of an error in my residential documents, but I was part of all the camps. It was a difficult time as I had left Kerala because I was not getting opportunities and now this happened. During that time, my mother kept pushing me

WFI events won't get recognition:
Sports ministry

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

The Ministry of sports on Sunday shot off a letter to Wrestling Federation of India president Sanjay Singh clearly stating that events organised by the suspended federation will be 'treated as unsanctioned and unrecognized competitions.'

Three days after the WFI election results were declared, the sports Ministry had suspended the sports body citing several violations of rules. After this the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) formed a three-member ad-hoc panel to run the federation. After winning the election Sanjay Singh had called on former president Brij Bhushan Sharang Singh, a BJP MP, who has been accused of sexual harassment by six women wrestlers.

In protest against Sanjay's closeness to the former president, Olympic medalist Bajrang Punia returned his Padma Shri and Vinay Phogat returned her Arjuna Award and Khet Ratna, while another Olympic medalist Sakshi Malik quit wrestling.

WFI president Sanjay Singh had said that an executive committee meeting of the federation would be held on January 16. He also declared that the WFI would conduct the national championships. He also said that the WFI does not recognise its suspension.

"It has come to the notice of the Ministry that you have issued a Circular bearing No. WFI/Senior National/Maharashtra/2024 dated 06.01.2024 on the letterhead of the Wrestling Federation of India regarding conduct of Senior National Wrestling Championship 2023 at Pune (Maharashtra) from 29-31 January 2024," Ministry said in a letter.

"As per this Ministry's order dated 24.12.2023, you have no authority to issue such a Circular or to use the letterhead of the Wrestling Federation of India wherein you claim affiliation of the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports."

The letter also said that only competitions conducted by the ad-hoc committee would be recognised. The ad-hoc committee had announced that it would conduct the national championships in February.

"Certificates of participation and medals won in championships conducted by the WFI will be of no consequence and will not be considered for eligibility under any scheme of the government or appointment to government jobs/to get admission in school and colleges under sports quota, sports awards."

Rohit, Virat back in T20 fold

In injured Hardik Pandya's absence, ODI and Test skipper given T20I reins for series against Afghanistan

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, JANUARY 7

AFTER LAST playing a T20 international for India over a year ago, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli made a comeback in the shorter format for the three-match series against Afghanistan, thus brightening their chances of playing the next T20 World Cup in June. Rohit and Virat had last played in the shortest format in November 2022, their last game being India's semifinal loss during the T20 World Cup in Australia.

This paper had reported last week that both senior batsmen had informed the selectors about their availability. Rohit has been named skipper, a role all-rounder Hardik Pandya had stepped into after the last T20 World Cup. But with Hardik injured the selectors went with Rohit.

However, it waits to be seen if Rohit will continue to lead once Hardik, who has had injury issues, is fit. The No.1 ranked T20 batsman, Suryakumar Yadav also missed out because of injury. Top order batsman Ruturaj Gaikwad was also unavailable for selection because of a fractured finger.

In Hardik's absence, Suryakumar had captained in the five-match series at home against Australia and also the three games in South Africa in December.

The team was picked after chief selector Ajit Agarkar had travelled to South Africa during the Test series.

A source said that IPL form will be key before the team is picked for the T20 World Cup to be played in the United States and West Indies in June. India have not won an ICC trophy since MS Dhoni captained the side to the Champions Trophy title in 2013.

Sharma's aggression at the top of the order during the 50-over World Cup, which gave the team flying starts, made it hard for the selectors to ignore his form and inclusion in the squad. Kohli has also been in sublime touch in ODIs and went past Sachin Tendulkar's record of most ODI centuries during the World Cup at home. Rohit has a T20 strike rate of 129.24 while Kohli's SR stands at 137.96.

After India fell at the final hurdle losing to Australia in the 50-over World Cup, Rohit Sharma had said: "It gives you the motivation to get back and start working again and look for another ultimate prize."



Rohit Sharma's aggression at the top of the order during the 50-over World Cup, which gave the team flying starts, made it hard for the selectors to ignore his form. PTI

Jadeja, pace duo rested

Meanwhile, as reported by this paper, the selection committee has rested pacers Mohammed Siraj and Jasprit Bumrah, who were main architects of the Indian bowling line-up in the recently concluded South Africa series.

The selection committee wanted to give them a break before they make it back for the five-match Test series against England at home.

Deepak Chahar who pulled out of the games against South Africa because of personal emergency was not included.

The selection committee has also rested spin-bowling all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, who was part of India's touring party to South Africa.

The Indian pace battery consists of Arshdeep Singh, Mukesh Kumar and Avesh Khan. With Pandya yet to recover from injury, the selectors have picked Mumbai's Shivam Dube.

The team also includes two other all-rounders in Washington Sundar and Axar Patel. Apart from these two, the spin department also has Kuldeep Yadav and Ravi Bishnoi. For the wicketkeeper's slot, Sanju Samson has to fight it out with Jitesh Sharma.

Wicketkeeper Sharma was part of the T20I series against Australia and South Africa recently and retains his spot while Samson hasn't played a T20 game for India since the series against Ireland in August – one in which India fielded a second string team.

It's not clear why Ishan Kishan has been left out for the series after he had pulled out during the South Africa series citing 'personal reasons'. Samson scored his maiden ODI century against South Africa in Paarl.

INDIA'S SQUAD FOR AFGHANISTAN:

Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Tilak Varma, Rinku Singh, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Shivam Dube, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Ravi Bishnoi, Kuldeep Yadav, Arshdeep Singh, Avesh Khan, Mukesh Kumar.

(Inputs from Venkata Krishna B)

Why no KL Rahul?

While Rohit and Kohli have earned a call-up, KL Rahul has to wait for now. Rahul has played almost all T20 International games as an opener. But with Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Kohli and Rohit in the squad, the top order slots are taken. The selectors believe wicketkeepers Jitesh Sharma and Sanju Samson are better suited as finishers, so Rahul missed out on a slot down the order too. The upcoming IPL will serve as a shoot-out for the two wicket-keeper's slots for the World Cup. ENS

Shami likely to miss 2 Tests against England

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, JANUARY 7

FAST BOWLER Mohammed Shami is likely to miss the first two Test matches against England starting from January 25 as he has yet to resume bowling after his ankle injury. In another development, World's No.1 ranked T20 batsman Suryakumar Yadav's return to cricket could take longer as it is learnt that he is suffering from hernia and needs surgery. Yadav is expected to be completely fit by the time of the IPL.

"Shami hasn't even started to bowl, he will have to go to NCA and prove his fitness. He looks doubtful for the first two Tests against England. Whereas in Yadav's case he will take more time than expected. After his hernia operation it might take up to eight-nine weeks for him to start training. Hopefully he will be fit during the IPL," a source in the Indian board informed.

Shami was included in the Test squad against South Africa that was announced on November 30 but the 33-year-old's availability was subject to his recovery post treatment.

Later in its press release BCCI had stated that Shami's participation in the Test series was subject to fitness and that he had not been cleared by the BCCI Medical Team.

The Indian Express understands that the BCCI will not rush Shami's return more so because the five-match Test series is being played at home and Mohammed Siraj and Jasprit Bumrah will be available. With spin also expected to play a major role, India won't need its full set of fast bowlers.

It is learnt the BCCI is consulting specialists regarding Yadav's hernia and he is likely to be sent abroad for surgery.



Mohammad Shami. PTI

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