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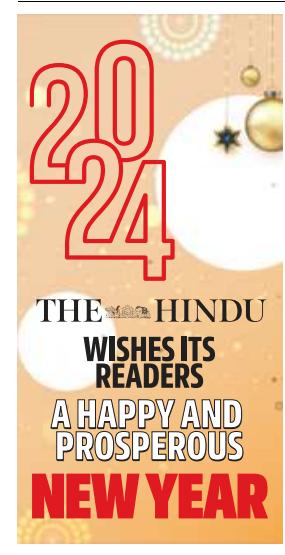
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IN BRIEF

R-Day tableau: Centre dismisses Mann's remarks

CHANDIGARH
The Centre on Sunday rejected as "baseless" Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann's criticism for not including the State's tableau in Republic Day parade. The Defence Ministry issued a statement saying tableau proposals are evaluated by an "expert panel". [Page 4](#)



EDUCATION PLUS [Page 7](#)

U.S. Navy sinks three Houthi vessels

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON/COPENHAGEN

U.S. Navy helicopters sank three vessels operated by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels that had attacked a container ship in the Red Sea, the military

said on Sunday.

Maersk Hangzhou, a Singapore-flagged and Denmark-owned and -operated container ship, came under attack for a second time in 24 hours while transiting the Red Sea. The U.S. Navy's actions came in res-

ponse to a request for assistance from the ship. Maersk suspended the passage of vessels through the Bab al-Mandab Strait in the Red Sea for 48 hours. While transiting the strait, the vessel was targeted with two anti-ship ballistic missiles

that were shot down by the U.S. military. After the Houthis fired on U.S. helicopters, they "returned fire in self-defence", the U.S. Central Command said.

[FULL REPORT](#)
[PAGE 16](#)

Curfew back in Moreh as armed men fire at police

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Curfew was reimposed in Moreh town on the India-Myanmar border on Sunday, following intermittent gunfights between armed miscreants and State police commandos since Saturday afternoon.

Moreh is in Kuki-dominated Tengnoupal, one of the districts in Manipur affected by the conflict between Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities since May 3.

District officials said a

High alert sounded after violence broke out on Saturday; fresh firing started on Sunday evening

high alert was sounded after fresh violence broke out around 3.45 p.m. on Saturday, when armed men ambushed a team of police commandos, leaving one injured. A gunfight ensued till 5.30 p.m. "A rifleman G. Ponkhamlung of the 5th India Reserve Battalion was

injured in his right thigh by a splinter," a police officer said. The injured commando was evacuated to an Assam Rifles camp and later shifted to a hospital in Imphal. The officer said that the extremists carried out another attack at midnight on Saturday, firing rocket-propelled grenades at the police. Four commandos sustained injuries. "Fresh firing started around 5 p.m. today [Sunday]. There is no report of any injury or death so far," an officer said around 7 p.m.

Panagariya to head 16th Finance Commission

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The government on Sunday appointed former NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Arvind Panagariya Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission, which will recommend the tax revenue sharing formula between the Centre and States for the five-year period beginning April 2026.

[CONTINUED ON](#)
[PAGE 12](#)

Aadhaar-linked pay made mandatory for MGNREGS workers

34.8% of registered workers and 12.7% of active workers still not eligible for the new payment system; 7.6 crore job cards deleted since April 2022

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI



Rules kick in: The fifth extension of the deadline to make the system mandatory ended on Sunday. FILE PHOTO

From the New Year, wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) will be paid only through an Aadhaar-based payment system (ABPS), which requires the Aadhaar details of workers to be seeded to their job cards.

The fifth extension of the deadline to make the system mandatory, giving the State governments time to reconcile databases, ended on Sunday. Since the first push in this direction, the rate at which MGNREGS job cards are deleted has significantly ri-

sen, which activists working in the field say is directly linked to the mandatory imposition of this payment method.

The first order to enforce the system was issued on January 30, 2023, followed by extensions till February 1, March 31, June

30, August 31, and December 31. Union Rural Development Ministry data show that 34.8% of the job card holders remain ineligible for this mode of payment as on December 27.

[CONTINUED ON](#)
[PAGE 12](#)

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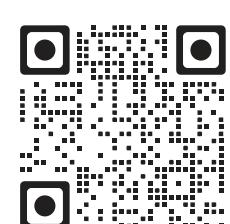
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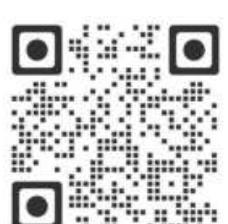
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City ushers in New Year as security forces keep strict vigil on revelries

Over 10,000 personnel, 250 teams of traffic units deployed all over Delhi; Haryana, U.P. police barricade border roads

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Large crowds thronged shopping complexes, monuments, and other busy spots like Connaught Place on Sunday to welcome the New Year in the city.

To ensure peaceful celebrations, Delhi Police set up checkpoints at vital places and deployed over 10,000 personnel across the city. Around 250 teams of the traffic unit were stationed to check rash or drunk drivers.

Meanwhile, the police in neighbouring Haryana and Uttar Pradesh put up multiple layers of barricades



Ringing in the New Year: Revellers (left) during the celebrations on New Year's Eve; security personnel patrolling Connaught Place on Sunday evening. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

on roads leading up to the Capital.

A senior Delhi Police officer said cameras were strategically installed to identify and prosecute violators.

At places like Delhi Zoo, heritage sites, and shopping malls, over 450 motorcycles were stationed, Special Commissioner of Police (Traffic) S.S. Yadav told *The Hindu*.

Even the Fire Department was geared up with strategic measures in place in areas with high footfall. "These included Ansal Plaza, Lajpat Nagar, Gandhi Nagar Market, Pacific Mall,

Chhatarpur, and Majnu Ka Tila," Delhi Fire Service chief Atul Garg said.

In the heart of the city, exits at Rajiv Chowk metro station were closed after 9 p.m. as announced a day earlier to prevent over-crowding at Connaught Place.

Noida advisory

Noida Police had issued a traffic advisory, informing people about diversions near crowded markets and shopping malls.

Diversions were seen near malls like The Great India Place, DLF Mall of India, Gardens Galleria, Logix City Centre, and the Sector 18 market.

Delhi govt. to extend its EV policy for another 3 months

Alisha Dutta

NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has decided to extend its EV policy by another three months till March 31, according to Transport Department officials.

An official said a proposal regarding this will be sent to the Delhi Cabinet for approval. The policy, which incentivises the purchase of battery-operated vehicles, was set to lapse on Sunday.

It aims at increasing the presence of electric vehicles on the city roads to 25% by 2024.

Earlier in October, Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot had told *The Hindu* that the policy will be given an extension of six months as his government is in the



The policy was earlier given an extension till December 31 by the government. FILE PHOTO

process of reformulating the scheme to give additional incentives to people choosing battery-operated vehicles.

He had said in the second version of the policy, his government will be encouraging retrofitting - the conversion of diesel and petrol vehicles to electric vehicles by 2030.

cles into EVs.

"For the time being, we will be extending the Delhi Electric Vehicle Policy 1.0," he had added, citing difficulties in its execution.

"Since the policy was first of its kind, there was no framework readily available to fall back on," Mr. Gahlot had said.

The Minister said his department also faced problems in finalising space for charging stations to be used by private vehicles as finding land for it was difficult.

The shift to EVs has also been vigorously pushed under the Delhi Motor Vehicle Aggregator and Delivery Service Provider Scheme. Under it, all aggregators will have to shift their entire fleet to electric vehicles by 2030.

From reel to real: how boys, young men enter the world of crime in north-east Delhi

Samridhi Tewari

NEW DELHI

Inspiration from Bollywood gangster films, the allure of establishing an online persona and awareness of legal loopholes are seemingly driving youth in pockets of north-east Delhi towards a life of crime.

Gangs of young men and boys - who have been in and out of juvenile observation homes - are involved in petty offences like theft as well as serious crimes like murder. Areas like Bhajanpura and Welcome have become hot-spots of such criminal activities, DCP (North East) Joy Tirkey told *The Hindu*.



Among the most gruesome cases involving minors was a murder of a 17-year-old in Bhajanpura by a juvenile (in picture). FILE PHOTO

He is a juvenile," an officer said. Requesting the court to consider the case 'rarest of the rare', the police are seeking to try him as an adult this time, he added.

On Instagram, Maya's profile shows off photos and Reels of bikes, hookahs, pistols and bottles of alcohol.

Celluloid inspiration

The 'Maya gang' gained notoriety in August for its involvement in a shoot-out over a petty argument in Bhajanpura, which claimed the life of Amazon employee Harpreet Gill.

The accused included Bilal Gani, Suhail, Mohammad Junaid, Adnan, and Mohammad Sameer, alias Maya - the 18-year-old leader of the eponymous gang whose criminal antecedents date back to 2020.

A Crime Branch officer said Maya had built close ties with members of the Chemu gang while he was in a juvenile home for two murders. "He adopted his moniker from Maya Dolas, the real-life gangster portrayed by Vivek Oberoi in

Pre-emptive action

In Seelampur, an upcoming gang was nipped in the bud after five boys involved in a stabbing case in February were nabbed. The 'Mastan gang' had at least 15 members, whose modus operandi allegedly involved waylaying two-wheeler riders on deserted stretches.

A senior officer said the gang was led by Shoaib alias Mastan - who borrowed his identity from the late Mumbai underworld don Haji Mastan.

Mr. Tirkey said the North East Delhi police has been focusing on providing young boys with vocational training to make them employable.

Kin seek relief after constable mows down e-rickshaw driver

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The family of an e-rickshaw driver, who was allegedly mowed down by a drunk police constable in his car on Saturday, has demanded action against the accused and adequate financial compensation.

On Saturday afternoon, Mukesh Kumar, a constable with the traffic unit, struck 40-year-old Amit Jha, while he was waiting for passengers, in west Delhi's Mayapuri, the police said on Sunday.

The officer said that the accused, who lives in the Mayapuri police station barracks, is in police remand and a probe is on to ascertain whether he was drunk at the time of the accident.

A senior officer privy to the investigation said Jha suffered serious injuries and was taken to Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital, where he died during treatment.

According to Jha's family, he was the sole earning

member.

"It is because of the negligence of the police constable that we lost my uncle," said his nephew Ashish Kumar.

"We request the government to help the family members financially and take strict action against the accused," Mr. Kumar added.

The officer said that the accused, who lives in the Mayapuri police station barracks, is in police remand and a probe is on to ascertain whether he was drunk at the time of the accident.

A case has been registered under Sections 279 (rash driving), 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others) and 304A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code.

According to Jha's family, he was the sole earning

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In the Court of the 3rd Additional Sr.Civil Judge, Vapi.

CRMA J. No. 326/2016

Fixd On: 10/01/2024

Exh:

Applicant: Gujarat Polysol Chemicals Ltd., Authorise Director, Umang, Shaiteshbhai Desai Resi, Plot No. C-5/101, N.H.No. 8, GIDC Char Rasta, Vapi, Ta, Vapi, Dist. Valsad, Gujarat-396195

V/s

Opponent: Capco International (Proprietor - Parul Nigam), Resi-1414, Chiranjiv Tower, Nehru Palace, New Delhi - 110019.

Whereas above named applicant has Instituted a CRMA J against your Opponent for Application Negotiable Instrument Act-133.

You Opponent hereby notice to appear in this Court, in person or by a pleader duly instructed and able to answer all material question relating to the CRMA J, or who shall be accompanied by some other person able to answer all such questions, on the 10th day of January 2024, at 10:30 a.m. in the morning the answer the claim, and as the day fixed for your appearance is appointed for the final disposal of the CRMA J, you must be prepared to produce on that day all the witnesses upon whose evidence & all the documents upon which you intend to rely in support of your defence. Take notice that, in default of your appearance on the day before mentioned the CRMA J will be heard and determined in your absence.

Give under my hand and seal of the court on 14th day of December 2023.

SEAL

Prepared by (C.N.Patel)

Assistant

3rd.Addl.Sr.Civil Court, Vapi.

Compared by (D.R.Patel)

Head Clerk

3rd.Addl.Sr.Civil Court, Vapi.

Registrar,

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LEGAL NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE

BEFORE THE HON'BLE SUB COURT, ERNAKULAM

E.P. No. 593 of 2022

O.S. No. 512 of 2006

Decree Holder : T.J. John aged 88, S/o. Joseph, Thekkanam House, Koyilthara Road, Panampilly Nagar P.O, Kochi, Pin code - 682036.

8th Judgment debtors: S. K. Mahajan, aged 70, S/o. P.C. Mahajan, Director, M/s. Plassy Builders Pvt. Ltd Registered Office at Basement 6, Community Centre, Saket, New Delhi, Pin code-110017.

NOTICE

Whereas the plaintiff have filed the above suit, which stands posted to 16.01.2024 at 11 A.M for appearance of the 8th Judgment Debtor. Notice is hereby given that you are required to appear before the Hon'ble Second Additional Sub. Court, Ernakulam either in person or through your authorized agent, failing which the suit will be decided in accordance with the law in your absence.

Dated this the 19th day of September, 2023.

By order of the Court,

(Sd/-) Ajith Viswanathan

Counsel for the decree holder

IN THE COURT OF THE HON'BLE MOTOR ACCIDENT CLAIMS TRIBUNAL AT ALANDUR

M.C.O.P No. 12/2021

Selvam

...Petitioner

V.

1. Gurucharan Singh Saluja

2. The National Oilic Co. Ltd. ...Respondents

HEARING NOTICE

IN BRIEF



Guna accident: police arrest absconding bus owner

The police on Sunday arrested the owner of the bus that caught fire after a collision, killing 13 people in Madhya Pradesh's Guna, an official said. Bus owner Bhanu Pratap Singh Sikarwar had been absconding since the accident, ASP Maan Singh Thakur said. According to the police, the bus overturned and caught fire after colliding with a dumper on the Guna-Aaron road around 9 p.m. on December 27. Officials had earlier said that the bus did not have the permit to operate on the route, nor did it possess the fitness certificate. PTI

Union Health Secy. Sudhansh Pant repatriated to Rajasthan

Union Health Secretary Sudhansh Pant has been repatriated to his cadre State Rajasthan where he is likely to become the Chief Secretary, an official said on Sunday. The appointments committee of the Cabinet has approved his repatriation to his parent cadre at the request of the Rajasthan government, as per a Personnel Ministry order. PTI

Political settlement impossible when ideals given up: ULFA(I)

Paresh Barua, leader of the anti-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Assam or ULFA (Independent), has termed the tripartite peace agreement signed with the pro-talks faction of the outfit as "shameful", asserting that "political settlement is not possible when revolutionaries give up their goals and ideals". PTI

CM targeting me to facilitate his son's future: Mysuru MP

The Hindu Bureau

MYSURU

Mysuru MP Pratap Simmha on Sunday said the arrest of his brother Vikram Simmha in an illegal tree-felling case in Belur taluk was part of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's "political strategy" to facilitate his son Yathindra's election from Mysuru Lok Sabha constituency.

Speaking to reporters, the lawmaker accused Mr. Siddaramaiah of "trampling" upon anybody posing a hurdle in the path of his son's election. Hence, he was targeting his family and "fixing" his [Mr. Pratap's] brother in the case.

The MP said Mr. Vikram had visited the Forest Department's office to give a statement though his name did not figure in the FIR in the illegal tree-felling case.

Cong., CPI(M) insecure about minorities' shift to BJP, says Surendran

The Hindu Bureau

THRISSUR



Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Kerala president K. Surendran has claimed that the minority communities are moving increasingly closer to the party. He spotlighted 47 families led by a priest joining the BJP in Pathanamthitta recently as proof.

Interacting with media persons here on Sunday, he said the Congress and the CPI(M) were politically insecure about the perceived shift in the allegiance of Christians towards the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha election.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Thrissur visit will create history. The Congress and the CPI(M) are using the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple at Ayodhya for creating religious polarisation. The

BJP will bring out a list of efficient candidates for the LS election," he said.

He termed the Congress and LDF Lok Sabha MPs from Kerala inefficient. The State should try to be part of the Modi government, which will pull off a hat-trick in the coming election. Kerala will not benefit by voting for the Congress, which could not win even 50 seats or for the CPI (M), which was not even in the picture last time, he added.

Although the authorities have decided to retain the 'Rahul collection' within the old Patna Museum building instead of moving it to the swanky new Bihar Museum following objections by his family members and scholars, the latter are still not satisfied.

The Rahul collection was a provisional gift made to Patna Museum by the late scholar commencing from 1933, and is the fruit of the four arduous journeys he made to Tibet in 1929, 1934, 1936 and 1938. Items were added to it until

Sreeparna Chakrabarty

NEW DELHI

An invaluable collection of manuscripts and paintings from Tibet by travel writer-historian Rahul Sankrityayan has become a bone of contention between the Bihar Museum authorities and eminent scholars as well as the family of the late historian.

scripts and paintings. "At present what is on display is a digital version of the manuscripts from the collection. We are not aware of the whereabouts of the originals. We appeal to the authorities to do a physical and scientific cataloguing of all the items in the presence of noted scholars and other stakeholders," Jaya Sankrityayan, daughter of the scholar told *The Hindu*.

Officials at the Patna Museum, however, said



Tibetan Thangka paintings of 'Rahul collection'. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

1956. It contains Tibetan 'Thangka' paintings, more than 1,600 Tibetan manuscripts, coins, ritual objects, images of bronze, unbaked clay and wood, items of jewellery, costumes as well as glass negatives of some rare palm leaf scriptures.

Demands cataloguing Sankrityayan's family as well as eminent scholars are now demanding a physical and scientific cataloguing of the manu-

TMC govt. notifies *Poila Boisakh* as 'Bangla Divas'

Shiv Sahay Singh

KOLKATA

The West Bengal government has issued a notification declaring *Poila Boisakh*, the first day of the Bengali New Year, as the State Day and the song 'Banglar Mati Banglar Jal' written by Rabindranath Tagore as the State Song.

"After careful consideration, it is hereby declared that *Poila Boisakh* will be observed as the State Day and it will be named 'Bangla Divas', the notification dated December 30 by outgoing Chief Secretary H.K. Dwivedi said.

The notification, while referring to the song 'Banglar Mati Banglar Jal' as the State Song, said the approximate playing time of the State Song is 1 minute and 59 seconds.

"The State Song should compulsorily be played with due respect in all government functions at the start and the National Anthem should be played compulsorily at the conclusion of it," the notification added.

Bengal not in show

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Kerala may renew campaign for new Mullaperiyar dam

K.S. Sudhi
KOCHI

Kerala will shortly renew its campaign for a new dam at Mullaperiyar as the revised Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the new structure is getting ready.

The new DPR, which complies with the guidelines of the Central Water Commission (CWC), will be ready by March. Experts recently completed the design of a new dam that has been proposed 366 metre downstream of the 126-year-old existing one.

New guidelines
The CWC introduced a series of guidelines for the construction of dams after Kerala prepared the DPR in 2011. The cost of various components of the project has also gone up since the last DPR. Hence the revision, said those privy to the developments.

The State government last week approached the CWC seeking to expedite the permission for the construction of new dam. The State had also conveyed to the CWC its willingness to provide water to Tamil Nadu from the new dam.

Kerala and Tamil Nadu had been fighting a protracted legal battle over the structural stability and related aspects of the existing dam. Kerala had been campaigning for a new dam on safety grounds.

Intense agitations took place in both States after Kerala raised safety concerns and demanded the decommissioning of the



The new structure of the dam would hold 450 million cubic metres of water.

existing dam.

Dam features

The full reservoir level of the proposed dam will be 152 ft, the same as that of the existing one. The maximum water level has been fixed as 155 ft. The new structure would hold 450 million cubic metres of water. The maximum depth of the dam will be 53 m and its length 630 m. It may take up to four years and around ₹1,000 crore to complete the project. The dam level and other aspects may be modified considering the interests of Tamil Nadu. The consent of Tamil Nadu is also required to begin the construction.

Though located in Idukki, the dam is owned and operated by Tamil Nadu, experts said.

The new dam, an earthquake-resistant one, will have a life of 100 years. The State had commissioned a seismic study of the dam area by the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, before designing the dam, they said.

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Christian priests failed to seek PM intervention in Manipur'

Press Trust of India

ALAPPUZHA

Kerala Cultural Affairs Minister Saji Cherian strongly criticised Christian priests on Sunday for their alleged silence on the issue of Manipur violence during the Christmas programme organised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his official residence in New Delhi.

Speaking after inaugurating a local committee of his party, CPI(M) in this coastal district, Mr. Cherian mocked certain bishops who attended the Prime Minister's programme, saying they got "goosebumps" when BJP leaders invited them.

He alleged that they forgot the issue of Manipur violence targeting their own community members when they were served with cakes and grape wine.

"Did they urge the Indian Prime Minister to intervene in the matter?" the CPI(M) leader questioned.

Stating that Christian community members were butchered in Manipur, Mr. Cherian also criticised certain Christian priests for still joining the BJP. His remarks came a day after a priest and around 50 Christian families joined the BJP. Neither the BJP nor the bishops have reacted to his allegations.

During an interaction with the Christians on Christmas, Mr. Modi had heaped praise on the minority community for its role in the freedom movement and in various fields such as healthcare and education, and said the country proudly acknowledged its contribution.

C.M.Y.K

'Silent wave of JN.1 variant in twin cities and Bengaluru'

The new strain has transmitted to a majority of population in these cities, shows wastewater sampling analysis; the scientists want officials to hold molecular testing of hospitalised cases

V. Geetanath
HYDERABAD

COVID-positive numbers in the daily official communiqué may be in single digit, but the new virus strain, JN.1, has clearly spread in a majority of the population in the twin cities, shows an analysis of the wastewater sampling being conducted by scientists of the Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology (CCMB), the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IITC) and the Tata Institute for Genetics & Society, Bengaluru.

"This new strain, a close relative of the Omicron variant, is an interesting and peculiar one evading the immunity obtained through previous infec-



The scientists have collected wastewater samples from Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Vijayawada, and Pune. G. RAMAKRISHNA

tions or vaccines infecting people. It is spreading silently as most cases are asymptomatic or even mild where an infected person may not even know. But, it has not shown any major illness in clinical context," says TIGS Director Rakesh Mishra, al-

so former CCMB Director.

In an exclusive interaction, the top scientist points out that the number of hospitalisations is very low, but wastewater sampling being conducted across the cities of Hyderabad (18 open drains), Bengaluru (26 sewage treat-

ment plants), Vijayawada, Pune and others has been showing an increasing trend in virus being discharged through the toilets into the drains in all the municipal areas since last month.

"The virus load has been climbing rapidly for the past few weeks and soon, we will know if the trend of infections is increasing or beginning to decrease, by constantly checking the wastewater samples," he explains.

Since the wave is 'silent' with little or no usual symptoms, the authorities must conduct molecular testing of the hospitalised cases to understand the nature of the infection and variant in case of SARS-CoV-2.

CBI issues notice to Kerala-based channel

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has issued a notice to Kerala-based Jaihind channel seeking details of the investments made in the channel by Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar. The notice was sent in connection with a disproportionate assets case against the Congress leader, officials said on Sunday.

The Bengaluru unit of the agency had asked the managing director of Jaihind Communications Pvt. Ltd. to appear before it on January 11. The agency has asked the channel to furnish details of investments made by Mr. Shivakumar and his wife Usha Shivakumar, dividends paid to them, share transactions, financial transactions along with bank details through which they were made, among others.

Revanth wants schools in all gram panchayats

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy said that there should be no gram panchayat in the State without a government school. "Every GP should have a school, whether it is a small village or tribal hamlet," Mr. Reddy said at a review meeting on school education at the Secretariat on Sunday.

"Students should not be

forced to travel to neighbouring villages or nearest towns to pursue education," he said.

He wanted schools that were closed on the pretext of zero students to be reopened with immediate effect. "Irrespective of the number of students in schools, these institutions should run," he said, adding that a mega DSC teachers recruitment would be conducted shortly to fill up vacancies.

Be ready to go to jail for people's welfare: Kejriwal to cadres

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



us," Mr. Kejriwal said.

He said there are over 1,300 political parties in India but it is only AAP leaders who have been put in jail.

"We have chosen the path for the welfare of people. Hence, we will have to go to jail. If you give good education to children, you will have to go to jail; if you provide free treatment to the poor, you will have to go to jail," he said.

"If you are prepared to go to jail, then continue on the path of providing good education to children and free treatment to the poor," he asserted.

Mr. Kejriwal also claimed that people have reposed faith in his party as they have accomplished the tasks that could not be done by other parties since the country's Independence.

"We started talking about education, health, electricity, inflation and employment, which no other party had ever done. For the first time, people got a real alternative to these parties and started liking the politics of work," Mr. Kejriwal said.

Attending Ram Temple consecration will be suicidal for Congress: Sudheeran

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



The Congress should have rejected the invitation to the ceremony. I don't understand the purpose of discussions before taking a decision on this.

V.M. SUDHEERAN
Congress leader

tempting to flare up communal passions as part of their political agenda. When they were attempting to gather support for this agenda, the Congress should have been able to see through it and reject the invitation to the ceremony. I don't understand the purpose of discussions before taking a decision on this.

Economic policies
Mr. Sudheeran demanded that the Congress leadership have a relook at its neo-liberal economic policies. Jawaharlal Nehru's and Indira Gandhi's policies of nationalisation and supporting the public sec-

tor kept the country in good stead. Although Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh initiated the neo-liberal shift with good intentions, it did not turn out the way they expected it to. The BJP, while transferring all the national assets to the Ambanis and Adanis, are claiming that they are only implementing what the Congress initiated. This should make the Congress rethink its economic policies, he said.

He also trained his guns on the Congress State leadership, expressing disappointment at the groupism that has engulfed the party.

He also criticised KPCC president K. Sudhakaran for falsely claiming that Mr. Sudheeran had left the Congress party in Kerala, when he was still participating in party-related events.

Leader of the Opposition in Kerala Assembly V.D. Sathesesan on Sunday criticised the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] for what he termed the party's attempts to politicise the Ram Temple consecration in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.

The Congress has not been invited to the event. Only a few individuals have been invited. The party will take a decision on the invitation.

The CPI(M) was attempting to create confusion and reap political benefit out of it, he alleged. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was following the footsteps of the BJP to create a wedge in the society over the issue, Mr. Sathesesan alleged.

CPI(M) politicising temple event in Ayodhya: Sathesesan

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI



Christian community in the State, Mr. Sathesesan said Christians have been targeted across the country under the BJP regime. Christians are intelligent enough to gauge the true intentions of Bharatiya Janata Party activists, who are paying them a visit these days. The Congress has steadfastly upheld the principles of secularism, he added.

The Chief Minister ridiculed the Opposition by giving good service entry to the policemen who assaulted Congress workers who staged protests against the Navakeralai Sadas organised by the State government. The Chief Minister converted Kerala into a goonda State by giving a call to his party workers to physically attack all those who protested against the Sadas, he said.

Attacks BJP
On Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) attempts to woo the

BJP stays silent on Veerashaiva-Lingayat demand

Girish Pattanashetti
HUBBALLI



Some people of the community want a sub-caste under the Central list of the OBC. FILE PHOTO

the 2018 Assembly election taken strong exception to the then Siddaramaiah-led Congress government's move to recommend separate religion status for Veerashaiva-Lingayat.

The BJP leaders had launched a scathing campaign against those championing the cause, alleging that they were bent on "dividing the community".

The recommendation from the State government, naturally, did not receive any support from the BJP-led Union government and it was returned to the State. The BJP had made it an important election issue. The community also

stood divided on the issue, with those affiliated to the BJP and some of the Veerashaiva seers strongly criticising Mr. Siddaramaiah. It is believed that this adversely impacted the Congress in the 2018 election in some parts.

This time, however, it is strikingly different, with even BJP strongman B.S. Yediyurappa, who took part in the mahasabha's 24th mega convention in Davangere, remaining silent over it. Mr. Yediyurappa and other BJP leaders have been dared to comment on the resolution of not identifying as Hindus. National general secretary of Jagatika Lingayata Mahasabha Shivanand Jamdar's demand for a reply from

RSS and Panchacharyas has not received any response.

Not a clear demand
The mahasabha, which does not want its members to identify themselves as Hindus, however, has not openly demanded an independent religion status in its resolution. But it wants all the sub-castes of Veerashaiva-Lingayats to be brought under the Central list of OBCs.

According to secretary of Veerashaiva Mahasabha H.M. Renuka Prasanna, in-

Raid uncovers graft at Kumily checkpost

The Hindu Bureau
IDUKKI

A surprise raid carried out by the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (VACB) Idukki unit at Kumily inter-State checkpost on Saturday night revealed the Motor Vehicle Department (MVD) officials accepting bribes from inter-State Sabarimala pilgrims.

According to an official, the VACB Idukki Deputy Superintendent of Police (DySP) Shaju Jose, the raid was carried out after receiving complaints about the officials accepting bribes from inter-State vehicles of the pilgrims.

The raid was carried out

at the MVD office of the checkpost, jointly shared by Excise, Livestock, MVD, and Goods and Services Tax (GST) enforcement departments in Kumily.

According to an official, the VACB officials approached the check post in disguise of Sabarimala pilgrims, and travelled in a Tamil Nadu registered vehicle. "The MVD officials from Kumily checkpost accepted a bribe of ₹1,000 from the disguised VACB officers," said Mr. Jose.

An excess amount of ₹8,230 was recovered from the MVD's office at the checkpost, according to VACB officials.

C.M.Y.K

Mehbooba urges compensation for Poonch victims' kin

Press Trust of India
POONCH/JAMMU



Peoples Democratic Party chief Mehbooba Mufti on Sunday demanded a compensation of ₹50 lakh, a government job, and a residential plot for the families of three civilians who were found dead a day after being picked by the security forces following a militant ambush on two Army vehicles.

Ms. Mufti alleged that despite visits by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande no action has been taken to deliver justice to the victims.

"I urge the Lieutenant-Governor to ask the Defence Minister to provide a compensation of ₹50 lakh, a government job, and a residential plot to the next of kin of the slain civilians," Ms. Mufti told reporters, while demanding a judicial probe into the incident.

The three civilians picked up by the Army for questioning after militants ambushed two Army vehicles on December 21 in Poonch were found dead on Friday last week.

The Army has ordered an internal probe into the deaths.

Ms. Mufti questioned the ongoing inquiry. "We have seen the fate of probe reports in the past. Following the report of three youths killed by the Army in Rajouri, the officers admitted to fake killings, but were let off. What probe can you do?" she asked.

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Ms. Mufti questioned the ongoing inquiry. "We have seen the fate of probe reports in the past. Following the report of three youths killed by the Army in Rajouri, the officers admitted to fake killings, but were let off. What probe can you do?" she asked.

yet there has been no response from the government, which is utilising our services for every work," rued a group of workers on Sunday.

Around one lakh anganwadi workers and helpers have been abstaining from their duties as a part of their protest. "These women have been away from

Rajasthan Congress asks EC to disqualify Karanpur candidate

Can't make a candidate for Assembly seat a Minister, says Congress in memorandum to EC; BJP defends Surendra Pal Singh, says move permitted by the Constitution, Congress govt. did it too

Press Trust of India
JAIPUR

The Congress on Sunday urged the Election Commission (EC) to disqualify the BJP candidate from the Karanpur constituency, Surendra Pal Singh, claiming his appointment as Rajasthan Minister ahead of voting on January 5 is a "violation of the model of conduct".

A party delegation submitted a memorandum in this regard to the Chief Electoral Officer of the State.

The memorandum stated that the appointment of a candidate as a minister is a "disregard for the basic principles of the Constitution". "The Election Commission is duty-bound to conduct free and fair elections. Such an appointment will influence the voters and is a grave impropriety," it added.



BJP MLAs take oath as Ministers in the Rajasthan Cabinet at Raj Bhavan in Jaipur. FILE PHOTO

The Congress delegation that submitted the memorandum included Raghu Sharma, Sanyam Lodha, Ram Singh Kaswan, Jaswant Gurjar and Kuldeep Poonia and Pradeep Agarwal.

Voting will be held in the Karanpur constituency on January 5. The delay in the election in the Assembly seat was due to the death of Congress candidate Gurmeet Singh Koonar.

Apart from Surendra Pal Singh, 21 BJP MLAs were sworn in as Ministers by Governor Kalraj Mishra at a ceremony in the Raj Bhawan here. While 12 leaders have been sworn in as Cabinet Ministers, five have been made Ministers of State (independent

charge), and five Ministers of State.

Mr. Singh took oath as Minister of State (independent charge).

Meanwhile, BJP leader Rajendra Rathore defended his party's decision, and said that the oath taken by Mr. Singh is in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

"Under the provisions contained in Article 164(4) of the Constitution, any person has the right to hold the post of Minister for six months without being elected. According to this, the oath of office of Minister can be administered to any person by the governor on the advice of the Chief Minister. After that, it is necessary for him to be elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly within six months. Many ministers have contested polls while holding a post in the previous government, too," he said.

workers," Mr. Hooda said. He also alleged that corruption was rampant in various spheres in Haryana.

Rampant corruption

"People wanted to remove the BJP from power in the 2019 Assembly elections as they were unhappy with this government. They defeated 12 out of 14 of their Ministers and sent them home, but the JJP betrayed its voters and joined hands with the BJP and formed the government with them," he said.

Mr. Hooda claimed that in the 2019 Assembly poll, the JJP won 10 of the 90 seats in the State because the BJP-JJP government will go, and Congress government will come to power," Mr. Hooda said while addressing a gathering during the Jan Aakrosh rally organised by the Congress in Ladwa. The Rajya Sabha MP alleged that people were fed up with the alleged misrule of the BJP-JJP regime.

"The government used force to suppress various agitations against anti-people decisions, and there was lathicharge on farmers, labourers, MNREGS workers, sarpanches, rural watchmen, and sanitation

Anganwadi workers in Andhra Pradesh accuse govt. of apathy as protest enters 20th day

Rajulapudi Srinivas
VIJAYAWADA

The anganwadi workers, who have been agitating for the last 20 days demanding solutions to their demands, have accused the Andhra Pradesh government of "apathy".

"We have been on the roads for the last 20 days,

yet there has been no response from the government, which is utilising our services for every work," rued a group of workers on Sunday.

Around one lakh anganwadi workers and helpers have been abstaining from their duties as a part of their protest. "These women have been away from

their homes. They missed Christmas and New Year celebrations. When you are not in a position to feed your family properly, what is there to celebrate?" asked Andhra Pradesh Pragathi Seela Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union Stage general secretary V.R. Jyothi.

"We are getting ₹7,000

per month and we have to manage expenses such as house rent, ration, school fees of children and utility bills. The government should tell us how to do it if it cannot raise our salaries," said Nagamani, an anganwadi helper.

Sudha Rani, an anganwadi worker, was quick to add, "A dailywager is earning

more than ₹15,000 per month. Successive governments have been paying us lower wages. We are being utilised for implementing all welfare schemes and programmes, but our welfare is the last thing on the government's mind," she lamented.

The workers accused the government of trying

to suppress their agitation by making alternative arrangements at anganwadi centres for the distribution of ration by roping in the secretariat staff.

The leaders of the unions asserted that the agitation would continue until the government conceded all of the anganwadi workers' demands.



Anganwadi workers staging a strike at Dharna Chowk in Vijayawada as part of a State-wide strike on Sunday. GIRI KVS

EDUCATION PLUS

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Mini Krishnan

Last month, I saw a 10-page presentation developed by a class teacher for each of her students. Titled "I Can Be Anything", every page showed different professions in recognisable gear, with the face of the child it was meant for. Astronaut, doctor, teacher, wildlife expert and so on. The teacher was "motivating" the students in her care. How old were the children? Three. Yet, in the shape of fun, the slow process of performance expectations, of prodding and nudging, had begun. Do this. Be that. On the other hand, when left by himself to read and dream, I have seen a nine-year-old make up his book on dinosaurs. The cover was a huge dino tooth!

The mainstream education system has always worked on the intellect and job skills of students,



oneself, rather than knowing yourself and your 'inner world'.

Can values be taught?

Exactly 20 years ago a group of writers, counsellors and teachers united to write a series of values education textbooks for Indian schools, also known to previous generations as moral education books. Even as teen suicides exploded in India 10 years ago and children turned against parents and friends, the chant in most households was still "As if values can be taught!" But, let's not forget, that humans, children and youngsters do not rush spontaneously to sacred texts instead of to films, videos

Towards a peaceful world

As we enter a New Year, we need to give students a moral GPS that can help them navigate a confusing and conflicted world that goes from excitement to disaster mode too suddenly and too often

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Empathy, justice, truth-telling have to be ingrained.

Some children are naturally more sensitive and thoughtful. Many are quite the opposite. Anger and fear management also need to be discussed. Loneliness is very much a modern child's companion with parents busy with their careers and hardly a sibling to be seen in most households.

In modern times, every aspect of a growing child's life is being carefully calibrated, tested, trained, pushed and pounded into some sort of shape acceptable to society while no attention is paid at all to its inner life. The values and peace education writers wanted

to make a difference. One of the most poignant selections for Class 5 was an account of what Majd Abu Asad, an eight-year-old Palestinian boy told a reporter, which was published by The Little Magazine.

"On March 28, 2002, suddenly the teachers started looking very scared. My parents came to take me home. When we reached home, the water and electricity had been cut. I was thirsty but there was no water. They closed the school. I had to stay at home. I was very angry. I slept a lot. By the time I walked to the store to fetch what my mother needed, I couldn't remember what she had asked for. I was

frightened. I used to be first in class. Now I can barely read. I have forgotten everything."

Emotional succour

This could happen to us. It could happen to your child if a public campaign for peace and values education is not launched formally in schools and colleges and teachers trained to do so.

War is the proverbial last straw. Weighed down by academic load, parental expectations, and lack of family support, the modern child does not have the resilience to manage crises, either of a private nature or something as harsh as war. Peace and values education promotes wellness, strengthens the mind and restores self-confidence and esteem in children.

It centres them more soundly in a world of people from diverse backgrounds, living beings and environments so that they can draw emotional succour from a wide network and also nourish the network that supports them. It is a moral GPS, a compass in the backpack of life, which can help young people navigate a world of confusing and conflicting ideas and ideals, a world of ever-changing distractions, and one which goes from excitement to disaster mode too suddenly and too often.

Now, more than ever before, actively waging peace is more important than anything else. The writer is the Editor, Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation

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Rewards: ₹75,000

Application: Online
Deadline: January 31
www.b4s.in/edge/KSS1

Courtesy: buddy4study.com



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Program Officer

completely neglecting their emotional needs, the development of their imagination and a strong grounding in personal values. In short, the focus has always been on managing the 'outer world' to benefit

CM
YK

A-NDE



Parade of unity

Political partisanship has no place on Republic Day

Tableau proposals by the Opposition-ruled States of Delhi, Punjab and West Bengal are among those that have not qualified for the Republic Day parade this year, on January 26, leading to allegations of partisanship. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) that is in power in Delhi and Punjab, and the Trinamool Congress that is in power in West Bengal are crying foul. Delhi had proposed showcasing its school education and health services and the Punjab government had plans to exhibit the State's heritage and the history of its martyrs for India's national movement. The West Bengal proposal was to display the Kanyashree project that serves girls in the State. Similar proposals by Delhi and West Bengal have been rejected earlier too. In the case of Delhi, its proposals have been turned down for three consecutive years. In 2022, Tamil Nadu's tableau, which was themed on the State's role in national movement, did not qualify. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has said that as these tableaux were meant for the political promotion of Opposition parties, they did not make the cut. Allegations of partisanship surfaced during the previous United Progressive Alliance regime too, where tableaux proposed by the BJP-run Gujarat government were not approved for the parade for several years.

A national celebration is one that can do without such controversies. The Republic Day parade is a combination of patriotism and pomp, and an observance of the country's unity and diversity. It is a show of hard power, highlighting India's military might, alongside its cultural heritage and soft power. There is a show of state power, but it is also a festival of people's power. The parade celebrates the memory of the momentous struggle that the founders of the republic undertook for freedom from imperialism and towards building a modern democratic nation. The theme for the 2024 Republic Day is 'India - Mother of Democracy' and 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India). The Ministry of Defence has an elaborate screening mechanism that selects participants for the parade. A committee of distinguished persons drawn from various fields screens proposals from States and organisations. Visual appeal, impact on the masses, theme, degree of detailing, music, and involvement of local artists are the key deciding factors in the selection of a tableau. It is an unfortunate turn for a cherished national day that some States feel excluded from it for political reasons. Regardless of whether their anguish is justifiable or not, efforts to mitigate it would befit the occasion. The Centre should seek ways to achieve more objectivity in the selection of tableaux, and leave little room for complaint.

Endgame

Tripartite agreement gives honourable exit to cadres of much weakened ULFA

The signing of a tripartite agreement, in New Delhi, between the pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Assam, the Union government and the Assam State government marks the end of a process that began in 2009. Nearly 15 years ago, the "chairman" of ULFA, Arabinda Rajkhowa, who went on to become the face of the pro-talks faction, was "arrested", even as other key leaders of the insurgent outfit surrendered. By 2011, following a unilateral ceasefire by the group, the ULFA's pro-talks faction had already signed a "suspension of operations" agreement, with several cadres staying put at special camps called "Nabanirman Kendras", putting an end to the then 32-year-old insurgency. A much-delayed talks process finally concluded last week, resulting in the current tripartite memorandum of settlement, enabling the faction's cadres to agree to surrender arms and vacate their camps. The "commander-in-chief" of the outfit, Paresh Baruah, had opposed the dialogue process in 2009, insisting that the "sovereignty issue" be a part of it, and since then his faction, the ULFA (Independent) has remained hostile to the peace process. The ULFA(I) is now a much weakened outfit, with Baruah believed to be in north-east Myanmar. The ULFA has long lost its potency as an insurgent force from its heydays in the 1990s, when it managed to farm the discontent that persisted in rural Assam even after the Assam Accord of 1985. Since then, the organisation has lost popular support, especially among sections of Assam's peasantry, due to its violent tactics targeting civilians such as migrant workers and the poor, relying on extortion, besides espousing a flawed chauvinist ideology that misconstrued the nature of the Indian state, which yielded diminishing returns.

Military operations by Bhutan in the early 2000s broke its insurgent might and, later, the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government in Bangladesh handed over most of the outfit's leaders. Since then, the pro-talks faction gave up the demand for sovereignty and revised its charter of demands to accommodate the interests of the "indigenous people" of Assam, while seeking an honourable exit. The delay in the conclusion of talks meant that some cadres had left the camps over the years, with a few joining the ULFA(I), but reports indicate that recruits to the Baruah-led organisation have fallen drastically in recent years. The threat of militancy from the remnants of the ULFA might have subsided dramatically over the years in Assam, but much needs to be done to raise the livelihood standards of the peasantry in the north-eastern State. Persistent poverty has been a key reason for mobilisation on a narrow ethnic basis, a radical version of which has been espoused by organisations such as ULFA.

In tracking the likely trajectory of geopolitics in the next 12 months, a blend of hope and realism may be the best yardstick. The past year witnessed a continuation of the polycrisis that began with the new decade, manifest in the COVID-19 pandemic, global economic slowdown, Russia-Ukraine war, sharpening climate challenges, escalating debt burden for developing countries, and the Israel-Hamas conflict. Will the world get some relief and traverse a shiny patch? Or will the situation be worse before it gets better? Predictions are often unreliable. But what can be offered is an informed reading of where we stand today to determine where we may arrive in December 2024.

This analysis presents an objective Indian perspective, infused with a sense of history. It is anchored in the conviction that India's recent record of speedy economic growth drives its proactive diplomacy aimed at ending conflicts by utilising dialogue and negotiations as the preferred path to peace and prosperity.

War or peace?

At last year's end, a critical issue was whether the two kinetic conflicts, Ukraine and Gaza, would end in 2024 or continue beyond it. Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister, asserted that the war would continue until Israel achieved all its goals: the release of Israeli hostages, destruction of Hamas, and effective deterrence by ensuring that Gaza no longer posed a threat to Israel. Yet, the fact remains that Israel's previous wars with its adversaries, including Hamas, ended at one time or another. Neither side has a limitless capacity to go on fighting. Whether the current military crisis is "at the tail-end" or will last for several more weeks is uncertain.

Also, no clarity exists about what follows the cessation of violence. The two-state solution, repeated by many as the ultimate mantra, has little chance of taking off due to an unbridgeable gap between the two sides and the enormous anger and anguish created by the recent hostilities. "Without a political horizon, Israelis and Palestinians will continue living from escalation to escalation, as they have over the past 75 years," said the Russian Foreign Minister last week.

Growing regionalisation of the conflict through attacks on merchant ships by the Yemen-based Houthi militia, probably with Iranian support, has further complicated the situation. Nightmares of violence at sea and the rise in prices of goods traded between Europe and Asia could turn out to be real in 2024. The future of the Russia-Ukraine war is more difficult to decipher because it is a conflict not only between two nations but also two conflicting systems – the



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western security system represented by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and Russia. War fatigue has set in. The United States is finding it difficult to keep pouring billions of dollars into a war that Ukraine has little hope of winning. The decline in material and financial assistance will erode Ukraine's ability to continue the war. "Indeed, it is no longer clear," wrote Ian Bremmer, the president of Eurasia Group, "that Ukraine can prevent further Russian advances through 2024, much less recover lost ground."

On the other side, Russia, having failed to prevail over a smaller neighbour, has shown remarkable tenacity to withstand the combined opposition of the West, biting economic sanctions, near-universal condemnation by the United Nations, and internal upheaval. Russian President Vladimir Putin now seems to be banking on a possible Trump victory. The former U.S. President gave enough signs of his proximity to the Russian leader. Scholars, therefore, suggest that if Mr. Trump enters the White House in January 2025, the war may end then, if not earlier. But if President Joe Biden gets a second term, this war may go on. Meanwhile, through 2024 the European pillar of NATO will have to carry a greater burden to ensure that Ukraine stays on the battlefield.

The world is no doubt anxious to avoid the outbreak of a new violent conflict in 2024. Possible flash points are all in the Indo-Pacific: Taiwan, North Korea, the South China Sea, especially the sharpening feud between China and the Philippines, and the India-China border. Their fate will continue to be moulded by the evolving U.S.-China strategic rivalry and the India-China contestation. Following the understandings reached at the recent Biden-Xi Jinping summit in California, the U.S. and China have enough motivations to avoid an armed conflict. Concerning the Ladakh issue, the protracted impasse is likely to continue in the absence of flexibility on China's part and the imperatives for India's resoluteness.

India's gains

In several areas, India's diplomacy scored handsomely and is on track to achieve more. The management of relations with the major powers has been marked with self-confidence and maturity. U.S.-India relations witnessed important strides. Political convergence, enhancing defence cooperation, and the expanding contours of the U.S.-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) have been notable highlights. The Khalistani issue and repercussions of the Panmun/Nijjar saga no doubt cast a dark shadow that may linger on for a while, but it is unlikely to hurt the growing strategic partnership in the medium term.

Cooperation with the European Union (EU) and bilateral relations with its key member-states are certain to advance positively. French President Emmanuel Macron's visit as the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations will further deepen collaboration with a vital strategic partner. Focus on special relations forged with Japan and Australia and further consolidation of the Quad (Australia, India, Japan, the U.S.) are on the cards. There were worries about the direction of India's relations with Russia, as Delhi and Moscow skipped the annual summit for two years. Nevertheless, Mr. Putin's public praise of the Indian Prime Minister and the tangible outcomes of the External Affairs Minister's recent visit to Moscow indicate that this 'time-tested' relationship remains stable and resilient, strong and steady. A Modi-Putin summit is a near certainty in 2024.

Another significant achievement was the adroit handling of the G-20 presidency, culminating in the adoption of the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration with "100% consensus". However, success in implementing the summit decisions is now largely dependent on the next two presidencies, Brazil and South Africa. India will no doubt exert as much influence and determination as it can to secure optimal implementation.

And challenges

China will continue to be the number one challenge in 2024 and beyond. South Asia, once India's backyard, is now a space where the Chinese footprint continues to expand, as shown by recent developments in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan. Beijing's 'invasion' is fuelled by its economic largesse and strategic vision that aims to keep India tied down to its neighbourhood. An effective counter-strategy needs to be devised.

In the new year, Indian diplomacy will grapple with both old and novel issues ranging from climate change and negotiations for various free trade agreements to promoting abroad India's expertise in digital technology and readiness to accord a place of priority to Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the nation's economic development. Multilateral groupings such as G-20, BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, and the need to push United Nations Security Council reform will demand serious attention.

Finally, the Ministry of External Affairs will have to project to the world the forthcoming parliamentary elections as a major milestone in the development of the world's largest functioning democracy.

An objective Indian perspective of what lies ahead, after a year that was affected by the continuation of a long polycrisis

Floods and a 'preventive measure' that needs review



Dr. Mani Sivasubramanian

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It has been many days since Cyclone Michueng passed, but every resident of Chennai still experiences the consequences of a slew of decisions taken for them, or on behalf of them, by an army of people.

All these choices had consequences. And so these decisions should be accounted for. Some consequences were visible and obvious, while others were hidden and subtle.

In the rains in 2015, many believed that the choice to hold off the release of water from a nearly full reservoir – until later events forced an urgent decision to do it without due warning or precautions – was what led to the most tragic outcomes of the flooding then.

Dangers in a home without power
The choice to stop electricity supply to areas where cyclonic winds can damage power cables and cause live wires to drop into flooded streets appears logical and sensible. But there is another side to this, especially when the practice is carried out as a 'preventive measure', extended across a wide area, and continued well after the natural event has passed or an accident has been reported. Homes and neighbourhoods plunged in darkness can be dangerous by themselves.

That an elderly relative can trip, fall, and break a hip is a worry as it can be as life-threatening as suffering a heart attack.

In 2021, Tamil Nadu had 13.8 crore people over the age of 60 years. Of Chennai metropolitan area's estimated 12 million-plus million population, 5,00,000 people are above this age, and over 50,000 are aged 80 or above. Many live alone, or with limited assistance. An area-wide power disruption is a significant hazard.

There are also the security and safety concerns of having no electricity in domestic households. Accidents and injuries are more likely to happen in the dark. Simple tasks become fraught, and even dangerous. Reptiles and insects could crawl into the house. So could miscreants.

The choice to turn off the electricity supply during a cyclone, and to keep it that way even

after the rain stops, has to be looked at in the backdrop of the facts given above. There is no objectively "safe" choice here. It is a constantly evolving, dynamic balance. And, that is why decision-makers should be held accountable for the choices they make.

Decision-making in any crisis can be emotionally challenging and psychologically stressful. When the scale of these decisions is large, and the nature of a disaster is cataclysmic, the process also becomes an extreme test of intellectual and analytical judgement, as well as that of personal strength and confidence.

The potential cost of mistakes looms large in a decision-maker's mind, which tends more often towards conservative options being preferred. And, yet, the dangers from inadequately considering the 'flip side' can lead to equally serious (even if less dramatic) complications due to inaction. Shutting off the electric supply in the event of a storm can be life-saving. But, restoring supply promptly afterwards is also vital to save lives and safeguard against terrible individual consequences.

The yardstick must be justification

A bureaucrat or government employee who has been granted executive power to decide to turn off the electricity supply power to a region, neighbourhood, street, or small area/home should be able to justify the decision and document the reasons, in real-time, in the event of a review. Just as premature restoration of power to areas with damaged cables carries the risks of electrocution and infrastructure damage, the unjustifiable extension of a power cut also has a real, and significant mortality risk for thousands of people in their own homes. However, this is not a reductionist argument.

Making tough choices in a phenomenally complex, poly-dimensional, multivariable scenario such as a natural disaster is a challenge that can be mind-numbing. And the experts tasked with making them deserve unstinted appreciation, gratitude and respect.

While shutting off electricity supply in an extreme weather event can be life-saving, restoring power without delay can also help avert problems for many

Some people make the disingenuous argument for more public transparency to these complicated decision-making processes. But clearly, in view of their specialised (and even confidential) nature, any such review should remain in the realm of specialists and subject-matter experts. A complex calculus should not ever be allowed to become a contest of cheap populism. The consequences of going that route during the floods in 2015 are still fresh in our memories.

Think of shared responsibility

And yet, this is not a case for elitist exclusivity either, where all decisions are from the top. In a healthy democratic system, no individual or group ought to have unfettered, unquestioned power over such choices, or be permitted to make them based on little more than a whim and fancy. It is time to hold the decision-makers accountable for their choices, especially when their choices impact the lives of millions. An 'ideal solution' may never be feasible, but we should strive towards one.

A hierarchy-based approach, with scaled levels of responsibility based on impact area or 'target population size', may work. The decision-making cell should be more granular and definitely faster, quickly developed and implemented to meet rapidly changing circumstances. Perhaps more than one person should be involved when it comes to making major decisions. In an evolving crisis, periodic review, done every few hours, by an oversight team, might help challenge and reverse questionable choices.

Regardless of the specifics, the principle at play is that a decision-maker's rationale and evidence in support of a choice or preference should be subject to review. If found indefensible or unsupported, such decisions must be overturned or modified at the earliest. And, responsibility is fixed squarely on the individual(s) who make such sub-optimal moves, even banning them from such decision-making positions in the future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Spotlight on Ayodhya

The hype surrounding the inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has been rising with every passing day. The infrastructure blitzkrieg that is being witnessed, which includes the launch of a new airport (Page 1, "Ayodhya airport takes off ahead of Jan. 22", December 31), the introduction of

trains for the route and so on, has been carried out on a gigantic scale and it would be no exaggeration to say that all roads lead to Ayodhya. A humongous sum of money has also been earmarked for development work in Ayodhya and it needs no guessing that the city will soon turn into a travel hotspot. The Bharatiya

Janata Party can be expected to milk the temple's inauguration to the maximum for electoral gains and there is nothing that can be done by the Opposition parties to stem this. **C.V. Aravind**, Bengaluru

By hook or by crook

If the graphic details of the

travails of the poor in Indian villages are heart-wrenching, their illegal, and sometimes risky, attempts to leave India for a living are devastating. Host countries, understandably, do not encourage illegal immigration as mass immigration into their countries is fraught with international ramifications. The recent incident

involving Indians, sheds light on the desperation of those who do not want to live in India any longer. No doubt, securing a decent job in India is a challenge, but that does not justify fleeing the country. Our government must make it plain that those who indulge in illegal migrations will be, once caught, dealt with sternly ('Ground Zero'

page, "Dream destination, nightmarish journey", December 30).

V. Lakshmanan, Tirupur, Tamil Nadu



Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address.

The fiscal challenge to Kerala's development

Kerala's development possibilities are being crippled by a fiscal crisis. While the critics allege extravagance in government operations, the State government blames the Centre for its troubles. In many ways, Kerala's problems are no different from the financial difficulties faced by several other States. One of the fundamental issues they all confront is the 'vertical fiscal imbalance': the power to raise most of the taxes is entrusted with the Union government while the bigger chunk of the spending is done by the State governments.

Other than State Goods and Services Tax (SGST), the only sources of revenue for the States are stamp duty and registration fee on property transactions and on vehicles; sales tax and excise duty on a few commodities such as alcohol; and revenue from mining leases, lotteries, and so on. The States bridge the excess of expenditures over their own revenues partly with fiscal transfers, grants, and loans from the Union government and partly with their borrowings, mainly from the market. A share of the taxes collected by the Centre is devolved to the States based on a formula recommended by the Finance Commission. While earlier the States could set tax rates independently, they surrendered that right when national uniform tax rates were introduced, notably the GST regime in 2017.

Weakening fiscal autonomy
The States must bear 40% of the outlay for most of the centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) or they risk losing the funds allotted for these schemes altogether. But the projects under CSS may not always be the suitable ones for the individual States given their respective development priorities. The States have also disagreed with some of the norms prescribed for availing themselves of the CSS. Over the last decade, there has been an increase in the



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share of surcharges and cesses in taxes collected by the Union government, which do not have to be shared with the States as per constitutional provisions. All these have weakened the fiscal autonomy of the States.

In 2021-22, Kerala raised revenues amounting to ₹688 billion (₹1 billion = ₹100 crore), with major contributions from SGST, sales taxes, and income from lotteries. According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Kerala is among the top performers in revenue mobilisation efforts. But it is also one of the biggest spenders of government money, on a per capita basis. The per capita revenue expenditures (for day-to-day operations) in Kerala were 1.3 times higher than the corresponding average for all the States in all developmental activities put together; 1.9 times higher in the case of health; and 3.7 times higher in social welfare. Kerala's revenue expenditures on social services alone came to ₹507 billion, which took up almost three-fourths of all the revenues the State mobilised on its own (all figures relate to 2021-22).

Kerala's share in the taxes devolved by the Union government to the States fell from 3.88% during the 10th Finance Commission period (1995 to 2000) to 1.93% during the 15th Finance Commission period (2021 to 2026). Notably, 1.93% is less than Kerala's share in India's population (2.6% in 2021).

Not having adequate financial resources is impairing Kerala's growth prospects. The educated youth are seeking opportunities outside the State. Translating Kerala's potential to emerge as a thriving region for knowledge-based industries requires big investments in infrastructure, research centres, and so on. However, capital expenditures undertaken by the State - equivalent to 1.87% of the State Domestic Product (SDP) - is hardly sufficient for this task.

There has been a lot of discussion about salaries and

Through a detailed blueprint for Kerala's future economy, the State government should allay the fears about its financing plans

pensions to government employees, which accounted for 48.8% of all of revenue expenditures by the State. Kerala has 5,26,000 government employees, with nearly half of them employed in the fields of education or health. About half of all government employees are women compared to just one-sixth at the national level.

Public employment has been one of the prime movers of Kerala's social achievements. But the government requires many more professionals and analysts on its ranks, and much fewer 'attenders' and 'typists'. Higher education receives only a quarter of all funds allocated for education in the State. This must be reviewed given the large demand for high-quality higher education on the one hand and the absolute decline in the population of children in the school-going years on the other. Almost 30% of the expenditure on salaries is set aside for teachers in institutions run by private managements. It is time to revisit this arrangement.

Borrow from the people
Kerala will have to seek new sources of finance. One option is to borrow from the people - to begin with, mobilise savings within the State, much of which is frittered away in houses, vehicles, and jewellery. Commercial and cooperative banks and the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board could be deployed for this task. However, the hurdle to this is the general opposition to debt-financed government expenditures. The Centre has rejected Kerala's plans to seek more loans, citing that the State's debt level (38.6% of SDP) is already high. But fears of debt are unwarranted if the debt-financed expenditures can generate new incomes and jobs and savings that can pay off the debts. The State government must take the lead in preparing a detailed blueprint for Kerala's future economy, which should allay the fears about its financing plans.

A herculean task ahead in Telangana

The Congress government will likely struggle to fulfil its promises

STATE OF PLAY

M. Rajeev

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For the first time since the formation of Telangana, the administration is reaching out to common people, including in remote areas, and listening to their grievances.

The new Congress government has initiated the Praja Palana (people's rule) scheme, which aims to take the government to the doorstep of the people. Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy announced the launch of the programme, spanning eight working days till January 6, under which officials will go to at least two villages every day to collect applications from the people in a prescribed format during gram sabhas. Through Praja Palana, the government hopes to learn of the grievances of the people and create a comprehensive database. This, it believes, will enable it to understand the needs of the people at the grass-roots level.

Through the scheme, the government also aims to ensure that the benefits of the welfare schemes promised by the Congress party as six guarantees in the run-up to the Assembly elections reach the last mile. The Congress had promised monthly financial assistance of ₹2,500 to women and LPG cylinders at ₹500 each under the Mahalakshmi scheme; ₹5,000 per acre per year to farmers including tenant farmers, a bonus of ₹500 for every quintal of paddy, and ₹2,000 to agriculture labourers every year under the Rythu Bharosa scheme; free power up to 200 units to all households under the Gruha Jyothi scheme; ₹5 lakh for the construction of



houses to families below the poverty line owning small plots of land, and 250 square yard house sites to families involved in the Telangana movement under the Indiramma Indlu scheme; ₹4,000 monthly pension to senior citizens, single women and widows; and ₹10 lakh for medical treatment under the Rajiv Arogya Sri scheme.

Two of the guarantees - free bus travel to women across the State and enhancement of health insurance coverage from ₹5 lakh to ₹10 lakh - has already been put in place. The government began the Praja Palana exercise so that it has a database to implement the remaining guarantees. The application forms issued for Praja Palana did not, however, mention Yuva Vikas, which provides financial assistance to students to pursue their education.

The governments of the erstwhile united Andhra Pradesh had programmes similar to Praja Palana. Former Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu conducted the people's outreach programme, Janmabhoomi, for years, while Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy opened the doors of his camp office to people every morning to hear their grievances.

The former Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government was considered inaccessible to the people although it did implement many welfare programmes. There were allegations that former Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao was even inaccessible to his own Cabinet colleagues and senior officials let alone the people.

In contrast, Mr. Revanth Reddy ordered that the barricades in front of Pragathi Bhavan (the camp office-cum-residence of Mr. Rao) be removed. He also renamed the premises as Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Praja Bhavan.

Official teams have been visiting at least two villages/wards a day since the launch of Praja Palana and collecting application forms from the gram sabhas, which are being conducted in all the villages in rural areas and wards in municipal areas across the State. The Chief Minister made the presence of officials and elected representatives mandatory as he believes that this will instil confidence among the people that their grievances will indeed be addressed.

The programme has drawn flak from the BRS, which says that Congress leaders are delaying the implementation of the party's guarantees in the name of collecting data in the run-up to the Lok Sabha election for political gains.

Criticism apart, the Congress government is going to face a herculean task in fulfilling its guarantees given the financial constraints of the State. The promises have been made at a time when Telangana has little scope for raising resources. The chances of imposing new taxes/duties for augmenting resources also appear remote, at least in the near future.

With the debt servicing burden pegged at ₹22,407 crore of the total budget outlay of ₹2.9 lakh crore for the current financial year, it is unclear how the government plans to raise resources to fulfil its promises.

The rise of AI chatbots in India's banking sector

About 80% of banks in India have adopted chatbots capable of engaging in conversations with human users

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

The 2022-23 report on the trends in, and progress of, banking in India, which was released on Wednesday by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), studies the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in banks and how it has grown over time. To assess the level of awareness and readiness for adopting AI in Indian banks, an analytical study was conducted on banks' annual reports by the RBI staff between 2015-16 and 2021-22.

This study employed a textual analysis method by matching keywords specific to the domain and utilising named entity recognition techniques. It leveraged widely recognised AI and Machine Learning (ML) dictionaries and glossaries from sources such as Google Vertex AI, Google Developers, IBM, NHS AI Lab, and the Council of Europe. Additionally, insights from Large Language Models such as ChatGPT and Bard were integrated into the analysis.

The analysis using a word cloud indicates a significant emphasis by banks on automation (Chart 1). This trend likely stems from the goal of improving efficiency and enhancing capabilities in the detection of fraud and other forms of predictive analytics, the RBI study suggests. It is also notable that there is an awareness or potential for adopting emerging technologies such as Robotic Process Automation, the Internet of Things, and Natural Language Processing.

A key application of AI in various service sectors is the use of chatbots, which are capable of engaging in conversations with human users in natural languages, either via text or voice. Chart 2 shows the number of banks in India which adopted chatbots. In FY17, only five banks had opted for this facility. This incrementally grew in the following years. Now, 26 banks have this facility.

Chart 3 shows the share of banks in India which have adopted chatbots. Over 78.8% of the banks have adopted this facility - i.e., 26 out of the 33 scheduled commercial banks analysed. According to the study, 11 out of 12 public sector banks (PSBs) had some form of chatbot and virtual assistant by using AI and ML technologies, by the end of June 2023. On the other hand, only 15 out of 21 private sector banks (PVBs) had them.

Chart 4 shows the growth in the share of PSBs and PVBs which adopted chatbots over the years. The share of PVBs with chatbots was significantly higher than the share of PSBs in FY17. However, the situation reversed in the following years, with the trend of large-scale mergers among the PSBs appearing to have influenced the adoption of chatbots, as merged entities often adopt the technology from their acquiring banks. According to the RBI study, non-banking financial corporations have also started introducing chatbots for customer services.

AI tools are extensively adopted and heavily utilised in areas such as fraud detection, optimising information technology operations, and digital marketing. The study argues that banks can improve efficiency and provide better customer experiences by leveraging these applications. The use of ML techniques for real-time analysis of customer transactions enhances the estimation of default risks. This bolsters their risk management strategies, the study suggests.

However, the study also ends with a cautionary note. AI in finance might heighten existing risks and introduce new ones, such as consumer protection concerns. The opaque functioning of AI models complicates compliance with laws, regulations, and internal controls in financial firms. These models could trigger market shocks and amplify systemic risks, particularly in terms of procyclicality, the study warns.

Banking on bots

The text and the graphs were sourced from an article titled the 'Adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Indian Banks', published in the Report on Trends and Progress of Banking in India 2022-23 produced by the RBI



Chart 1: A word cloud showing a textual analysis of AI-related keywords in banks' annual reports



Chart 3: The chart shows the share of banks in India which adopted chatbots by the end of June 2023

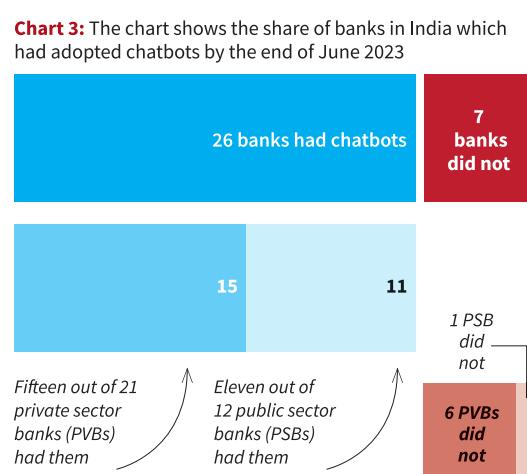
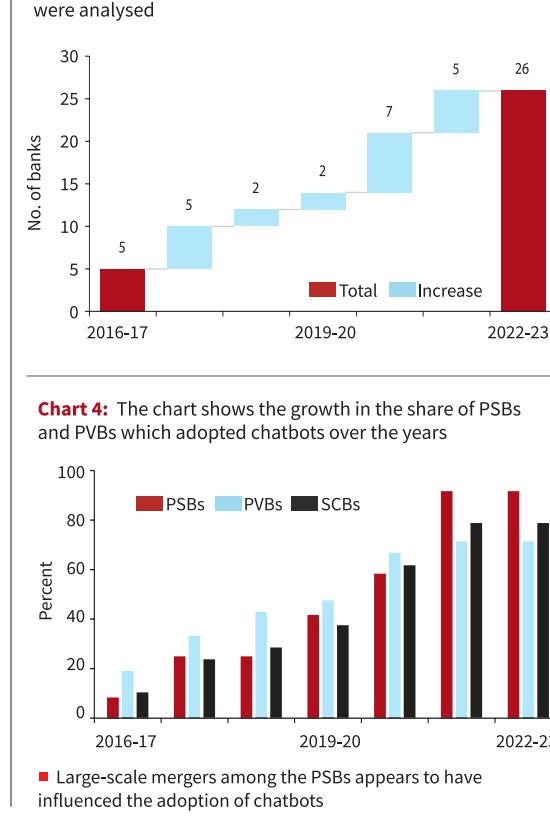


Chart 2: The chart shows the number of banks in India which adopted chatbots. In total, 33 scheduled commercial banks were analysed



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 1, 1974

Tragic end of Indian job-seekers off Dubai

Bombay, Dec. 31: One hundred and sixty three Indians, who landed at Sharjah in West Asia as illegal immigrants and were later bundled out, found a watery grave when the launch carrying them sank off Dubai on December 10 according to reports received here. The delayed reports said 152 others aboard the vessel survived the disaster [and] are now undergoing jail terms in Dubai.

Although the first reports of the tragedy that struck the fortune-seekers - most of them from Kerala - trickled in through air passengers and cables from Dubai a clearer picture of the mishap became available after a letter signed by 30 of the survivors was received by the Kerala Muslim Association here. Showing a UNI reporter the letter which spoke of the pathetic end of the job-seekers, a spokesman of the Association said: "Some of the victims are known to us. The survivors desperately need our help. But what can we do?"

The letter told this harrowing tale: In all 315 Indians left Bombay in launches for Dubai lured by get-rich-quick tales of fellow Indian settlers in the oil-rich Gulf States. They carried no valid documents. The illegal immigrants were caught by the authorities as they landed at Sharjah and lodged in a jail. The Indian Mission in Dubai disowned the immigrants on the ground that they could produce no proof that they were Indians. The authorities in Sharjah then dumped the 315 Indians into a small India-bound launch, deporting them to where they came from.

The vessel, according to the letter written by the survivors, was too small to carry such a large number of people. "Our humble entreaties that we should not be packed into a small boat fell on deaf ears. It was leaking even as we got in and sank slowly after cruising for a short while."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 1, 1924

Labour league of India

The Honorary Secretary writes from Calcutta under date December 29th: The Labour League of India has been established in India with a view to bring together Unions and Labour Associations in this country and to uplift the condition of all classes of labour as also to ensure labour is not used by interested parties for their own ends or greed.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of properties registered in Mumbai in 2023

1.26 in lakh. Property registration in the Mumbai municipality increased 4% year-on-year to an all-time high of 1,26,907 units in 2023. The State government collected a revenue of ₹10,869 crore as stamp duty in 2023. PTI

Number of people killed in Syria's civil war in 2023

4,360 The figure includes combatants and civilians who were killed in the thirteenth year since fighting began. Over the years, the country's conflict spiralled dramatically. AP

People killed in Palestinian territory since the war

21,822 The figure includes 150 deaths over the past 24 hours, a Ministry statement said. It added that 56,451 people have been wounded in Gaza. The war with Israel erupted on October 7. AFP

Revenue earned by social media from teen users in 2022

11 In \$ billion. Social media giants like Instagram, X and Snapchat gained this amount in advertising revenue from users younger than 18 years. Researchers said that 30-40 per cent of the advertising revenue generated by such firms was attributable to young people. PTI

OpenAI's annualised revenue in mid-December

1.6 In \$ billion. OpenAI's annualised revenue topped \$1.6 billion on strong growth from its ChatGPT product, up from \$1.3 billion as of mid-October, The Information reported. REUTERS

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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The government's OTT oversight

What does the Union government's draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill mean for OTT platforms and content creators? How will the government ensure fair representation within the Content Evaluation Committee? What measures are proposed to prevent abuse of power during unannounced inspections?

EXPLAINER

Sumedha

The story so far:

The new Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023, expands regulatory oversight to include OTT platforms and digital content. It aims to replace the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, proposing mandatory registration, content evaluation committees for self-regulation, and a three-tier regulatory system. The government claims it will modernise regulations and enhance business ease but the move raises concerns over potential censorship and impacts on freedom of speech due to increased scrutiny of digital media for "obscene and vulgar" content.

What does the Bill say?

No person or broadcasting company can provide services or run a network without formal registration or intimation to the government, with the exception of a few authorised bodies like Prasar Bharati or Parliament channels.

In line with the provisions of the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act of 1995, all cable and satellite broadcasting network operators must register to operate, while broadcasters should get approval from the registering authority for transmitting programmes. They are also required to maintain subscriber data.

Similar provisions apply to terrestrial and radio broadcasting networks. "Different rules can be made for different types of broadcasters and network operators, allowing for tailored regulations based on the nature of their operations," reads the explanatory note released along with the Bill.

The draft further expands the purview of broadcasting rules to networks that use the internet to broadcast services and programmes, such as Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) and OTT broadcasting services (classified as broadcasting network operators in the draft) if they have the required number of subscribers or viewers. The Bill leaves it to the Union government to prescribe limits later.

Under the Act, OTT broadcasting services will, however, not include a social media intermediary or a user of such intermediary, as defined under the Information Technology Act, 2000.

Content quality and accessibility

Any programme or advertisement broadcasted through TV, radio, or other broadcasting services must adhere to the Programme Code and Advertisement Code, which are yet to be defined. These Codes will also apply to individuals and organisations broadcasting news and current affairs programmes online through e-newspapers, news portals, websites and other similar social media platforms that operate as a "systematic business" or "professional" entity. Digital copies of newspapers and publishers of commercial newspapers, however, will be exempted.

Broadcasters will have to classify their programmes into different categories based on context, theme, tone, impact and target audience. The classification must be prominently displayed at the beginning of the show so that viewers can make "informed decisions." The Bill requires network operators to implement access control measures for shows that are classified for restricted viewing, such as those with adult content.

Additionally, the Bill provides accessibility guidelines to address the



Content Controls: The broad scope of the Bill for traditional broadcasters has drawn a mixed response from legal experts and advocates. GETTY IMAGES

needs of persons with disabilities, calling for broadcasting network operators and broadcasters to make their platform, equipment and programmes more accessible. Suggested measures include audio descriptions for the blind, sign language translations, adding subtitles in different fonts, sizes and colours, and using accessible applications.

It further asks broadcasters to make a certain percentage of content accessible within a specified period in accordance with the accessibility guidelines. A disability grievance redressal officer will be appointed by the Centre to address complaints pertaining to the accessibility guidelines, and a broadcaster or broadcasting network operator could be penalised in case of a violation.

Self-regulation

One of the highlights of the draft is a proposed self-regulation regime to ensure compliance with the programme and advertisement codes and to address other complaints.

Every broadcaster or broadcasting network operator must establish a Content Evaluation Committee (CEC) with members from various social groups, including women, child welfare, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and minorities. Broadcasters will be allowed to air only those programmes certified by the CEC, except for specific shows exempted by the government.

The Centre, meanwhile, will have the authority to define the size, quorum, and other operational details of the committee. The details of the committee members, including their names and credentials, should be published by the broadcaster or network operator on their website.

The three-tier broad regulatory structure prescribed in the draft has the following components:

Self-regulation by operators

Broadcasters and broadcasting network operators will have to establish and maintain mechanisms for the filing and redressal of complaints. A grievance redressal officer will be appointed to handle complaints related to content and contravention of the programme and advertisement codes. In case the official is unable to decide in the prescribed period or the complainant is not satisfied with their decision, it can approach the self-regulatory organisation.

Self-regulatory organisations

It is a proposed body of broadcasters, broadcasting network operators or their associations, which will guide their members to ensure compliance with the

broadcasting rules and deal with grievances related to content violations not resolved within a specific time frame. They can also take up appeals against the decisions of broadcasters or network operators.

If a broadcaster is found guilty of any wrongdoing, the self-regulatory organisation to which it belongs has the authority to expel, suspend, or impose penalties in the form of advisories, censures, warnings, or monetary fines, not exceeding ₹5 lakh for each violation.

Broadcast Advisory Council

The Centre will establish an advisory council, consisting of independent experts and government representatives, to oversee the implementation of the regulations. It will hear content violations complaints and accordingly make recommendations to the government.

The government will then, after due consideration, issue appropriate orders and directions. The Council can also form review panels to assist with its functions. These panels are assigned specific cases or appeals and provide their recommendations, considered as recommendations of the Broadcast Advisory Council as per the text of the Bill.

Provision for inspection, seizure of equipment

The Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill allows inspections by the government without prior notice. Operators must facilitate monitoring at their own cost and can face equipment seizure if violations are suspected. Companies are liable unless they prove a lack of knowledge or due diligence.

"The equipment seized shall be liable to confiscation unless the operator of broadcasting network or broadcasting services demonstrates compliance with the provisions of the rules or guidelines, within 30 days from the date of seizure of the said equipment," the Bill says.

There is, however, a provision of a written notice to the operator informing it of the grounds for such confiscation to provide the opportunity of making a representation. In case no such notice is given within 10 days from the date of the seizure of the equipment, it has to be returned to the operator.

What are the penalties for non-compliance?

The Bill includes provisions for penalties such as removal of objectionable shows, orders, apologies, off-air periods, or even cancellation of registration in case of non-compliance with the programme and advertisement codes.

The Centre may prohibit the

transmission of a programme, or operation of broadcaster or broadcasting network by citing public interest or national security reasons. If the programme or channel is "likely to promote disharmony or feelings of enmity, hatred, or ill-will between different religious, racial, linguistic, or regional groups or castes or communities or if it is likely to disturb public tranquillity on grounds of religion, race, language, caste, or community," then it can be prohibited by order, the draft reads.

"Where the Central Government thinks it necessary or expedient so to do in the interest of the— (i) sovereignty or integrity of India; or (ii) security of India; or (iii) friendly relations of India with any foreign State; or (iv) public order, decency or morality, it may, by order, regulate or prohibit the transmission or re-transmission of any Television Channel or programme," it says.

In addition, the Bill provides for monetary penalties and imprisonment for certain "serious offences." The amount of the penalty will depend on the financial capacity of the company or individual. The maximum penalty for unregistered entities and major categories is 100%, while the penalty for medium, small and micro categories is 50%, 5% and 2%, respectively.

What are the main concerns?

The broad scope of the Bill for traditional broadcasters, such as cable TV, and the evolving OTT space, which essentially has a different business model and content delivery mechanism, has drawn a mixed response from legal experts and advocates for digital freedom.

Digital rights organisation Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) has called for a cautious examination of the Bill due to the proposed codes' similarity to the Code applicable to cable TV and the increased censorship of TV programmes as a consequence. "This may affect the publisher's online free speech, freedom of journalistic expression and artistic creativity, & the citizen's right to access differing points of view because publishers will be compelled to only produce content which is palatable to the Union Government," it says.

The group claims that exerting executive control over OTT content will lead to "over-compliance and self-censorship" because platforms would aim to avoid the government's broad discretion when it comes to punishments.

The IFF further notes that the Bill has left several provisions to be determined later by the Centre, arguing that such excessive delegation of rule-making would create uncertainty for stakeholders. "Spanning over 70 pages, the Bill includes 60 instances of "as may be prescribed" and 17 instances of "as notified by the [Union] Government." While we recognise that in some instances specificity is needed to be or must be left to future rulemaking, these must be accompanied by relevant safeguards to protect against arbitrary rule-making," the IFF says.

On the potential impact of the legislation on digital platforms, technology policy expert Shruti Shreya of think-tank *The Dialogue* believes that the requirement for all online content creators to adhere to a programme code requires careful consideration. "While ensuring content quality is essential, the subjective nature of terms like 'good taste' or 'decency' could lead to ambiguous interpretations... The digital space thrives on creativity & expression - how will this legislation affect this dynamism?" she asks.

THE GIST

The Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill broadens regulation to cover OTT platforms and digital content, introducing mandatory registration and a three-tier regulatory system.

No person or broadcasting company can provide services or run a network without formal registration or intimation to the government. Cable and satellite operators must also gain approval to transmit programs.

The Bill extends rules to internet-based broadcasting services like IPTV and OTT platforms based on subscriber/viewer thresholds.

A Content Evaluation Committee (CEC) is proposed for the certification of programs, and a self-regulatory framework involving committees and councils is outlined.

The Bill allows government inspections without notice, and potential equipment seizures for violations, and mandates compliance within 30 days upon seizure.

Critics fear potential censorship, its impact on free speech, and creativity, expressing concerns about excessive delegation of rule-making and its subjective nature impacting online content creators' freedom.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

A bridge to nowhere: hidden plight of diverted payments

The APBS, aiming to streamline payments via Aadhaar, has led to diverted payments affecting MGNREGA workers due to flawed Aadhaar seeding, premature account mapping, and a lack of consent mechanisms

Niklas Wagner
Sakina Dhorajiwala

From the New Year, wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) will be paid only through an Aadhaar based payment system (APBS), which requires the Aadhaar details of workers to be seeded to their job cards. In this article, dated March 27, 2019, Sakina Dhorajiwala and Niklas Wagner discuss systemic flaws within the Aadhaar Payment Bridge System (APBS), resulting in diverted payments affecting vulnerable groups like pensioners and MGNREGA workers.

Perhaps you will remember “l'affaire Airtel” – the mass diversion of LPG subsidies to Airtel wallets that came to light in 2017. Many of the wallets were unwanted, or even unknown to the recipients. Those affected, fortunately, included millions of middle-class Airtel customers who protested when the goof-up emerged. The subsidy money was returned, Airtel was fined by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), and the world moved on.

This is an instance of what might be called “diverted payments” – bank payments being redirected to the wrong account, without the recipient’s consent or knowledge. What has escaped attention is that diverted payments have become a widespread problem in recent years, not so much for the middle class as for powerless people such as old-age pensioners and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) workers. The main culprit is the Aadhaar Payment Bridge System (APBS).

Shaky foundations

The basic idea of the APBS, an offspring of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), is that a person’s Aadhaar number becomes her financial address. Instead of having to provide multiple account details (say, her name, bank account number and IFSC code) to receive a bank transfer, she only has to provide her Aadhaar number.

Induction of a bank account into APBS involves two distinct steps, both of which are meant to be based on informed consent. First, the account must be “seeded” with the customer’s Aadhaar number. Second, it must be connected to the NPCI mapper – a step known as “mapping”. In cases of multiple accounts for the same person, the APBS automatically sends money to the latest-mapped account.

To understand the dangers of this “bridge”, we must rewind to 2014, when the Jan Dhan Yojana (JDY) was launched. In the frantic drive that followed, millions of bank accounts were opened and seeded with Aadhaar in a haphazard manner, under relentless pressure from the Central government. Some JDY accounts certainly served a purpose, but many others were superfluous and created a confusing multiplicity of accounts. More importantly for our purpose, Aadhaar numbers were seeded into these accounts without proper verification.

Given short shrift
Haphazard seeding continued well



MGNREGA workers in Jharkhand often have great difficulty withdrawing their wages. VELANKANNI RAJ

beyond 2014 because the government wanted to bring all direct benefit transfer (DBT) payments – pensions, scholarships, subsidies, MGNREGA wages, and so on – under the Aadhaar payments umbrella. Government departments started sending bulk lists of bank accounts and Aadhaar numbers to the banks for accelerated Aadhaar seeding. Meeting the seeding targets was the top priority and due verification, once again, took the back seat.

Thus the groundwork required for APBS to work – reliable seeding of bank accounts with Aadhaar – had simply not been done when the APBS was rolled out. The seeding mess, it seems, was sought to be cleaned up by making “e-KYC” compulsory. This essentially means that account holders were required to go through biometric authentication to verify their Aadhaar number and identity information. To enforce e-KYC, many banks used the “ultimoatum method”: a deadline was set, and people’s accounts were blocked when they missed the deadline.

Compulsory e-KYC became a nightmare for poor people, for a number of reasons: some did not know what they were supposed to do, others had problems with biometric authentication, and others still struggled with

inconsistencies between the Aadhaar database and the bank database. Among the worst victims were old-age pensioners. To this day, in Jharkhand, many pensioners are struggling to understand why their pension was discontinued after e-KYC was made compulsory.

A risky bridge

So far so bad. But there is worse: without waiting for the seeding mess to be cleaned up, the APBS was forced on millions without consent. Mapping (the induction of an Aadhaar-seeded account into the APBS), according to NPCI and UIDAI guidelines, should be based on an explicit request from the customer. This gives a measure of protection to educated middle-class customers. It ensures, for instance, that they know which account their money is being directed to by the APBS. For poor people, however, consent is a fiction. In Jharkhand at least, bank accounts have been mass-mapped onto the APBS without any semblance of consent, with or without e-KYC being completed – in other words, without necessarily verifying that an account has been correctly seeded with Aadhaar.

Recent discussions with local managers of 10 different banks spread across the Ranchi district revealed that they make

no clear distinction between seeding and mapping. The two steps are essentially conflated, based on default options and symbolic consent – sometimes just a signature on a photocopy of the account holder’s Aadhaar card, or below a consent line printed in English.

The result of this premature and coercive imposition of the APBS is that diverted payments have become a serious problem in Jharkhand. For example, recent victims include Premani Kunwar, an elderly widow in Garhwa district who died of hunger on December 1, 2017, two months after her pension was diverted by the APBS to someone else’s account.

Others affected are MGNREGA workers. Already discouraged by delays in wage payments, they have to contend now with diverted payments and other pathologies of the APBS. A recent study of the Indian School of Business (ISB), based on an analysis of more than 10 million payments in 2014-18, concludes that 38% of all the APBS payments of MGNREGA wages in Jharkhand “redirect wages to a completely unrelated account”. This study should have set alarm bells ringing, but little has been heard of it so far.

Even if the ISB study’s estimate (38%) is on the higher side, we do know from numerous ground reports that MGNREGA workers in Jharkhand often have great difficulty tracing or withdrawing their wages. For example, hundreds of workers in Boram block were mystified, a few years ago, when their wages stopped being credited to their Bank of India accounts. It turned out that wages had been redirected by the APBS to ICICI accounts that had been opened by business correspondents on their behalf without proper intimation. This is a precise analogue of the Airtel-wallet mix-up.

Lack of accountability

We end with a few overarching remarks. First, diverted payments are not the only problem associated with the APBS. There are others, discussed elsewhere, such as rejected payments – another nightmare for powerless DBT recipients.

Second, these problems are magnified by a pervasive lack of accountability. The APBS is a very opaque payment system and few people have a clear understanding of it. When people have problems of diverted or rejected payments, they have no recourse. More often than not, they are sent from one office to another.

Even with the best of intentions, a bank manager may be unable to help them. Guidelines for resolving payment problems are conspicuous by their absence. Some cases of diverted payments we have personally dealt with took days to understand and weeks to resolve.

Third, none of this seems to perturb the agencies that are promoting the APBS and related financial technologies. Last month, we tried to draw the attention of the NPCI and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to some of these issues. They gave us a patient hearing but their response was far from reassuring. Nobody seems to be responsible for monitoring the sort of problems we have discussed, let alone resolve them. Similarly, nobody appears to be in charge of enforcing the consent norms and other “guidelines” issued by the NPCI. The RBI may be the nominal regulator, but the real action is at the NPCI, the UIDAI and other strongholds of the Aadhaar lobby.

The UIDAI did take cosmetic damage control measures from time to time in the last two years. Judging from Jharkhand’s experience, however, the pathologies of the APBS continue to cause havoc on the ground. An independent and participatory review of the system is long overdue.

(Sakina Dhorajiwala is a researcher at LibTech India, based in Jharkhand, Niklas Wagner studies at the Free University of Amsterdam)

Please send in your answers to

dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

THE DAILY QUIZ

On this new year, here is a quiz on some significant historical occurrences and events related to January 1

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1

In 45 BCE, the Julian calendar took effect as the calendar of the Roman Empire, establishing January 1 as the first date of the year. Which famous personality, immortalised by Shakespeare, brought this into effect?

QUESTION 2

On January 1, 1887, Queen Victoria was given a title of great significance. What was this title?

QUESTION 3

Which famous revolution culminated in the ousting

of Fulgencio Batista on January 1, 1959?

QUESTION 4

This British Special Operations Executive agent of Indian origin known by the code name Madeline was born on this day. She was posthumously awarded the George Cross, the highest civilian decoration for gallantry for her services, in the U.K. Who was she?

QUESTION 5

This is a small volcanic rock in the South Atlantic. It is thousands of kilometres from civilisation. It was discovered in 1739 on this day by a French explorer, Charles Bouvet de Lozier. What is this island called and how is it popularly known?



Visual Question:

This Indian polymath, Padma Bhushan awardee, Fellow of the Royal Society, and collaborator with Albert Einstein was born on January 1. Who was he?

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz

1. This word which is internet slang for romantic appeal or charisma, was named Oxford’s 2023 Word of the Year. **Ans: Rizz**

2. This word gained popularity across the globe after Elon Musk’s lawyers said during a lawsuit that the businessman was often a subject of _____ videos. **Ans: Deepfake**

3. According to *The New York Times*, Adieu is the most popular first attempt word in the game. Which is the second most popular word? **Ans: Stare**

4. This word signifying periods of time, became popular on social media platforms this year. **Ans: Era**

5. Zhuh means to suddenly stop participating or engaging in (something) in a fit of anger. Is the statement true or false? **Ans: False, it means a small improvement, adjustment, or addition that completes the overall look, taste, etc. of something**

Visual: An amalgamation of the names of the two movies, this word was one of the most searched terms this year. **Ans: Barbenheimer**

Early Birds: Dweej B. Shinde | Princi Rajawat | Vibhuti Singh | Adeeba Nisar | Chandan



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

He will always be known as a nepo baby

No matter what he achieves, he’ll always be labelled the same. The success, therefore, is undeserving

S. Upendran

What is the meaning of ‘nepo baby’?

(L Damini, Mumbai)

The first syllable in ‘nepo’ rhymes with ‘pep’, ‘rep’ and ‘hep’, while the following ‘o’ sounds like the ‘o’ in ‘no’, ‘go’ and ‘so’. The word is pronounced ‘NEP-o’, with the stress on the first syllable. Although the expression ‘nepo baby’ is relatively new, the word from which we get ‘nepo’ is rather old. It is the abbreviated form of ‘nepotism’; a word which comes from the Latin ‘nepot’, meaning ‘nephew’. When highly influential people like politicians, businessmen, etc., use their clout to promote their friends, relatives and children, it is said to be a form of nepotism. The expression ‘nepo baby’ is normally used to refer to the children of well-known celebrities; children who have followed in the footsteps of their parents, and have succeeded in their careers. When you call someone a ‘nepo baby’, what you are suggesting is that the individual would not have succeeded if it hadn’t been for the influential parents. The success, therefore, is undeserving.

No matter what he achieves, he will always be known as a nepo baby.

What is the difference between ‘permeate’ and ‘penetrate’? (K.C. Amaral, Secunderabad)

The verb ‘penetrate’ comes from the Latin ‘penetratus’ meaning ‘to get into, enter’. When you penetrate something, you force your way into it. The use of this word suggests that there is some sort of stiff resistance to what you are trying to achieve – in this case, gain entry to something – and this has to be overcome. Since some sort of aggressive action is required for any kind of penetration, the word, at times, carries with it a negative connotation.

Luckily for the soldier, the stray bullet failed to penetrate his skull.

The word ‘permeate’ does not have the sense of violence that is associated with ‘penetrate’. It is normally used to mean to pass through something without any rupture or tear; the entry, unlike in the case of penetration, is gradual and subtle. The word is mostly used when talking about smells and liquids.

The smell of fresh filter coffee permeated the room.

Why do we say ‘a three-day event’ and not ‘a three-days event’?

(Muhammed Akram, Kasargod)

In a sentence like ‘It’s a three-day event’, ‘day’ is functioning as an adjective, and not as a noun; it, therefore, is used in its singular form – not plural. Although it comes after a number (‘three’ in this case), it remains singular. Here are a few more examples.

The young couple went on a two-week honeymoon. (Not ‘weeks’)

Last week, the students went on a five-mile trek. (Not ‘miles’)

If you wish to use ‘weeks’ and ‘miles’ in the above sentences, then they can be rewritten as:

The honeymoon of the young couple lasted two weeks.

Last week, the students went on a long trek; it was nearly five miles.

upendranky@gmail.com

Word of the day

Admonish:

scold or counsel in terms of someone’s behaviour

Synonyms:

criticise, reproach, warn

Usage:

We had to admonish a student for arriving late to the class.

Pronunciation:

bit.ly/admonishpro

International Phonetic Alphabet:

/əd'monɪʃ/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to letters@thehindu.co.in with the subject ‘Text & Context’

From Page One

Aadhaar-linked pay made mandatory

Government sources, however, say the decision not to extend the deadline again is guided by active workers, rather than job card holders. Active workers are those who have worked for at least one day over the past three financial years. Till December 27, 12.7% of these active workers are still not eligible for the new system. Of the 25.25 crore registered workers, 14.35 crore are categorised as active workers.

Sources said that in its communication making the system mandatory, the Ministry has asked the State governments to take a lenient view if linking has not been done for any genuine reason.

Deletion of cards

Anecdotal evidence and ground reports suggest that facing pressure from the Union government to have 100% compliance with the new system, the States have deleted a number of cards ineligible for Aadhaar payments. These includes cases where there were discrepancies between Aadhaar and the job card, due to issues such as different spellings of names. The cards have been deleted citing various reasons, including that the worker was "not willing to work".

LibTech India, a consortium of academics and activists, says the names of 7.6 crore workers have been deleted over the past 21 months.

"Compelling the use of ABPS with more than one-third of the total MNREGS-registered workers rendered ineligible will inevitably lead to the denial of the right to work. This stands in direct contravention to the Act passed by the Parliament," Chakradhar Buddha, a senior researcher at LibTech India says.

Mr. Buddha said the government should not only revoke the mandatory implementation but also direct the States to reinstate names of workers erroneously deleted and provide due compensation for the loss of work opportunities.

The new systems uses the workers' 12-digit Aadhaar as their financial address. To get payment, a worker's Aadhaar details must be seeded to their job card; their Aadhaar details must be seeded to their bank account; their Aadhaar must be mapped with the National Payments Corporation of India database; and finally, the bank's institutional identification number must itself be mapped with that database. The government contends that ABPS implementation will plug leaks, ensure speedy payments, and reduce rejection.

Panagariya to head 16th Finance Commission

The Finance Ministry on Sunday notified President Droupadi Murmu's order for Mr. Panagariya's appointment. The terms of reference for the panel were approved by the Cabinet on November 29.

Mr. Panagariya, a Columbia University Professor and trade economist, had served as the first Vice-Chairman of the NITI Aayog, which replaced the Planning Commission, from 2015 to 2017.

The names of the members of the commission will be notified separately, says the order, which appointed Ritvik Ranjanam Pandey, who was earlier a Joint Secretary in the Department of Revenue, as the panel's secretary.

"The Chairman and other members of the Commission shall hold office from the date on which they respectively assume office upto the date of the submission of report or October 31, 2025, whichever is earlier," the order specified.

October 2025 is the deadline set for the commission to submit its recommendations, so that they can be incorporated in the Budget exercise.

'NIA achieved conviction rate of 94.7% in 2023'

Devesh K. Pandey

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) achieved a phenomenal conviction rate of 94.7%, arrested 625 accused, and attached assets worth about ₹56 crore in 2023. The agency cracked down on the nexus between pro-Khalistan operatives, gangsters, and drug smugglers, and also carried out operations against the modules linked to the Islamic State and other banned terror outfits.

There was an increase of nearly 28% in the number of arrests compared with 490 in 2022. Among those arrested were 65 allegedly related to the IS, 114 in the other "jihadi terror" cases, 45 accused of human trafficking, 28 accused of terrorist and organised criminal activity, and 76 linked to the Left-Wing Extremism cases, the agency said on Sunday.

SC's translation projects picked up good speed in 2023

Abhinav Lakshman

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court's monumental project of translating all of its 36,000 judgments into Scheduled Languages achieved unprecedented speed in 2023, with the E-SCR portal starting with just 2,238 translated judgments in January and ending the year with over 31,000.

Currently, the highest number of translated judgments are in Hindi at 22,396, followed by Punjabi (3,572), Kannada (1,899), Tamil (1,172), and Gujarati (1,112).

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, in his Republic Day speech, said that the Supreme Court was on a mission to provide judgments in all Scheduled Languages – a project that started under the tenure of Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi in mid-2019 and taken forward by his successors.

Justice Gogoi had at the time given credit to his successor and then number two judge, Justice S.A. Bobde, for first mooted the idea of translating the

Geelani-founded outfit declared 'unlawful body'

The Tehreek-e-Hurriyat is involved in activities to separate J&K from India, says Home Minister; many cases registered against the outfit under various Sections of the UAPA, says Ministry

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

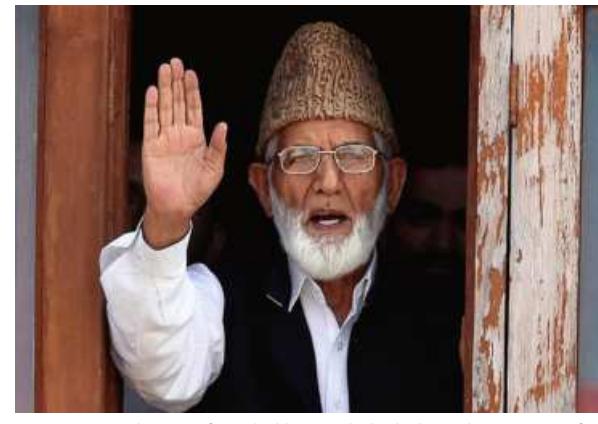
The Union Home Ministry on Sunday declared Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, Jammu and Kashmir (TeH) an "unlawful association" under Section 3 of the anti-terror law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

The TeH is one of the constituents of the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and was founded by separatist Syed Ali Shah Geelani, who died in 2021.

Home Minister Amit Shah posted on X: "The outfit is involved in forbidden activities to separate J&K from India and establish Islamic rule. The group is found spreading anti-India propaganda and continuing terror activities to fuel secessionism in J&K."

He added: "Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's zero-tolerance policy against terrorism, any individual or organisation found involved in anti-India activities will be thwarted forthwith."

The Ministry said that many criminal cases had



Under ban: The TeH, founded by Syed Ali Shah Geelani, is one of the constituents of the All Party Hurriyat Conference. AP

been registered against this organisation under various Sections of the UAPA, the Arms Act, the Ranbir Penal Code, and the Indian Penal Code.

The notification said the TeH was known for its involvement in fomenting terrorism and anti-India propaganda for fuelling the secessionist activities in Jammu and Kashmir and the leaders and members of the outfit had been involved in raising funds through various sources, including Pakistan and its proxy organisations for perpetrating unlawful activities, including support-

ing terrorist activities, sustained stone pelting on security forces in Jammu and Kashmir.

"The TeH and its members by their activities show sheer disrespect towards the constitutional authority and constitutional set-up of the country... members are paying tributes to terrorists who were killed in encounters with security forces and its members have been involved in supporting terrorist activities with an intent to create a reign of terror in the country," the Ministry said.

The Home Ministry said

the TeH indulged in unlawful activities, which are prejudicial to the integrity, sovereignty, security, and communal harmony of the country and the outfit never believed in a democratic system of governance and the TeH leadership gave repeated calls to boycott Assembly elections on multiple occasions.

The Ministry said that if there is no immediate curb of unlawful activities of the TeH, it will use the opportunity to continue advocating the secession of J&K from the Union of India while disputing its accession to the Union of India, continue with the anti-national activities; and will continue to propagate false narrative and anti-national sentiments among the people of Jammu and Kashmir with the intention to cause disaffection against India and disrupt public order.

The Union government directed that this notification shall, subject to any order that may be made under Section 4 of the UAPA, have effect for a period of five years from the date of its publication in the official gazette.

Navy deploys frigates, destroyers to assist commercial vessels

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI



Boost security: m.v. *Chem Pluto* which was attacked by a drone in the Arabian Sea.

Against the backdrop of the increasing attacks on commercial ships transiting the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Arabian Sea, the Indian Navy said on Sunday that it had substantially enhanced maritime surveillance efforts in the central and north Arabian Sea and "augmented force levels".

"Task Groups comprising destroyers and frigates have been deployed to undertake maritime security operations and render assistance to merchant vessels in case of any incident. Aerial surveillance by long-range maritime patrol aircraft and Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) has been enhanced to have a complete maritime domain awareness," the Navy said in a statement.

With Coast Guard

Towards effective surveillance of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of India, the Navy is operating in close coordination with the Coast Guard, it said.

The hijacking of m.v. *Ruen* approximately 700 nautical miles off the Indian coast and the drone attack on m.v. *Chem Pluto*

The first phase of the India-China border road project (ICBR) was initiated in 2005 when it was decided that the Home Ministry would construct 27 priority roads with a total length of 608 km along the border with China. The second phase of the ICBR project was approved on September 21, 2020.

The Ministry added that 184.39 km of roads had been constructed along the Bangladesh border, and 120.06 km along the Nepal border.

In all, 88 border outposts were constructed in 2023.

The Ministry said that 2.4 km of the border with Myanmar and 18 km of the border with Pakistan had been fenced.

4G services will be provided at 1,117 border outposts in six years: Centre

Vijaita Singh

NEW DELHI

The Union government has approved 4G mobile services for more than 1,100 border outposts along India's international borders, including the border with China, at a cost of ₹1,545.66 crore, the Home Ministry said in its year-end review.

The Ministry said it had signed a tripartite agreement with the Department of Telecommunications and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited to execute the project over the next six-and-a-half years.

The project will cover 1,117 border outposts and intelligence posts of the armed forces and the Intelligence Bureau.

According to the memorandum, the ministries are required to submit their proposals by January 8.

The interim Budget 2024-25 is likely to be presented on February 1.

of the 379 villages and hamlets approved under the 4G saturation project for the Union Territory of Ladakh, mobile phone towers have been established at only nine sites, with the foundation work completed at 34 sites.

Since 2020, India and China have been engaged in a stand-off at multiple locations along the demarcated Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

Border road projects

The Ministry said that this year, 48.03 kilometres of roads had been constructed along the China border, while four border outposts and three helipads had been added.

After the June 2020 inci-



The Ministry has signed an agreement with DoT and BSNL.

dent at Galwan in Ladakh, when 20 Indian soldiers were killed in violent clashes with Chinese forces, the Union government sanctioned 32 roads along the China border, according to a report tabled in the Parliament in 2022.

The report said that 32 helipads were being constructed and upgraded along the China border.

'NIA achieved conviction rate of 94.7% in 2023'

Devesh K. Pandey

NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) achieved a phenomenal conviction rate of 94.7%, arrested 625 accused, and attached assets worth about ₹56 crore in 2023. The agency cracked down on the nexus between pro-Khalistan operatives, gangsters, and drug smugglers, and also carried out operations against the modules linked to the Islamic State and other banned terror outfits.

There was an increase of nearly 28% in the number of arrests compared with 490 in 2022. Among those arrested were 65 allegedly related to the IS, 114 in the other "jihadi terror" cases, 45 accused of human trafficking, 28 accused of terrorist and organised criminal activity, and 76 linked to the Left-Wing Extremism cases, the agency said on Sunday.

Six workers killed in fire at a factory in Maharashtra

The Hindu Bureau

PUNE

Six workers were killed in a fire that broke out at a gloves-making factory at Sambhajinagar (formerly known as Aurangabad) in Maharashtra on Sunday morning.

+

Even for the Hindi translations that are most common on the E-SCR portal, lawyers practising in States such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have told *The Hindu* that the absence of headnotes in the translated judgments is another barrier in them being used.

there was a lack of expert translators who could get the job done accurately.

Even for the Hindi translations that are most common on the E-SCR portal, lawyers practising in States such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have told *The Hindu* that the absence of headnotes in the translated judgments is another barrier in them being used.

Project disclaimer

But even as the project continues, the court has ensured that each translated judgment comes with a disclaimer: "Supreme Court Registry will not be responsible for incorrect or inaccurate translation and for any error, omission or discrepancy in the content of translated text. The translation of judgments is provided for general information and shall have no legal effect for compliance used."

As for Tamil translations, Justice Chandrachud told *The Hindu*, "I have seen some of the translations made so far. No one can read them. For each word in law in English, we have different usages in Tamil Nadu and there is no standardised version created for translations."

He added that while the AI system for translations had its own problems, and



Great pace: CJI D.Y. Chandrachud had said, the SC was on a mission to provide its judgments in all Scheduled Languages. FILE PHOTO

Further, the translated rulings come with a disclaimer that absolves the Supreme Court Registry of any responsibility for incorrect or inaccurate translations.

And apart from Hindi, there is no standardised glossary of legal terminology in many other regional languages to facilitate uniform translations from English, which has already led to incoherent translations in some languages such as Tamil, said Justice K. Chandru (retd), former judge of the Madras High Court. The Bar Council of

India's Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti, chaired by Justice Bobde, is currently working on creating this "common core vocabulary" for all Indian regional languages, the government said earlier this year.

A Supreme Court source said that they started with breaking down the judgments made so far. No one can read them. For each word in law in English, we have different usages in Tamil Nadu and there is no standardised version created for translations."

He added that while the AI system for translations had its own problems, and

Expressing grief over the accident, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde announced compensation of ₹5 lakh each to the kin of the deceased workers.

Modi highlights 'Vocal for local', Chandrayaan-3

In his *Mann ki Baat* radio broadcast, the PM also touches upon women's reservation Bill, better ranking in the Global Innovation Index, and achievements in sports meets, and Oscar wins

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

In the 108th episode of *Mann Ki Baat* on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi shared his best wishes for the New Year.

Reflecting on the year gone by, Mr. Modi said, "In this very year, 'Nari Shakti Vandana Act', which has been awaited for years, was passed. The record business on Deepavali proved that every Indian is giving importance to the mantra of 'Vocal for Local'."

Mr. Modi recollects that 2023 was marked by the success of Chandrayaan-3 and the Oscar awards for the song "Naatu-Naatu" from the movie *RRR* and *The Elephant Whisperers*. "Through them, the world saw the creativity of India and understood our bonding with the environment," Mr. Modi said.

"Our players won 107



Looking back: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and BJP chief J.P. Nadda listening to *Mann Ki Baat* on Sunday. PTI

medals in Asian Games and 101 medals in Asian Para Games. Indian players won everyone's heart with their performance in the Cricket World Cup," he said.

An inspiring victory

"The victory of our women's cricket team in the Under-19 T-20 World Cup was very inspiring. Now Paris Olympics will be held in 2024, for which the whole country is encouraging her players," he said.

"In 2015, we were ranked 81st in the Global Innovation Index – today our rank is 40th. This year, the number of patents filed in India was high, of which about 60% were from domestic funds. This time the highest number of Indian universities have been included in the QS Asia University Rankings," the Prime Minister added.

Mr. Modi spoke about an experiment in which he used the AI tool Bhashini. Using the tool, his address

in Hindi was translated live in Tamil at an event in Kashi. "The day is not far when an address will be delivered in one language and the public will listen to the same speech in their own language in real time. You can imagine how big a change would take place when this technology starts being widely used in our schools, our hospitals, our courts. I would urge today's young generation to further explore AI tools related to real time translation and make them 100% foolproof," Mr. Modi said.

He also lauded the unique initiative of a tribal school in Jharkhand to provide education to its children in their mother tongue. "Children are being imparted education in Kudukh language in Manglo village of Garhwa district. The name of this school is, 'Karthik Oraon Adivasi Kudukh School'. About 300 tribal children study in this school," he said.

Amid churn, Assembly Speaker calls on RJD chief

Press Trust of India

PATNA

Bihar Assembly Speaker Awadh Bihari Chaudhary on Sunday called on Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) president Lalu Prasad, at a time when the State is witnessing a political churn.

Mr. Chaudhary, who belongs to the RJD, met the party supremo at the official residence of the latter's wife and former Chief Minister Rabri Devi. Mr. Prasad's elder son and Minister Tej Pratap Yadav had accompanied the speaker.

After the meeting, Mr. Chaudhary told presspersons, "I had met Laluji to extend greetings on the eve of the New Year. There was nothing political about it." The development came close on the heels of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar taking over as the national president of the JD(U), following the resignation of his trusted aide Rajiv Ranjan Singh, aka "Lalan".

There had been speculation that Lalan had grown too close to Mr. Prasad which had made Mr. Kumar uncomfortable. However, in a gesture that appeared to be aimed at dispelling speculation, Mr. Kumar was with Mr. Lalan when he received a rousing welcome from the JD(U) cadre upon return from Delhi on Friday.

Congress asks PM to fulfil promises on housing, farm incomes and economy

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Congress, on the eve of the New Year on Sunday, attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and asked him to fulfil the promises that he made to people before coming to power.

The Opposition party also alleged that there was no accountability for the Union government in 2023 too.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, in a post on the social media platform X, said the BJP's lies were the strongest. "Narendra Modiji, Today is the last day of 2023. By 2022, you had said, income of the farmers will be dou-



Mallikarjun Kharge

bled, all Indians will get a house, electricity will be available throughout the day and night and the economy will touch five trillion dollars. Nothing of this has happened. But every Indian now knows that BJP's lies are the strongest," Mr. Kharge said.

In another post, the Congress said that Mr. Modi had not held any press conferences.

"No accountability. Jumla politics. 2023 was no different, Modiji," the party said.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh questioned the decision of the government over the delay in conducting the Census.

Responding to *The Hindu's* report on the issue, Mr. Ramesh said: "The inordinate delay in conducting the decennial Census last due for 2021 raises several questions. It is not just related to the Covid pandemic. Undoubtedly there is something brewing," he said on X.

In another post, the Congress said that Mr. Modi had not held any press conferences.

"No accountability. Jumla politics. 2023 was no different, Modiji," the party said.

गारत सरकार - अंतरिक्ष विभाग / GOVERNMENT OF INDIA - DEPARTMENT OF SPACE
निर्माण एवं अनुरक्षण समूह, एसएसी-शार / CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE GROUP, SDSC-SHAR
श्रीहरिकोटा / SRIHARIKOTA - 524124

संक्षिप्त ई-निविदा सूचना / Brief E-TENDER NOTICE
संस्कार-सीएमपी जिलेविडा नं/शार-संस्कार-सीएमपी-सूचना-1 / निविदा-PT-23/23-24 तिथि: Date. 29.12.2023

मार्ग के राष्ट्रपति की ओर से "एसएमपी-सूचना-1" के निविदा मांग के नवीनीकरण* (टी/सी-23-089, अनुमानित लागत ₹ 23.38 लाख), "एसएसी-शार के एसएसी-यूनिट-1 के एवआइएल सुविधा में पाव स्तरीय छत उपचार" (टी/सी-23-090, अनुमानित लागत ₹ 8.38 लाख), "एसएमपी-सूचना-1 के शार उप-केंद्र एवं उपी-उपी उपचार के चारों तरफ कॉर्सा के नवीनीकरण" (टी/सी-23-091, अनुमानित लागत ₹ 18.02 लाख), "एसएमपी-सूचना-1 के एवआइएल सुविधा में शौचालय नवीनीकरण का कार्य" (टी/सी-23-093, अनुमानित लागत ₹ 11.84 लाख) त्रैते मद दर ई-निविदाएं आमंत्रित की जाती हैं। निविदा दस्तावेजों को 16.01.2024 को 14:30 बजे तक डाउनलोड किया जा सकता है। इच्छुक निविदाकारी विस्तृत सूचना के लिए संस्कार वेबसाइट www.isro.gov.in या www.tenderwizard.com/ISRO देखें।

On behalf of President of India, Item Rate tenderers are invited through e-tendering for "Refurbishment of Disposal Bed @ SMPC Unit-1" (TIC-23-090, Est. cost ₹ 23.38 Lakhs); "Five layer roof treatment at HIL facility @ SMPC Unit-1, SDSC SHAR." (TIC-23-090, Est. cost ₹ 8.38 Lakhs); "Refurbishment fencing all-round the SHAR Sub-station & 132 kv substation at SMPC Unit-1" (TIC-23-091, Est. cost ₹ 27.76 Lakhs); "Periodical Painting at SMPC Unit-2" (TIC-23-092, Est. cost ₹ 18.02 Lakhs); "Toilet Renovation works in CISF Barracks at SMP & ETP" (TIC-23-093, Est. cost ₹ 11.84 Lakhs). Tender documents can be downloaded up to 16.01.2024, 14:30 hrs. Interested tenderers may visit www.isro.gov.in or www.tenderwizard.com/ISRO for details.

हस्तांतर-संस्कारी शार / Sd/- GROUP HEAD, CMG / SDSC SHAR

Office of The Additional Chief Engineer, PHED, Region-Kota

Notice Inviting Bid

Bids for works are invited from interested bidders upto 03.01.2024, 18:00 Hours. Other particulars of the bid may be visited on the <http://www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>, <http://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in>, website detail are following:-

NIT No.	Name of work	Estimated Cost	Date & time for online submission of tender
19/2023-24	Operation and Maintenance of (192 MLD Plant) World Bank Pump House, Recycle Pump House, Cph. 33 KV GSS, 64 Mid WTP Unit I, II & III (With Chlorinator) at Akelgarh Head Works Kota for 05 years UBN No. PHE2324WSOB10591	Rs. 491.25 Lacs	
20/2023-24	Operation and Maintenance work of transmission and Cluster Distribution System, Package-I&II of Chapi-Jhalawar-Jhalrapatan water supply Project for 5 Years, District- Jhalawar UBN No. PHE2324WLOB10592	Rs. 1705.57 Lacs	14.12.2023 at 10.00 Hrs upto 03.01.2024 (upto 18:00 Hrs)
21/2023-24	Work of Construction of OHSS CWR, Pump House and Providing, Laying, Jointing, Testing and commissioning of Feeder Pipe Line from Akelgarh Head Works to University of Kota District Kota UBN No. PHE2324WLOB10593	Rs. 762.29 Lakh	

(Mahesh Jangid)
Additional Chief Engineer
PHED, Region, Kota

DIPR/C/16253

INDIA bloc is keen on dragging country down: Nadda

The Hindu Bureau

LUCKNOW

BJP president J.P. Nadda on Sunday targeted the Congress and said that those who had left no stone unturned in doing injustice to society were now thinking about holding a *Nyay Yatra*.

He said the Opposition Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) was aiming to bring down the country while Prime Minister Narendra Modi was taking it forward. "Those people who left no stone unturned in doing injustice to society are imagining the *Nyay Yatra* these days. Our imagination of developed India is when youth, women, poor, and farmers join the pace of development, then India becomes developed," Mr. Nadda said in Lucknow.

He also lauded the unique initiative of a tribal school in Jharkhand to provide education to its children in their mother tongue. "Children are being imparted education in Kudukh language in Manglo village of Garhwa district. The name of this school is, 'Karthik Oraon Adivasi Kudukh School'. About 300 tribal children study in this school," he said.

From Article 370 to new criminal laws, second Modi term draws ideological arc

NEWS ANALYSIS

Nistula Hebbar

NEW DELHI

If the current tenure of the Narendra Modi-led government began with the abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370, it ends with a more fundamental change: replacing the three British-era criminal laws.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which replaces the Indian Penal Code; Bharatiya Nagarik Suvarsha Sanhita, which replaces the Code of Criminal Procedure; and the Bharatiya Saksha Adhiniyam, in place of the Evidence Act; form a large part of what the government has described as its decolonisation project.

While the three "core issues" of the BJP – abrogation of special status under Article 370, construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, and the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code – are front and centre in any discussion of the party's ideology, the decolonisation project, as the BJP understands it, has been the quietest meta narrative running through it.

The BJP's understanding of decolonisation stems from its belief that despite independence from British rule, the country continued to be ruled by a Westernised elite which perpetuated the systems through which privileging of Western ideas and education



Core ideas: BJP workers celebrating after the Supreme Court's verdict on Article 370, outside the party's office in Mumbai. ANI

continued. While changes such as emphasis on local languages and referring to India as "Bharat" in government communication in English has been around for some time, the most fundamental change has been through the three Sanhitas.

Responding to the debate on the Bills in the Lok Sabha, Home Minister Amit Shah said they "stressed justice rather than punishment". "This is a pure Indian law after removing all the British imports," he said.

According to Mr. Shah, the new laws catch up with the fact that India is now a sovereign nation, and the remnants of being a colonial subject have been removed, which is reflected, by prioritising sections on crimes against women and children, over the protection of Ram Temple, the second term of Mr. Modi creates an ideological arc in its attempt to reimagine a new India," he said. The Winter Session was the last "working session" of Parliament as India heads into an election year. For the second Modi government, one that began with one legacy legislation being read down, the replacing of the criminal laws with an "Indianised" version is an ideological stamp that closes the circle.



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"Jnana Sangama", Belagavi - 590 018, Karnataka State, India
Phone: (0831) 2405468 Fax: (0831) 2405467 www.vtu.ac.in
Ref: VTU/BGM/LIB/Consortium-24/2023-24/5181 dated:29-12-2023

INVITATION FOR PROPOSAL FROM ORIGINAL E-RESOURCES/PUBLISHERS

The Visvesvaraya Technological University, Belagavi, invites proposals from the existing/new original publishers of e-Resources (India & Abroad) for subscription of e-Resources viz. e-Books, e-Journals, Technology platform, & multimedia e-Learning Resources related to Engineering, Technology, Management, Architecture and Allied Branches of Engineering Science, to the Member colleges of VTU Consortium. The proposal should also include a list of their e-Resources Board-wise along with price details for slab of subscription as per format. The proposals must be addressed to the Registrar, VTU, "Jnana Sangama", Belagavi-590018, Karnataka, India, & shall be sent on or before 31st January 2024 at 5:30pm. The envelope should be superscribed as "Proposal for Subscription/Renewal/Purchase of e-Resources for VTU-Consortium-2024-25". The format of the proposal may be downloaded from the website: www.vtu.ac.in

Sd/-REGISTRAR

DIPR/BGM/RO-NO 862/KSMCA/2023-24

Office of The Additional Chief Engineer, PHED, Region-Kota

Notice Inviting Bid

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IN BRIEF



India records 841 new COVID cases, 3 deaths in one day

India logged 841 new cases of COVID-19, the highest in 227 days, in the 24 hours to 8 a.m. on Sunday. The number of active cases was recorded at 4,309, the Health Ministry said. Three deaths, one each from Kerala, Karnataka and Bihar, had been reported in the 24 hours. India had recorded 865 new cases on May 19. The number of daily cases had dropped to double-digits till December 5 but cases have again gone up after the emergence of a new variant and cold weather. During the pandemic, more than 4.5 crore people had been infected and over 5.3 lakh deaths had been reported in about four years. PTI

VHP flags fraud in the name of Ayodhya Ram temple trust

The Vishva Hindu Parishad on Sunday said "some people" have been seeking funds in the name of the Ayodhya Ram temple trust without any approval and a complaint has been made to Uttar Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and the Union Home Ministry requesting immediate action against the culprits. In a post on X, VHP national spokesperson Vinod Bansal cautioned people against falling into the trap of people "trying to dupe" them in the name of the Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra. He also shared the complaint sent to the Uttar Pradesh police chief, a copy of which was marked to Mr. Adityanath and Home Minister Amit Shah. PTI

FORDA writes to Mandaviya over UPSC faculty vacancies

The Federation of Resident Doctors Association (FORDA) has written to Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, seeking timely recruitment of regular faculty members in all medical colleges and hospitals. "...it has come to our attention that there has been a significant paucity of vacancies released by UPSC [Union Public Service Commission] for regular posts in certain clinical branches, including orthopaedics, medicine, surgery, and others, persisting for an alarming duration of up to four years," it said. Now, valuable job opportunities seem to be increasingly replaced by contractual, and regular recruitment by ad hoc practices, it added.

Delhi HC issues notice on boxer's Arjuna Award plea

The Delhi High Court issued notice in response to a petition by World Boxing Champion Nitu Ghanghas, requesting authorities to consider and confer her with the Arjuna Award. The high court posted the case for hearing on January 5 after counsel appearing for the Centre submitted that a representation made by Ms. Ghanghas on the issue will be considered. Senior advocate Mohit Mathur, appearing on behalf of the Ms. Ghanghas, submitted that his client has already given a representation dated December 17 in respect of her not being awarded the honour given for outstanding performance in sports and games.

Lemongrass, mint spread scent of change in Odisha

Satyasundar Barik

RAIGHAR

Odisha's tribal communities, finding it difficult to make a living from rain-fed agriculture and scarce natural resources, have new hope. High-value aromatic crops and floriculture have recently emerged as a means to supplement their livelihood.

After the fairly successful introduction of aromatic plants in Nabarangpur district, where tribal farmers showed a keen interest in diversifying from the traditional maize crop, neighbouring Koraput in southern Odisha has followed suit.

With the help of the Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP) in Lucknow, the district has recently introduced different aromatic plants such as menthol mint (the CIM-Unnati variety), rosemary (Hariyali variety), patchouli (CIM-Samarth), damask roses (Ranisahiba), chamomile, and geraniums (CIM-Bharat).

The favourable climate and availability of vast stretches of land offer exciting opportunities for farmers to foray into aromatic plantation, though it is an unfamiliar domain.

Higher value

The district administration is confident that tribal farmers can adapt to newer high-value crops, given that strawberry, which had never been grown in the region till a few years ago, is now approaching commercial production within years of field trials.

The CIMAP, a Council of Scientific and Industrial Research laboratory, started an experimental lemongrass plantation in Nabarangpur a couple of years ago.

Crops and varieties were selected considering their tolerance to high levels of water stress. At present, lemongrass is grown across 300 acres of land in Nabarangpur.

Three improved distillation units have been installed to process lemongrass oil. Besides lemongrass, mentha, vetiver,



A tribal woman prepares lemongrass before sending them for oil distillation, in the Raigarh area. BISWARANJAN RUT

er, and citronella are grown in Nabarangpur.

Attracted by the high returns, Techchand Naik – who hails from the Gond tribe in the Raigarh area of Nabarangpur – left his job in a leading bank, where he earned more than ₹1 lakh each month, and took a plunge into lemongrass farming and distillation.

Currently, he has planted lemongrass on 35 acres of land and expects a guaranteed return of ₹1 lakh an acre. "The more I gain experience in aromatic planta-

tion, the more will be the returns. Besides, I am exploring byproducts of oil distilled out of lemongrass, which will boost the income from aromatic plantation," he said.

Huge demand

"There is huge demand for aromatic plants in the market. Aromatic plants do not face regulatory challenges [that] medicinal plantations face. With little effort, farmers can surely get good returns from aromatic plantation. The district administration is facilitat-

ing setting up of distillation units for adding value to the crop," said Prashanta Rout, principal scientist with CIMAP.

At the end of 2023, the CSIR-Aroma Mission has touched 26 out of 30 districts of Odisha, through 46 clusters. Across the State, nearly 850 hectares have been planted with aromatic crops, while 22 distillation units have been installed, and have produced 25 to 30 tonnes of aromatic oil.

Much of the credit for introducing aromatic plants goes to Ajit Kumar Shasany, the director of the National Botanical Research Institute, Lucknow – another CSIR laboratory. In 2014-15, Mr. Shasany started creating an aromatic cluster near Raigarh on just 15 acres of land. The oil distilled from lemongrass grown there was sold out immediately in the open market.

Repel elephants

The crop was also an instant hit in Angul district, where farmers were dis-

3 arrested in case of molestation in IIT-BHU

The Hindu Bureau

LUCKNOW

Nearly two months after a woman student of the Indian Institute of Technology-Banaras Hindu University (IIT-BHU) was allegedly disrobed and molested on campus, three men were arrested by the Varanasi Police.

"The accused have been identified as Kunal Pandey, Anand, alias Abhishek Chauhan, and Saksham Patel. Necessary action is being taken as per law," said the police.

Opposition parties said the accused were members of the ruling BJP. "These are the new group of BJP workers, roaming freely under patronage of senior BJP leaders," wrote Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly and former Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav on X (formerly Twitter). The post included a picture of a local media report, which said Pandey is the convenor of the BJP IT cell's Varanasi Metropolitan unit, while Patel and Anand are the unit's co-convenor and working committee member, respectively. The assault took place on November 2.

Either the petitioners have simply failed in court or the government has got around the court direction through amendments of laws or sheer delay in implementation.

On paper, the statistics on Constitution Benches look impressive. The pendency of five-judge Constitution Bench cases was reduced from 36 to 19 between January 1 to December 15. Dates were notified for hearing six cases before seven-judge Benches and five before nine-judge Benches. The Supreme Court credited its "strenuous effort" for the achievement.

Chief Justice of India D.Y.

Chandrabhushan presided over five-judge Constitution Benches for a total of 71 days in 2023, delivering five judgments. He even headed a seven-judge Bench for four days and pronounced a judgment.

"Important matters like In Re Section 370, arbitration matters relating to stamped documents and their admissibility, heavy motor vehicles being driven on normal licenses, settling the tussle between Delhi government and the Centre, Maharashtra Legislative Assembly matter, the rights of LGBTQ [same sex

marriage], and other important matters have been duly heard and pronounced," the court said in a statement in December.

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The Central Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act of 2023, passed in the background of an unprecedented mass suspension of Opposition MPs, has subverted a March 2 Constitution Bench direction that the Chief Justice should be a member of the selection committee to pick the appointees.

The Centre, through the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2023, has also effectively nullified a Constitution Bench ruling in May which had upheld the authority of the Delhi government over civil services in the capital.

Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar is yet to pronounce his decision on the pending disqualification petitions against the Ek Nath Shinde camp under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution.

Pendency down, but petitioners disappointed in many cases

Constitution Bench rulings on abrogation of Article 370, same-sex marriage, and demonetisation are examples; there were also cases of the government getting around directions by amendments to laws or sheer delay in implementation



Long hours: Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrabhushan presided over five-judge Constitution Benches for 71 days last year. ANI

Chandrabhushan had himself presided over five-judge Constitution Benches for a total of 71 days in 2023, delivering five judgments. He even headed a seven-judge Bench for four days and pronounced a judgment.

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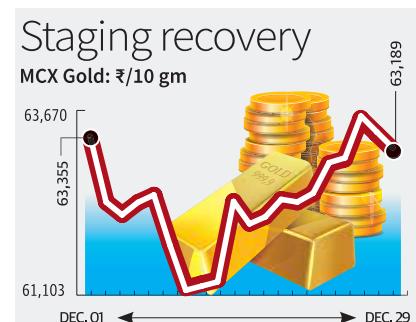
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MONEYWISE



Gold gains glitter, silver ebbs

PRECIOUS METALS

Weakness in the U.S. dollar, expectations of an interest rate reduction by the U.S. Federal Reserve aid a recovery in the yellow metal's price

B.Krishnakumar

The last month of the year 2023 was characterised by mixed sentiments towards precious metals. While Comex gold managed to regain its sheen after a weak start to the month, Comex silver ruled relatively weak. The weakness in the U.S. dollar and the expectations of an interest rate cut by the U.S. Federal Reserve triggered positive sentiment towards gold.

Comex gold gains

Comex gold gained 0.7% in December to end at \$2,071.8. The yellow metal posted a gain of 13.45% for 2023. Comex silver ended with a decline of 6.1% to settle at \$24.09.

Mirroring the trend in the global markets, MCX gold gained 0.9% in December and closed at ₹63,189 per 10-gram. MCX silver closed 4% lower at ₹74,400 per kilogram.

Comex gold ruled weak as anticipated last month. But the price did not reach the then mentioned downside target zone of \$1,960-\$1,980. The subsequent move above the positive trigger level of \$2,060 indicates that gold has resumed its prior uptrend.

The price could head to the immediate target zone of \$2,095-\$2,110. Only a fall below \$2,020 would invalidate this positive outlook.

The price of Comex silver moved in sync with last month's expectations. As anticipated, the price reached the target zone of \$24.75-\$25.25 mentioned last month. Comex silver price has been confined in a range of \$21.9-\$26.4. A breakout from this range would set the tone for the next big move in silver. Until then, expect volatile price action within this range.

Mirroring the global trend, MCX gold ruled firm in December. The price ruled weak in the beginning of the month and almost reached the downside target zone of 59,800-₹60,500. More recently, MCX gold has been trading in the ₹59,900-₹64,000 zone. A move above ₹64,000 would impart momentum to the upside and the price could then head to ₹65,500-₹66,000.

A fall below ₹59,900 would be a sign of weakness and could push the gold price to lower levels.

MCX silver rules weak

As observed last month, the MCX silver price ruled weak in the first half of December. The price almost reached the then mentioned downside target zone of ₹69,500-₹70,500. MCX silver has been trading recently in the ₹70,700-₹78,500 zone. A breakout from this zone would fuel the next significant directional move.

Until the price breaks out of the above range, expect volatile range-bound price action to persist. Above ₹78,500, the price could head to the ₹81,500-₹82,500 zone. A fall below ₹70,700 would be a sign of weakness and MCX silver could then slide to ₹66,000-₹67,500 zone.

To summarise, the short-term outlook for precious metals is mixed. While gold appears to be relatively stronger and set to head higher, silver is still confined in a trading range.

The author is a Chennai-based analyst / trader. This is not meant to be a trading or investment advice.



Making money: To maximise returns, buy when prices are low and sell after they shoot up on some external trigger. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Should you invest in Sovereign Gold Bonds?

Gold-price gains are far from even, they tend to rise sharply over short periods and retreat equally quickly; price spikes are usually triggered by global events such as geopolitical tensions

GOLD BONDS

Aarati Krishnan

Sovereign gold bonds (SGBs) have been attracting a lot of interest lately, after the first set of the bonds matured in November. Investors who bought SGBs in 2015 at a face value of ₹2,584 per bond have seen the maturity value zoom to ₹6,132 with a rise in market prices of gold.

This works out to an annualised return of about 10.8%, on top of the annual interest of 2.75% the SGBs have paid. This is an exceptional return for a government-backed instrument.

But, if you are planning to invest in SGBs in the hope of 10%-plus returns, hang on. You may need to tone down return expectations and weigh the pros and cons of SGBs against other gold investments.

Volatile returns
SGBs are Government of India borrowings denominated in gold. The bonds are issued at a face value pegged to the prevailing market price of gold. At maturity after 8 years, they are redeemed at the gold prices prevailing then.

SGBs score over physical jewellery or bullion on ability to deliver gold returns transparently, based on the prevailing market prices of gold. With jewellery or physical bullion, you incur making charges, GST and other costs at the time of purchase and again suffer deductions such as



But returns from SGBs are highly dependent on movements in gold prices between buy and sell dates. Also, they pay a nominal interest on face value

wastage, when selling it back to the jeweller. The costs eat substantially into returns even if gold prices have zoomed during the holding period. With SGBs you get prevailing gold prices sans deductions.

But returns from SGBs (like from physical gold) are highly dependent on movements in gold prices between buy and sell dates. Also, the bonds pay a nominal interest on face value, which used to be 2.75% earlier, but has been set at 2.5% now.

Many Indians believe gold prices rise every year. In reality, they move up and down and do not even manage a gain every year. Between 2015 and 2023, Indian gold investors faced two years of losses (8% fall in 2015 and 4% drop in 2021) and two years of lower-than fixed deposit returns (3% and 7% in 2017 and 2018). But bumper years like 2019 and 2020, when gold prices added 20%-plus, lifted the average return to 10.8%.

For these investors, price returns on gold originate from two sources – movements in the international price of gold (because most of the gold con-



You can't cash out SGBs at a time of your choice. Once sold, the bonds are traded on the exchanges. But, they tend to feature low trading volumes, making exit difficult

sumed in India is imported) and the movement of the rupee against the U.S. dollar (a weaker rupee adds to the import price). Swings in these two components make for a volatile combination. On an average, rupee depreciation has contributed 2-3% to the returns from gold. Should gold prices stay put or the rupee appreciate against the dollar, this can make returns from SGBs.

Unlike in equities, your ability to hold gold for a long period does not necessarily improve returns. A long-term rolling return analysis of gold from 1990 to 2020 showed that over 10-year holding periods, it offered less than 10% returns about half the time, while it returned over 12% about 40% of the time. This suggests you cannot rely heavily on SGBs to create wealth.

Unpredictable moves

Gold-price gains are far from even. It tends to rise sharply over a few weeks or months and retreat equally quickly. Price spikes are usually triggered by global events such as a financial crisis, geopolitical tension or flare-up in crude

oil prices. As the events are tough to predict, it becomes difficult to tell when gold will perform.

To maximise returns, buy when prices are ruling low and sell after they have shot up on some external trigger. This is a habit that Indian jewellery buyers have honed over time. But with SGBs, practising the strategy is difficult as the timing of buys or sells is not in your hands. SGBs are sold and redeemed during limited windows of time decided by the Reserve Bank of India.

Liquidity

Unlike physical gold or gold Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs) you cannot cash out of SGBs at a time of your choice. SGBs, once sold, are traded on the exchanges. But they tend to feature low trading volumes, making exit difficult. For an assured exit, you may need to wait for 5 years, after which RBI offers to buy them back at a fixed price. Or, you need to wait until maturity date 8 years later. Gold ETFs, in contrast, can be bought or sold at any time. But they don't pay interest. They also entail an annual management fee which you don't incur with SGBs.

For individuals, SGBs bought from RBI and held until maturity are exempt from capital gains tax. But all other forms of gold investments - jewellery, gold ETFs - are subject to short-term capital gains tax if held for less than 36 months and long-term capital gains tax if held longer.

Govt. bonds or bank deposits?

THINKINVESTOR

You cannot easily manage reinvestment risk, but you could spread deposits across large banks to moderate credit risk; in the end, it is a matter of what you are comfortable with

Venkatesh Bangarawuswamy

Previously in this column, we showed that bank deposits are important for goal-based investments as they help manage reinvestment risk. A reader wanted to know whether direct investment in government bonds are better. In this article, we show why bank deposits have an edge over government bonds.

Reinvestment risk vs. credit risk

All investments expose you to some risk. Equity investments, for instance, have high market risk. Bank deposits have credit risk – the risk that a bank may not return your deposit and/or pay interest on time. Government bonds do not run credit risk but pay interest every half year, exposing you to reinvestment risk. There is the risk of bond investments earning lower than the required return in any year, leading to goal failure.

Suppose you maturity-match bond investment with the time horizon for life goal. That is, to achieve a 10-year goal, suppose you invest in a 10-year government bond that pays 7% a year. This translates to a post-tax return of 4.9%, assuming 30% marginal tax rate. To achieve your goal at the end of 10 years, you must earn 4.9% every year on the interest income too. This is because the required return on your bond investment, referred to as the minimum acceptable return, is a post-tax compounded annual return. The issue is that you must find opportunities to reinvest the interest income at 4.9%. The risk is that you will be unable to find investment avenues if interest rates slide. Also, you must continually resist the temptation to spend the income on discretionary expenses such as entertainment and vacation.

The possibility that rates will be cut during the time horizon of life goal is high, given that most goals are typically longer than 5 years. Cumulative deposits and recurring deposits pay interest at maturity. The possibility of a large bank defaulting on its deposits is relatively low, although the magnitude of loss could be high in the event of a default.

Conclusion

You cannot easily manage reinvestment risk, but you could spread deposits across large banks to moderate credit risk. Note Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation insures your deposits, including savings account, to a maximum of ₹5 lakh per bank. In the end, it is a matter of which you are comfortable with – reinvestment risk (government bonds) or credit risk (bank deposits).

(The author offers training programmes for individuals to manage their personal investments)

Personal Loans

Rates and Charges		Loan amount 5 lakh Tenure 5 years	Loan amount 1 lakh Tenure 5 years	(% of loan amount)
Name of Lender	Interest Rate (%)	EMI (Rs)	EMI (Rs)	Processing fee
HDFC Bank	10.50 onwards	10,747 onwards	2,149 onwards	Up to Rs 4,999
Tata Capital	10.99 onwards	10,869 onwards	2,174 onwards	Flat Rs 51
State Bank of India	10.55-14.55	10,759-11,777	2,152-2,355	NIL (till 31 Jan. 2024)
ICICI Bank	10.65 onwards	10,784 onwards	2,157 onwards	Up to 2.50%
Bank of Baroda	10.10 onwards	10,648 onwards	2,130 onwards	Up to 2% (min Rs 1,000 and max Rs 10,000)
Axis Bank	10.49 onwards	10,744 onwards	2,149 onwards	Up to 2%
Kotak Mahindra Bank	10.99 onwards	10,869 onwards	2,174 onwards	Up to 3%
Bank of India	10.25-14.75	10,685-11,829	2,137-2,366	Up to 1% (Maximum Rs 5,000)
Canara Bank	10.65-15.65	10,784-12,066	2,157-2,413	Up to 1%
Punjab National Bank [^]	10.40-16.95	10,772-12,413	2,144-2,483	Up to 1%
HSBC Bank	9.99-16.00	10,621-12,159	2,124-2,432	Up to 2%
Federal Bank	11.49 onwards	10,994 onwards	2,199 onwards	Up to 3%
Union Bank of India	11.35-15.45	10,959-12,013	2,192-2,403	Up to 1% (Maximum Rs 7,500)
Bajaj Finserv	11.00 onwards	10,871 onwards	2,174 onwards	Up to 3.93%
Punjab & Sind Bank	10.15-12.80	10,660-11,325	2,132-2,265	Up to 1%
South Indian Bank	12.85-20.60	11,338-13,414	2,268-2,683	Up to 2%
UCO Bank	12.45-12.85	11,236-11,338	2,247-2,268	Up to 1% (Minimum Rs 750)
IDFC First Bank	10.75 onwards	10,809 onwards	2,162 onwards	Up to 3.50%
Bank of Maharashtra	10.00-12.80	10,624-11,325	2,125-2,265	1% (Rs 1,000-Rs 10,000)
Karnataka Bank	14.28	11,707	2,341	Up to 2% of loan amount (Min. Rs 2,500 & Max. Rs 8,500)
IndusInd Bank	10.49 onwards	10,744 onwards	2,149 onwards	Up to 3%

Car Loans

Rates and Charges		Loan amount 5 lakh Tenure 5 years	(% of loan amount)
Name of Lender	Interest Rate (%)	EMI (Rs)	Processing fee
Union Bank of India	8.70 - 10.45	10,307 - 10,735	Rs 1,000
Punjab National Bank	8.75 - 9.60	10,319 - 10,525	0.25% (Rs. 1,000 - Rs. 1,500)
Bank of Baroda	8.75 - 12.10	10,319 - 11,148	Up to Rs 500
Canara Bank	8.70 - 11.95	10,307 - 11,110	Nil till 31 December 2023
Bank of India	8.75 - 10.75	10,319 - 10,809	Nil
UCO Bank	8.45 - 10.55	10,246 - 10,759	0.5% (Up to Rs 5,000)
State Bank of India	8.75 - 9.80	10,319 - 10,554	Nil
Bank of Maharashtra [*]	8.70 - 13.00	10,307 - 11,377	Nil</

KINSHASA

Congo President Tshisekedi re-elected for a second term



Democratic Republic of Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi has been re-elected for a second term after getting more than 73% of the vote in this month's presidential election. Earlier on Sunday, Congo's main Opposition candidates asked supporters to take to the streets to protest after the release of provisional results. REUTERS

JERUSALEM

Katz to swap positions with Cohen as Israel's Foreign Minister



The Israeli government on Sunday approved the appointment of a new Foreign Minister to replace Eli Cohen, a statement said, in a pre-arranged reshuffle. Israel Katz, the current Energy Minister, will swap positions with Mr. Cohen as part of the ministerial rotation that is subject to parliamentary approval. AFP

SEOUL

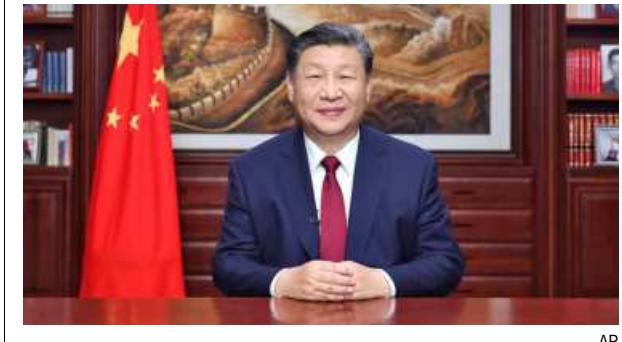
North Korea's Kim orders military to prepare for a possible 'war'



North Korea's Kim Jong-un wrapped up the year with fresh threats of a nuclear attack on Seoul and orders for a military arsenal build-up to prepare for a war that can "break out any time" on the peninsula. Plans were put out to launch three more spy satellites, build drones and develop electronic warfare capabilities. AFP

DHAKA

China's reunification with Taiwan is inevitable, says Xi on New Year



China's "reunification" with Taiwan is inevitable, President Xi Jinping said in his New Year's address, striking a stronger tone than he did last year with less than two weeks for the Chinese-claimed island's elections. The January 13 polls are happening at a time of fraught relations between Beijing and Taipei. REUTERS

Israel ready to let ships bring aid to Gaza's shores: Cohen

Reuters
JERUSALEM

Israel is prepared to let ships deliver aid to the war-ravaged Gaza Strip "immediately" as part of a proposed sea corridor from Cyprus, the Israeli Foreign Minister said on Sunday, naming four European countries as potential participants.

Under the arrangement first suggested by Nicosia in November, cargo would undergo security inspection in the Cypriot port of Larnaca before being ferried to the Gaza coast, 370 km away, rather than through neighbouring Egypt or Israel.

If the plan goes ahead, it would mark the first easing of an Israeli naval blockade imposed on Gaza in 2007.

The idea may also go some way toward meeting a UN Security Council resolution of December 22 calling for expanded humanitarian relief mechanisms.

Gaza war will continue for months, says Netanyahu

Officials in central Gaza say at least 35 people have been killed in Israeli strikes; Israel PM says he wants to assume control of Gaza's border with Egypt to ensure demilitarisation of the enclave

Associated Press
DEIR AL-BALAH

Israeli strikes in central Gaza killed at least 35 people on Sunday, hospital officials said, as fighting raged across the tiny enclave a day after Israel's Prime Minister said the war will continue for "many more months," resisting international calls for a cease-fire.



Protracted battle: An Israeli soldier carries a heavy shell past battle tanks deployed at a position in southern Israel on Sunday. AFP

Israel expanded its offensive to central Gaza this week. The fighting has pushed much of the population south, where people have flooded shelters and tent camps near the border with Egypt, even as Israel has also struck those areas.

In the area of Zweida in central Gaza, an Israeli air-strike killed at least 13 persons and wounded more than 55,000 others.

sons and wounded dozens of others, according to witnesses.

Army's claims

The Israeli military said it was battling militants in Khan Younis, where Israel believes Hamas leaders are hiding. It also said its forces operating in the urban Shati refugee camp, in northern Gaza, found a

bomb in a kindergarten and defused it. Hamas continued to launch rockets toward southern Israel.

Israel's plans

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel must maintain open-ended security control over the Gaza Strip. At a news conference on Saturday, he

said the war would continue for "many more months" and that Israel would assume control of the Gaza side of the border with Egypt.

"(It) must be in our hands, it must be sealed. It's clear that any other agreement will not guarantee the demilitarisation that we need and require," Mr. Netanyahu said. Israel says Hamas has smuggled weapons from Egypt, but Egypt is likely to oppose any Israeli military presence there.

U.S. shoots Houthi rebels after latest attack on container ship in Red Sea

Associated Press
BEIRUT

The U.S. military said on Sunday that its forces opened fire on Houthi rebels after they attacked a cargo ship in the Red Sea, killing several of them in an escalation of the maritime conflict linked to the war in Gaza.

The U.S. Central Command said the crew of the USS *Gravely* destroyer first shot down two anti-ship ballistic missiles fired at the Singapore-flagged *Maersk Hangzhou* late on Saturday, after the vessel reported getting hit by a missile earlier that evening as it sailed through the Southern Red Sea.

Four small boats then attacked the same cargo ship with small arms fire early on Sunday and rebels tried to board the vessel.

Next, the USS *Gravely* and helicopters from the



New battlefield: The ship came under attack from four small boats and the rebels tried to board the vessel. FILE PHOTO

said in a statement.

The events surrounding the *Maersk Hangzhou* represented the 23rd illegal attack by the Houthis on international shipping since November 19.

The Denmark-based shipping giant Maersk, owner of *Maersk Hangzhou*, said Sunday it would suspend shipping through the Red Sea again after the two attacks on its freighter.

Campaigning journalist and documentary maker John Pilger dead

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

Australian-born investigative journalist and documentary maker John Pilger, known for his support for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and his coverage of the aftermath of Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia and the Thalidomide scandal, has died in London, his family said on Sunday.

Pilger, who had mostly lived in Britain since the early 1960s, had worked for Reuters, Britain's left-

wing Daily Mirror and commercial channel ITV's former investigative programme *World In Action*.

In 1979, the ITV film *Year Zero: The Silent Death Of Cambodia* revealed the extent of the Khmer Rouge's crimes, and Pilger won an International Academy of Television Arts and Sciences award for his 1990s follow-up ITV documentary *Cambodia: The Betrayal*.

Pilger also made the 1974 documentary for ITV called *Thalidomide: The*

Ninety-Eight We Forgot, about the campaign for compensation for children after concerns were raised about birth defects when expectant mothers took the drug.

He received Bafta's Richard Dimbleby Award for factual reporting in 1991.

"It is with great sadness the family of John Pilger announce he died yesterday December 30, 2023 in London aged 84," it posted on X.

"His journalism and documentaries were cele-



brated around the world, but to his family he was simply the most amazing and loved Dad, Grandad and partner. Rest In

Peace."

Kevin Lygo, managing director of media and entertainment at ITV, called Pilger a "giant of campaigning journalism".

He had always "eschewed comfortable consensus" in favour of a "platform for dissenting voices over 50 years", he said.

Pilger also campaigned for the release of WikiLeaks founder Assange, who has been embroiled in a lengthy battle against extradition to the United States, and put up the cost

of his bail.

Former Pink Floyd musician Roger Waters paid tribute, calling him a "friend" and a "great man".

Truth to power

On X, WikiLeaks called Pilger a "ferocious speaker of truth to power, whom in later years tirelessly advocated for the release and vindication of Julian Assange".

During his career, Pilger made a series of remarks criticising American and British foreign policy, and

the treatment of Indigenous Australians.

Former leader of Britain's Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn wrote on X that he had given "a voice to the unheard and the occupied: in Australia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Chile, Iraq, East Timor, Palestine and beyond. Thank you for your bravery in pursuit of the truth - it will never be forgotten".

Pilger had also expressed controversial views on Russia and its President Vladimir Putin.

Danish Queen Margrethe to abdicate on January 14

Agence France-Presse
COPENHAGEN

Queen Margrethe of Denmark announced during her traditional New Year's Eve televised address that she would abdicate on January 14, making way for her son, Crown Prince Frederik. In two weeks, she would have completed 52 years in power.

Anahat leads dominant Indian run at Scottish Junior Open

SQUASH

Sports Bureau

Anahat Singh led a superb Indian performance at the 2023 Scottish Junior Open in Edinburgh, bagging the girls' under-19 title with an 11-6, 11-4, 11-5 victory over home favourite Robyn McAlpine in the final.

Subhash Choudhary rallied to beat compatriot Shiven Agarwal 5-11, 4-6, 6-11, 11-8, 11-5 in the boys' under-15 final, while Shreshth Iyer got the better of Shreyansh Jah 11-8, 11-8, 3-11, 11-8 in the boys' under-13 summit clash.

Top-seeded Indian Aadya Budhia displayed resilience in beating Malaysia's



Fantastic show: The Indian contingent that won a bunch of titles at the Scottish Junior Open. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Nia Chew 9-11, 11-8, 8-11, 11-8, 11-9 in the girls' under-13 final. Divyanshi Jain finished runner-up in the girls' under-11 final.

Watch My Stride takes the honours in first division of Auxiliary Plate

RACING

HYDERABAD: Trainer R.H. Sequeira's Watch My Stride (Shivansh up) claimed the Auxiliary Plate Div. I, the main event of Sunday's (Dec. 31) races. The winner is owned by Mr. Rama Sesu Eyunni & Mr. P. Prabhakar Reddy.

1. ASTONISH PLATE: DIVINE PROPHECY (P. Sai Kumar) 1, Flying Fury (Md. Ismail) 2, Imperia (Deepak Singh) 3 and Royal Parade (R.S. Jodha) 4. 1/2, 6 and 2-1/4, 1m, 12.22s. 224 (w), 11, 13 and 14 (p). SHP: 27, THP: 44, SHW: 12 and 10, FP: 72, Q: 32, Tanala: 165. Favouite: Divine Prophecy.

2. AUXILIARY PLATE (DIV. I): WATCH MY STRIDE (Shivansh) 1, City Of Blessing (Ajay Kumar) 2, Kingston (Rahul Singh) 3 and High Reward (Nakhat Singh) 4. Neck, 1/2 and 1-1/2, 2m, 24.63s. 106 (w), 19, 27 and 17 (p). SHP: 49, SHW: 37 and 60, FP: 915, Q: 413, Tanala: 5,145. Favouite: Watch My Stride.

3. DYNAMIC DANCER CUP: CARNIVAL LADY (Santosh Raj N.R.) 1, Hero Of The East (Abhay Singh) 2, Track Blazer (Ajay Kumar) 3 and Exclusive Spark (Md. Ismail) 4. Neck, 1/2 and 2-1/4, 1m, 39.76s. 137 (w), 18, 16 and 14 (p). SHP: 73, THP: 29, SHW: 18 and 49, FP: 475, Q: 14, Tanala: 2,236. Favouite: Exclusive Spark.

4. DILIGATE PLATE: QUALITY WARRIOR (Mukesh Kumar) 1, Exponent (R.S. Jodha) 2, Challenger (Md. Ekram Alam) 3 and Sundance Kid (Md. Arif) 4.

Owners: Mr. L. Arun Kumar & Mr. Rameshbabu. Trainer: B. Mukesh Kumar.

5. DILIGATE PLATE: QUALITY WARRIOR (Mukesh Kumar) 1, Exponent (R.S. Jodha) 2, Challenger (Md. Ekram Alam) 3 and Sundance Kid (Md. Arif) 4.

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Owners: Mr. L. Arun Kumar & Mr. Rameshbabu. Trainer: B. Mukesh Kumar.

7. GANGOTRI PLATE: DREAM JEWEL (Ajay Kumar) 1, See My Attitude (Mukesh Kumar) 2, Canterbury (Md. Ekram Alam) 3 and Duck Hawk (P. Sai Kumar) 4.

Not run: Great Combo. 6, 1/2 and 2-1/2, 1m, 25.73s. 225 (w), 11, 15 and 19 (p). SHP: 29, THP: 49, SHW: 12 and 21, FP: 59, Q: 31, Tanala: 246. Favouite: Dream Jewel.

8. GANGOTRI PLATE: DREAM JEWEL (Ajay Kumar) 1, See My Attitude (Mukesh Kumar) 2, Canterbury (Md. Ekram Alam) 3 and Duck Hawk (P. Sai Kumar) 4.

Not run: Great Combo. 6, 1/2 and 2-1/2, 1m, 25.73s. 225 (w), 11, 15 and 19 (p). SHP: 29, THP: 49, SHW: 12 and 21, FP: 59, Q: 31, Tanala: 246. Favouite: Dream Jewel.

9. GANGOTRI PLATE: DREAM JEWEL (Ajay Kumar) 1, See My Attitude (Mukesh Kumar) 2, Canterbury (Md. Ekram Alam) 3 and Duck Hawk (P. Sai Kumar) 4.

Not run: Great Combo. 6, 1/2 and 2-1/2, 1m, 25.73s. 225 (w), 11, 15 and 19 (p). SHP: 29, THP: 49, SHW: 12 and 21, FP: 59, Q: 31, Tanala: 246. Favouite: Dream Jewel.

10. GANGOTRI PLATE: DREAM JEWEL (Ajay Kumar) 1, See My Attitude (Mukesh Kumar) 2, Canterbury (Md. Ekram Alam) 3 and Duck Hawk (P. Sai Kumar) 4.

Not run: Great Combo. 6, 1/2 and 2-1/2, 1m, 25.73s. 225 (w), 11, 15 and 19 (p). SHP: 29, THP: 49, SHW: 12 and 21, FP: 59, Q: 31, Tanala: 246. Favouite: Dream Jewel.

11. 1 EME CENTRE PLATE: MISS MARVELLOUS (Mukesh Kumar) 1, Sacred Bond (Afras Khan) 2, Lady Danger (D.S. Deora) 3 and Divine Destiny (Surya Prakash) 4. Not run: Manisha, 6, Shd and 1/2, 1m, 50.61s. 195 (w), 21, 12 and 27 (p). SHP: 35.

12. 1 EME CENTRE PLATE: MISS MARVELLOUS (Mukesh Kumar) 1, Sacred Bond (Afras Khan) 2, Lady Danger (D.S. Deora) 3 and Divine Destiny (Surya Prakash) 4. Not run: Manisha, 6, Shd and 1/2, 1m, 50.61s. 195 (w), 21, 12 and 27 (p). SHP: 35.

13. 1 EME CENTRE PLATE: MISS MARVELLOUS (Mukesh Kumar) 1, Sacred Bond (Afras Khan) 2, Lady Danger (D.S. Deora) 3 and Divine Destiny (Surya Prakash) 4. Not run: Manisha, 6, Shd and 1/2, 1m, 50.61s.

CURB INSTINCTS

Gill is playing too aggressively in Test cricket: Gavaskar



Sunil Gavaskar said Shubman Gill has to curb his aggressive intentions while batting in Tests after he failed to produce a substantial outing in the first Test against South Africa. "He is playing a bit too aggressively. The red ball moves a little more than the white ball in the air and off the pitch as well," Gavaskar said.

RETIREMENT PLANS

Murray reveals 2024 could be his last on the Tour



Andy Murray has said 2024 could be his final year after illness and injury hampered his preparation for the new season. "We'll see how the year goes, see how the body holds up. If things are going well, I'd love to keep going. But if they're not, and I'm not enjoying it, it could be the last year."

PROLIFIC PORTUGUESE

Ronaldo ends 2023 as the world's top goal scorer with 54 strikes



Cristiano Ronaldo was the top goal-scorer in world football in 2023. The five-time Ballon d'Or winner scored 54 goals for Portugal and Al Nassr. Harry Kane was second with 52 goals for England and Bayern Munich along with PSG's French attacker Kylian Mbappe. Manchester City's Norwegian striker Erling Haaland netted 50 times.

THREE IN A ROW

Gujarat Giants surmounts Bengal Warriors' challenge



Gujarat Giants swatted away the challenge of the Bengal Warriors by 51-42 in Season 10 of the Pro Kabaddi League in Noida on Sunday. The winning team, which rode on a 25-point show from Parteek Dahiya, registered its sixth win and the third on the bounce. In another match, Bengaluru Bulls edged Tamil Thalaivas 38-37.

A sense of emancipation and a touch of enterprise

It was as if Elgar was batting with a kind of freedom he rarely showed in the 84 Tests he played before, as if he was giving himself the luxury of playing all the strokes he wanted for once

INDIA IN SOUTH AFRICA

P.K. Ajith Kumar
CENTURION

Dean Elgar will walk out for toss with Rohit Sharma at the Newlands Cricket Ground in Cape Town on Wednesday morning.

He wasn't expected to do that. Temba Bavuma was, but he got injured.

Elgar went on to play one of the most fluent Test innings of the year. He wasn't expected to do that. He was expected to grind.

After making a pair on Test debut, he wasn't expected to sledge the Australian captain Michael Clarke, either.

That was in 2012. Elgar may have failed with the bat, but South Africa won the Test at Perth by 309 runs. He hadn't opened, and came in at No. 6, in fact.

It was in 2014 that he opened in a Test match for the first time, against Australia at Port Elizabeth, alongside Graeme Smith. He made 83 in his first Test innings as an opener; he had found his place in the formidable South African batting order (Hashim Amla, Faf du Plessis, A.B. de Villiers, Quinton de Kock).

Elgar has since established himself as one of the finest Test openers of his generation. Opening is one of the toughest jobs in Test cricket, especially in South Africa, where the freshness of the pace bowlers and the wickets that offer them bounce and assistance make it even more challenging.

Elgar belongs to the old school, where the openers were taught to get their eyes in first, leave the balls alone that could be left alone, and build an innings – of your own and that of the team.



Rewarding journey: Elgar, who began his Test career with a pair, will sign off as South Africa's captain in Cape Town. PTI

England's Zak Crawley and Ben Duckett may be shredding those lessons into pieces – and who knows there could be more of their like in the future – but cricket also needs grafters, the unglamorous ones who will save you a Test or set up the chase for the more dashing batters down the order.

Rishabh Pant could play a blinder to give India its greatest Test win at the Gabba three years ago because Cheteshwar Pujara faced 211 balls, many of

them with his body.

India missed someone like Pujara in the second innings of the First Test here. Only Virat Kohli could stand up to the hostile bowling from the South African quicks.

It was Elgar's brilliant 185 – his first Test hundred on his home ground – that set up South Africa's innings victory inside three days.

It was as if he was batting with a kind of freedom he rarely showed in the 84 Tests he played before, as if

he was giving himself the luxury of playing all the strokes he wanted in a Test match for once.

South Africa's coach Shukri Conrad, in fact, said it was his decision to retire from international cricket that made him play the way he did. After Bavuma walked off the field with a hamstring strain in the first session of the Test, he took over the captaincy. Now he will lead South Africa in his farewell Test.

Nobody deserved that honour more.

The final ODI will serve as a chance for India to experiment against a formidable tourist

AUSTRALIA IN INDIA

Lavanya L
MUMBAI

India might not have an opportunity to salvage the ODI series against Australia, with the visitor taking an unassailable 2-0 lead. However, the third game at Wankhede Stadium on Tuesday gives the host a chance to experiment as it prepares for the 2025 ODI World Cup scheduled in India.

Coach Amol Muzumdar's decision to promote Richa Ghosh, seen often as a potent finisher, to No. 3 in the second ODI puzzled many. He chose to back her top-order credentials that have brought her success in the domestic circuit for Bengal with the Indian side as well.

This means Muzumdar views Jemimah Rodrigues, a middle order mainstay, more in the number five slot. In the 26 ODIs she has played, Jemimah has played only three matches in that position and has 178



Need to step up: Harmanpreet, who has not crossed double digits in the ODI series, will want to finish on a high. EMMANUEL YOGINI

runs to her name. Her top two scores of 86 and 82 both came in this slot.

Muzumdar also dropped Shafali Verma and Saika Ishaque in this game.

Shafali's ordinary run with the bat (She has

scores of 1,4,0,8,1 in her last five ODIs) gave Yastika Bhatia a chance to keep her place in the top order.

"I thought Yastika played well in the first ODI, she got 49 and we thought we should continue with her. Shafali is a part of the

team.

"We had a long chat and conveyed it to her in the best possible manner. We will be working with her over the next couple of days because the T20I series is coming up," Muzumdar said.

Santner's exploits help NZ level series

Agence France-Presse
MOUNT MAUNGANUI

New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner took four wickets as it beat Bangladesh by 17 runs in a rain-hit third and final T20I on Sunday to draw the series 1-1. After dismissing the tourists for 110, NZ's top-order collapsed to 49 for five before Jimmy Neesham and Santner recovered to reach 95 for five off 14.4 overs. When rain halted play, the host was comfortably ahead of the DLS target.

The scores: Bangladesh 110 in 19.2 overs (Santner 4/16) lost to New Zealand 95/5 in 14.4 overs (Finn Allen 38, James Neesham 28 n.o.). New Zealand won by 17 runs via DLS method, three-match series ends 1-1.

Calendar of Events 2024

Dakar Rally January 5-19 Saudi Arabia
African Cup of Nations January 13-February 11 Ivory Coast
Indian Open Badminton January 16-21 New Delhi
ICC Men's U19 World Cup January 19-February 11 South Africa
World Aquatic Championships February 2-18 Doha, Qatar
Super Bowl LVI February 11 Paradise, Nevada (USA)
Formula One season opener - Bahrain Grand Prix March 2
All England Open Badminton March 12-17 Birmingham
Masters Tournament (golf) April 8-14 Augusta, USA
PGA Championship May 13-19 Kentucky, USA
French Open May 26-June 9 Paris
UEFA Champions League final June 1 Wembley, London
US Open (golf) June 13-16 North Carolina, USA
Euros 2024 June 14-July 14 Germany
Copa America June 20-July 14 USA
Tour de France June 29-July 21
The Open (golf) July 14-21 Royal Troon Golf Club, Scotland
ICC Women's T20 World Cup September-October Bangladesh
WTA Finals November 3-10
ATP Finals November 10-17 Turin, Italy
Billie Jean King Cup Finals November
Davis Cup Finals November Malaga, Spain
Badminton World Tour Finals December 11-15 Hangzhou, China



AUSTRALIAN OPEN
January 14-28



INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE
March-May



ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP
June



WIMBLEDON
July 1-14



SUMMER OLYMPICS
July 26-August 11



SUMMER PARALYMPICS
August 28-September 8



US OPEN (tennis)
August 26-September 8

Fulham ruins Arsenal's plans of ending the year as league topper; Forest punishes United



Stop there! Saka, right, found the net early for the Gunners, but it wasn't enough. AP

EURO LEAGUES

Agencies

LONDON

Arsenal fell to a second straight loss with a 1-2 defeat at Fulham on Sunday, missing out on a chance to end the year atop the Premier League table.

Bukayo Saka gave Arsenal the lead after just five minutes, but the visitor was toothless after that as Raul Jimenez equalized in the first half and Bobby De Cordova-Reid poked in the winner in the 59th.

Arsenal topped the standings at Christmas but enters 2024 in fourth place after this defeat followed its first home loss of the season against West Ham on Thursday. A win at Fulham would have lifted Mikel Arteta's team provisionally above leader Liverpool in a tightly packed top four.

In another match, Tottenham Hotspur brought resurgent Bournemouth down to earth with a flat-tiring 3-1 victory thanks to goals by Pape Matar Sarr, Son Heung-min and Richarlison.

Earlier, Manchester United suffered a 1-2 defeat at Nottingham Forest on Saturday as the home side piled more misery on its beleaguered visitor with goals from Nicolas Domínguez and Morgan Gibbs-White securing the points at a rocking City Ground. Erik ten Hag's United team is struggling in seventh on 31 points after its 14th defeat this season in all competitions.

Dominguez broke the deadlock in what had been a drab game after 64 minutes with a shot from the centre of the box. In the Serie A, Adrien Rabiot's second-half goal earned Juventus a 1-0

home win against AS Roma as it moved within two points of leaders Inter Milan. The results: Premier League: Fulham 2 (Jimenez 29, Reid 59) bt Arsenal 1 (Saka 5); Tottenham 3 (Sarr 9, Son 71, Richarlison 80) bt Bournemouth 1 (Scott 84).

Serie A: Juventus 1 (Rabiot 47) bt Roma 0; AC Milan 1 (Pulisic 84) bt Lecce 0; Verona 0 lost to Salernitana 1 (Tchaoun 48).

Saturday: Premier League: Nottingham Forest 2 (Domínguez 64, Gibbs-White 82) bt Manchester United 1 (Rashford 78); **Serie A:** Juventus 1 (Rabiot 47) bt Roma 0; **On Saturday: Premier League:** Nottingham Forest 2 (Domínguez 64, Gibbs-White 82) bt Manchester United 1 (Rashford 78); **Serie A:** Juventus 1 (Rabiot 47) bt Roma 0.

On Saturday: Premier League: Nottingham Forest 2 (Domínguez 64, Gibbs-White 82) bt Manchester United 1 (Rashford 78); **Serie A:** Juventus 1 (Rabiot 47) bt Roma 0; **Saturday:** Premier League: Nottingham Forest 2 (Domínguez 64, Gibbs-White 82) bt Manchester United 1 (Rashford 78); **Serie A:** Juventus 1 (Rabiot 47) bt Roma 0.

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IN BRIEF



Nadal loses doubles match on comeback

Rafael Nadal's first match back after a 12-month injury lay-off ended in defeat when he and Marc Lopez went down to Australian pair of Jordan Thompson and Max Purcell 4-6, 4-6 in the Brisbane International on Sunday. Nadal, who looked sharp on court and appeared to have no issues with his movement after the long lay-off for a hip problem, takes to the singles court on Tuesday against former U.S. Open champion Dominic Thiem.



Jamshedpur FC appoints Khalid Jamil as head coach

Experienced AFC Pro Licence holder Khalid Jamil has been appointed as head coach of Jamshedpur FC, the football club said on Sunday. Jamil's appointment was announced after previous gaffer Scott Cooper and JFC parted ways on Friday.



Knicks sign Anunoby, Quickley heads to Raptors

New York Knicks has signed British-born guard-forward O.G. Anunoby from the Toronto Raptors in a multi-player deal the NBA club announced on Saturday. Precious Achiuwa and Malachi Flynn also head to the Knicks as part of the deal which sees Immanuel Quickley and R.J. Barrett head in the opposite direction.

Jeremy and Jhili clinch titles in National weightlifting

Jeremy Lalrinnunga lifted a total of 298kg to convincingly win the men's 67kg gold medal in the National weightlifting championships at Itanagar on Sunday. Jeremy returned to competition to lift 136kg in snatch and establish a healthy 10kg lead, which proved decisive. Jhili Dalabhera claimed the women's 49kg title in a close contest.

The results (Elite only): Men: 67kg: 1. Jeremy Lalrinnunga (Miz) 136kg, clean and jerk 162kg, total 298kg; 2. Neelam Raju K. (RSPB) 126kg, 162kg, 288kg; 3. Lalnunthara (SSCB) 121kg, 163kg, 284kg.

Women: 49kg: 1. Jhili Dalabhera (RSPB) 77kg, 96kg, 173kg; 2. Panchami Sonowal (Asm) 75kg, 96kg, 171kg; 3. Gyaneshwari Yadav (Cht) 77kg, 94kg, 171kg.

Rethin, Maaya spearhead Indian challenge

The second seeds Rethin Pranav and Maaya Rajeshwaran will aspire to assert the Indian supremacy in the ITF junior tennis tournament to be played at the CLTA Complex from Monday. Rohan Belday and Anya Murthy of the US have been seeded No. 1 in the boys' and girls' sections respectively. Rohan will open against Aarjun Pandit who has been performing well in the international circuit. Rethin plays Ren Matsumura of Japan in the first round, while Maaya will be up against Kariman Buoi of Israel. Overall, it will be interesting to see how well the Indian players cope with the overwhelming presence of quality foreign players.

The seedings: Boys: 1. Rohan Belday (USA), 2. Rethin Pranav, 3. Cho Se Hyuk (Kor), 4. Debasish Sahoo, 5. Hitesh Chauhan, 6. Luc Wieland (Sui), 7. Kim Moo Been (Kor), 8. Lovro Maricic (Cro). Girls: 1. Anya Murthy (USA), 2. Maaya Rajeshwaran, 3. Shihomi Li Xuan Leong (Mas), 4. Maayan Laron (Isr), 5. Yu-Chen Lin (Tpe), 6. Maria Golovina, 7. Tzeng Mu-Jie (Tpe), 8. Rishitha Basireddy.

LIVE TELECAST

Ultimate Kho-Kho: Sony Sports Ten 1 (SD & HD) & LIV, 7 & 8.30 p.m.

PKL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 8 p.m. onwards

'We have to prove we can play fearlessly'

Head coach Stimac wants to use the Asian Cup to gain experience and better the team's chances in the World Cup qualification process

FOOTBALL

Sports Bureau
KOLKATA

India will try to utilise the Asian Cup experience in bettering its chances in the 2026 World Cup qualification process, said the head coach of the senior men's national team, Igor Stimac, after his side landed in Doha to participate in the final stage of the continental competition.

Stimac said that India can play fearless football and he would like to see the players bring their best against the likes of Australia, Uzbekistan and Syria, who are the three opponents in the group league stage.

"We are now trying to play fearless football and can prove our stuff without getting intimidated by the opposition. We need to find stability in our team as we know we can play well," said Stimac.

"But I am not looking at the final result to be honest. I just want the boys to



Setback: Stimac feels that India's chances at the Asian Cup have been hit by injuries to key personnel.

enjoy the tournament and gain experience. As I have said earlier our top priority now is to qualify to the third round of the 2026 World Cup qualifiers."

He said that India could have hoped to do well in the Asian Cup but the team's prospects suffered because of injuries to key players. "Things changed dramatically for us owing to injuries that happened to some of our key players in the last couple of months.

"It started with Ashique Kuriniyan. Then it was Anwar Ali followed by Jeak-

son Singh. Next we lost some of our back-up options like Ghan (Martins) and Rohit (Kumar) to injuries.

"We are not as good as we could have been but we do not have time to think of the players who are not with us. We have to focus on those who are there with us. We have to try to utilise the time given to us (by the AIFF) and prepare the team by bringing their fitness to a higher level," Stimac added.

India plays Australia in the first match on January 13.

Simranjeet to lead India men; Rajni to captain women's side

HOCKEY5S WORLD CUP

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Simranjeet Singh and Rajni Etimarpu will lead the men's and women's sides respectively as Hockey India on Sunday named the Indian teams for the upcoming FIH Hockey5s World Cup to be held in Muscat, Oman.

While the Hockey5s Women's World Cup will be held between January 24 and 27, the men's event is slated from January 28 to January 31.

Experienced goalkeeper Rajni will have defender Mahima Chaudhary as her deputy, while Mandeep Mor will be the vice-captain of the men's team.

The women's team also comprises Bansari Solanki as the second goalkeeper, with Akshata Abaso Dheka and Jyoti Chhatri as defenders.

Among midfielders, Mariana Kujur and Mumtaz Khan have been named while Ajmina Kujur, Rutaja Dadasa Pisal and Deepika Soreng have been named as forwards.

The Indian women are grouped in Pool C along with Namibia, Poland and

Olympic bronze medallist Simranjeet, includes goalkeepers Suraj Karkera and Prashant Kumar Chauhan.

Mandeep Mor will be joined by Manjeet in defence, while midfield features Mohd Raheel Mousseen and Maninder Singh and forward-line comprises Pawan Rajbhar, Gurjot Singh and Uttam Singh along with captain Simranjeet.

Grouped in Pool B, India will play against Egypt, Jamaica and Switzerland to make the knockout rounds.

The other teams in the fray include the Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan and Poland in Pool A and Pool C features Australia, Kenya, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago while Pool D includes Fiji, Malaysia, Oman and the United States.

"We have chosen a very balanced team with youth and experience for this exciting format of hockey," coach Sardar Singh said.

"Several players in this squad already have the experience of playing this format and are eager to perform well."

"We have worked hard for this tournament and look forward to finishing on the podium."

Champion USA beats a battling Britain to stay in contention in the United Cup

TENNIS

Agence France-Presse
SYDNEY

Jessica Pegula and Taylor Fritz had to fight through a deciding doubles match to conclude a 2-1 defeat of Britain on Sunday for the United States to stay in title contention at the United Cup.

The defending champion, which won the trophy last January over Italy, earned a 1-6, 7-6(5), 10-7 mixed doubles win to claim victory in Perth.

"We have a team energy from last year here, we don't want to take a loss and let it die," said Fritz.

World No. 5 Pegula added: "To get a win in this fashion after such a long day (on court) brings back a lot of memories. It was a big win today, especially after losing such a tough sin-



Stepping up: Fernandez won twice to guide Canada home. AFP

gles match."

Britain, which beat Australia to open its tournament account, took a 1-0 lead when Pegula crashed 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 to Katie Boulter in the singles.

It was Boulter's first win over a top-five player on her seventh attempt after she bounced back from a set and double-break down.

Pegula's 10th-ranked teammate Fritz kept the tie alive despite a thigh strain he blamed on over-training, defeating Cameron Norrie 7-6(5), 6-4.

Fernandez delivers

In Sydney, Leylah Fernandez led Canada to a fighting victory over Chile with the former US Open finalist winning her singles rubber and then backing

up in a decisive mixed doubles.

The 35th-ranked Fernandez got Canada off to a perfect start, cruising past Chile's Daniela Seguel 6-2, 6-3 in 73 minutes.

With Canadian No. 1 Felix Auger-Aliassime sitting out the men's singles, 314th-ranked Steven Diez stepped up but was topped by World No. 19 Nicolas Jarry 7-5, 6-4.

In the deciding mixed doubles, Fernandez teamed with Diez to battle past Seguel and Tomas Barrios Vera 7-5, 4-6, 10-8.

The results: USA bt Britain 2-1 (Jessica Pegula lost to Katie Boulter 7-5, 4-6, 4-6; Taylor Fritz bt Cameron Norrie 7-6(5), 6-4; Pegula & Fritz bt Boulter & Neal Skupski 1-6, 7-6(5), 10-7)

Canada bt Chile 2-1 (Leylah Fernandez bt Daniela Seguel 6-2, 6-3; Steven Diez lost to Nicolas Jarry 5-7, 4-6; Fernandez & Diez bt Seguel & Tomas Barrios Vera 7-5, 4-6, 10-8).

Osaka's love for tennis rekindled

Agence France-Presse
BRISBANE

Japan's Naomi Osaka admitted on Saturday she almost gave up tennis but had rekindled her love of the sport after becoming a mother earlier this year as she prepares for a return in Brisbane.

"I would say right after Tokyo for, like, a month maybe I was thinking about retirement because I felt like all my joy went away for the sport," she said at the season opening Brisbane International.

In her time away, she gave birth to daughter Shai, and did not watch any tennis until last year's Wimbledon.

Although excited to be back, she conceded that retiring permanently had crossed her mind.

"I would say right after Tokyo for, like, a month maybe I was thinking about retirement because I felt like all my joy went away for the sport," she said at the season opening Brisbane International.

Emma Raducanu feels 'reborn' ahead of Auckland tennis classic

Associated Press
WELLINGTON

Former U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu says she feels "reborn" as she prepares to play her first match of 2024 at the Auckland tennis classic.

The 21-year-old Raducanu has been out of action since April after wrist and knee operations and says she feels reinvigorated at the start of a new season.

"I feel reborn in a way, I feel fresh," the 2021 major winner told reporters. "I feel ready, I feel happy, I feel excited."

Feeling fresh

"So overall I'm feeling positive and lighter. For two years after the U.S. Open I felt maybe a bit more like with a weight on my shoulders, but now I feel completely fresh." Raducanu suffered an ankle injury in Auckland last year but played through the pain at the Australian Open. By



Comeback trail: Raducanu has been out of action since April after wrist and knee operations and feels reinvigorated. AP

April she had come to realize she had to take time out for surgery.

"I was having wrist pains for five months before I came to Auckland so I was managing it, keeping it going and under wraps as much as I could," Raducanu said. "I knew it was inevitable if I wanted to fix the problem but I wanted

Meanwhile, the 2023 U.S. Open champ Coco Gauff is drawn to play American compatriot Claire Liu in the first round as she begins her 2024 season and defense of the Auckland singles title.

Caroline Wozniacki will play Ukraine's Elina Svitolina in round one as she plays at the Auckland tournament for the eighth time. The 33-year-old made a strong comeback in 2023 after taking three years away from tennis to start a family.

"I was surprised by how high of a level I was playing at from the get go," Wozniacki said. "It's not easy coming back and playing matches after a month away and I had three and a half years away."

"I didn't touch a racquet for three years and then I came back and started practising, got into the rhythm and quickly found my feet on the match court."



Intense action: Yoddhas held its nerve in the final minute to pip defending champions Juggernauts. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

UKK

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CUTTACK

Mumbai Khiladis registered its first win in the ongoing Ultimate Kho Kho Season 2 as it defeated Rajasthan Warriors 31-30 on Sunday, while Telugu Yoddhas held their nerve in the last 59 seconds to script a thrilling 29-28 win over defending champion Odisha Juggernauts.

In an evenly-contested match, skipper Pratik Waikar claimed the most points (10) for the winning side.

Juggernauts were defending initially and made a frantic start, gaining three dream run bonus points in the opening turn. Yoddhas, however, bagged only 10 points before coming up with a bright performance, especially defensively during the second turn.

Yoddhas, however, bagged only 10 points before coming up with a bright performance, especially defensively during the second turn.

'Bucket Hatters' light up Wankhede, give game's largest stakeholder a voice

They're called the Bucket Hat Cult, named after the group's 'uniform' – a bucket hat in any colour or design; these fans from different walks of life get together in the Garware pavilion of the Stadium during the Indian women's cricket team's winter fixtures



EMMANUEL YOGINI

Lavanya L

The uniting power of sports can often be a tired cliché, sometimes even seeming a bit too good to be true. However, a bunch of ardent women's sports fans in Mumbai have proven why getting together in the name of the game can go a long way for the game and those who play it.

They're called the Bucket Hat Cult, named after the group's 'uniform' – a bucket hat in any colour or design. This group of fans from different walks of life got together and lit up the Garware pavilion of the Wankhede Stadium during the Indian women's cricket team's winter fixtures in the city.

With whistles, innovative chants and the energy levels dialled up to 200, this group went viral for their 'sledding' of the Aussies and added a splash of colour to the viewing experience for the players, those on ground alongside them and those following along on broadcast.

"The first time some of us met was at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai, during the first session on day three of the India vs. England Test. We were just six or seven of us but we had about 100 school kids seated next to us and we used their voices to create an atmosphere. After that, the India-Australia Test match marked the origin of the Bucket Hat Cult in its current form," said Parth Suri, one of the founding members of the group.

When one visits stadiums in Mumbai, irrespective of the teams playing or gender, there'll be one group that will scream "Sachin...Sachin..." during a cricket match. It's wired into the DNA of the public and understandably so. And so to hear chants like "Bhuk lagi hai, wicket do, wicket do... (we're hungry, we want a wicket)" when the Indian bowlers marked their run-up or "Kaun humari superstar, Pooja Vastrakar... (who is our superstar, Pooja Vastrakar)" was a refreshing change.

Deep Gadhia, a Mumbai-based sports analyst, credits the Women's Premier League (WPL) for galvanising the ecosystem.

"The WPL was a turning point in women's franchise cricket, not just for players but for fans also here, because I don't think many of us have had the resources to go watch the Women's Big Bash League just yet. A lot of us met there. We would follow the women's game from our homes and the corners in our offices but we never had a group or community to enjoy the sport. That's something the WPL facilitated. Australia's tour of India helped this collective to blossom into something more beautiful that also gave us the Bucket Hat Cult," he said.



The WPL was staged entirely in Mumbai, as are most women's cricket fixtures off late. While the consequences of that trend warrant a conversation, fans in the city have made use of it to acquaint themselves with the calibre of players in the system.

"The best part is that children were joining us and at some points even leading our chants. There was a kid who made a very cheeky comment during the first ODI about Ellyse Perry being no Glenn Maxwell (when she cramped up during the first ODI) but that kid took charge and led our chants multiple times. There was a little kid at the DY Patil Stadium too from the school group. I haven't seen a more accomplished chant leader. He knew how to tempo the cheering, how to engage the crowd. If the chant was dying, he knew how to switch content. Watching someone so young take over cheering duties like this was the stuff of dreams," Akshay Dutia, a chartered accountant, said.

"In one of the games, I overheard a conversation about Shreyanka Patil and the chances of her debut in the ODI series," Ashwini Patil, a producer and anchor said. "There are people who are educating themselves on the game and then there are casual fans who just want to be entertained. Everyone is welcome."

Information asymmetry

Crowds were sparse for the first few days of the England Test but fans picked up momentum as the fixtures passed. Radha, a management student, said this boils down to better planning.

"People are interested to go but they don't know about it or they don't know soon enough. I am able to watch as many sports as I do because I actively look out for the schedule and buy train tickets on the same day. I think it stems from the fact that it's not marketed enough," she said.

"One thing we want to do is make

ourselves visible on TV and make the stadium experience interesting enough for people to want to go to games, so people say 'I want to be a part of this, when is the next match?' The information asymmetry has been an issue for a very long time and continues to be. The tickets being free or priced at ₹100 don't make much of a difference because you have to invest your time to go to a stadium and watch a game."

This prompted the group to get on social media, with accounts being made on a train ride from Churchgate to Lower Parel, Prabhadevi and Dadar. Jargon associated with the Mumbai Local also makes it to their chants, a nice homage to the network's role in their emergence.

"We asked a hawker outside Churchgate station where one can get the kind of hat I was wearing. He curtly replied, 'Outside Churchgate platform four.' Nothing fit our account's bio better." Radha remembers. "Sanjay dada (the hat seller) is also in on the fun and is ensuring bucket hats are available for all



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

match goers," said Saurabh.

Ashwini said the conversation needs to be about the larger viewing experience of a women's cricket match too. During the England T20Is, fans with tickets were turned away due to a lack of space in the couple of stands that were opened for the game.

"During the third T20I against England, the crowd was crazy but the crowd management was very poor. Fans remember these things about what happened the one time they came for a women's game," she said.

Another member, Adwait, hopes the resources of the Board of Control for Cricket in India allows them to invest more in the stadium experience. "BCCI is a very well-to-do board and no one has the comfort of being able to invest in the women's game without getting hurt too much financially. It's a luxury most countries don't have and we should capitalise," he added.

The group's innovative cheers tickled players from across the aisle, some of whom the group got to meet after the Australia Test thanks to assistance from seasoned journalist Annesha Ghosh. "Smriti told us that the team was discussing our chants and that they didn't have to sledge the Aussies because we did it for them," Ashwini said.

"When we met Meghan Schutt, she took a dig at Tahilia McGrath who was also there and said, 'Your batting was so boring, the chants kept me entertained,' because she was defending and giving dot after dot for a while," Deep added.

Rohan Pai, a financial risk manager said, "I remember reading an interview of Smriti from a few years ago where she said, 'Even if people are criticising poor shots or bowling, at least they're talking about us. Earlier there was complete silence when we used to play. At least now there's a conversation.' That's what we're going for here – to get people talking."

THE GIST

What you need to join the Bucket Hatters – Get yourself a bucket hat, turn up to a women's cricket fixture

An enemy's enemy is your friend – the Aussies lauded the group for its chants aimed at the England side when it sang 'You took it to day four'. England lost to India in the one-off Test in two-and-a-half days

The group says its long-term goal is 'Mission 2025' and India hosts the ODI women's World Cup that year; so it wants to build a fanbase across the country that can cheer the team on

SCIENCE

You had your genome sequenced and found something - now what?

Many genetic tests can be performed today not on single genes but on combinations of them. For example, whole exome sequencing sequences around 1% of the genome, encompassing several protein-coding regions, and its results can be used to identify genetic diseases and conduct pharmacogenomic assessments

Sridhar Sivasubbu
Vinod Scaria

In the last two decades, the landscape of genomics and the utility of genetic information in healthcare have both undergone a revolutionary transformation, marked by the increasing affordability and accessibility of personal genomes. What was once the exclusive preserve of scientific research and intellectual pursuit, limited to a few major centres across the world, has today turned mainstream, offering to empower individuals with unprecedented insights into their own genetic makeup.

The lower costs associated with genome sequencing technologies - particularly with advancements in next-generation sequencing - has played a pivotal role in this democratisation.

This accessibility has catalysed large-scale initiatives and population-wide projects that try to harness the power of genetic data to improve healthcare.

The convergence of technology and biology has also paved the way for more population-scale whole genome sequencing endeavours.

These initiatives plan to decipher the genetic codes of diverse populations, promising a deeper understanding of the genetic foundations of diseases and cures to them.

Personal genome sequencing in particular can help us tailor treatments to individual genetic profiles and predict individuals' susceptibility to specific diseases.

Incidental findings

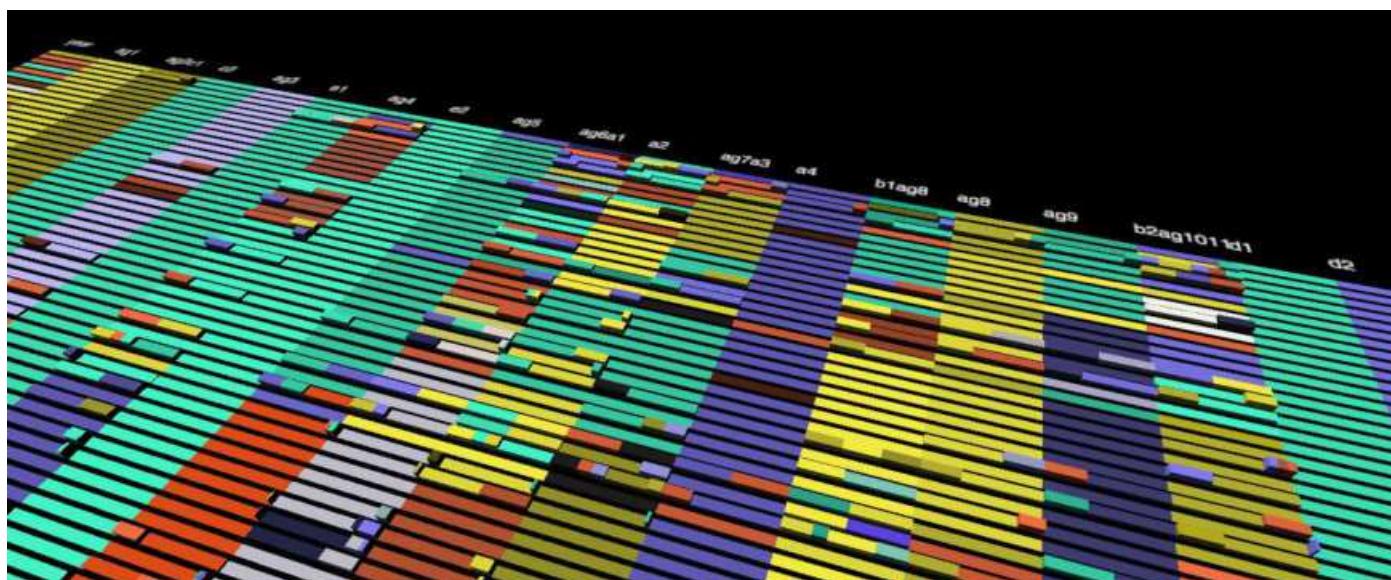
Genetic testing has significantly improved in the last decade.

Many tests can be performed today not on single genes but on combinations of them. For example, whole exome sequencing sequences around 1% of the genome, encompassing several protein-coding regions.

Such tests examine specific portions or the entirety of the genome, and their results can be used to identify genetic diseases, conduct pharmacogenomic assessments, assist in carrier screening and genetic counselling, and map one's ancestry.

In many instances, the use of comprehensive tests can also reveal genetic abnormalities that extend beyond the initial purpose or indication of a given test. Such findings are called incidental or secondary findings.

Of course, not all incidental findings will be useful to an individual - a fact that has sparked some debate among medical researchers whether individuals should be able to access such results.



Genome data visualised on a screen. JER THORP (CC BY 2.0)

Incidental and actionable

In 2013, the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG) put together a recommendation for laboratories that performed whole exome or whole genome sequencing.

The recommendation was that incidental findings that pertained certain conditions and diseases could be disclosed to the individual because that could help them.

It followed year-long consultations with various stakeholders.

These conditions included genetic cancer syndromes (including familial breast and ovarian cancers), familial gastrointestinal cancers, and common cardiac and metabolic diseases.

The ACMG has continued to expand this list.

The latest version of the list (sf.3.2) was published in June 2023: it included 97 disorders and 81 genes spanning cardiovascular and metabolic disorders and cancer.

Separately, researchers have also been analysing the prevalence of incidental and actionable genetic information - via population-scale genome-sequencing programmes currently underway in many countries - in their respective populations.

Various estimates suggest the prevalence of such information ranges from 1% to 3% among different populations as well as different versions of the genes in the secondary findings.

In the Indian population itself, such studies have revealed two prevalent but under-diagnosed diseases - cardiac channelopathies and familial hypercholesterolemia. Their prevalence is approximately 1 in 100 and 1 in 150, respectively.



What was once the preserve of research has turned mainstream, offering to empower individuals with unprecedented insights into their genetic makeup.

Do incidental findings matter?

The incidental findings included in the ACMG list are accompanied by significant evidence on the medical benefits of disclosure. As a result, people who participate in genome-sequencing programmes that look for the genes associated with these disorders prefer to be able to access the results. This said, there has been limited evidence on the population-scale impact of such incidental findings. Iceland has been at the centre of genetics research due to the unique historical demographic isolation of its population as well as because it initiated a large population-level genome-sequencing programme early, led by deCODE Genetics. Specifically, by combining population-scale genomic data with comprehensive genealogical and medical records, the latter initiative has contributed significantly to the identification of genetic variants associated with a number of diseases, enabling insights into disease susceptibility and then personalised medicine. On November 9 this year, researchers in Iceland published a paper in the *New England Journal of Medicine* by researchers in which they reported trying to address whether these incidental findings could be associated with the lifespan of an individual. Researchers pored through more than 57,000 whole genome sequences obtained from a population in Iceland.

Based on their analysis, they suggested that approximately 1 in 25 individuals in the cohort could have actionable and incidental genetic variants - and acting on which could improve their lifespan.

Individuals who had an actionable genetic finding also had a significantly lower lifespan of one year on average compared to those who did not. However, 10% of those with an actionable variant died much earlier than those who didn't have that variant.

Adjusted for disease type, the researchers reported that individuals with cancer-related actionable genotypes lived three fewer years on average than those who didn't. They also found that 10% of individuals in this group died eight years earlier on average.

They associated this difference largely with whether the latter set of individuals carried the BRCA1 and the BRCA2 genes, mutations in which can increase the risk of breast cancer.

At a time when genome-sequencing is swiftly becoming both more accessible and more affordable, the prospect of both regular population-scale sequencing programmes and newborn sequencing initiatives is quite real. When such programmes are implemented widely, a substantial fraction of the population will stand to gain invaluable medically actionable insights. Armed with them, individuals but also healthcare systems can proactively take precise and meaningful measures to treat and, importantly, prevent diseases effectively.

(The authors are senior consultants at Vishwanath Cancer Care Foundation and adjunct professors at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.)

THE GIST

Personal genome sequencing in particular can help us tailor treatments to individual genetic profiles and predict individuals' susceptibility to specific diseases

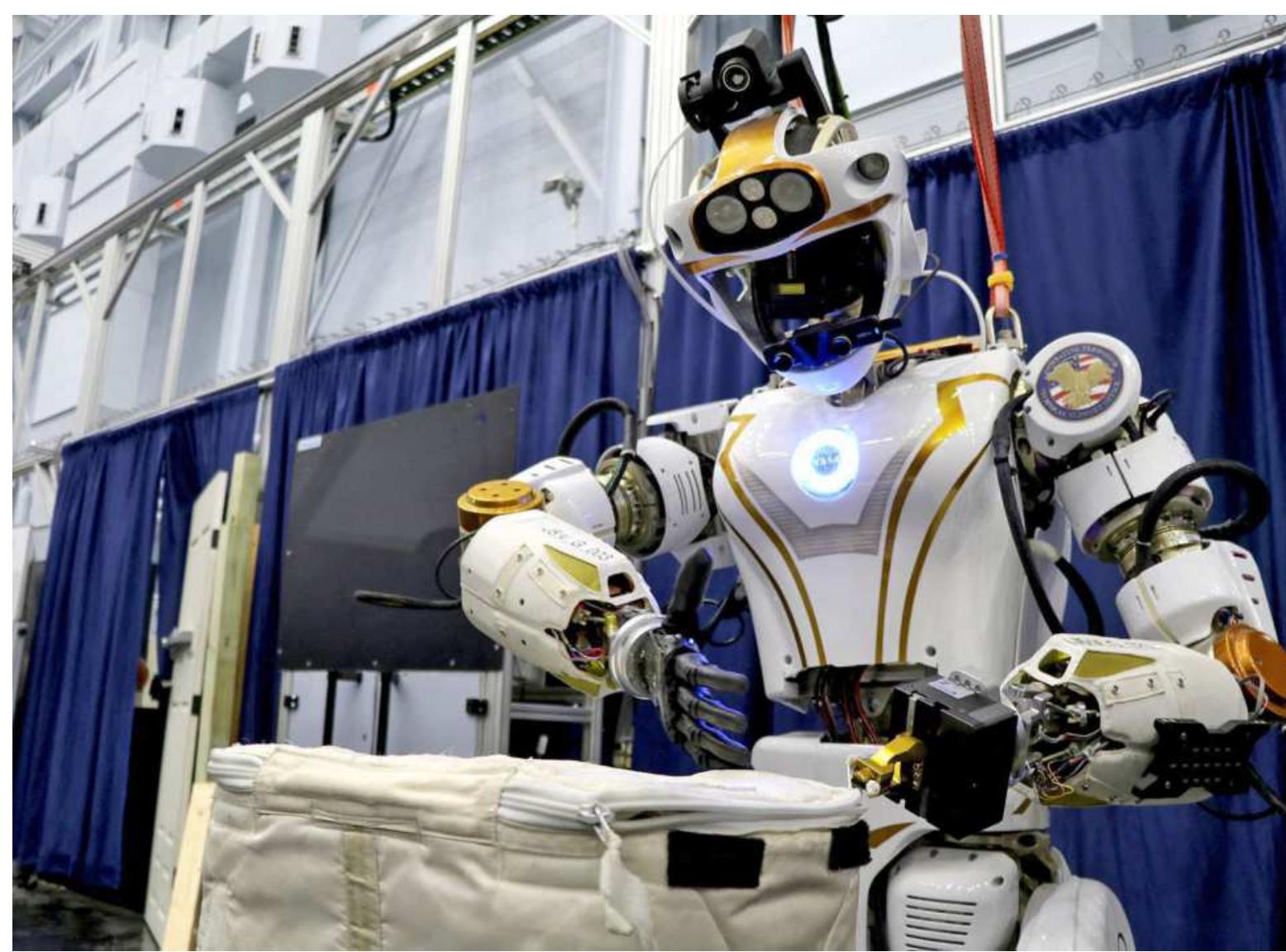
Researchers have been analysing the prevalence of incidental and actionable genetic information via population-scale genome-sequencing programmes currently underway in many countries

Individuals who had an actionable genetic finding had a significantly lower lifespan of one year on average compared to those who did not

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BIG SHOT



NASA's humanoid robot Valkyrie performs tasks at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. It is designed to operate in "degraded or damaged human-engineered environments," like areas hit by natural disasters, as well as handle risky tasks like cleaning solar panels or inspecting malfunctioning equipment outside spacecraft. REUTERS

WHAT IS IT?

XPoSat: ISRO's X-ray eye in the sky

Vasudevan Mukunth

At 9.10 am on the first day of 2024, the Indian Space Research Organisation will launch XPoSat, short for 'X-ray Polarimeter Satellite'. Once launched, the satellite will study X-rays emitted by phenomena in space and their polarisation from earth-orbit. X-rays are electromagnetic radiation whose wavelength is 0.01-10 nanometres (where 1 nanometre is one-billionth of a metre), corresponding to energies of 100-100,000 electron-volt (eV). Electromagnetic radiation is characterised by an electric field and a magnetic field vibrating perpendicular to each other. The polarisation of electromagnetic radiation refers to the orientation of these two fields as the radiation moves through space.

X-rays can be polarised when they get scattered. For example, when an X-ray travelling through space encounters an atom, the electric field of the X-ray can energise an electron, which will then emit a photon. Since X-rays are also photons, the new photon will give the impression that an X-ray photon has been scattered. Polarised X-rays are also produced when the path of a fast-moving charged particle is bent by a magnetic field.

Studying these X-rays can reveal which way the magnetic field is pointing, and tracking how these X-rays evolve in time can reveal many things about the body producing such fields, like a



XPoSat undergoing tests before launch. ISRO

pulsar. The XPoSat satellite has two payloads to make these measurements. POLIX will study X-rays with energy 8-30 keV emitted by around 40 astronomical sources in five years. XSPECT will study X-rays with energy 0.8-15 keV and track changes in continuous X-ray emissions.

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