

AAP, BJP trade charges of voter list fraud in Delhi

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI



The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday accused each other of manipulating the Delhi electoral roll in an attempt to win the Assembly election due to be held in February.

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal accused the BJP of trying to manipulate the voter list in the New Delhi Assembly constituency to win the election by "unfair" means. AAP Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh said the BJP was even trying to get his wife's name deleted from the list.

Hitting back, the BJP said that it would not allow fake votes to be cast in Delhi. It claimed to have provided multiple pieces of evidence, and accused Mr. Kejriwal of attempting to cover his "wrongdoings" by creating confusion

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'Expect tariff hikes, FTA push in new Trump era'

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

India should expect raised tariffs and a renewed push to get a free trade agreement finalised as Donald Trump gets set to begin a second term as U.S. President, says former U.S. Ambassador to India Kenneth Juster.

In an exclusive interview, Mr. Juster, a former U.S. Department of Commerce official who was appointed by Mr. Trump to India in the first term (2017-2020), said Mr. Trump's first term and campaign pronouncements were indicators that the second term would see a further strengthening of India-U.S. ties, but certain irritants in ties, such as high tariffs, market access in areas such as "agricultural exports from United States to India and the IT equipment sector and medical devices", and differences over Iran policy could return.

In Mr. Trump's first term, the U.S. had withdrawn India's GSP status for exporters, and forced India to cancel all oil imports from Iran.

He said Mr. Trump's Cabinet nominees had strong pro-India positions.

Humpy's win caps India's 2024 chess dominance

P.K. Ajith Kumar

India's great year in chess became greater on Sunday as Koneru Humpy won the women's World Rapid Chess Championship in New York. This is the second world rapid title for the 37-year-old from Vijayawada.



Kenneth Juster

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And this is the second world chess title of the month for India as D. Gukesh had lifted the World Championship Trophy in Singapore just two weeks ago.

Back in September, India's men's and women's teams were the champions at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest.

Ms. Humpy emerged as the champion in New York, scoring 8.5 points from 11 rounds. The final round had begun with seven players tied on 7.5 points, but among them only Ms. Humpy won, against Indonesia's Irene Sukandar, making her the outright champion.

Shortly after her victory, Ms. Humpy told

The Hindu over phone from New York that the title meant a lot to her. "This is one of the most cherished titles for me, as I wasn't among the favourites here," she said.

Erigaisi fifth

D. Harika tied for second place, but was placed fifth after tie-breakers were applied. It was a disappointing day for India in the Open section, though.

Arjun Erigaisi, who had begun the day as one of the joint leaders, could only finish fifth, with nine points, 1.5 points behind the champion, 18-year-old Volodar Murzin of Russia.

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Snowed in



Off track: Tourists gather around a bus that had veered off a snow-laden road near Patnitop in Udhampur district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday. The snowfall since Friday evening in the Union Territory is dubbed as one of the heaviest in recent memory. PTI (REPORT ON PAGE 3)

After weeks on the run, tiger Zeenat from Odisha tranquillised and caged in Bengal

The Hindu Bureau

KOLKATA

A female tiger that had kept forest officials of three States on their toes for weeks was finally captured on Sunday after being tranquillised in Bankura district of West Bengal.

Zeenat, the three-year-old tiger, had run away from the Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha earlier this month. It stayed in Jharkhand for a few days before entering West Bengal.

"Preliminary health observation of the tiger will be done in some veterinary hospital where veterinary hospital facilities are present," Debal Roy, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest and Chief Wildlife War-



The tiger in Bankura on Sunday.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Efforts to tranquillise the animal had been going on for the past few days. On Saturday, one such attempt went in vain. The tranquillising and caging of the animal have come as a big relief not only for forest officials but also for people residing in the Jangalmahal area of West Bengal.

For the past several days, forest officials had put up nylon nets in the habitation where the tiger was being tracked.

Kept changing location
Zeenat was relocated to the Simlipal Tiger Reserve from Tadoba in Maharashtra to bolster the tiger population in Odisha. She has a radio collar on her neck, which helped forest offi-

cials track her location.

The tiger had been changing her location every few days. She entered West Bengal from Jharkhand on December 19.

She was first tracked in Jharkhand, and then she travelled to the Bandwan area of Purulia district on Thursday. She moved to Purulia's Dangardi forests in Manbazar for only a day.

She was in Purulia's Bandwan for over five days.

The tiger reportedly killed over three domestic goats and the carcasses were found in the nearby jungles. The fragmented forest patches of Purulia, Jharkhand, and Bankura, called the Jangalmahal region, does not have any tiger population.

Dr. Singh's wife Gursha-

Manmohan's ashes immersed in Yamuna amid BJP-Cong. row

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Family members of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh immersed his ashes in the Yamuna here on Sunday following Sikh religious rituals. The war of words between the BJP and the Congress continued on Sunday too over a memorial to Dr. Singh. The BJP criticised the Gandhi family for its absence on the occasion on Sunday.

The family members collected Dr. Singh's ashes from the Nigambodh Ghat, where he was cremated on Saturday, and took it to the banks of the Yamuna near the Majnu Ka Tila Gurdwara.

Dr. Singh's wife Gursha-



Last rites: The 'Asthi Visarjan' ritual being performed for Manmohan Singh at Yamuna Ghat in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI

ran Kaur, and his daughters Upinder Singh, Daman Singh, and Amrit Singh, along with relatives, were present during the immersion.

BJP leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa questioned the absence of the Gandhi family at the ceremony.

"We all will always remember Manmohan Singh Ji's service to the na-

IN BRIEF



Use ballot papers for elections, EVMs untrustworthy: SP chief

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav has called for elections to be conducted using ballot papers, citing a lack of trust in electronic voting machines (EVMs). The former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister said this at a press conference at the SP headquarters in Lucknow on Sunday, alongside Rahul Kumar Kamboj, an Indian-origin member of Parliament from Germany. "Even a country like Germany conducts elections using ballot papers. But in India, elections are conducted with EVMs to serve vested interests," Mr. Yadav said. PTI

Five arrested for attacks on police stations in Punjab

The Punjab police on Sunday claimed to have busted a module backed by banned terror group Babbar Khalsa International and Pakistan's ISI, responsible for the recent grenade attacks on some police stations in the State, with the arrest of five persons. Two of the accused – Abhijot Singh and Kuljit Singh – sustained bullet injuries in retaliatory firing by the police team when they attacked the team to evade custody, the police said in a statement. The other three arrested persons have been identified as Rohit alias Ghessi, Shubham, and Gurjinder Singh alias Raja, all residents of Qila Lal Singh in Batala. PTI

Political row in Kerala over suspected suicide of Congress functionary, son

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The suspected suicide of Wayanad District Congress Committee treasurer N.M. Vijayan, 78, and his son, Jijesh, 38, has sparked a political row in Kerala that ostensibly put the Opposition party on the defence.

The ruling CPI(M) and the Opposition BJP have alleged that the father and son were the victims of a Congress-controlled cooperative bank job scam involving the party's legislator, I.C. Balakrishnan, who has denied the allegations.

Vijayan, who was also the former Sultan Bathery panchayat president, and Jijesh, a former Sultan Bathery Cooperative Bank employee, were found in critical condition at their house by neighbours on December 24, and admitted to the Government Medical College Hospital, Kozhikode. Jijesh died at 6.30 p.m., followed by Vijayan at 9.30 p.m. on December 27.

'Abetment to suicide'
The BJP has demanded invoking of abetment to suicide charges against Mr. Balakrishnan, under whose

directions Vijayan had allegedly accepted money from those aspiring for jobs in the Sultan Bathery Cooperative Bank.

Demanding Mr. Balakrishnan's arrest, BJP State chief K. Surendran said the two are the latest victims of cooperative banks scams that have hit Kerala.

The CPI(M)'s Wayanad district leadership said the complaints regarding recruitment issues in the bank had cropped up earlier, but the aspirants were fearful of speaking out openly due to threats.

The party accused the

Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee of failing to intervene in the issue.

Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan has said the Congress has no one to protect or wrongdoing to hide and welcomed the demand for a inquiry. Mr. Balakrishnan said he would face the allegations legally. He said an alleged document signed by the deceased and a job seeker regarding payment for appointments was fake.

(Those in distress may contact Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health suicide prevention helpline OII-40769002.)

crossed the border, but emphasised specialised teams have been "effective in arresting and neutralising" such elements.

West Bengal shares a 2,216-km border with Bangladesh, and since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina regime in August this year, there have been several arrests of Bangladeshi nationals in Kolkata and other parts of the State.

Facing the heat
The State police recently unearthed a fake passport scam, and several arrests were made. The police is

Punjab team tries to persuade Dallewal to take aid, he declines

Press Trust of India
CHANDIGARH

A team deputed by the Punjab government on Sunday made attempts to persuade fasting farmer leader Jagit Singh Dallewal, 70, to take medical aid, but he declined and feared that force may be used to evict him from the protest site.

With Mr. Dallewal's indefinite hunger strike entering its 34th day on Sunday, farmer leaders at Kharau said they have been following the Gandhian way to continue their protest and it is up to the government to decide whether it wants to use force to evict their senior leader.

The developments came amid the Supreme Court's strong criticism of the Punjab government for not shifting Mr. Dallewal to a hospital immediately.

A high-level team of the Punjab government comprising Deputy Inspector General of Police Mandip Singh Sidhu and retired Additional DGP Jaskaran Singh met Mr. Dallewal and other farmer leaders at Kharau border site on Sunday.

Later, farmer leaders said Mr. Dallewal had refused to take any medical aid. Speaking to reporters late in the evening, after



Farmer leader Jagit Singh Dallewal's fast entered its 34th day on Sunday. PTI

two rounds of talks with them," the retired Additional DGP said.

Mr. Jaskaran said Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann was being apprised of the situation.

Video message
After the meeting, Mr. Dallewal came out with a short video message late on Sunday evening.

"The information which we are getting is that very heavy force is being sent here. We have said this many times that our job is to fight the battle, to win is your job," he said, appealing to people to come in large numbers to Kharau.

Let CBI probe Beed murder case: Cong.

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Senior Maharashtra Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar on Sunday said the probe into the murder of sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh in Beed must be handed over to the CBI.

Mr. Wadettiwar said the Devendra Fadnavis government can arrest the accused in 24 hours if it wanted to but was doing nothing despite all fingers pointing towards one person.

Deshmukh was allegedly abducted, tortured, and killed on December 9.

For the Anglo-Indian community in Kolkata, hope lives in the shadow of its past

SPOTLIGHT

Moyurie Som

Guy Gomes, 54, feels December 23 is the best day in the Christmas week to visit Bow Barracks in central Kolkata. Like every year, this year too, Guy found himself at the centre of the quadrangle in the area, guiding hundreds of visitors who thronged the century-old Anglo-Indian hub to enjoy the festivities.

"So many people from around the city, especially the Anglo-Indians who moved away, come here every year for the musical night. The atmosphere is electric," the travel industry professional says.

Guy is one of the few Anglo-Indian residents who continued living at the brick-coloured, three-storey buildings at Bow Barracks, believed to have been a garrison's mess for the Allied Forces during World War I. Over the past few years, it has become a prime destination to celebrate Christmas in the city.

Down the 500-metre lane at the festively decorated barracks, white-haired residents chat in circles as visitors photograph each other under glittering

Christmas lights.

"Many Anglo-Indians eventually moved out to different parts of the city, and many more out of the country for better prospects," Guy says. "But the hype around visiting Bow Barracks during Christmas has only increased in the last decade. The crowd of visitors only gets bigger every year," he says.

On Christmas eve, around 100 people dressed in finery pour into St. Francis Xavier's Church in Bowbazar, a stone's throw from Bow Barracks. Earlier, the church was the parish for most of the Roman Catholic Anglo-Indians who lived in Bow Barracks. However, as members of the community emigrated, attendees dwindled massively over the last decade.

The great exodus

Article 366(2) of the Constitution describes "Anglo-Indian" as "a person whose father" or "other male progenitors in the male line" is of European descent, living in India. While India's last census in 2011 pegged the total number of Anglo-Indians at 296, members of the community see this as a gross understatement.

"It is accepted that there are about 4 lakh Anglo-Indians



Festive spirit: Bustling crowds celebrate Christmas at Bow Barracks, central Kolkata, which is home to a large number of members from the Anglo-Indian community. DEBASISH BHADURI

get smaller and smaller."

Institutions like the Calcutta Rangers Club, originally known as the Calcutta Naval Volunteers' Athletic Club, remind the city of the thriving Anglo-Indian population of some decades ago. "Established in 1896, this is the only exclusively Anglo-Indian club outside the British Isles. Only Anglo-Indian members and their families have voting rights," Ernest Maxwell Dias, 73, a senior member of the club, says. He points out that emigration has "drastically re-

duced" club members to about 400-500.

In his book, O'Brien highlights the stages of the 'Anglo-Indian exodus' from India. "The first exodus was when thousands of Anglo-Indians set sail for 'home' in the 1940s and 1950s in England fearing the uncertainty and insecurity that comes with fitting into a new country with new rulers." Soon after, a second, equally massive exodus took place in the 1960s and 1970s, when Anglo-Indians in their 30s and 40s emigrated to va-

rious parts of the world in the hope of a better life. However, according to O'Brien, from the 1980s to date, the emigration of Anglo-Indians steadily declined but continued, mostly for reasons similar to that of other communities settling abroad.

Educating a community

Nearly a fortnight before Christmas this year, festivities had begun at Marian Co-Educational School in Kolkata's Picnic Garden area. Around 50 middle-aged people of the city's Anglo-Indian community gathered at the school's assembly hall in the evening to ring in Christmas with Sister Marisa, the principal and respected member of the community.

"They are my children. I took them in and taught them when they got thrown out of schools for various reasons – if they could not pay the fees, keep up with studies, or did not know Hindi or Maths. The schools discriminated against them. But look at how far they have come," she says.

Between 1985 and 2000, she educated nearly 3,000 school dropouts, mostly Anglo-Indians, through remedial classes at

St. Mary's School on Ripon Street. Her alumni include a now-retired tram loco pilot, teachers, entertainment professionals, and entrepreneurs.

Music and more

Among the Anglo-Indian attendees at the student reunion was Linda Churm, who recalls her days as a musician in iconic cultural hotspots of the city.

Anglo-Indians were at the forefront of the city's cultural landscape, shaping its music, theatre, and fashion scene in the post-British era. Many consider the boom in contemporary English music in Calcutta between the 1960s and the 1980s as a contribution of the city's Anglo-Indian community, which would perform rock 'n' roll, jazz, and blues in restaurants and bars across Park Street and central Kolkata.

Actor and casting director for English-speaking foreigner roles in Tollywood, Mario Edmonds, 53, feels that one of the biggest crises of the current community is the gradual fading away of its age-old traditions. He mentions the removal of the nomination of MPs and MLAs from the community in 2020 as one of the biggest losses it

faced in recent times. Elvina Carr, 56, a corporate trainer for soft skills, feels the best way Anglo-Indians can help themselves and each other is through employment and financial independence.

This year, Kolkata-based Anglo-Indian entrepreneur and Elvina's business partner, Craig Gomes, started AngloNet, a virtual professional and social networking platform for Anglo-Indians worldwide.

"A lot of friends and family who got disconnected for multiple decades found each other on the platform," Craig says. Elvina says it has even opened matrimonial propositions.

Craig also started *The Anglo*, a monthly magazine archiving Anglo-Indian history, culture, recipes, and personal life stories of the community's members. Three digital and physical editions have already been circulated worldwide.

"My next aim is to bring to life the Global Anglo Business Council, where an advisory board of high-profile Anglo-Indians can create business opportunities for members of the community," he adds.

LINK TO FULL STORY

> <https://bit.ly/3DuA6Rm>

INBRIEF



Sabarimala temple reopens for Makaravilakku festival

Marking the start of the second leg of the annual pilgrimage season, the Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala will reopen for the Makaravilakku festival on Monday. Melsanthi (head priest) S. Arun Kumar Namboothiri will open the sanctum at 4 p.m. in the presence of Tantri (chief priest) Kandararu Brahmadathan. Special arrangements for crowd control and safety have been implemented, with an increase in spot booking counters for easier access.

MLA in Kerala falls during event, put on life support

Thrikkakara MLA Uma Thomas sustained serious head injuries after falling from a height at the Jawaharlal Nehru International Stadium, Kaloor in Kerala on Sunday evening. She was rushed to a private hospital and placed on ventilator support due to critical condition. The incident occurred while she attended a dance event aiming for a Guinness World Record, where she reportedly lost her balance and fell from a height of 15 feet on to concrete floor.

Modi should take a firm stand on steel plant, says CPI(M)

CPI(M) State secretary V. Srinivasa Rao has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to confirm the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant's public sector status during his January 8 visit. Mr. Rao criticised Mr. Modi for previously avoiding the topic and accused him of secretly pushing for privatisation. He also expressed disappointment that Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu did not address the VSP issue in his recent discussions with Mr. Modi in Delhi.

Maximum Kuchipudi



In step: Nearly 1,500 Kuchipudi dancers from various parts of the country take part in the finals, Brahmanjali, of the International Traditional Dance Congress at MGM Park in Visakhapatnam on Sunday. V. RAJU

Kodagu imposes prohibitory orders amid tensions over temple dress code dispute

The Hindu Bureau
MYSURU

The district administration in Kodagu in Karnataka has imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita in S. Kattemadu village till January 2 following tension between two communities on dress code over temple entry.

The ban orders will be in place within a radius of 5 km from the Maha Mrutyunjaya Temple at S. Kattemadu village in Madikeri taluk.

The tension erupted after the temple authorities prevented a section of the

The tension started when temple officials prevented some local people from entering the temple

local people clad in traditional Kodava attire from entering the temple on Saturday, citing temple by-laws that devotees should be clad in dhotis.

This led to an altercation between the devotees clad in traditional Kodava attire and the temple administration.

The police order prohibits taking out of any procession, rally, jatha or rais-

ing incendiary or provocative slogans.

The incident drew flak from various sections of the Kodava community, some of whom threatened to organise a 'Kattemadu Chalo' on the grounds that this was an affront on the cultural practices of the local community.

Maletira Srinivas, secretary of Virajpet Kodava Samaj, held a press conference on Saturday to decry the incident and announce the march.

Meanwhile, security has been tightened in and around the temple to prevent any untoward incidents.

150-year-old coffee tree at Idukki church a window to district's early plantation history

Sandeep Vellaram
IDUKKI

Those who visit the premises of the British-built church at Pallikkunnu near Kuttikanam in Kerala's Idukki district can see a coffee plantation on the church grounds. It is believed that the British planted coffee on the land owned by the church, which is over 150 years old, during the early period of the plantation industry in Peerumade. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) constructed the cross-shaped church in 1869 on a 15-acre plot of land gifted by the then-ruler of erstwhile Travancore. According to church authorities,



Roots to history: The 150-year-old coffee tree on the church grounds of Pallikkunnu CSI church in Idukki. JOMON PAMPALAYY

the church plans to preserve the historically valuable coffee tree at Pallikkunnu.

Pallikkunnu St. George CSI Church Vicar Fr. Liju

Not given ceremonial farewell, Khan leaves Kerala to take over as Bihar Governor

G. Anand

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Outgoing Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, who often broke the conventions of the gubernatorial office by recurrently adopting an arguably combative stance against the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government, Left student unions, and the CPI(M) during his five-year politically tumultuous tenure, left the State on Sunday to assume charge as the Governor of Bihar.

Mobbed by presspersons at the Thiruvananthapuram airport, Mr. Khan refused to stir further controversy by declining to hold forth on why the State government had not accorded him a ceremonial farewell.

CPI(M) State secretary M.V. Govindan chided the media for "lionising" Mr. Khan's "unconstitutional actions to implement the Sangh Parivar agenda".

BJP president K. Surendran countered that the CPI(M) malice towards Mr. Khan for upholding the law as the head of State appeared unabated even after the latter left office.

Fond memories'

Mr. Khan said he was bidding adieu to Kerala with fond memories and had only "good words for everybody".



Controversial departure: Outgoing Governor Arif Mohammed Khan at Thiruvananthapuram airport on Sunday. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

U.P. railway staff spraying cold water on resting passengers sparks outrage

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

A viral video showing railway staff at Lucknow's Charbagh station spraying cold water on passengers – mostly women, children and elderly people – resting on platforms on a winter night provoked outrage across social media on Sunday.

The incident, which allegedly took place on Christmas night, has been termed a "shame on humanity" and "heartbreaking" by social media users, while the Opposition parties said it shows that Uttar Pradesh's capital lacks public shelters or cheap lodging facilities to house the poor during the bitter cold of winter.

In the face of the harsh criticism, the Divisional Railway Manager (DRM), Lucknow, issued a statement asking travellers to rest in waiting areas, dormitories and retiring rooms instead of using the platforms.

"Necessary instructions have been issued to the cleaning staff and CHI (Chief Health Inspector). Passengers are also suggested to refrain from sleeping on the platform.

At the station, ample facilities like waiting hall, dormitories, and retiring rooms are available, which can be availed for convenience," the DRM, Lucknow, said.

"Employees of Lucknow railway station woke up people sleeping at the station by throwing cold water on them. Railway workers have given the reason behind doing this as cleanliness of the station. If cleaning was to be done, there was another way to wake up. What was the need to commit inhumanity by throwing cold water on a sleeping person in the cold?" said Javed Rashid Khan, an X user, in a post.

The video is heart-breaking. It shows insensitivity of the highest order by the railway authorities," said Anil Yadav, a senior U.P. Congress leader.

10-year-old boy who fell into borewell in M.P. dies

Press Trust of India
BHOPAL

A 10-year-old boy, who fell into a 140-foot borewell in Madhya Pradesh's Guna district, lost his battle for life despite hectic efforts by multiple agencies for 16 hours to save him, officials said on Sunday.

The boy, Sumit Meena, slipped into the open shaft of the borewell at around 5 p.m. on Saturday in Pipiliya village under Raghogarh Assembly segment, located 50 km from Guna.

He was unresponsive when he was brought out at 9.30 a.m. on Sunday, officials said. The boy was rushed to a hospital on life support system.

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Shaming humanity'

"Such ignorance in the cold season is shaming humanity. Minister of Railways please take cognizance," posted another X user Ashutosh Patel, posting a link to the video.

The video is heart-breaking. It shows insensitivity of the highest order by the railway authorities," said Anil Yadav, a senior U.P. Congress leader.

officials to ensure the protection of the tree. Two years ago, the Coffee Board officials visited the church, inspected the tree, and assured support for its preservation. But the initiative came to a standstill after we failed to get a certificate from the church. The church aims to secure government support for the initiative," Fr. Abraham said.

CSI East Kerala Diocese public relations officer Viju P. Chacko said, "The church needs to separate the 150-year-old tree from the group of coffee plants and create a special passage for visitors to view the rare tree."

The tree could serve as a

window for visitors into the plantation culture of Peerumade," Mr. Chacko noted.

Kerala State Biodiversity Board (KSBB) district coordinator Ashwathi V.S. said that the KSBB can ensure the preservation of biodiversity-rich trees or plants through the Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) in any area.

Interestingly, during the initial period of the plantation industry in Idukki, coffee plants were the crop of choice. The book *Above Heron's Pool* by Heather Lovatt and Peter de Jong, describing the plantation history in Peerumade, sheds light on the change.



Dangerous skies

The Russia-Ukraine war poses great risk for airlines operating in the region

The crash of an Azerbaijani airliner near the Kazakhstani city of Aktau that killed 38 people has again brought into focus the danger of flying over the Russia-Ukraine conflict zone. The Embraer 190 was en route from Baku to Russia's Grozny when it was diverted and attempted an emergency landing some kilometres from Aktau. While initial fears centered around a bird hit, government and media reports have increasingly pointed at a misguided Russian anti-drone attack on the plane. Holes in the plane and videos of oxygen masks releasing would indicate depressurisation. The aircraft was still airborne after the attack, eventually crossing the Caspian Sea on the east, a distance of some 300 miles as the crow flies. Reports talk about the plane's control system being damaged, which would possibly explain its loopy flight paths, and permission being denied to the damaged aircraft to land in nearby airports although norms would allow a damaged civilian plane to land anywhere close. The Cockpit Voice Recorder and the Digital Flight Data Recorder have been recovered, which would reveal much information. Azerbaijan has sovereignty over the flight and the Brazilian manufacturer, Embraer, would also be party to the multi-stakeholder investigation that would reveal the cause of the accident, the course of events, and whether and how the control systems of the flight were affected. The last would indicate the role, if any, played by jamming systems that are part of air and drone defence.

Azerbaijani and U.S. officials have blamed Russian air defence systems responding to a Ukrainian attack likely with drones. Russian President Vladimir Putin apologised to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev "for the fact that the tragic incident occurred in Russian airspace". In this half-hearted apology, he stopped short of acknowledging active Russian involvement or that it was collateral damage to Azerbaijan, a Russian ally. That the plane was damaged nearly 500 miles from the Ukrainian border has shown the state of warfare today, in which drones and microdrones have moved centrestage as low-cost weapons capable of strikes and surveillance across broad swathes of enemy territory causing much damage deep inside enemy territory. If the Kazakhstan air crash calls for one urgent response, it is for the de-escalation of military action in the region, the success of which would depend preponderantly on Moscow's willingness to end its invasion of Ukraine and an agreement on limiting the expansion of NATO. Failure to do so now risks not only collateral damage resulting in such avoidable loss of innocent lives, but could also see more regional actors getting pulled into the conflict.

Korean drama

South Korea's political class must prioritise constitutional stability

Iver the decades, South Korea has evolved from a brutal military dictatorship to a pro-business democracy. But this journey has also been blemished with controversies involving corruption, abuse of power and political vendetta. The impeachment of the acting President, Han Duck-soo, who took charge a few days earlier following the impeachment vote against President Yoon Suk Yeol, exemplifies the vulnerabilities in the political system. Governance has been in a paralysed state ever since Mr. Yoon became President in 2022. While he won on a thin margin, the opposition Democratic Party took control of the National Assembly. Controversies and scandals followed and his approval rating tanked to below 20%. In April this year, the Democratic Party won the legislative election again, widening its lead in Parliament. As the chasm between the presidency and the opposition-controlled National Assembly widened, Mr. Yoon declared martial law earlier this month, which triggered instant protests from political quarters and the public. In a country that still keeps the dark memories of its not-so-distant military dictatorships, his move was seen as an extreme measure aimed at torpedoing its democracy. He was impeached and Prime Minister Han stepped in as the interim leader. But his tenure has also proved short-lived.

This is the first time South Korea is impeaching an interim leader. The crux of the dispute was Mr. Han's refusal to appoint three judges to fill vacancies at the nine-member Constitutional Court. According to South Korea's Constitution, a President will be stripped of powers as soon as they are impeached in Parliament but to remove them from office, at least six judges in the Constitutional Court should rule in favour of the impeachment. The opposition accused Mr. Han of delaying the constitutional process, while Mr. Han and the ruling People's Power Party argued that only an elected President has the powers to sign off appointments for the Constitutional Court. This would mean that the political and constitutional crisis is expected to persist for the foreseeable future at a time when South Korea is grappling with economic woes and also security challenges from the North. A prolonged crisis and paralysis in governance could also weaken the political institutions and empower anti-democratic forces which were in power until the late 1980s. This is perhaps the deepest crisis South Korea is facing since its transition into a democracy. Its fractious political class should prioritise constitutional stability over narrow political interests. The new acting President should strive for consensus with the key parties on appointments to the Constitutional Court and expedite the impeachment proceedings against Mr. Yoon.

Incidents on loop, but it's escape for regulator, airlines

The recent incident, on December 5, 2024, involving an Air India Airbus A320 aircraft at Goa's Mopa airport is another wake-up call for Indian aviation. The crew of the Hyderabad-bound aircraft had to reject takeoff after entering a parallel taxiway instead of the main runway. This is not the first time an event such as this has happened to airlines in India. This falls under the category of runway confusion. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the regulatory body that primarily deals with safety issues, as we have seen during the past 20 years, will blame the pilots and sweep the report under the carpet. The blame, squarely, points to the regulator and the airlines. It has failed to learn from earlier events.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)'s Annex 13 makes it mandatory for a member-state to investigate accidents, serious incidents and also incidents and identify the cause and take corrective steps to prevent a recurrence.

Series of incidents

The history of runway confusion errors by Indian carriers is long. In 1993, a Jet Airways Boeing 737 inaugural flight to Coimbatore landed at the Sulur air base of the Indian Air Force instead of Peelamedu civil airport. In September 2002, a Jet Airways Boeing 737 landed on the taxi track in Dabolim airport in Goa. In June 2007, a Spicejet Boeing 737 landed on the wrong runway at Delhi. In December 2008, a Spicejet Boeing 737 landed on a wrong runway at Kolkata. In March 2009, a Jetlite CRJ landed on a wrong runway at Kolkata. In September 2018, an Air India Airbus A320 on the Delhi-Thiruvananthapuram-Male sector landed on a wrong (under construction) runway in the Maldives.

Just a month earlier, a Jet Airways Boeing 737 had to abort takeoff while on a taxiway at Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. In January 2014, an Air India Boeing 787 almost landed at Melbourne's Essendon airport before air traffic control directed the crew to Melbourne Tullamarine airport. And in December 2020, a Spicejet Boeing 737 had a hard touchdown short of the runway threshold in Guwahati, Assam.

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**Captain A.
(Mohan)
Ranganathan**

a former airline instructor pilot and aviation safety adviser. He is also a former member of the Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council (CASAC), India

Had the DGCA and the airlines concerned taken proactive and corrective steps, India would not have to cut a sorry figure in international aviation. India is lucky that none of these events resulted in fatalities. The blame is apportioned to pilot error while the airlines and the regulator walk away without accountability.

In June 2010, in the first meeting of the Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council (CASAC), formed after the Mangaluru crash of an Air India Express flight (May 2010), this writer had highlighted some of the events, between 2002 and 2009, in a presentation before the Union Minister of Civil Aviation. If such serious incidents are still taking place in 2024, the blame falls squarely on the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the DGCA and the airlines for their failure to prevent a recurrence.

Singapore took corrective measures

Contrast this with an incident involving a Singapore Airlines flight in Taiwan on October 31, 2000. The crew were trying to expedite their departure before the airport closed due to a typhoon. They took off from a wrong runway which had been partially closed. The aircraft crashed into construction equipment, exploded in a fire and several passengers died. It was night, in heavy rain and with strong winds. Singapore took corrective measures and there has not been a serious incident till date. Can India not learn from them?

Airlines in India have had a repeated number of accidents involving high and fast approaches, resulting in runway overruns since 2005. In October 2005, an Air Sahara Boeing 737 went off the runway at Mumbai and there was serious damage to the aircraft. In March 2015 a Spicejet DH8-D sustained damage during a runway excursion on landing in Hubli. In July 2019, a Spicejet Boeing 737 overran the runway in Mumbai on landing and was damaged. In December 2016, a Jet Airways Boeing 737 went off the runway at Goa after a rejected take-off.

A majority of those aircraft have resulted in hull losses and some such as the Mangaluru and Kozhikode (2020) crashes have resulted in the loss of 179 lives. In all those overrun accidents, pilots have been blamed but never the poor

training and safety standards of airlines, the non-compliance with ICAO standards on aerodrome infrastructure and the failure of the DGCA's and Airport Authority of India's safety audits that have covered up serious deficiencies. The Flight Standards Directorate of the DGCA – which is supposed to oversee standards – has failed miserably, as it is the same type of accidents that have occurred and aircraft have been written off.

Pressure on crew

India has one of the worst set of regulations on flight and duty time limitations for flight crew. Pilots and cabin attendants are pressured to operate in violation of flight time limits, flight duty limits and rest periods. The new addition to pressure on flight deck crew is the hydra-headed monster called "on time performance", or OTP. Many of these errors can be attributed to the OTP pressure and failure of crew resource management in the cockpit.

In the Kozhikode crash, the captain was in a hurry to land because he was required to operate the next day's flight. The accident is a classic case of "press-on-it is" where, once the pilot gets fixed on to the landing strip, no inputs are received from the other pilot. The same happened in the Mangaluru accident. Repeated calls by the co-pilot to go around were ignored.

The incident, in Mopa, Goa, shows a lack of knowledge of runway markings by the pilots. Runways and not the taxi track have specific markings. Pilots landing short is also an indication of a lack of knowledge of runway markings and non-compliance of stabilised approach criteria. Airline training and safety departments should wake up and address these serious training deficiencies.

India has to move from the old adage, "If a pilot is alive, blame him. If he is dead, bury him". The recent deferment of flight and duty time limits at the behest of airline managements is a serious safety issue. To add fuel to the fire is a High Court decision asking the DGCA to negotiate with the two sides to find a suitable solution. Safety and fatigue are not negotiable. This is another instance of the judiciary having no clue about aviation safety.

One Nation One Election and representative democracy

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, that was tabled in the Lok Sabha, proposes simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State/Union Territory Legislative Assemblies with the insertion of Article 82(A). This ambitious reform seeks to synchronise elections, fix the tenure of the Lok Sabha, and simultaneously align elections to the State Assemblies. If the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly is dissolved before its five-year term, mid-term elections will only cover the remainder of the original tenure.

The Bill also amends Articles 83, 172, and 327, with changes effective from an 'appointed date', post-2029 general elections, thereby initiating simultaneous elections in 2034. A second Bill, the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, aligns the tenure of Union Territories' legislative Assemblies with the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

While the proposal seeks administrative efficiency and reduced election fatigue, critical questions arise: has the 'One Nation, One Election (ONOE)' process been truly inclusive and representative? Are there limits to our understanding of the representative spirit of Indian democracy?

Understanding representative democracy
Representative democracy is a system wherein citizens elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf. Rooted in the principles of free and fair elections, political accountability, and the protection of individual rights, it balances majority rule with the protection of minority interests. This form of governance becomes especially critical in diverse and populous countries such as India.

The theoretical underpinnings emphasise that elected representatives act as intermediaries, ensuring stable governance while accommodating competing interests. Citizens, being too numerous and diverse to participate directly in governance, delegate authority to their elected representatives. The system thrives on periodic elections, informed citizen participation, and institutional checks and balances.

Despite its theoretical merits, representative democracy faces growing challenges in practice. A 2024 Pew Research Center study across 24 nations, including Brazil, India, Nigeria, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States, revealed widespread disillusionment with

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the system. Citizens increasingly questioned its effectiveness, with some exploring alternatives such as direct democracy, expert rule, or even authoritarian regimes.

In 13 countries, significant segments supported strong leaders bypassing parliamentary checks, reflecting frustration with institutional inefficiencies. Alarmingly, military rule garnered between 15% to 17% support in nations such as Greece, Japan, the U.K., and the U.S. Such trends underscore growing distrust in representative systems, driven by perceived inefficiencies, corruption, and unfulfilled promises.

Jayaprakash Narayan's critique

In India, debates about representative democracy are not new. Jayaprakash Narayan, in his seminal work, *A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity* (1959), offered a deep critique of parliamentary democracy. JP argued that the reliance on individual voting created an 'atomized society', where fragmented, partisan politics overshadowed the collective national interest.

JP highlighted the following defects – risks of minority governments: In a multi-party system like India, he warned that parliamentary democracy risks unstable and unrepresentative governments.

First, demagoguery and populism: JP highlighted how political parties manipulate public opinion through half-truths, empty promises, and divisive rhetoric.

Second, centralisation of power: Parliamentary democracy, according to JP, concentrates power in the state, weakening intermediary institutions between citizens and the national government.

Third, financial costs of elections: JP critiqued the exorbitant cost of elections, tethering democracy to moneyed interests and large organisations.

While critical, JP's analysis aimed to reform and strengthen democracy. His concerns resonate today as India debates ONOE and its implications for democratic representation.

For a reform as significant as ONOE, an inclusive and representative process is crucial. In representative democracies, public opinion shapes policy, holding governments accountable to citizens' aspirations and concerns. To achieve this, pre-legislative consultation becomes indispensable, enabling policymakers to gather diverse views, address challenges, and enhance transparency.

The Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy, 2014,

mandates a minimum 30-day period for public feedback on proposed legislation. It requires draft Bills to be accompanied by explanatory notes that clarify key provisions in accessible terms.

However, the process adopted for ONOE fell short. First, inadequate consultation period: The high-level committee issued a public notice on January 5, 2024, inviting suggestions on ONOE. Citizens were given just 10 days – until January 15 – to respond, undermining the spirit of the 2014 policy. Second, lack of explanatory material: Despite the high-level committee being established in September 2023, no explanatory notes or background papers were provided, limiting citizens' understanding of the proposal's scope and challenges. Third, framing of questions: The high-level committee's approach, seeking 'yes/no' responses on supporting ONOE, appeared perfunctory, giving the impression the matter was already settled.

Such procedural lapses risk alienating citizens and stakeholders, undermining trust in the reform process. In a diverse democracy like India, meaningful public engagement is vital to ensure that policy reflects varied perspectives and fosters consensus.

Implications for representative democracy

The ONOE Bill raises critical questions about the representative nature of Indian democracy. First, centralisation versus federalism: synchronising elections risks a further centralising of power, potentially undermining the federal spirit of the Constitution. State-specific issues may be overshadowed by national narratives. Second, inclusivity and participation: by curtailing consultation and rushing reforms, the government risks sidelining citizens' voices, weakening democratic inclusivity. Third, electoral accountability: frequent elections, while resource-intensive, enhance accountability by enabling voters to evaluate governments regularly. Simultaneous elections could dilute this accountability.

India's democratic fabric thrives on citizen participation, inclusivity, and accountability. Reforms such as ONOE, while aimed at efficiency, must not compromise these principles. A rushed process undermines trust and risks centralisation. Only by adhering to the principles above can our democracy remain truly representative in letter and spirit.

The views expressed are personal

The process adopted for the One Nation One Election Bill had lapses that affect India's democratic fabric

children of today who are habituated to online reading. This is not as beneficial and effective as having a proper book in their hands and reading it.

M. Chandrasekhar,
Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh

It was Dr. Singh's vision that transformed India into a hub for innovation and growth, laying the foundation for its emergence as a global economic powerhouse. His contributions underscore the transformative power of leadership rooted in pragmatism and foresight, leaving an indelible mark on modern India. **Avineshwar Bhardwaj**, Darbhanga, Bihar

India has lost a statesman and a fine economist. Dr. Singh may have slipped into the pages of history but he will live forever in the heart of every Indian.

Devendra Khurana,
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

I had the privilege of being present at Dr. Singh's visit to Somayajulapalli village in Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh, in 2004, when he laid the foundation stone for a minor irrigation tank. The Kurnool District Collector, Ajay Jain, explained the salient features of the project to Dr. Singh. I was the superintending engineer, irrigation circle, Kurnool, from February 2002 to June 2004. Dr. Singh evinced keen interest, eliciting many details as well as asking about the irrigation outlook in the district.

Y. Abdul Basheer,
Hyderabad

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Manmohan Singh

While Dr. Manmohan Singh deserves everybody's applause for his economic reforms – along with the former Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao – that steered India away from a big crisis, it is to be noted that the great economist's knowledge and talent were sidelined by the Congress party. The party only used the great man as a tool to rule

the country for 10 years. The economic reforms of 1991 have not been properly handled by successive governments which resulted in the country and the common people being dragged into debt traps and a westernisation of social life. But there is a positive side. The former Prime Minister's voracious book-reading habit has to be utilised to inspire the youth and the

children of today who are habituated to online reading. This is not as beneficial and effective as having a proper book in their hands and reading it. **M. Chandrasekhar**, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh

It was Dr. Singh's vision that transformed India into a hub for innovation and growth, laying the foundation for its emergence as a global

Restoring constitutional order in Manipur

An editorial titled 'Welcome spotlight: On the Supreme Court directive to Manipur government' published in *The Hindu* on December 14, 2024, rightly mentions that the executive's reticence and lack of accountability, both at the federal and State levels, for the unrelenting ethnic violence in Manipur has again forced the higher judiciary to intervene. However, we must be circumspect in projecting the Supreme Court as a benevolent institutional actor that has dutifully responded with alacrity matched by requisite conviction, and concern to consistently hold the executive to account.

A thorough assessment of the Supreme Court's interventions in Manipur over the last 18 months and the incremental steps it can take to rebuild trust in the rule of law is at least merited. In general, we can witness a gradual slide towards institutional dereliction, complacency, and apathy that is unbefitting of a Constitutional Court meant for all Indians. This is evident from the fact that, except for the last hearing on December 9, where it sought details of destroyed and encroached properties, the court did not hold any effective hearings or pass corresponding orders in 2024.

Throughout this year, the main batch of petitions on Manipur was heard only six times. In other words, the court functioned as if its writ jurisdiction had ceased to extend to Manipur, even as 2024 saw some of the bloodiest phases of violence and gruesome killing of innocent victims belonging to both warring ethnic communities. Adding to this are the continuation of various events that emerged on or after May 3, 2023, and are unprecedented in the life of our republic. The list of illustrations is lengthy and extensive – the demographic and geographical separation of the State and its enforcement through a militarised buffer zone, the State's complete surrender over the monopoly of

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John Simte
Lawyer and researcher

violence and law and order to armed militant groups, and the administration of an illegal, hateful ethno-cultural oath to legislators by the Arambai Tengol.

On some occasions, the Supreme Court did respond, especially when it took suo moto cognisance after a video depicting tribal women being sexually assaulted and paraded naked by a mob went viral on social media. But its responses were episodic across several months in 2023, only to remain largely absent in 2024. This is evident as magisterial courts in Assam, to whom the Supreme Court had given charge of pre-trial procedures, await its directions to take cognisance of the chargesheets filed and begin the trial. For instance, the trial is yet to begin in the case of the sexual assault and naked parade of two tribal women, even though the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had filed chargesheets against six accused persons, including a juvenile, in October 2023.

In an order dated August 7, 2023, the Supreme Court had directed: the formation of a committee of three retired judges, led by Justice Gita Mittal, to look into all matters of relief and rehabilitation; the constitution of 42 Special Investigation Teams (SITs) in six groups based on the crimes, comprising CBI officers drawn from cadres/States and headed by a retired Director-General of Police. By all accounts, the functioning of the former has been reduced to a mechanical, bureaucratic ritual of filing occasional reports. Several tribal student organisations have since also filed separate pleas before the Supreme Court for relocating displaced students to other universities and professional institutes. Simultaneously, a report in *The Hindu* (December 18, 2024) stated that chargesheets for only 6% (192 cases) out of 3,023 registered cases have been filed by the SIT till November 20, 2024. It remains unclear how much of the

The SITs should be directed to fill the existing informational vacuum and provide timely updates to petitioners and the families of deceased victims about the progress of the investigations and trials

structure envisioned for the SITs by the Supreme Court is still intact, as publicly available information suggests that multiple IPS officers on deputation to the SITs from Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, and Delhi have either sought repatriation or have already been repatriated back to their home cadres.

Crucial measures
These directions, initially viewed with a high degree of optimism, have overwhelmingly failed to instill any sense of justice among the people of Manipur or arrest their feelings of institutional neglect and the complete erosion of the rule of law. Now that the Supreme Court appears to have turned its attention back to Manipur, it must undertake the following measures to provide the State with a much-needed healing touch.

First, given the volatile situation in Manipur, inimical to a fair criminal justice system, the trials of cases investigated by the SITs should be transferred forthwith outside Manipur, and the appropriate trial courts should be allowed to take cognisance of chargesheets already filed. Second, the SITs should be directed to fill the existing informational vacuum and provide timely updates to petitioners and the families of deceased victims about the progress of the investigations and trials.

Thirdly, considering the enormity of multi-faceted issues arising from the conflict in Manipur that persist and are likely to continue due to the sharp governance deficit, a bipartisan High Powered Commission comprising eminent persons, including members from both conflicting communities, should be constituted. This commission, in turn, be directed to report its findings directly to a Special Bench of the Supreme Court, which should be given the task of exclusively hearing cases related to the ethnic violence in Manipur.

A case for pragmatic approach in T.N.

The conflict over V-C appointments has left six universities without leadership

STATE OF PLAY

T. Ramakrishnan
ramakrishnan.t@thehindu.co.in



minee of the UGC chief, for the selection of V-Cs of State, private, and 'deemed to be' universities.

The next day, Mr. Chezhiaan issued a statement. He stated that the State government had been following laws enacted by the State legislature.

It

did

not

accept

the

stipulation

concerned

(7.3 - ii)

when its Higher Education department came out with an order in January 2021. The order, issued by the previous AIADMK regime, had marked the general acceptance of the UGC Regulations on minimum qualifications for the appointment of teachers and other academic staff in universities and colleges under the control of the State Higher Education department. However, the order was categorical in stating that the "appointment and selection of the Vice-Chancellor" of 12 universities would be governed by provisions of the Tamil Nadu Universities Laws (amendment), 2017, and in respect of Madras University, the existing provisions of the relevant 1923 law would do.

When Mr. Chezhiaan interacted with the media for the first time as Minister, he conveyed the advice given to him by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin: to avoid tussles and follow the rules and regulations in the interest of the students. However, in no time, the expectations of a cordial relationship between the Governor and the State government disappeared with old issues getting revived.

In the past week, the State witnessed a familiar controversy between the two institutions over the appointment of V-Cs. The trigger for the latest round came when Mr. Ravi objected on December 18 to a government order, issued on December 9, on the constitution of a search committee for shortlisting a set of candidates for V-C of the Annamalai University. According to the Governor, this order, which had ignored the 2018 UGC Regulations [7.3 - ii] on the subject by excluding the nominee of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman from the panel, "violates Supreme Court judgments." As per the regulations, there has to be a panel of 3-5 persons, including a no-

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overnment is at liberty to frame its own laws relating to education in the State and is not, therefore, bound to accept or follow the regulations framed by the UGC" and in the event of the States' willingness to adopt the regulations, they would have to abide by the conditions laid down by the Commission.

In fact, on the very same issue, the Governor, in 2023, issued notifications constituting Search-cum-Selection Committees for the identification of candidates for appointment of V-Cs of the Bharathiar, Madras, and the Tamil Nadu Teachers Education Universities. This prompted the State government to approach the Supreme Court in November 2023, where the case was pending. In January this year, Mr. Ravi took back the notifications.

Subsequent to the Minister's response, there was one more round of exchange of words between him and Mr. Ravi. But, what is at stake is the fate of six universities, which do not have V-Cs for months, the earliest vacancy being at Bharathiar University since October 2022. Madras University has remained headless since August 2023. In addition, there are two universities wherein the extended tenure of V-Cs is due for expiry in February and May 2025. Ironically, it was to ensure that universities enjoyed the continuity of V-Cs that the State, in May 2017, promulgated ordinances.

Notwithstanding the correctness or otherwise of the respective position of the Governor and the State government, both institutions, in the interests of the students, should adopt a pragmatic approach and resolve all the outstanding issues as early as possible.

36% of TB patients in four T.N. districts are migrants: survey

Migrants with TB face greater disadvantages and require clinical, social, and economic support

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

A recent report by the Resource Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health (REACH) highlights efforts to address tuberculosis (TB) among migrants in Tamil Nadu. Several challenges, including loss to follow-up, occupational risks in hazardous environments, and lack of official documentation, hinder diagnosis and treatment for this vulnerable group.

In collaboration with the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) and with support from the STOP TB Partnership, REACH implemented a pilot intervention in four Tamil Nadu districts – Chennai, Coimbatore, Kanchipuram, and Vellore – from July 2023 to December 2024.

As part of the project, people with TB at selected health facilities were screened to identify migrants among them. Of the 11,564 TB patients screened, the majority were aged 15–59 years (77%, Chart 1) and male (66%, Chart 2). Significantly, 36.6% were migrants (Chart 3), with 2.2% of these cases being drug-resistant TB. Based on drug resistance status, additional nutritional support, such as enhanced dry rations, was provided.

Migrants were categorised by their location. Over 62% were identified as those transferring out of the intervention districts to other districts or States, while about 22% resided in another district but came to the intervention districts for medication (Chart 4).

A co-morbidity study among these migrants revealed that 29% were undernourished, 27% had diabetes, and 25% consumed alcohol (Chart 5). Mapping inter-State migrant TB cases showed that most transfers occurred in West Bengal, followed by Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand (Chart 6). Chart 7 depicts intra-State migrant

TB and its impact on migrants

The data for the charts were sourced from an impact report prepared by REACH in partnership with the Stop TB Partnership and the National TB Elimination Programme

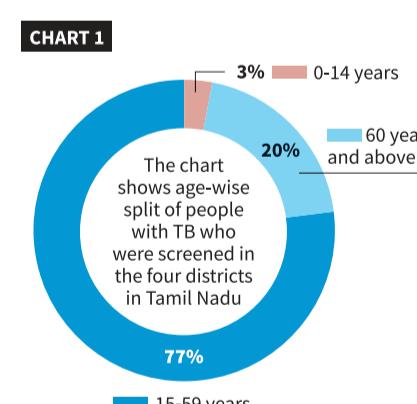


Chart 2: The chart shows the gender-wise split of people with TB who were screened

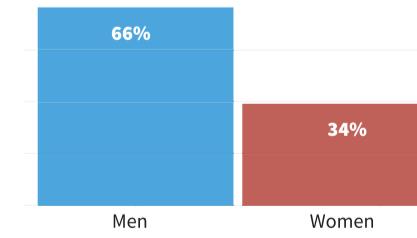


Chart 3: Chart shows the share of migrants among those who were screened in the four districts in Tamil Nadu

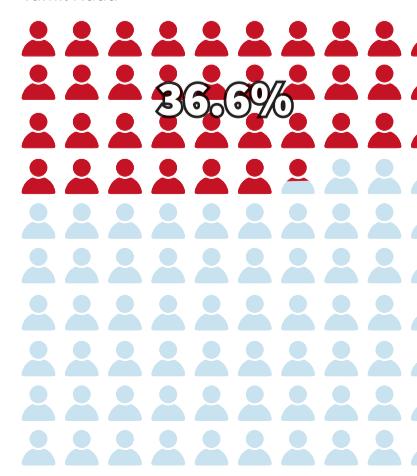
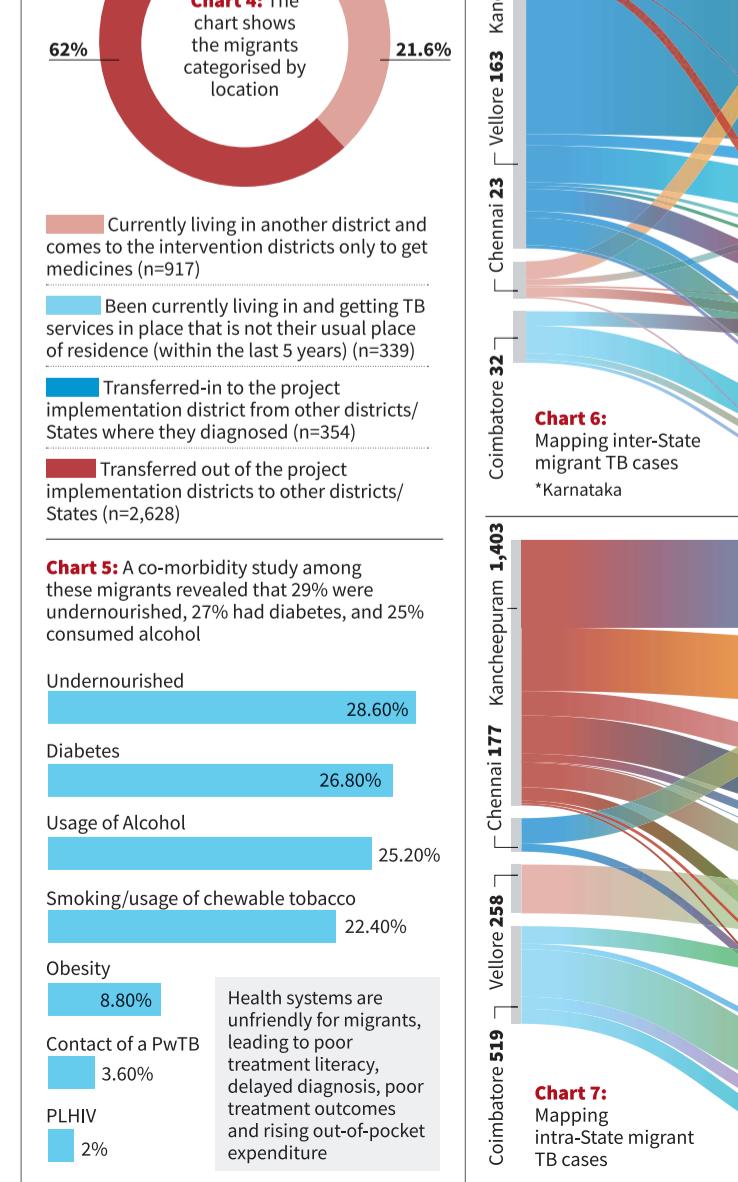
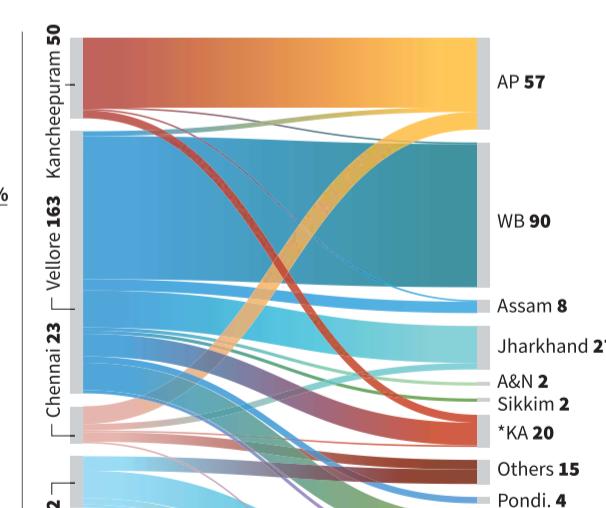


Chart 5: A co-morbidity study among these migrants revealed that 29% were undernourished, 27% had diabetes, and 25% consumed alcohol



REACH, or the Resource Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health, is an India-based non-profit organisation, established in Chennai

The Stop TB Partnership is a hosted entity of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 30, 1974

Disappointing Year for Hides & Skins

MADRAS, Dec. 30: The year 1974 for the East India tanning industry and leather trade was one of continuous crisis which not only sapped the resourcefulness of the industry but killed the buoyancy and optimism which have been its special qualities.

The performance of the tanning industry in Madras during the year that has just ended has been thoroughly disappointing with a fall of about 50 per cent in production and exports. Representations made to the Central Government from time to time for the revival of the industry and trade made no impact and the situation continued to drift. The world economic situation raised new problems and under the present restrictive policies of the Government, even if the industry takes voluntary measures to rehabilitate itself, it is rather doubtful if it would bear fruit.

There has been a world wide slump in raw hides especially America and the Continent as a result of increased production due to shortage of cattle feed. The forecast of production for the New Year is also on the higher side. World raw material prices have dropped to 1960-62 levels and Indian leather with its high cost of production and export duties seems to be pricing itself out of the overseas markets.

The development of tanning techniques in African and Middle Eastern countries has created a situation where India is being fastly replaced by those countries.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 30, 1924

I.C.S. Examination.

The following press communiqué dated December 23 has been issued:-

An open Competitive Examination for the Indian Civil-Service will be held in London commencing on the 1st August 1925. The age of the candidates on the 1st August 1925 must be less than 24 years but not less than 21 years. Applications from intending candidates must reach the Secretary, Civil Service Commission, on or before the 15th May 1925. Copies of the form of applications and other particulars can be obtained from the Director of Public Instruction, Madras. Detailed rules and regulations and a syllabus of the examination will be published in the Fort St. George Gazette.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of people arrested in crackdown on Assad loyalists

300 Syria's new authorities have arrested nearly 300 people, including informants, pro-regime fighters and former soldiers, in a crackdown on loyalists to former president Bashar al-Assad. The authorities intensified efforts to consolidate control. AFP

The number of years for which Chad was under military rule

3 Chad began voting on Sunday in a general election that is presented by the government as a key step towards ending military rule but has been boycotted by the opposition. Turnout was low in the capital N'Djamena when polling stations opened for voters to choose a new parliament. AFP

The extent of employee attrition in private banks

25 In per cent. Employee attrition in private sector banks has witnessed an increase to about 25% and this high turnover rate poses operational risk, according to the Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023-24. Employee attrition rates are high across select private sector banks. PTI

Number of devotees expected to attend Maha Kumbh

40 crore. In a first, "underwater drones" capable of diving up to 100 metres will be deployed during the upcoming Maha Kumbh to provide round-the-clock surveillance at the Sangam area in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, the Culture Ministry said on Sunday. PTI

The length of the new extension of the Suez canal

10 km. Egypt has tested a new 10-kilometre (6.2-mile) extension to the Suez Canal as it tries to minimise the impact of currents on shipping and increase the key waterway's capacity. Two ships used the new extension on Saturday. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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The challenge of holding judges accountable

The review mechanism for judges in India requires 'proved misbehaviour or incapacity' to be decided by a committee set up under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. This committee functions like a trial court, but is set in motion only after a successful attempt to impeach the judge is moved either in the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha

LETTER & SPIRIT

Kunal Shankar

A speech delivered by Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav of the Allahabad High Court, that made apparent his biases against the Muslim community, at an event organised by the legal cell of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad within the Court precincts on December 8, has once again spotlighted the difficulty in India's review mechanism to hold judges of the higher judiciary accountable.

The review mechanism requires "proved misbehaviour or incapacity" to be decided by a three-member committee set up under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. This committee functions like a trial court, but is set in motion only after a successful attempt to impeach the concerned judge is moved either in the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha, which must be approved by the presiding officer of the House – the Speaker in the case of the Lok Sabha, or the Vice-President/Chairman in case of the Rajya Sabha. The provisions for this mechanism flows from Articles 124 (4), (5), 217, and 218 of the Constitution of India, and the those of the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.

Justice V. Ramaswami's trial

Only two judges out of seven so far, aside from Justice Yadav against whom impeachment has been attempted, have been found guilty for their "misbehaviour" by the three-member committee, which must comprise of a Supreme Court judge, a Chief Justice of a High Court and an eminent jurist.

The first was retired Supreme Court Justice V. Ramaswami, who was found guilty of extravagant spending on his official residence such as buying air conditioners, plush furniture and bedding, without following due process, much like the accusations made against Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra by the ruling BJP last year. While such misdemeanours by current accounts of corruption seem like an arcane quibble over propriety, they nevertheless animated public discourse on a judge's conduct in the late 80s and early 90s. Such discussions led to the foundation of the 'Restatement of Values of Judicial Life' adopted by the Supreme Court on May 7, 1997, as the code of conduct for those holding high offices in judiciary.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, retired Madras High Court Justice K. Chandru, who played a pivotal role in the impeachment proceedings against Justice Ramaswami, recollects how the judge "bought 6-7 maces, one with a silver head to denote the Chief Justice's arrival and took it on a cargo plane in 1988, and not by rail," following his elevation as the Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court. "There was no tendering process that was followed for the purchase of the maces," Justice Chandru added. He was referring to the colonial practice followed at the Madras HC where an orderly precedes a judge, to signal his arrival to ensure those in the hallway and the courthouse "maintain decorum". Justice Ramaswami deemed it fit to continue this practice at the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which did not have this practice as it was founded in independent India, much to the shock of his "brother judges". In his Tamil book, *I too became a judge*, Justice Chandru recalled a letter dated August 18, 1988, in which then Chief Justice V. Ramaswami's colleagues wrote "You will remember that most of us told you later



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too that we are opposed to the introduction of maces. Maces are but a relic of the imperial past and out of tune with our socialistic pattern of society."

The adverse verdict by the three-member panel constituted under the Judges Inquiry Act against V. Ramaswami set the precedent of then CJI Sabysachi Mukherjee deciding not to allocate any work to him in 1993. The failure of the impeachment motion in the Lok Sabha that year, did not lead to a reversal of the CJJ's decision. No cases were listed for hearing before Justice Ramaswami's Bench until his retirement three years later.

Article 124 (4) of the Constitution stipulates that the panel's finding must be voted upon by Parliament. The motion requires either a two-thirds majority of present MPs voting in favour of the motion or an absolute majority in each House, for the judge to be removed. On May 10, 1993, of the 401 members present in the Lok Sabha, 196 voted for Ramaswami's removal. While no one voted against the motion, 205 abstentions by the ruling Congress ensured the defeat of the impeachment.

Resignation before accountability

The second judge to face an impeachment motion was Justice Soumitra Sen of the Calcutta High Court. Justice Sen became the first judge of India's higher judiciary who was voted to be removed by the Rajya Sabha by an

overwhelming majority, but he resigned in September 2011, days before the motion was to be tabled in the Lok Sabha. Justice Sen was found guilty of misappropriating ₹33.23 lakh in a case in 1983, as a court-appointed receiver in his capacity as a lawyer, and misrepresenting facts before a Calcutta court.

Similarly, Chief Justice of the Sikkim High Court, P.D. Dinakaran resigned on July 29, 2011, the day of the first sitting of the three-member panel constituted under the Judges Inquiry Act, to look into 16 charges, some of them as grave as appropriating more than 300 acres of lands from farmers in Tamil Nadu's Tiruvallur district, after he became a judge of the Madras High Court.

Such instances highlight that members of India's higher judiciary enjoy a disproportionately greater level of immunity when compared with even elected officials as they "continue to enjoy the perks of being a retired judge, like pension" and other benefits, said jurist Mohan Gopal, who was part of the three-member committee in the Dinakaran case. Such resignations abort the trial and subsequent impeachment, something not afforded to even sitting or former Chief Ministers, like in the case of Jayalalithaa in the disproportionate assets petition decided in 2014.

The Forum for Judicial Accountability (FJA) that led the campaign against judicial corruption in the Dinakaran case, wrote to the three-member committee on

August 6 that year, seeking a continuation of the committee's investigations arguing that "the jurisdiction of the Committee is untouched by the factum of removal...". The FJA's contention was that there were two separate parts to the removal process of a justice – one that concerns finding guilt, which is governed by Article 124 (5) and the second, which is impeachment, which is governed by article 124 (4) and is within the jurisdiction of Parliament. "The purpose of impeachment is not merely removal from office, but a more substantial one about accountability to the people whose trust is alleged to be breached and whose confidence in judiciary needs to be reinforced," the FJA argued.

"Though Article 124(5) of the Constitution uses the words "removed from office" and is silent on the issue of disqualification from holding future office, the finding of guilt by the Committee and the subsequent proceedings in Parliament will have the effect of disqualifying the person from holding public office in future. It may be noted that Justice V.Ramasami having been found guilty by the Committee, continued to hold office as a judge of the Supreme Court and retired with all the benefits, taking advantage of the defeat of the impeachment motion. Post retirement he was appointed as Chairperson of the Tamil Nadu Law Commission," said FJA.

The need to complete proceedings
RTI petitions by former *Frontline* legal affairs editor, V. Venkatesan revealed that both jurist Mohan Gopal and the Chairman of the three-member panel retired justice Aftab Alam believed the work of the committee must continue. The RTI replies made public a set of correspondence between Mohan Gopal and the two members of the committee, and of the committee with the Rajya Sabha Chairperson Hamid Ansari. Mr. Venkatesan has included these letters as annexures to his 2014 book *Constitutional Conundrums: Challenges to India's Democratic Process*. In his August 15, 2011 letter to Justice Aftab Alam and J. S. Kehar, the then Chief Justice of the Karnataka HC, Mr. Gopal writes, "the resignation of Justice P.D. Dinakaran presents our Committee with an unprecedented situation. Any decision we take will have a profound and far-reaching impact on the framework for judicial accountability in our country – both in terms [of the] future implementation of the Judges Inquiry Act, 1968, and in terms of the manner in which the current Constitutional and legal framework for judicial accountability is reformed...While undoubtedly the investigation and the proof stage arises only when there is a prayer for removal from office and is the essential first step or that purpose, it would be an error to ignore the independent role and value of the investigation and proof part of the process in and by itself...A view that the resignation would result in the investigation and proof process being aborted would in effect place in the hands of the judge who is the object of the investigation the power to end the investigation against him by resigning – an absurd situation that the legislature could not have intended. In such circumstances, there would be no incentive arising from this process for any judge to avoid misbehaviour as any judge can end investigation into charges against him at any point by resigning from office."

While the Chair justice Aftab Alam concurred and sought the continuation of the Committee, the request was rejected by Rajya Sabha Chairman Hamid Ansari.

THE GIST

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CACHE

From Gemini to Llama: how AI titans shaped the industry

In a relatively short span of time, AI has transformed from a novelty to an everyday tool. What are some of the notable advances in AI in 2024, and how did this tech become a common trope in such a short period?

John Xavier

Artificial Intelligence (AI) was seen as novelty in 2023 with the launch of ChatGPT just a month before the start of that year. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, after investing \$10 billion in OpenAI, threw down the gauntlet to Google, taunting the DeepMind owner to show what its AI could do. Google tottered with its half-baked Bard bot that spewed out inaccurate answers. In subsequent months, the Alphabet-owned company went through a baptism of fire and finally came out with a rechristened AI, Gemini, by the end of 2023.

Building on that momentum, the search giant steadily rebuilt its reputation and began infusing Gemini's capabilities in almost all of its products and services in 2024. Google's recent AI advances, including the second generation of Gemini, the Trillium AI accelerator chip, and breakthroughs in quantum computing with the Willow chip, have significantly boosted investor confidence, driving its stock price to a record high.

OpenAI did not give Google's Gemini an easy run. The competition between the two Silicon Valley giants was intense. Both the firms launched advanced AI models with improved reasoning capabilities.

OpenAI's o3 model built on top of its predecessor, o1, by focusing on enhanced reasoning skills, outperformed previous models in complex coding and advanced mathematics. Similarly, Google's Gemini 2.0 Flash Thinking model answered complex questions by outlining its thought process, enhancing the model's reasoning capabilities. OpenAI's o3 model, with its advanced reasoning capabilities, garnered more attention from Microsoft as the tech giant relies on OpenAI models for its AI assistant, Microsoft 365 Copilot. While o3 promises better performance, its increased cost and computation time are significant considerations for business applications.

Anthropic's Claude and Mistral AI
It wasn't just Google's turn-around this year. Product launches and updates from a clutch of other AI companies have, in some instances, stolen OpenAI's thunder this year. Amazon-backed Anthropic upgraded its AI model, Claude 3.5 Sonnet, with a "computer use" capability. That feature enables the AI to autonomously perform tasks such as moving the cursor, typing, and browsing the Internet, effectively automating complex computer interactions. This development aims to enhance productivity, particularly for software developers, by allowing the AI to execute multi-step actions with minimal human intervention.

Another area Anthropic made strides this year was in how it implemented safety measures. During the U.S. presidential election, with its Clio tool, it analysed AI usage to ensure responsible AI deployment. In another instance, the AI company allowed the U.K.'s AI Safety Institute to early-test its Claude 3.5 Sonnet model.

French AI company Mistral for its part brought in a certain level of transparency in AI with its open-weight models, including Mistral 7B and Mistral 8x7B.

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THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on Koneru Humpy, the newly crowned Women's World Rapid chess Champion

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1
Why did her parents Koneru Ashok and Latha initially name her Hampi and then change it to Humpy?

QUESTION 2
In which famous city known for its film festival did Humpy win the girls' under-10 title in 1997 for her first World crown?

QUESTION 3
In 2002, at the age of 15 years,

1 month and 27 days, she became the youngest woman ever to become a Grandmaster. Whose record did she break for the feat?

QUESTION 4
To whom did Humpy finish runner-up in the Women's World Chess Championship?

QUESTION 5
With which civilian award was Humpy honoured in 2007?

QUESTION 6
Prior to her win in New York, in which city and year did Humpy claim her first World Rapid title?



Visual question:

Which gold medal is Humpy showing off proudly? PTI

Open-source models allow a broader audience to engage with AI technology, facilitating collaborative development and rapid innovation. This openness contrasts with the closed nature of proprietary models, which restrict access to underlying code and data.

Developers can customise open-source LLMs to specific needs, enhancing versatility across diverse applications. This adaptability is often limited in closed-source models due to proprietary restrictions. While open-source models offer benefits, they may face challenges in matching the performance and specialised capabilities of proprietary systems. Proprietary models often have access to extensive resources and data, enabling them to achieve higher performance in certain tasks. And success in AI is dependent on the kind of data the models are trained in.

On-device experience

In 2024, AI models were increasingly deployed across various devices to bring their capabilities closer to end-users, enhance functionality, and provide real-time experiences. For instance, in smartphones and tablets, Apple's Neural Engine, Qualcomm's Snapdragon AI Engine, and Google's Tensor chipsets were integrated with LLMs and vision models to power various tasks, including voice assistants like Siri and Google Assistant, real-time image processing for photo enhancements and augmented reality, and multimodal AI for speech, text, and image-based queries.

Apple's incorporation of AI features into its latest iPhones, such as Visual Intelligence and Image Playground, has revitalised consumer interest, contributing to a significant increase in iPhone sales. This integration has positioned Apple on the brink of becoming the first company to surpass a \$4 trillion market capitalisation.

PC manufacturers are fully embracing AI by integrating AI accelerators such as NVIDIA GeForce RTX series GPUs, AMD Radeon chips, and Apple's M-series chips. These accelerators enable generative models and advanced features like AI-powered transcription and video editing tools, enhanced productivity tools, and gaming enhancements including real-time ray tracing and AI-driven non-playable characters (NPCs) to run on the device.

Talent is key

At the core of the current AI revolution lies a dual-engine system. One engine is responsible for training the data, while the other leverages the trained data to make inferences. To effectively operate these engines, hardware resources alone are insufficient. Human expertise plays a crucial role. This has become a pain point for OpenAI in particular as it has been bleeding top talent this year. A notable departure from the AI giant is co-founder Ilya Sutskever. The company also lost its chief technology officer Mira Murati, and several other leading computer scientists.

To make matters worse, some of the departing members are joining rivals. For instance, John Schulman, another OpenAI co-founder, moved to Anthropic. Mr. Schulman is a key leader in the creation of ChatGPT.

According to a BCG analysis of top skilled labour, AI experts are the most mobile at nearly 11 out of 100 experts moving internationally every five years. So, where they go can make a big difference. Companies and countries that attract the best talent can gain a competitive edge in the tech world. Countries that are open to global talent tend to invent more and grow faster. As countries compete for leadership in AI, their ability to attract top talent is crucial for their success.



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

She has a chronic knee problem

The water is freezing for this time of year. Don't stay too long in the pool and catch a cold, capiche?

S. Upendran

"I feel great after playing three sets of tennis today. Surprisingly, I didn't see Malathy on court. I wonder if..."

"I don't find that surprising at all! The poor girl has a chronic back problem."

"What are you talking about? Malathy plays tennis almost every day. How can she do that with a serious back problem?"

"I said she has a chronic back problem, not a serious back problem."

"What's the difference?"

"A chronic problem is one that lasts for a long time. The problem doesn't go away easily."

"So, it's not a serious problem!"

"It needn't be a serious problem. A 'chronic' problem is one that persists. When I was growing up, there was always a chronic shortage of water during the summer months."

"I remember those days. How about this example? I'm told there's a chronic shortage of housing in some of our big cities."

"Sounds good! My grandmother has a chronic knee problem. Now then, do you..."

"When the problem is rather serious, what do you say?"

"You could consider using the word 'acute'. When you say that someone has an acute back problem, what you're suggesting is that it is rather bad. The individual is unable to do anything."

"So, the difference between 'acute' and 'chronic' is one of intensity."

"Also, duration. An acute problem does not usually last long. It is of short duration. We had an acute water shortage last year."

"The patient complained of acute abdominal pains."

"Good example! We need to..."

"I came across an interesting word yesterday. It was spelt c.a..p..i..c..h..e. Is the first syllable pronounced like the word 'cap'?"

"No, it isn't. The 'a' in the first syllable sounds like the 'a' in 'china', while the vowel in the second is pronounced like the 'ee' in 'feel', 'peel' and 'kneel'. The final 'che' sounds like the 'sh' in 'ship', 'sheet' and 'shoot'. The word is pronounced 'ke-PEESH' with the stress on the second syllable."

"I see. What does the word mean?"

"Capiche is mostly used in informal contexts. It comes from the Italian 'capisci' meaning 'do you understand'. In everyday conversation in English, this word usually comes at the end of a sentence. Don't discuss our plans with him, capiche?"

"Just do whatever she tells you to. Don't ask any questions. Capiche?"

"Good example! The word can also be spelt 'c.a..p..e..e..s..h..'. Ramesh will probably ask for money. I don't want you to be lending him any. Capeesh?"

"Capeesh!"

upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

lynchpin:

a central cohesive source of support and stability

Synonyms: anchor, backbone, keystone, mainstay

Usage: Teachers are the lynchpin of the education system.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/lynchpinpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /lɪntʃpɪn/

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

From Page One

179 killed as S. Korean flight crash-lands

Senior Transport Ministry official Joo Jong-wan said workers had retrieved the flight data and cockpit voice recorders of the plane's black box. He said it may take months for investigators to complete their probe. The runway at the Muang airport will be closed until January 1, the Ministry said. Footage of the crash aired by South Korean television channels showed the plane skidding across the airstrip at high speed, apparently with its landing gear still closed, overrunning the runway and colliding head-on with a concrete wall on the outskirts of the facility, triggering an explosion. Other local TV stations aired footage showing thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was engulfed in flames.

Among the 177 bodies so far found, officials have so far identified 88 of them, the fire agency said. The passengers were predominantly South Korean, as well as two Thai nationals.

Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra expressed deep condolences to the families of those affected by the accident in a post on X. She said she ordered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide assistance immediately.

Kerati Kijmanawat, the Director of Airports of Thailand, confirmed in a statement that Jeju Air flight 7C 2216 departed from Suvarnabhumi Airport with no reports of abnormal conditions with the aircraft or on the runway.

Jeju Air in a statement expressed its "deep apology" over the crash and said it will do its "utmost to manage the aftermath of the accident."

In a televised news conference, Kim E-bae, Jeju Air's president apologised to bereaved families and said he feels "full responsibility" for the incident. Mr. Kim said the company had not identified any mechanical problems with the aircraft following regular checkups and that he would wait for the results of government investigations into the cause of the incident.

Boeing said in a statement on X it was in contact with Jeju Air and was ready to support the company in dealing with the crash.

"We extend our deepest condolences to the families who lost loved ones, and our thoughts remain with the passengers and crew," Boeing said.

The incident came as South Korea is embroiled in a huge political crisis triggered by President Yoon Suk Yeol's imposition of martial law and ensuing impeachment. Last Friday, South Korean lawmakers impeached acting President Han Duck-soo and suspended his duties, leading Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok to take over.

AAP, BJP trade charges of voter list fraud

The AAP chief claimed that when the party verified 500 of the 5,000 applications for deletions, they found that 408 of those voters had been living at their addresses for the past 20 to 30 years. "This means valid, existing voters are being deleted. Deleting legitimate citizen's vote effectively strips them of their citizenship," he said.

In one house, 47 votes were added, and in another, 22 votes were added, Mr. Kejriwal claimed. However, when inspected, these houses were found to be non-existent and this showed that it was a clear case of fraud, he added. Noting that there are 1.06 lakh voters in the New Delhi constituency, the AAP supremo claimed that the BJP was trying to delete 5% of the electorate and add 7.5% new voters. "This would amount to tampering with 12% of the votes. If 12% of the votes are manipulated, there's no point in holding elections as the process loses all fairness. This is a blatant and brazen act of misconduct," he added.

Meanwhile, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva accused the AAP of "manipulating" the electoral roll. "In Narela alone, over 2,000 people applied for new voter registrations on December 24. Similar applications have been observed in various constituencies on December 25, 26, and 27. This is not mere coincidence but evidence of Mr. Kejriwal's manipulation plan affecting 70 constituencies," he said.

anti-militancy operations, which left 10 security personnel dead.

It's the first time in many decades that security forces have taken more casualties, including officers and personnel of the elite PARA units of the Army, compared with militants in the Jammu region.

An official said militants started setting up bases in the Pir Panjal Valley (comprising Rajouri and Poonch districts) in 2020, first time since 2005, in the wake of revocation of Article 370 in 2019. This year, militants fanned out to new forest ridges of Kathua, Reasi, Doda, and Kishtwar and used out-of-bound passes, with no motorable access, to operate and carry out attacks, a senior official working in

2025 may ring in small savings rate cuts

While the case for rate cutting cycle is in place starting with next quarter, government may defer its initiation till April for better optics as reduction amid high inflation, with important Assembly polls around the corner, may not go down well with voters, say experts; rates were last cut in 2020

Vikas Dhoot

NEW DELHI

Investors in small savings schemes should brace themselves for a year of interest rate cuts, and the first reduction in returns on these schemes may come as early as this week when the government resets rates for the January to March quarter.

While the case for a rate cutting cycle is in place starting with the upcoming quarter, the government may defer its initiation till April for better optics as a reduction amid high inflation, with an important Assembly election around the corner, may not go down well, experts believe.

The government had last slashed rates on small savings schemes in April 2020, in the range of 0.5% to 1.4% on different instruments, bringing the return on Public Provident Fund (PPF) savings to 7.1% from 7.9% prevalent till then.

Although the PPF rate has remained unchanged since then, the Centre be-

gan hiking rates on other small savings instruments from October 2022.

"Since Q3 [third quarter] of 2022-23, interest rates on various small savings instruments have been cumulatively increased in the range of 70 to 250 basis points (bps) by the Government of India [GoI]," the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had noted in its October bulletin. One basis point equals 0.01%.

"The GoI kept rates on small savings schemes unchanged for Q3:2024-25. Rates on most of the small savings instruments are now above the formula-based rates, except rates on public provident funds and post office recurring deposits," the RBI had noted, estimating the Q3 returns were a tad under 40 bps higher than the formula for most schemes.

G-sec yields
Since October this year, government securities (G-sec) yields, to which small savings returns were linked in 2016 based on a

Growing gap

The table shows the interest rates on various small savings schemes for the third quarter of the fiscal year 2024-25

Small savings schemes	GoI announced interest rates (%)	Gap from formula-based interest rates (% points)
Savings deposit	4	—
Public Provident Fund	7.1	-0.24
One-year*	6.9	+0.09
Two-year*	7	+0.19
Three-year*	7.1	+0.28
Five-year*	7.5	+0.42
Recurring deposit account	6.7	-0.12
Monthly income scheme	7.4	+0.36
Kisan Vikas Patra	7.5	+0.41
NSC VIII issue	7.7	+0.44
Senior Citizens Savings Scheme	8.2	+0.37
Sukanya Samridhi Scheme	8.2	+0.36

months, owing to a dip in the latter during this period. This suggests that there is room to cut small savings rates for Q4 of 2024-25," Aditi Nayar, ICRRA chief economist, told *The Hindu*.

Bank of Baroda chief economist Madan Sabnavis agreed there is a "theoretical case" for rate cuts but this may not be the right time to effect a reduction as inflation is still high and there is a feeling that consumption is taking a hit.

Moreover, he noted that these schemes are targeted at more vulnerable sections of society and senior citizens.

Tepid inflows

Incidentally, the inflows on account of savings deposits and certificates and the PPF have been quite tepid during April-October 2024, amounting to just about 37% of the budgeted amount during this period (compared to around 50% in the year ago period) as per Controller General of Accounts (CGA) data.

This would likely prompt the government to keep rates unchanged for the coming quarter, Ms. Nayar reckoned. "However, amid the expectations of a policy rate cut in Q4 of 2024-25 and Q1 of 2025-26, we believe that the interest rates on small savings schemes are likely to be pared from the April-June 2025 quarter onwards, which will also aid in the transmission of monetary policy," she concluded.

Support for rate cuts

"During the course of the year 2025, there could be a stronger case for cutting rates on these schemes, particularly if the RBI cuts the repo rate. But a repo rate cut may not necessarily lower G-sec yields as other factors also play a part," Mr. Sabnavis noted.

"We expect the 10-year G-Sec yield to trade between 6.5% and 6.6% by the end of 2024-25 and between 6.1% and 6.3% by 2025-26," said CareEdge Ratings' chief economist Rajani Sinha.

'Siang project to help avert floods if China releases excess water'

Press Trust of India

ITANAGAR



Pema Khandu, PTI

project of national importance, he said hydropower generation is only the secondary goal of it.

Objective of project

"The real objective of the project is to save the Siang river and the communities that have depended on it for generations," he said.

The survey for preparing the pre-feasibility report of the projects is yet to be done amid stiff opposition from locals who are concerned about displacement, loss of livelihoods, and environmental impact of the mega dam.

"The SUMP, with an estimated installed capacity of 11,000 MW, is not just about generating power, but also about maintaining the natural flow of the Siang river and mitigating potential flood risks from water releases by China," Mr. Khandu told PTI in an interview.

Describing SUMP as a

warning of severe consequences if China's project moves ahead "without safeguards", Mr. Khandu said the neighbouring country's plans to divert water from the Brahmaputra into its arid regions could drastically reduce the flow of the Siang river during winters.

India shuts down Internet 60 times in 2024, the lowest in eight years

Aroon Deep

NEW DELHI



No connectivity: The most shutdowns happened in 2020 after the abrogation of special status of J&K under Article 370. FILE PHOTO

these curbs are usually imposed for a fixed number of days at a time.

Digital rights activists have complained of the constant use of shutdowns, arguing they are unnecessary and ineffective as a response to unrest. What's more, States do not always publish the shutdown orders as ordered by the Supreme Court. "Four years after the historic Bhasin versus Union of India judgment, officials continue to fail to publish shutdown orders and have been repeatedly corrected by courts for failing to comply," the advocacy group Access Now said in May.

"The contribution of the Internet for the well-being of citizens has to be balanced with the need to prevent misuse by anti-social elements requiring temporary suspensions of internet services," Union

Minister of State for Communications Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar said in a written Rajya Sabha answer on December 12.

No study

The Union government reiterated in Parliament in the Winter Session that it did not have centralised data on Internet shutdowns across India and that it had not conducted any study on the efficacy of the measure.

Minister of State for Communications Sanjay Dhotre said in the Upper House in February 2020 that "records related to Internet shutdowns ordered by State governments are not maintained by either DoT or the Ministry of Home Affairs".

Mr. Dhotre said the same month that "DoT has not conducted any study on the effect of internet shutdown on economy, tourism, education sector etc". Similarly in 2021, he had said, "DoT has not conducted any study to calculate the economic cost of Internet shutdowns in the country."

In 2022, former MoS for Communications Devansinh Chauhan said that "DoT has not commissioned any study to assess the efficacy of internet shutdowns in dealing with public emergencies".

Security forces faced resurgence in militancy in Jammu region this year

Peerzada Ashiq

SRINAGAR

Security forces maintained an upper hand over militants in Kashmir in 2024 compared with the Jammu region, which saw itself in the throes of a full-blown militancy involving all 10 districts. The ratio of security personnel killed against militants in Jammu is far higher than the Valley, indicating a change in tack by militants in terms of training and survival tactics.

According to official data, the Jammu region witnessed the killing of 18 security personnel against 13 militants in around 30 contacts established either in ambuses or anti-militancy operations. In Kashmir, 55 militants were killed in

the Jammu region told *The Hindu*. The change in tack was evident both in terms of training level and survival tactics of these militants in the forest ranges, officials said. "They did turn forest covers and treacherous topography to their advantage," the official said.

Official data suggested that nine people were killed in militancy-related incidents in Doda, Kathua, and Reasi districts, five in Kishtwar, four in Udhampur, three in Jammu, three in Rajouri, and two in Poonch.

The security forces remain on tenterhooks in the Chenab Valley, especially in Udhampur, Reasi, Doda, and Kishtwar districts, as only 13 militants could be neutralised this year in the face of inputs about the

presence of over 30 militants in the region. To match the militants' upscaling of tactics, a special unit of the National Security Guard, an elite force also known as Black Cats, has been stationed in Jammu for the first time this year. J&K also saw an increase

in civilian deaths in militant attacks this year, with 16 killed in the Kashmir region and 14 in the Jammu region.

These civilian casualties included nine pilgrims, who were killed in Jammu's Reasi on June 9, on the eve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swear-

ing-in. Three village defence guards were also killed by militants this year.

Militants also stepped up attacks in Srinagar after the return of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar from the Pakistan visit on October 17, a trip that failed to break ice between the two countries. His return was followed by a major attack on a tunnel project, a strategic project connecting Kashmir with Ladakh, in Ganderbal district and left seven, including six labourers and one doctor dead, on October 20.

Police officials said one local, Hakan Din, 45, was arrested in the Reasi attack and charged with the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for helping militants "to execute the

Ex-IPS officer and Ayodhya dispute OSD dies in Patna

The Hindu Bureau

PATNA

Acharya Kishore Kunal, former IPS officer and founder secretary of Mahavir Mandir Trust, died of cardiac arrest in Patna on Sunday.

The 1972-batch IPS officer of Gujarat cadre had also served as Patna Senior Superintendent of Police. He was also appointed officer on special duty on the Ayodhya dispute.

He has penned several books, the most famous being *Ayodhya Revisited*, which was also part of the final hearing on the *Ram Janmabhoomi* case.



Under attack: An official said militants started setting up bases in the Pir Panjal Valley in 2020, first time since 2005. FILE PHOTO

in civilian deaths in militant attacks this year, with 16 killed in the Kashmir region and 14 in the Jammu region. These civilian casualties included nine pilgrims, who were killed in Jammu's Reasi on June 9, on the eve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swear-

attack with his active logistic support". The Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) 'commander', Junaid Ahmad Bhat, behind the Ganderbal attack was killed in Srinagar's Harwan area in December.

According to the J&K police data, the crackdown on militants and their supporters showed no let-up in Kashmir this year. Fourteen houses of militants and supporters have been attached and around 168 locals arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for acting as "overground workers" for the militants.

The Jammu region, once an infiltration route, is facing a full-blown militancy this year, with militant sleeper cells operating in most districts.

'U.S.-India ties will be strengthened, but expect tariff hikes'

Former Trump envoy to India says the new administration will push hard on Iran sanctions, China challenge; he says Trump appointees by and large will be furthering the strength of U.S.-India ties; the President-elect has indicated that he will impose tariffs of 10% to 20% on most countries, and this probably will include India; Juster emphasises that the two leaders have a good relationship

INTERVIEW

Kenneth Juster

Suhasini Haidar

With the inauguration of Donald Trump as the President of the United States for the second time just weeks away, New Delhi stepped up its outreach to the incoming administration with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri both spending the year-end week in Washington. In an exclusive interview, Mr. Trump's last envoy to India (2017-2020), Kenneth Juster, spoke about what to expect from his next tenure in office. Excerpts:

Broadly, how do you think President Trump

will approach India, given your experience of the ties during his previous tenure?

I think there is going to be a very strong U.S.-Indian relationship during the second term of the Trump presidency, and I base that on what happened during the first term. President Trump was the first U.S. President to label China as a strategic challenge... we also revived the Quad, which has continued to thrive under the Biden administration. We enhanced our defence cooperation significantly, signing three major foundational agreements, increasing the number of military exercises and having the first ever tri-services exercise. We increased energy exports to India... There's a very strong relationship between the President and the

Prime Minister, and the U.S. really provided very critical and important assistance to India when China came across the Line of Actual control into disputed territory in 2020.

What should one make of Trump nominees thus far?

I think the appointees by and large will be furthering the strength of the U.S.-India relationship... In addition, these advisers see China as the major strategic challenge that the United States faces. And in that sense, I think there is a certain strategic clarity between the United States and India as to what some of the challenges will be in the Indo-Pacific region.

Given Mr. Trump's threats of the past on India being a "tariff



abuser" and how India lost its GSP status for exporters, should India expect more of such shock therapy?

Look, the President has been clear that he believes India should lower tariffs and is too protectionist. I don't think it's correct to say that the GSP issue was a shock therapy. The President-elect has indicated that he will slap tariffs of 10% to 20% on most coun-

tries, and I think that would probably include India. But I also think that could be the beginning of a negotiation to open markets a bit and, from India's perspective, to try to lock down the benefits of its largest trade partner, the United States, in both goods and services. And one should think expansively in terms of what other issues of concern, whether it be in technology, in energy, or elsewhere, where

the two sides could do some horse trading and reach a broader trade and economic agreement.

indictments in the Adani case, now the Pannun case, and will it affect India-U.S. ties?

I would not expect that the Trump administration would seek to inject itself in these cases. I can't foresee what the legal people at the Department of Justice will do.

But beyond that, I don't

see these cases having any substantial effect on the broader U.S.-India relationship.

What are the skills that you think Mr. Trump should be looking for in the next envoy to India?

The choice should be one that understands President Trump and how he operates, so that he or she can help deal with any statements that come out of Washington in terms of

translating them effectively to the Indian government.

There is also some commentary on whether PM Modi will get an invitation to the Trump inaugural on January 20, as Chinese President Xi Jinping has. Your thoughts?

It's not normally been the tradition to have foreign leaders come to an inauguration. Instead, it's been representatives and ambassadors in Washington who attend. I don't know what the thinking is within the administration, and I have not yet heard anything one way or the other in terms of an invitation to Prime Minister Modi. I would emphasise that the two leaders have a very good relationship.

(Full interview at <https://newsth.live/Kennethjuster>)

Modi announces a series of events to mark 75 years of Constitution

In his monthly *Mann ki Baat* radio address, PM says the Constitution is 'our guiding light, our guide', asks people to visit a special website named constitution75.com; says there has been an 80% reduction in the number of malaria cases, deaths

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



All ears: BJP supporters listen to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's *Mann Ki Baat* radio address in Varanasi on Sunday. ANI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his monthly radio address, *Mann Ki Baat*, on Sunday, said his government had commenced year-long activities to celebrate the completion of 75 years of the Constitution. He said it was a matter of great honour for the people of the country.

"The Constitution, handed over to us by our Constitution makers, has stood the test of time in every sense of the term. The Constitution is our guiding light, our guide," he said, adding that it was on account of the Constitution that he was able to talk to the people.

"This year, on Constitution Day, the 26th of November, many activities have commenced that will go on for a year. A special

website named constitution75.com has also been created to connect the citizens of the country with the legacy of the Constitution," Mr. Modi said, asking people to visit the website, read the Preamble of the Constitution, and upload their videos. "You can read the Constitution in myriad languages; you can also ask questions pertaining to the Constitution," he said.

He appreciated an effort in Paraguay by a citizen,

Erica Huber, to promote Ayurveda. "At the Indian Embassy there, Erica Huber offers Ayurveda consultation. These days, a large number of local people are reaching out to her to get Ayurveda-based advice," Mr. Modi said.

Speaking of the Fiji government's efforts to promote Tamil, he said it's a matter of great pride that Tamil is the oldest language in the world. "The number of people learning it is constantly rising in countries around the world. At the end of last month, a Tamil teaching programme was started in Fiji with the support of the Government of India. This is the first time in the past 80 years that trained Tamil teachers are teaching the language in Fiji," he said.

Citing a report of the World Health Organization, he said there had been an 80% reduction in

the number of malaria cases and deaths in India between 2015 and 2023. "This is no mean achievement. The most heartening thing is that this success has been achieved through everyone's participation," the Prime Minister said.

Talking about an effort in Kalahandi, Odisha, Mr. Modi said a Farmers Producer Organisation (FPO), Kisan Upad Sangh, started using modern technology in farming, and at present, their business was worth crores. "Today, vegetables from Kalahandi are reaching other States, and the farmers there are now learning new techniques of potato and onion cultivation. Friends, this success of Kalahandi teaches us all that can be done with determination and collective effort," Mr. Modi said, urging people to encourage and strengthen FPOs in their areas.

He had been called to record a statement after a woman filed a written complaint against him

ing to conduct a judicial probe, and that the district judge also named a three-doctor panel for the post-mortem.

Officer suspended

"We also called in a forensic officer from Ujjain to inspect the spot. The station in-charge was suspended late on Saturday night," he said.

Meanwhile, workers of the Bhim Army and family members of the deceased have alleged that the police "killed" Longre.

On Sunday afternoon, State Congress chief Jitu Patwari also staged a protest outside the Satwas police station and demanded that Chief Minister Mohan Yadav suspend all staff members of the station and give compensation of ₹1 crore to the man's kin.

(Those in distress may contact Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health suicide prevention helpline 011-40769002.)

'Shivling' beneath U.P. CM's residence must be removed: Akhilesh

The Hindu Bureau
LUCKNOW



Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday said there was a 'Shivling' beneath Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's official residence in Lucknow. He called for its excavation.

"There is a Shivling under the Chief Minister's residence in Lucknow. It should also be excavated," Mr. Yadav told presspersons in Lucknow.

The statement, seen as a dig at Mr. Adityanath, came amid a rising political face-off over recent surveys sought in Uttar Pradesh, mostly around temples and mosques. Last week, a 250-ft-deep stepwell, dating back to the era of the 1857 revolt, was unearthed during a survey in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal. The stepwell was found after two bulldozers were involved in excavation at the site in the Laxman Ganj area of the town.

The SP and the Congress have continuously alleged that the Bharatiya Ja-

Turnout of overseas Indians in Lok Sabha election low, says EC

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Overseas Indians showed great enthusiasm in registering as electors, with nearly 1.2 lakh enrolling on the voter list, but a minuscule number turned up to exercise their franchise in the Lok Sabha election this year.

Data released by the Election Commission show that as many as 1,19,374 registered overseas electors in 2024, with the highest registrations of 89,839 in Kerala. In 2019, as many as 99,844 registered as overseas electors.

The commission said only 2,958 overseas electors flew down to India to participate in the largest democratic exercise in the world in 2024. Of these, an overwhelming 2,670 were from Kerala.

Several large States such as Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu saw zero turnout of overseas electors.

Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home State, saw only two out of 885 overseas electors cast

The missing diaspora voter

Despite a 19.6% increase in registered NRI electors since the 2019 LS polls, their participation in the 2024 election was poor

■ Registered overseas electors

1,19,374

■ Overseas electors who voted

2,958

■ Highest NRI voter turnout: Kerala

(2,670) voters

■ Some States with zero NRI voter turnout: Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Bihar and Goa

SOURCE: ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

ing their votes. Similar was the story in Maharashtra, where only 17 of the 5,097 NRI electors voted.

While there were 7,927 registered NRI electors in Andhra Pradesh, only 195 flew down to vote. In Assam, none of the 19 registered NRI electors exercised their franchise.

Similarly, in Bihar none of the 89 registered NRI electors cast their ballots. In Goa, none of its 84 voters cast their ballots.

While NRI voters is a generic term, the EC describes them as overseas electors, those who actually ex-

ercised their franchise are described as voters.

In August 2018, the 16th Lok Sabha passed a Bill to allow proxy voting rights to eligible overseas Indians.

The Bill, however, could not be brought to the Rajya Sabha.

Remote vote proposal

In 2020, the EC proposed to the Union Law Ministry to extend the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) facility,

so far available only to service voters, to eligible overseas Indian voters as well. It would require changes in the election rules. But the government has so far not taken a call on the issue.

The EC had then told the government that it had been receiving several representations from the Indian diaspora to facilitate voting through postal ballots.

The electors cited travel costs, compulsions of employment overseas, and education, among other things, as reasons for their inability to cast their votes in person, the commission said.

Centre gets 6.21 lakh applications under PM internship scheme

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

real-life business environment, across varied professions and employment opportunities," the Centre said.

Financial aid

"The interns will be provided with financial assistance of ₹5,000 per month [for 12 months], of which ₹4,500 would be disbursed by the Union government, and ₹500 per month would be paid by the company from its CSR [corporate social responsibility] funds," the Centre added.

The Corporate Affairs Ministry will also provide a one-time grant of ₹6,000 for incidentals to each intern, upon joining the place of internship.

The Kerala Minerals and Metals Ltd (A Govt. of Kerala Undertaking) Sankaramangalam, Kollam-691 583

Phone: 0476-2651215 to 2651217, e-mail: md@kmml.com, URL: www.kmml.com

TENDER NOTICE

For more details, please visit E-Tendering Portal, <https://etenders.kerala.gov.in> or www.kmml.com

Sl No. Tender ID Items

1 2024_KMML_718010_1 For the supply of Shell and Tube Condensers/ HeatExchangers

2 2024_KMML_717670_1 For the supply of Ladle Furnace-Resistance Heating 3 Zone

Chavara 27.12.2024 Sd/- Managing Director for The Kerala Minerals and Metals Ltd

MONEYWISE

**In 2024,
Small was
Beautiful**

MARKETMUSINGS

Sumedha Shankar

NEW DELHI

Dalal Street minnows stole the show in 2024, giving handsome returns to investors, helped by a largely optimistic trend in the stock market and impressive retail investors' participation.

Analysts attributed the positive trend in the equity markets, where the benchmark indices shattered many records this year, to robust domestic liquidity, strong fundamentals of the Indian economy, and policy continuity. Market experts are optimistic about midcap and smallcap stocks for the next year, driven by factors like strong domestic consumption and government infrastructure spending.

Till December 23 this year, the BSE smallcap gauge has jumped 12,144.15 points or 28.45%, while the midcap index surged 9,435.09 points or 25.61%. In contrast, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex has soared 6,299.91 points or 8.72%.

To put that in context, the BSE Sensex had jumped 11,399.52 points or 18.73% in 2023, while the BSE smallcap gauge had rallied 47.52% and the midcap index climbed 11,524.72 points or 45.52%.

"Smallcap and midcap indices outperformed in 2024 due to sectoral growth, policy support, and investor interest. Key sectors like real estate, infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy, heavily represented in these indices, benefited from government initiatives and favourable market conditions," said Palka Arora Chopra, director at Master Capital Services Ltd.

Local interest

Increased interest from domestic investors seeking higher returns and the valuation catch-up of smallcap and midcap stocks after prior underperformance also played a key role.

The midcap and smallcap segments tend to outshine their larger counterparts in a bull rally in the market, experts said.

The BSE smallcap gauge hit its lifetime high of 57,827.69 on December 12 this year, while the midcap index surged to a record 49,701.15 on September 24. The blue-chip peer Sensex reached its all-time high of 85,978.25 on September 27.

Liquidity driven

"Domestic liquidity has been a major driver behind the outperformance of the midcap and smallcap segments. Record SIP inflows, predominantly directed towards midcap and smallcap funds, have played a significant role in this trend," said Sunil Nyati, managing director, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

According to analysts, smaller stocks are generally bought by local investors, while overseas investors focus on blue-chips or large firms.

The midcap index tracks companies with a market value that is on average one-fifth of blue-chips, while smallcap firms are almost a tenth of that universe.

The BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty have faced heavy corrections in recent months after a record-breaking rally due to rich valuations.

Benchmarks lag

"Excluding the final quarter of 2024, the Indian equity market delivered strong performance, with investors reaping significant returns in several midcap and smallcap stocks. However, the benchmark indices, Nifty and Sensex, lagged behind global markets, particularly the U.S., primarily due to persistent aggressive selling by FIIs," Nyati said.

"The outlook for midcap and smallcap stocks in 2025 remains promising, but the rally is unlikely to be broad-based. Investors will need to adopt a more selective approach, as valuations in many areas have become stretched, and growth momentum appears to be lacking in certain sectors," Mr. Nyati reckoned.

Send queries on personal finance and investing to the moneywise@thehindu.co.in. ID. Our experts in personal finance will respond to select queries, but will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund, share or fixed deposit.

Over three years, health insurance claims rise 30%

The most common conditions leading to claims include fever (seasonal diseases), gastritis, heart disease, diabetes and cancer; the share of claims of younger adults has been higher

HEALTH COVER

Team Policybazaar

Seasonal and chronic conditions are driving up health insurance claims. The most common conditions leading to claims include fever (seasonal diseases), gastritis, heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Seasonal diseases like fever typically drive a surge in claims during specific months, particularly during monsoon and winter. Meanwhile, conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer reflect long-term health trends, indicating increasing prevalence of chronic diseases among Indians.

Rapid rise in claims

The 30% rise in average payouts over three years suggests healthcare costs are rising, and policyholders are claiming higher amounts for medical treatments. This trend also indicates insurance is becoming a more essential tool for managing medical expenses as medical inflation outpaces general inflation.

Maharashtra, Delhi

States like Maharashtra and Delhi report higher claim payouts despite having a similar proportion of total claims. This can be due to the higher cost of healthcare in urban centers and more advanced medical facilities available.

Claims frequency

Claim frequency has steadily increased over the last three years. It means more policyholders are utilising health insurance benefits. This could be due to improved access to healthcare services, a greater awareness of health insurance coverage, and a proactive approach to managing personal health.

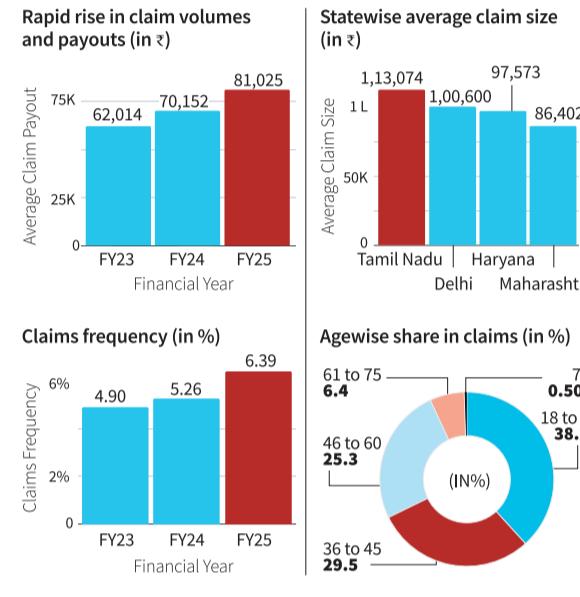
Young adult claims up

The higher share of claims from younger adults (18-35) reflects a combination of seasonal illnesses (fever, viral infections) and rising claims for chronic conditions like diabetes, which are increasingly diagnosed at younger ages. This trend underscores the need to buy health insurance when young and healthy.

The gender distribution (86% male) is typical of health insurance claims, as men tend to file claims more frequently, possibly

Rising costs

Insurance is becoming a more essential tool for managing medical expenses as medical inflation outpaces general inflation



Car: Segment wise claim volume share and claim amount range

Vehicle Type	Claim Volume Share	Claim Amount Range (₹)
Hatchback	54%	20,000 - 25,000
Sedan	21%	25,000 - 30,000
SUV	26%	30,000 - 35,000

The frequency of claims has steadily increased over the last three years. It means that more policyholders are utilizing their health insurance benefits.



The prevalence of accidents and total loss claims reflects the importance of having robust motor insurance to protect against both collisions and theft

due to a higher penetration of insurance among males.

Motor insurance

The leading causes of motor insurance claims are primarily accidents, theft, and damage from natural events. The prevalence of accidents and total loss claims reflects the importance of having robust motor insurance to protect against collisions and theft

Claim amount basis

The higher claim amounts for SUVs reflect their greater value and more complex repair costs compared to smaller vehicles



There is a notable spike in motor insurance claims during monsoon season, with a 40% rise in claims during rainy months in cities more prone to heavy rains

like hatchbacks. The higher claim volumes from hatchbacks are due to their higher market share in the overall vehicle population.

Monsoon claim surge

There is a notable spike in motor insurance claims during the monsoon season, with a 40% rise in claims during rainy months in cities which are more prone to heavy rains.

Factors like heavy rains, flooding and slippery road conditions contribute to higher total loss claims, higher accident rates and damage to vehicles, especially in regions prone to monsoon weather.

Popularity of add-ons

Policyholders are increasingly choosing add-ons like zero depreciation, engine protectors, and cost of consumables as part of motor insurance plans for their car as old as up to 10 years. This indicates a growing trend towards enhanced protection and a desire for comprehensive coverage in the event of a claim.

South and Delhi-NCR

Regions such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh report higher total loss motor claims due to cyclones, while States like Delhi NCR, Maharashtra experience more accidental claims.

Heart issues

Heart disease and natural causes remain the most prevalent reasons for term insurance claims, which is consistent with the overall ageing population and the growing awareness of health risks. COVID-19 claims also reflect the impact of the pandemic on life insurance needs even after three years.

Male policyholders

The majority of term insurance claims are made by male policyholders (90-92%). This is mainly due to the high penetration of term insurance among males. Men also generally have higher mortality rates and may be more likely to take term life cover resulting in a higher percentage of claims from them.

Regions with higher urban populations leading in claims. The top regions for term insurance claims include Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Karnataka, and Gujarat. These areas see higher claim volumes due to a combination of larger populations and greater awareness of the importance of life insurance. Regions with higher urban populations and greater access to financial services see more claims because policyholders are more likely to engage with life insurance products.

Riders gain popularity

Approximately 35-40% of term insurance policyholders are opting for riders like critical illness and accidental death benefits, indicating a growing desire for comprehensive protection, particularly among those concerned about critical illnesses or accidents.

The alpha arithmetic

THINKINVESTOR

Given the market behaviour in recent years, portfolio managers must continually move from one sector to another (sector rotation) to consistently generate positive alpha

Venkatesh Bangaruswamy

As investors, we want to earn above-average returns. In the context of mutual fund investments, above-average return means earning greater than a fund's benchmark return. This excess return is referred to as alpha. Active funds strive to generate positive alpha. Small wonder that investors typically prefer active over passive funds. Here, we discuss the arithmetic of alpha returns.

Zero-sum game?

Market, here, refers to the style benchmark of a fund. So, if you invest in a large-cap style fund, market in relation to the fund refers to all large-cap stocks. Likewise, if you were to invest in a mid-cap fund, market refers to all mid-cap stocks.

Now, consider the NSE 100 index, the large-cap style benchmark. The average return in relation to large-cap stocks would be the NSE 100 Index. So, we can state active large-cap funds that generate positive alpha earn above-average returns. But that means some other active large-cap funds must generate below-average returns. How else can the average returns of all these funds be equal to the NSE 100 Index? In other words, alpha must be a zero-sum game.

That is, the sum of positive alpha returns must equal the sum of negative-alpha returns.

Note, there many other funds like diversified and solution-oriented funds that will invest in large-cap stocks. Also, mid-cap funds may invest in large-cap stocks. Therefore, proving that alpha is a zero-sum game is easier said than done.

Nevertheless, the above argument has some implication on your investment decision. If alpha were a zero-sum game, some portfolio managers will win, and some others will lose. And, if portfolio managers are skillful, it is highly unlikely the same portfolio managers will always win while some others will always lose. In other words, portfolio managers may be skillful, yet a fund's annual return can swing between positive and negative alpha between one year and the next.

Conclusion

Given the market behaviour in recent years, portfolio managers must continually move from one sector to another (sector rotation) to consistently generate positive alpha. But more the active decisions (active bets), greater the active risk (likelihood of negative alpha).

Then, there is the alpha fade rate – the rate at which an alpha strategy fades (no longer generates alpha) is faster than the rate at which newer strategies can be developed. You must be mindful of these factors when you invest in active funds.

(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	10.85-24.00	10,834-14,384	2,167-2,877	Up to Rs 6,500
Tata Capital	11.99 onwards	11,120 onwards	2,224 onwards	Up to 5.5%
State Bank of India	11.45-14.85	10,984-11,856	2,197-2,371	NIL
ICICI Bank	10.85-16.25	10,834-12,226	2,167-2,445	Up to 2%
Bank of Baroda	11.05-18.75	10,884-12,902	2,177-2,580	Up to 2% (Maximum Rs 10,000)
Axis Bank	11.00 onwards	10,871 onwards	2,174 onwards	Up to 2%
Kotak Mahindra Bank	10.99-16.00	10,869-12,159	2,174-2,432	Up to 5%
Bank of India	10.85-16.10	10,834-12,186	2,167-2,437	Up to 1% (Min Rs 250 and Max Rs 10,000)
Canara Bank	10.95-16.40	10,859-12,266	2,172-2,453	0.25% (Maximum Rs 5,000)
Punjab National Bank	11.40-17.95	10,971-12,683	2,194-2,537	Up to 1%
HSBC Bank	10.15-16.00	10,660-12,159	2,132-2,432	Up to 2%
Federal Bank	11.49-14.49	10,994-11,762	2,199-2,352</	

DAMASCUS

Nearly 300 arrested in crackdown on Assad loyalists in Syria: monitor



Syria's new authorities have arrested nearly 300 people, including informants, pro-regime fighters and former soldiers, in a crackdown on loyalists to ousted former president Bashar al-Assad, a monitor said. The militants led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group have intensified efforts to consolidate control in Syria. AFP

TBILISI

Georgia's new President is sworn in amid political showdown



Georgia inaugurated Mikhail Kavashvili, a far-right governing party loyalist, as President, escalating a political showdown moments after his pro-EU predecessor Salome Zurabishvili declared herself the "only legitimate President". The move ratchets up a long political crisis that has seen huge pro-EU demonstrations. AFP

SEOUL

N. Korea moots 'toughest' strategy to counter U.S. at party meeting



North Korea will launch its "toughest" ever strategy to counter the United States, state media said on Sunday, reporting on a key year-end party meeting overseen by leader Kim Jong-un. The nuclear-armed state held a five-day party meeting last week as part of a drive to chart the country's course for 2025. AFP

KABUL

Taliban leader bans windows overlooking women's areas



The Taliban's supreme leader issued an order banning construction of windows in residential buildings that overlook areas used by Afghan women and saying that existing ones should be blocked. "Seeing women working in kitchens, in courtyards or collecting water from wells can lead to obscene acts," a statement read. AFP

Russia tried to 'hush up' the shooting of airliner, says Azerbaijan President

For the first three days, we heard nothing from Russia except delirious versions, says Ilham Aliyev; he adds that the incident may have been unintentional, but it still happened, taking 38 lives of the 67 on board; an investigation is under way

Associated Press

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev said on Sunday that the Azerbaijani airliner that crashed last week was shot down by Russia, albeit unintentionally, and criticised Moscow for trying to "hush up" the issue for days.

"We can say with complete clarity that the plane was shot down by Russia. (...) We are not saying that it was done intentionally, but it was done," he told Azerbaijani state television.

Mr. Aliyev said that the airliner, which crashed on Wednesday in Kazakhstan, was hit by fire from the



Collateral victims: People mourn during a funeral of the crew members of the Azerbaijan Airlines in Baku on Sunday. AP

ground over Russia and "rendered uncontrollable by electronic warfare". Mr. Aliyev accused Russia of trying to "hush up" the issue for several days, saying he was "upset and sur-

prised" by versions of events put forward by Russian officials.

"Unfortunately, for the first three days we heard nothing from Russia except delirious versions," he

said. The crash killed 38 of 67 people on board.

The Kremlin said that air defence systems were firing near Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, where the plane attempted to land, to deflect a Ukrainian drone strike.

Three demands
Mr. Aliyev said Azerbaijan made three demands to Russia in connection with the crash.

"First, the Russian side must apologise to Azerbaijan. Second, it must admit its guilt. Third, punish the guilty, bring them to criminal responsibility and pay compensation to the Azerbaijani state, the injured

passengers and crew members," he said.

Mr. Aliyev noted that the first demand was "already fulfilled" when Russian President Vladimir Putin apologised to him on Saturday.

Mr. Putin called the crash a "tragic incident" though stopped short of acknowledging Moscow's responsibility. He said that an investigation was ongoing, and that "the final version (of events) will be known after the black boxes are opened."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Sunday that Mr. Putin had spoken to Mr. Aliyev over the phone again, but did not provide details.

Israeli air strike near Syrian capital kills 11: war monitor

Associated Press

BEIRUT

An Israeli air strike on the outskirts of Damascus on Sunday killed 11 persons, according to a war monitor, as Israel continues to target Syrian weapons and military infrastructure even after the ouster of former President Bashar al-Assad.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the air strike targeted a weapons depot that belonged to Mr. Assad's forces near the industrial town of Adra, northeast of the capital. The observatory said at least 11 persons, mostly civilians, were killed.

Beirut-based pan-Arab Al-Mayadeen TV also reported the air strike but put the death toll at six. The Israeli military did not



comment on the air strike.

Israel, which has launched hundreds of air strikes over Syria since the country's uprising turned-civil war broke out in 2011, rarely acknowledges them.

Syrian insurgents who ousted Mr. Assad in a lightning offensive in early December have demanded that Israel cease its air strikes.

Minority body in Bangladesh seeks release of Hindu monk

Press Trust of India

DHAKA

A minority group in Bangladesh on Sunday called for the "immediate release" of Chinmoy Krishna Das, asserting that the case against the arrested Hindu monk is "false" and "harassing".

Das, a former ISKCON leader, was arrested in Dhaka on November 25. A court in Chattogram sent him to jail, rejecting his bail petition as he was accused of a sedition charge for allegedly disrespecting the country's flag. The hearing in the case will be held on January 2, 2025.

The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCOP) released a statement demanding his immediate release, the *Prothom Alo* news portal reported.

Always in favour of H1-B visas, says Trump as he sides with Musk on work permit row

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON



Donald Trump

with Mr. Musk even vowing to "go to war" over the issue.

Poll plank

Mr. Trump's insistence calls for sharp curbs on immigration were central to his election victory in November over President Joe Biden. Mr. Trump has vowed to deport all undocumented immigrants and limit legal immigration.

But tech entrepreneurs like Tesla's Mr. Musk – as well as Vivek Ramaswamy, who is set to join Mr. Musk in co-chairing a government cost-cutting panel – say the U.S. produces too few highly skilled graduates, and they fervently champion the H1-B programme.

Mr. Musk, who migrated from South Africa on an H1-B, posted on Thursday on his X platform that luring elite engineering talent from abroad was "essential for America."

Adding acrimony to the debate was a post from Mr. Ramaswamy, the son of immigrants from India, who deplored an "American culture" that he said venerates mediocrity, adding that the U.S. risks having "our asses handed to us by China."

Year-end event to announce the 'burying' of 1972 constitution: Bangladesh students group

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

On the last day of the year, the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement of Bangladesh and other constituents of the July-August political uprising in the country will launch a 'July proclamation' that will "bury the 1972 constitution of Bangladesh", the conveners of the Anti Discrimination Students Movement announced on Sunday.

Addressing a press conference in Dhaka, the group's convener, Hasnat Abdullah, said the procla-

Delaying the move offers Hasina's supporters a chance to question the uprising, says group

mation should have been released earlier and that the delay in announcing it has offered Sheikh Hasina and her supporters a chance to question the uprising.

The announcement is a significant development in the turbulent year in which Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government was overthrown in a movement

that was led by the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement. "At 3 p.m. on December 31, we will declare the proclamation of July revolution. This will be the announcement of the Bangladesh's next goals, dreams and intentions. The declaration of December 31 at the Shahid Minar will be a legal recognition of the July revolution. We want the *Mujib-badi* (*Mujib-era*) constitution to be buried," Hasnat Abdullah said.

A draft of the 'July proclamation' that was shared on the occasion by the organisers held the constitu-

tion responsible for multiple problems that the country faced in recent years, including the strong arm rule by Ms. Hasina.

"We resolve that, we need a political settlement altering the '72 and 1/11 Settlements, which will pave the way for new democratic republic," the draft document stated. It further said, "We want reform or annulment of '72 constitution as it has sustained fascism in Bangladesh. The Interim Government, duly constituted, will be entrusted with reforms of the institutions and constitution."

The stage is set. Claim the spotlight, this Margazhi.

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Age Group

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Below 12 years

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*T&Cs apply



Submit your entry at
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Last date: January 5, 2025

**Margazhi
Music
Contest**

IN A HURRY!

Bumrah quickest Indian to 200 Test wickets by balls bowled



AFP

Jasprit Bumrah while dismissing Travis Head on Sunday with his 8484th legal delivery, not only became the fastest Indian pacer to reach 200 Test wickets but also the fastest in terms of balls bowled. He beat the record of fellow-pacer Mohammed Shami, who reached the same milestone after bowling 9896 deliveries.

TEAM MAN

Labuschagne all praise for skipper Cummins for the revival



AFP

Marnus Labuschagne lauded skipper Pat Cummins after their 57-run seventh-wicket stand revived the host's second innings on Sunday. "Pat was amazing. He took the game on. He finds a way when the team needs him to scrap. I told him that I will take on Bumrah and we kind of stuck to that process."

REWARD BECKONS

Arshdeep and Smriti shortlisted for top ICC honours



GETTY IMAGES & VIJAY SONEJI

Pacer Arshdeep Singh and opener Smriti Mandhana have nominated for the ICC Men's and Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year awards respectively. Arshdeep emerged as the joint highest wicket-taker in India's T20 World Cup triumph, while Smriti has had a stellar year in international cricket.

JOB DONE

Rabada and Jansen's stand seals South Africa's WTC final spot



GETTY IMAGES

Kagiso Rabada (31) and Marco Jansen (16)'s unbeaten partnership of 51 off 50 balls saw South Africa edge Pakistan by two wickets in the first Test at Centurion and book a place in next year's World Test Championship final. **The scores:** Pakistan 211 & 237 lost to South Africa 301 & 150/8 in 39.3 overs (Bavuma 40, Abbas 6/54).

Aussie resistance outweighs Bumrah's mastery at MCG

The India speedster rocks the middle-order with a fiery spell before the host huffs and puffs to 228 for nine – 333 runs in the green; Labuschagne's 70 and a 55-run unbroken last-wicket stand between Lyon and Boland frustrate the visitor

INDIA IN AUS

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
MELBOURNE

A genius, high on speed and tempered with sense, largely owned a Sunday under Melbourne's deep blue skies. Jasprit Bumrah's inroads into Australia's second innings and the host's gritty lower-order resistance left the fourth Test poised on the razor's edge.

At close on the fourth day, Australia posted 228 for nine in its second innings and has an overall lead of 333. The last-wicket pair of Nathan Lyon and Scott Boland resisted all that the visitors flung at them and frustrated Rohit Sharma's men.

Probing away

After India finished its first innings at 369 in the morning with centurion Nitish Kumar (114) being the last man to be dismissed, Australia had the task of converting the 105-run lead into a challenging target. Bumrah, though, had other ideas and relentlessly probed around the stumps.

Sam Konstas gave the charge, played and missed, while Usman Khawaja dug in. Bumrah castled Konstas and the Melbourne Cricket Ground came alive.

The debutant retreated and even as Khawaja essayed some pulls, the latter had to grapple with Mohammed Siraj.

The speedster got one to dart in and as the stumps were pegged back, Siraj gesticated to the crowd to stay quiet. Obviously the reflexive boozing that has



Fine margins: India tried its best to restrict Australia but Lyon and Boland kept on swelling the lead. AFP

SCOREBOARD**AUSTRALIA — 1ST INNINGS**

474 in 122.4 overs

INDIA — 1ST INNINGS

Yashasvi Jaiswal run out 82

(18b, 11x4, 1x6), Rohit Sharma c Boland b Cummins 3 (5b), K.L.

Rahul b Cummins 24 (42b, 3x4),

Virat Kohli c Carey b Boland 36

(86b, 4x4), Akash Deep c Lyon b

Boland 0 (13b), Rishabh Pant c

Lyon b Boland 28 (37b, 3x4),

Ravindra Jadeja lbw b Lyon 17

(51b, 3x4), Nitish Kumar c Starc

Lyon 114 (189b, 11x4, 1x6),

Washington Sundar c Smith b

Lyon 50 (162b, 1x4), Jasprit

Bumrah c Khawaja b Cummins 0

(3b), Mohammed Siraj (not out) 4

(15b); Extras (lb-2, nb-4, w-5): 11;

Total (in 119.3 overs): 369.

FALL OF WICKETS**AUSTRALIA BOWLING**

Starc 25-2-86-0, Cummins

29-6-89-3, Boland 27-7-57-3, Lyon

28-3-4-96-3, Marsh 7-1-28-0, Head

3-0-11-0.

AUSTRALIA — 2ND INNINGS

Sam Konstas b Bumrah 8 (18b,

1x4), Usman Khawaja b Siraj 21

(65b, 2x4), Marnus Labuschagne

lbw b Siraj 70 (139b, 3x4), Steve

Smith c Pant b Siraj 13 (41b, 1x4),

Travis Head c Nitish b Bumrah 1

(2b), Mitchell Marsh c Pant b

Bumrah 0 (4b), Alex Carey b

Bumrah 2 (7b), Pat Cummins c

FALL OF WICKETS

1-20 (Konstas, 6.3), 2-43

(Khawaja, 18.5), 3-80 (Smith,

32.3), 4-85 (Head, 33.2), 5-85

(Marsh, 33.6), 6-91 (Carey, 35.6),

7-148 (Labuschagne, 55.1), 8-156

(Starc, 58.1), 9-173 (Cummins,

64.1).

INDIA BOWLING

Bumrah 24-7-56-4, Akash

17-4-53-0, Siraj 22-4-66-3, Jadeja

14-2-33-1, Nitish 1-0-4-0,

Washington 4-0-7-0.

Smith to go searching outside the off-stump.

Once Smith left, Rohit smartly called Bumrah for another spell. This was a moment tailor-made for a great player to impose his will, and the spearhead delivered.

Travis Head, cramped by Bumrah's angle, tried to force one towards the on-side and found Nitish waiting. In the same over, a tentative Mitchell Marsh attempted to ride the extra bounce and ended up feathering one to Rishabh Pant.

In his next over, Bumrah scythed through Alex Carey's stumps.

This was fast bowling of extreme menace and enormous merit. And the torrid spell read 3-1-4-3 while Australia gasped at 91 for six.

Dropped

Meanwhile Labuschagne motored on. Dropped on 46 by Yashasvi Jaiswal off Akash Deep, the batter got to his fifty, and with Pat Cummins, stretched Australia to 135 for six at tea.

In the last session, Labuschagne (70) fell to Siraj and when Mitchell Starc sought a risky two, he was left stranded by Pant's throw at the non-striker's stumps.

Skipper Cummins, ever the thorn in India's flesh, hung in for a vital 41 till Ravindra Jadeja drew an edge.

The final pair of Lyon and Boland doggedly resisted through a 55-run unbroken partnership. Bumrah even "scalped" Lyon with a no-ball in the day's last over before sheepishly realising the over-stepping bit.

Monday will be about agony or ecstasy, the Indians would hope for the second part.

Precious Bumrah has to be looked after

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

MELBOURNE

mins has 17. Importantly, Bumrah went past the 200-wicket mark in Tests. Travis Head was his 200th victim before Mitchell Marsh and Alex Carey emerged as his subsequent prey.

Fantastic figures

To have 202 scalps with a mind-boggling average of 19.52, economy of 2.76 and strike-rate of 42.42, places Bumrah in the realm of fast bowling excellence.

At 31, he has more years ahead. However, whether he can stretch himself thin across all three formats is something that the team-management, selectors and he have to decide.

India cannot afford a jaded Bumrah. He is precious.



Bumrah...202 and counting. AFP

Nitish is a man on a mission

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

MELBOURNE

An unmistakable confidence ripples through Nitish Kumar Reddy.

It was evident when he spoke to the media at the Melbourne Cricket Ground here on Sunday.

"I felt so happy about my first century. My father is here and I am representing the country and it's a special moment. I helped my team in a difficult situation," he said.

Amused and relieved with Mohammed Siraj surviving against Pat Cummins, Nitish said: "The crowd went crazy after Siraj's last-ball defence. Even for my century (the cheers) were not that loud. I loved the way Siraj approached the three balls and I should thank him."

Work in progress

Nitish's origin story has evoked curiosity but for

him, this has been a work in progress: "For you guys, it's like one or two months. For me, I see my last three years, and about how hard I have worked on my batting and bowling. Fitness is important for me as an all-rounder. After my first IPL season, I worked a lot on my batting and that's helping now. I have to improve as a bowler."

Playing with his idol Virat Kohli is an obvious high: "I have been watching Virat from my childhood and now play with

him is special. He came to me and said that I played well and got the team back in the game and I felt so happy."

Grateful

Asked about his father Mutyala Reddy's contribution, Nitish got effusive: "When I was nothing, the first person who believed in me was my father. He resigned from his job, and took me to the ground, gym, and made a lot of sacrifices. I am grateful to have a father like him."

Humpy regains World Rapid crown

CHESS**Sports Bureau**

Konneru Humpy regained the women's World Rapid chess championship after a gap of five years on Sunday.

The 37-year-old from Vijayawada finished with 8.5 points after beating Indonesia's Irene Sukandar in the final round in New York.

The victory helped Humpy move ahead of the other six joint leaders, including compatriot D. Harika, who had to settle for fifth place.

Among other Indian women, Divya Deshmukh (seven points) ended 21st, Padmuni Rout (6.5) was 26th, R. Vaishali (5.5) 52nd



Best on show: Murzin and Humpy strike a happy pose after sealing the Rapid titles. PTI

and Vantika Agrawal (five) 67th.

In the Open event, Russia's Volodar Murzin emerged the champion.

The 18-year-old Russian finished with 10 points from 13 rounds. Alexander Grischuk and Ian Nepomniachtchi ensured it was 1-2-3 for Russia, as they scored 9.5 points each.

Erigaisi fifth

The best Indian performer was Arjun Erigaisi, but it was a disappointing finish for him after starting the

day as one of the joint leaders. He ended in fifth place with nine points.

Among the other Indians, R. Praggnanandhaa was 17th with 8.5 points. Arvindh Chithambaram (eight points) was 40th. V. Pranav (7.5) 44th and Raunak Sadhwani (seven) 55th.

The standings:

1. Volodar Murzin (Rus) 10 points; 2-3.

Alexander Grischuk (Rus) and Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus) 9.5; 4-9.

Leinier Dominguez Perez (USA), Arjun Erigaisi (Ind), Javokhir Sindarov (Uzb), Alireza Firouzja (Fra), Daniil Dubov (Rus) and Karen Grigorian (Arm) 9.

Women:

1. Konneru Humpy (Ind) 8.5 points; 2-7. Ju Wenjun (Chn), Kateryna Lagno (Rus), Tan Zhongyi (Chn), D. Harika (Ind), Alexandra Kosteniuk (Swi) and Afruza Khamdamova

IN BRIEF



Man City beats Leicester to return to winning ways

Manchester City beat Leicester 2-0 in the Premier League on Sunday to notch just its second win in 14 games in all competitions.

The results: Premier League: Leicester 0 lost to Manchester City 2 (Savinho 21, Haaland 74).

Serie A: Udinese 2 (Toure 41, Lucca 49) drew with Torino 2 (Adams 53, Ricci 64); Napoli 1 (Raspadori 79) bt Venezia 0

On Saturday: Serie A: Cagliari 0 lost to Inter Milan 3 (Bastoni 54, Martinez 71, Calhanoglu 78-pen); Empoli 1 (Esposito 74) lost to Genoa 2 (Badelj 46, Ekuaban 68); Lazio 1 (Dele-Bashiru 27) drew with Atalanta 1 (Brescianini 88); Parma 2 (Hernani 56-pen, Valenti 90+8) bt Monza 1 (Pereira 86).

Shahidi slams unbeaten ton as batting marathon continues

Captain Hashmatullah Shahidi was unbeaten on 179 as Afghanistan trounced Zimbabwe by 71 runs after a rain-shortened fourth day of the first Test in Bulawayo on Sunday. He and double centurion Rahmat Shah put on 364 for the third wicket before the latter was out having made a career-best 234 at the Queens Sports Club.

The scores: Zimbabwe 586 in 135.2 overs vs Afghanistan 515/3 in 156 overs (Rahmat 234, Shahidi 179 batting, Afzar Zazai 46 batting).

Syed Kirmani's autobiography *Stumped* launched

A galaxy of stars descended at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Sunday for the launch of *Stumped* by Syed Kirmani, the autobiography of one of India's finest wicketkeepers. The book is co-authored by Debashish Sengupta and Daksheesh Pathak. The cricket universe was represented by Kapil Dev, Rahul Dravid, V.V.S. Laxman, Anil Kumble, Brijesh Patel, E.A.S. Prasanna, B.S. Chandrasekhar and many of Kirmani's State teammates.

Shatakshika and Tavish take the honours

Qualifier Shatakshika Sahayak beat Prachi Malik 7-5, 6-3 to clinch the under-18 girls title in the HPCL Mittal AITA National series junior tennis tournament at the CLTA Complex in Chandigarh on Sunday. The boys' title was bagged by Tavish Pahwa as he raced past Armaan Walia 6-1, 6-4.

Jamshedpur gets past Kerala Blasters

Sports Bureau

Jamshedpur FC beat Kerala Blasters FC 1-0 at the JRD Tata Sports Complex in the Indian Super League on Sunday.

A second-half strike by Pratik Chaudhari ensured that JFC FC broke the Kochi-based team's six-game-long unbeaten streak against it. The Men of Steel accordingly jumped four positions from the eighth place to the fourth spot in the standings, now boasting 21 points from 12 matches.

JFC found the eventual breakthrough from a powerful shot taken by defender Pratik in the 61st minute. KBFC made repeated attempts to clear a cross earned by the host but Pratik pounced upon a loose ball and netted it into the bottom left corner to score only his third-ever ISL goal.

The result: Jamshedpur FC 1 (Pratik 61) bt Kerala Blasters FC 0.

Muddappa clinches three National titles

Sports Bureau

Hemanth Muddappa of Mantra Racing reinforced his status as the "Drag King" by notching up a triple crown in the fourth and final round of the MMSC fmisci Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship at the Madras International Circuit (MIC) here on Sunday.

Muddappa took his tally of National titles to 15, making him the country's most decorated motorsport athlete.

The results (Provisional, all 4-Stroke unless mentioned):

Unrestricted: 1. Hemanth

Muddappa (Mantra Racing)

7.837s; 2. S.P. Sugan Prasad

(Mantra Racing) 7.970; 3. Khaja

Awais Ahmed 8.060.

Rider champion: Muddappa;

Champion team: Mantra Racing;

551cc - 850cc (SS): 1. Muddappa

8.275; 2. Mohammed Riyaz (Fast

Track Racing) 8.275; 3. Altaf Khan

(Fast Track Racing) 8.306. **Note:**

Muddappa and Riyaz tied with

same timing. Muddappa with a

faster "Reaction Time" was

placed first.

Rider champion: Mohammed

Riyaz; **Champion Team:** Fast

Track Racing.

361cc - 550cc (SS Indian): 1.

Iqbal Sheikh 11.281; 2. Shahrukh

Khan (Mantra Racing) 11.599; 3.

Naveed Ahmed 11.991.



Hemanth Muddappa.

851cc - 1050cc (SS): 1.

Muddappa 7.926; 2. Ahmed 8.126;

3. Sugan Prasad 8.196.

Rider champion: Muddappa;

Champion team: Mantra Racing;

1051cc - 1650cc (Super Sport):

1. Mujahid Pasha (Fast Track

Racing) 7.950; 2. Ayman Baig

8.169; 3. Alimon (Fast Track

Racing) 8.288.

Rider champion: Muddappa;

Champion Team: Fast Track

Racing.

361cc - 550cc (SS Indian): 1.

Iqbal Sheikh 11.281; 2. Shahrukh

Khan (Mantra Racing) 11.599; 3.

Naveed Ahmed 11.991.

Kenaf should come good in Bonzer Cup

HYDERABAD: The four-year-old

Kenaf, who ran third in her

last outing, should make amends

in the Bonzer Cup, the main even

of Monday's (Dec. 30) races.

1 GANGOTRI PLATE (DIV. II (1,200M), 3-y-o and upward, rated up to 24 (Cat. III), 3.35; 1. Nonpariel (SS): 1. S. Prashanth 13.075; 2. K. Prashanth 13.395; 3. R. Shahinsha 13.582.

Rider champion: Prashanth.

Up to 165cc (SS Indian): 1.

Mohan Babu (Rockers Racing) 13.541; 2. Iqbal Sheikh 13.656; 3.

J. Bharathraj (Rockers Racing) 13.743.

Rider Champion: Bharathraj;

Champion team: Rockers

Racing.

Girls (Stock Up to 165cc): 1.

Jagathisree Kumaresan (One

Racing) 16.463; 2. S.P. Shuria

(One Racing) 16.886.

Rider champion: Jagathisree;

Champion team: One Racing.

2-Stroke 131cc - 165cc (SS): 1.

Syed Imran (Fast Track Racing) 12.307; 2. Prashanth 12.538; 3. R.

Balasubramanian (ACCSY India

Racers Racing) 12.767.

Rider Champion: Syed Imran;

Champion team: Fast Track

Racing.

2.5 Up to 130cc (SS): 1. Syed

Imran 12.781; 2. Shahrukh 12.826;

3. Shaikh Sabitullah (Fast Track

Racing) 13.178.

Rider Champion: Shahrukh

Champion team: Big Boys

Racing Team.

1. DALI'S CHAMPION, 2. N R I

DHEERA, 3. FARAA

1. SECRET OPTION, 2. AMBOSELI, 3.

SWISS GIRL

3 WISHFUL THINKING PLATE (DIV. II (1,200M), 4-y-o and upward, rated up to 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 4.45; 1. Only The Brave (Shivansh 26, Planter Super 7) Ajay 59, 3. G. Flaming Memories (I) Nakhath 56, 4. Great Giver (9) Kuldeep Jr. 57, 5. Day's Best (Kaleek) 56, 6. Star Medal (8) Md. Ekram 57, 7. Day's Best (Kaleek) 56, 8. Star Medal (8) Md. Ekram 57, 9. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 10. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 11. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 12. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 13. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 14. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 15. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 16. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 17. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 18. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 19. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 20. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 21. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 22. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 23. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 24. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 25. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 26. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 27. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 28. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 29. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 30. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 31. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 32. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 33. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 34. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 35. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 36. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 37. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 38. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 39. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 40. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 41. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 42. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 43. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 44. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 45. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 46. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 47. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 48. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 49. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 50. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 51. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 52. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 53. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 54. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 55. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 56. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 57. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 58. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 59. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 60. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 61. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 62. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 63. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 64. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 65. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 66. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 67. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 68. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 69. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 70. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 71. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 72. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 73. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 74. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 75. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 76. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 77. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 78. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 79. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 80. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 81. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 82. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 83. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 84. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 85. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 86. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 87. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 88. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 89. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 90. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 91. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 92. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 93. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 94. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 95. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 96. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 97. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 98. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 99. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 100. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 101. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 102. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 103. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 104. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 105. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 106. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 107. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 108. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 109. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 110. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 111. Cup (6) T. Dheera 57, 112. Cup

Djokovic plans to keep on playing for 'years to come'

Says he is looking to take part in more tournaments this year than last season and hopes he will win a few and improve his ranking from No. 7

TEENNIS

Agence France-Presse
BRISBANE

Novak Djokovic said on Sunday that he planned to keep playing for "years to come" – with more tournaments on his schedule in 2025 – as he looks to take down the new guard led by Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz.

The 37-year-old had a disappointing campaign last year by his standards, failing to win a Grand Slam and claiming just one title – Olympic gold in Paris.

He has slipped to No. 7 in the world and said he wanted to get his ranking back to "where it should be".

Good start

"I'm looking for a good start to the season, I'm looking for more consistency across all the tournaments," he said as he prepared to play at the Brisbane International this week. "I'm looking to play more tournaments this year than I played last season, so hopefully also my level is going to go up. Hopefully, I will win a few more tournaments and my ranking will go up to where it should be."

The 24-time Grand Slam champion is beginning a season for the first time without any of the other so-called Big Four on the other side of the net following the retirements this



Hoping to turn it around: Djokovic is looking to be more consistent. GETTY IMAGES

year of Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray. Roger Federer called it quits in 2022.

As they faded, Sinner and Alcaraz stepped up to become the new Grand Slam kings.

Djokovic, who is targeting an 11th Australian Open title next month and a record 25th Grand Slam crown, said he had no thoughts of retirement despite turning 38 in May.

"The way I'm feeling today, I still think that I can go strong for years to come," he said. "But how

long I'm going to feel motivated to keep going is unpredictable. I still love this sport and I still love competing."

Djokovic will also play doubles alongside Nick Kyrgios, who is making a competitive return after playing just one ATP Tour singles match in two years following knee, foot and wrist injuries.

Meanwhile, he expressed his frustration at being "kept in the dark" regarding Sinner's doping case. "I'm not questioning



How long I'm going to feel motivated to keep going is unpredictable. I still love this sport and I still love competing

whether (Sinner) took the banned substance intentionally or not," Djokovic said. "We've had plenty of players in the past and currently under suspension for not even testing positive to banned substances. Some players with lower rankings waiting for their case to be resolved for over a year. I've been really frustrated... to see we've been kept in the dark for at least five months (on the Sinner case)."

Lack of transparency
The Serbian further criticised the lack of transparency from tennis authorities regarding doping breaches.

"The ATP hasn't really talked in depth about it. Why have they kept that case away from the public? We see Simona Halep's case on the WTA Tour, now Iga Swiatek's case.

"It's not a good image for our sport. I'm just questioning the way the system works and why certain players aren't treated the same as others.

"Maybe some ranking reasons are behind it, or some players have more financial backing and stronger legal teams to tackle these cases," he said

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SESSION LINE-UP

9:45 AM - 10:45 AM

Inauguration & Special Address

Devesh Chaturvedi (Secretary, Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare)

Sanjeev Chopra (Secretary, Department of Food and Public Distribution)

Ashish Kumar Bhutani (Secretary, Ministry of Co-operation)

Shaji KV (Chairman, NABARD)

Session 1: 10:45 AM - 11:30 AM

Why Monsoon Has Been Raining Woes Over The Last Few Years

Session 2: 11:45 AM - 12:30 PM

Overcoming Climate Change with New Seeds, Strategies

Session 3: 12:30 PM - 1:15 PM

Interaction with Drone Didis

Session 4: 2:00 PM - 2:45 PM

Tapping Digitisation, Technology for Agri Development

Session 5: 2:45 PM - 3:30 PM

Making Way for Biomass-Based Bio-Energy

Session 6: 3:30 PM - 4:00 PM

Interaction with Solar Didis

Session 7: 4:00 PM - 4:45 PM

Challenges in Price Risk Management

4:45 PM - 5:15 PM

Valedictory Address

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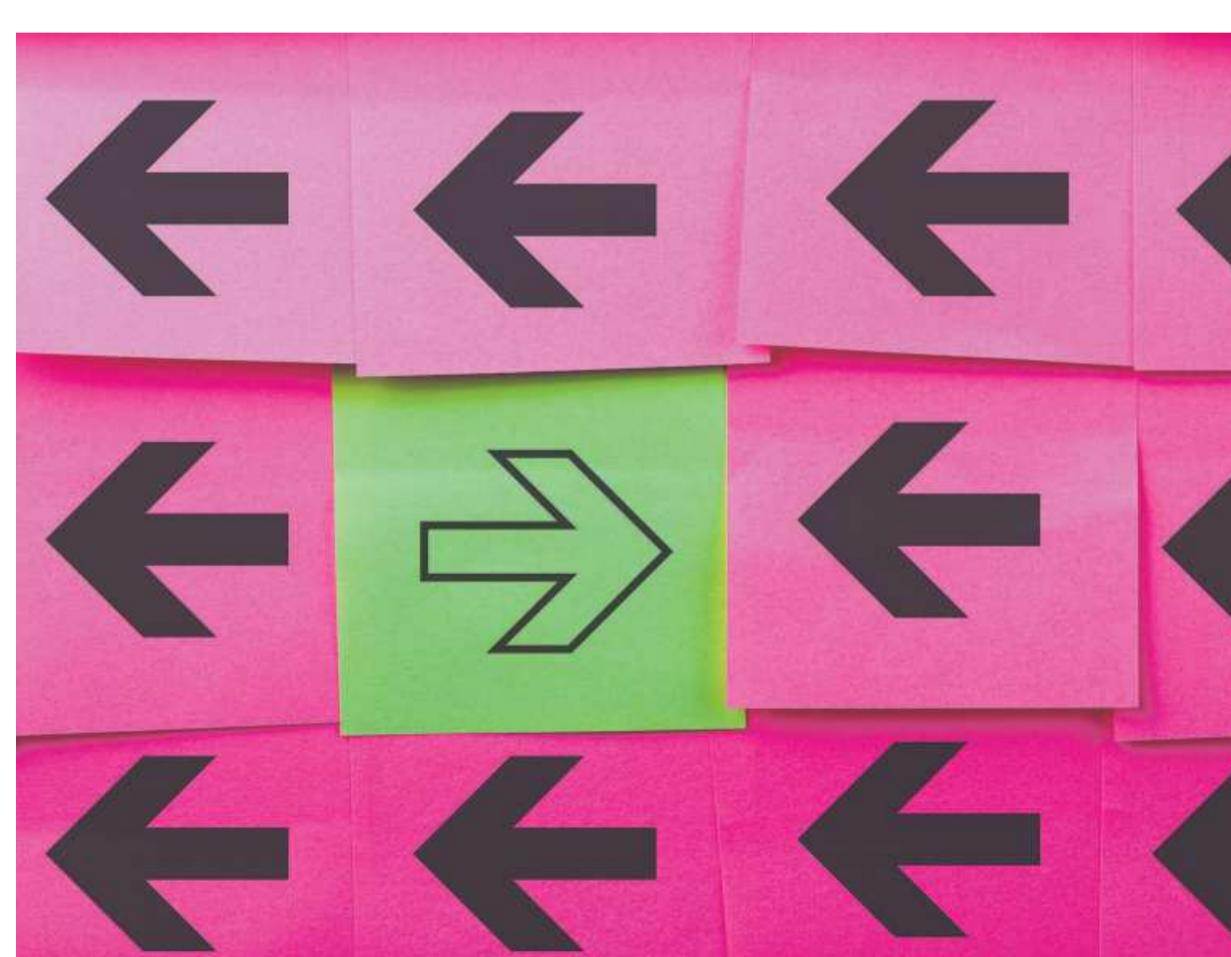
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Balaji Vharkat
Priyanka Shendage

India, known for its rich and diverse ecosystems, is facing severe environmental challenges due to rapid urbanisation and development. Pollution, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and the looming impacts of climate change are taking a toll on the balance of fragile natural ecosystems. While this year has presented a multitude of climate challenges, each with far-reaching consequences, 2023 was the warmest year on record, and 2025 is projected to be even hotter. India has observed a significant mean temperature increase of 0.15°C per decade since 1950, according to a 2020 assessment by the Ministry of Earth Sciences. This has dire implications for ecosystems, agriculture, and human health.

Build resilience

The brunt of these environmental challenges is felt by the youth, who have to deal with not only the immediate effects but also the long-term consequences. Thus, for India's younger generation, building resilience against these crises is vital, as they will inherit and shape the planet's future. In this context, green skills have emerged as an essential tool in mitigating and adapting to the rapidly changing climate. These skills encompass technical knowledge, practical competencies, and mindsets required to implement sustainable practices, environmentally friendly technologies, and resource-efficient solutions across various sectors.



Towards a green future

By equipping young people with green skills, India can chart a course toward a more sustainable and equitable future

required to implement sustainable practices, address pressing environmental concerns and are especially crucial for youngsters, who will drive the global shift towards sustainability. In India, approximately 20% of the workforce is already employed in green

jobs, a number expected to double by 2030. This growing demand for green-skilled workers presents a unique opportunity to harness the country's demographic dividend. The range of green skills needed spans (but is not limited

to) renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, water resource management, climate change adaptation, and waste management.

For example, skilling in

power plant operations can significantly contribute to India's renewable energy transition. Expertise in sustainable farming practices, such as organic agriculture and water conservation, can strengthen food security while protecting the environment. Similarly, skills in urban planning, pollution control, and waste management are critical to create sustainable cities and reduce the ecological footprint of urban areas.

Green skills are not only about adopting new technologies but also include efficient management of existing infrastructure, services, and systems. India's continued growth relies on sustainable operations across sectors, from energy to agriculture, to ensure that economic expansion does not come at the cost of the environment.

Pivotal role

The role of the youth in the green transition is paramount. Youngsters are already at the forefront of the net zero transition with climate action and spearheading sustainability initiatives. But, to effectively lead this charge, they need access to training and upskilling opportunities. Whether through formal education, vocational training, or informal programmes, acquiring green skills is essential to tackle climate challenges and lead communities in climate adaptation efforts. Youth-led green businesses and start-ups are already emerging across India,

introducing innovative solutions to environmental issues. By leveraging their creativity, digital expertise, and future-oriented thinking, youngsters are playing a pivotal role in reshaping the green economy. As leaders in green entrepreneurship, they are laying the groundwork for a sustainable future, driving economic and environmental progress.

The government has recognised the need to invest in green skills and the Green Skill Development Programme, for instance, aims to skill youth in fields related to the environment, renewable energy, forestry, wildlife conservation, and climate change.

Such programmes are essential to ensure that India's future workforce is equipped to handle the demands of a green economy. There is also a growing shift in academic curricula, with an increasing emphasis on environmental education and sustainability.

However, there is still a need to align skilling courses and academic programmes with the specific needs of the green economy. This is a pivotal moment for India, as the youth have the potential not only to transform industries but also to drive a broader cultural shift towards sustainability in business, employment, and everyday life.

Balaji Vharkat is Climate Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction Officer, and Priyanka Shendage is State Consultant, UNICEF Mumbai.

SCHOLARSHIPS

OakNorth STEM Scholarship and Mentorship Programme

Eligibility: Girls from Haryana, Uttarakhand, and Bihar who are in any year of a STEM-related graduation course in government institutions and have scored 80% or above in Class 12 and 65% in the previous year. Annual family income must be less than ₹ 3.5 lakh.

Rewards: ₹30,000
Application: Online
Deadline: December 31 www.b4s.in/edge/ONSS3

Programme in Mathematics for Young Scientists (PROMYS)

Eligibility: Students in Classes 9-12 who are least 15 years on May 11, 2025
Rewards: Covers tuition fees and other benefits.
Application: Online
Deadline: January 15 www.b4s.in/edge/PROM2

Tata Capital Pankh Scholarship

Eligibility: Students in Classes 11 or 12, degree, diploma or ITI courses at recognised institutions who have scored at least 60% in the preceding class. Annual family income must be less than or equal to ₹ 2.5 lakh.

Rewards: Variable
Application: Online
Deadline: January 15 www.b4s.in/edge/TCPS27

Courtesy: buddy4study.com

I will be smarter and go for the top-50

Tennis is a very lonely sport and you just have to keep doing your own thing; I wish I also had some Indian friends playing in the upper tier; it is nice to see two or three people at a bigger event and share the biggest stage; I wish I was taller but if I can be physically fit and mentally strong, I will be doing well



REUTERS

INTERVIEW

SUMIT NAGAL**N. Sudarshan**

Sumit Nagal had a mixed 2024. At the Australian Open, he came through the qualifiers and stunned the then World No. 27 Alexander Bublik in the first round, and in February, he broke into the ATP top-100 for the first time. In April on the Monte Carlo clay, he started in the qualifying rounds and nearly entered the round of 16 before losing narrowly to Holger Rune (No.7) in three sets. Propelled by a trophy and a runner-up finish in consecutive Challengers in June – again on his beloved red dirt – he got to a career-best ranking of No. 68 in mid-July.

But the 27-year-old's lack of success at the other three Slams – French Open, Wimbledon and US Open – will rankle him, and so will his 1-11 win-loss record on the Tour starting from the Paris Olympics.

There was also the controversy regarding his non-availability for the Davis Cup World Group I tie against Sweden in September – an issue he did not want to comment on – that India lost badly (0-4). As the 2025 season looms, Nagal, now ranked 98th in the World, told *The Hindu* in an interview that he was confident of learning from the experiences of the last 12 months and making a push for the ATP top-50. **Excerpts:**

Since breaking into the top-100, you have managed to stay there. How do you describe your season?

I feel like I played two different seasons. The first seven months were different, and around the US Open and post-US Open, things were different. The first few months I was really fit and playing well. The confidence was high and I really enjoyed being on the court. Once my back gave up a bit, and I really couldn't find out what the reason was, the training became less and there was a lot of worrying on the court. I lost track a little there.

You competed at all four Majors, a first in your career. Then, you played a few Masters tournaments which included your Monte Carlo high, a few ATP 500s and 250s. What were the biggest learnings from being in the upper tier?

If I am talking about playing the higher-ranked opponents, [I learnt that] you have to

be on top of your game because the margin is very less. Everyone serves well, hits well, moves well. So, you have to show that you are ready to fight and play the first and last points at the same high level. That's the difference I feel from Challengers to the ATP Tour. You don't get so many free points [on the Tour].

How do you rate yourself? Do you feel you belong to this stage?

Definitely. I very much believe that I belong in the top-100. I will back myself for it. I just have to be a little smarter in a few things, like scheduling, fitness routines... if that is done, I should be okay.

You are the only Indian playing in singles in the bigger events. Do you feel the pressure?

Not really. I just feel sad. I wish I also had some Indian friends playing. It is nice to see two, three people at a bigger event, share the biggest stage and share some dinners. It gets very lonely otherwise. Obviously, in tennis, things don't change overnight. I really hope there's a time when we have two or three people playing at a very high level.

You have put together winning streaks in Challengers. Earlier in 2024, you won the title in Chennai and reached the semifinals in Bengaluru in back-to-back weeks. What does it take to replicate something similar at the Tour level? What is the gulf in challenge that you're looking at?

It's very similar if you look at the physical side of things. You have to be fit because matches are getting longer and harder. There were a few times in the ATP 250s where I felt like I should have won, but didn't. So, instead of losing in the second round or round of 16 on a Thursday, I could have gone deeper in the tournament. There was a match where I was serving 40-love up and ended up losing. Then there was one where I was a set and a break up and lost. If I could have turned around those, the year would have been very different. But it's fine. It's my first experience. Obviously, I can't expect a good draw all the time and sometimes I have to take it up as a challenge.

How does your game measure up to the prevailing standards in men's tennis? We

see players getting bigger and taller...

I wish I was taller. I really wish. But then, I cannot change that. So, for me, to give myself a chance, it is to be like how David Ferrer was. I have tried to copy him. If I can be physically fit and mentally strong, fighting for every ball, making that extra ball all the time, I will be doing well.

Game-wise, what have you worked on? What do you have to get better at?

I'm practising a lot of serves, backhands and transitions to the net. These three are my biggest goals. I am getting better, but there's a lot of room to upscale.

When you play at big tournaments, you meet a lot of top players. What have you learnt from them?

When the top players get the racquet on the ball, they don't miss. It is incredible how they do it because it is super tough. They hit it hard and they don't miss. It's very simple to say but tough to do. That's where the difference comes. People who are able to do it will go high up the rankings. I played the World Ten-

nis League in Abu Dhabi last year too and that was probably the first time I got to see so many top-ranked players. It was the same thing with everyone – if they have the racquet in position, they do not miss.

What do you think was the high point of 2024? And what could you have done better?

To be able to compete for many months. For almost a year and a half, nothing major happened to me and I was on the court practising and getting better. That was really good. In the past, I couldn't really play for the whole year. It was on and off, and that didn't give me the chance to play at the highest level. Towards the end of 2023, I knew I was playing really good tennis. I was eager and hungry to start the next year.

Are you feeling the same now?

Yes. I'm actually looking forward to it. I've never enjoyed going to Australia but since the beginning of 2024, my perspective has changed.

What did that one win against Bublik tell you?

I don't think it was just that one match. It was the whole tournament. It felt like I had figured out how to play on those courts. When I was young, I struggled quite a bit. But now, I am more comfortable playing in those conditions. If I enjoy the conditions, nothing matters to me.

How do you maintain your focus? You have dealt with many injuries in the past. Recently, the never-ending controversy regarding Davis Cup selection flared up again...

Nothing, to be honest. You just keep doing your own thing. Tennis is a very lonely sport. It doesn't really bother me because I have bigger and better things to do, and I have to improve so much on my game that my whole focus goes towards it.

Have you set any targets for 2025? What do you want to improve on?

I would love to break into the top-50. I'm going to push for it because 2024 was a good learning experience. It was the first time playing the ATP calendar. In the coming season, I'll be smarter with scheduling and I'll go for the top-50.



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

SCIENCE



The PSLV-C60 rocket ahead of its launch on December 30, 2024. ISRO

All eyes on PSLV-C60 mission as ISRO looks to end 2024 on a high

The PSLV-C60 flight is scheduled for 9.58 pm on December 30, 2024. The rocket will carry two satellites called SDXO1, dubbed 'Chaser' and SDXO2, dubbed 'Target.' Each weighs 220 kg. After launch and orbit insertion, the two satellites will rendezvous in low earth orbit, dock, and then undock.

INDIA IN SPACE

Pradeep Mohandas

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) hopes to end 2024 on a high with an exciting mission on the launch pad to test technologies that will one day be used for interplanetary and human spaceflight. It also hopes to kickstart preparations for human spaceflight missions that have already been delayed for years.

Mission updates

PSLV-C59: The PSLV-C59 mission dedicated to NewSpace India Ltd. (NSIL) placed the European Space Agency's (ESA) Proba-3 spacecraft – short for 'Project for Onboard Autonomy' – into a highly elliptical orbit of 600 km to 60,500 km as planned 18 minutes after liftoff. The liftoff was from the Satish Dhawan Space Center's first launch pad at 4:04 pm IST on December 5. This mission demonstrated the ability of ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) to launch a spacecraft into such orbits.

After the launch, the ESA said the Yatharagga station in Australia began receiving telemetry from the satellite "almost immediately after separation." The telemetry will be passed on to the ESA's mission control centre in Belgium.

Gaganyaan: Ahead of its experimental flight of Launch Vehicle Mark 3 (LVM-3) in 2024, ISRO had wanted to test the vehicle's ability to fly through the thickest part of the earth's atmosphere. The organisation designed a suborbital flight for this with an altitude of 126 km and a range of 1,600 km from Satish Dhawan Space Centre. The vehicle didn't carry a cryogenic engine in its third stage and didn't reach earth orbit by design.

The LVM-3 X test flight also tested the reentry characteristics of the crew module using the Crew-module Atmospheric Re-entry Experiment (CARE). On December 18, 2014, the CARE module re-entered the earth's atmosphere after separating from the rocket and performed a controlled landing in the Bay of Bengal using its thrusters and parachutes. This successful mission was an important precursor to India's human spaceflight mission.

Ten years later, on the same day, December 18, 2024, ISRO began assembling the human-rated LVM-3 (HLVM-3) for its first uncrewed mission. This was done by stacking the nozzle end segment of the S-200 solid rocket motor with the full flex seal nozzle at 8.45 am on December 18. This marked the official launch campaign for the HLVM-3 G1/OM-1 mission. 'G1' stands for the first Gaganyaan mission, and 'OM-1' for the first orbital module mission. The orbital module consists of the crew module and a service module.

PSLV-C60 SpaDeX

Just like the CARE mission preceded the human spaceflight mission, the SpaDeX – short for 'Space Docking Experiment' – is a predecessor to ISRO's Bharatiya Antarksh Station (BAS) and the

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Chandrayaan-4 missions. SpaDeX will demonstrate in-orbit docking.

The year 2024 began with a PSLV flight and looks like it will end with one as well. The PSLV-C60 flight is currently scheduled for 9.58 pm on December 30, 2024. The rocket will carry two satellites called SDXO1, dubbed 'Chaser,' and SDXO2, dubbed 'Target.' Each weighs 220 kg. After launch and orbit insertion, the two satellites will rendezvous in low earth orbit, dock, and then undock.

In addition, the fourth stage of the PSLV-C60 rocket will carry 20-plus payloads of its own, designed by various ISRO centres, academic institutions, and Indian private companies. After inserting the satellites in orbit, the fourth stage will enter an orbit of its own, where its payloads will perform various tests.

The PSLV-C60 mission will fly the rocket in its core alone configuration (called CA); i.e., its first stage will fly without its strap-on boosters.

The 'Chaser' and 'Target' satellites will be placed in a 470-km-wide circular orbit with an inclination of 55°. The duo will also have different velocities such that the gap between them increases to 10-20 km after a day.

The propulsion system on board the 'Target' satellite will be used to slow it down to the same speed as the 'Chaser' over time. They will eventually maintain a distance of 20 km in the same orbit heading up to the SpaDeX mission's first milestone, called far rendezvous. Then they will move closer such that the gap drops to 5 km, 1.5 km, 500 m, 225 m, 15 m, and finally 3 m. Then 'Chaser' and 'Target' will dock.

After a rigid mechanical connection is realised between the two satellites, electrical power transfer between 'Target' and 'Chaser' will be demonstrated before they undock and drift apart.

They will then operate their on-board payloads with a mission life of two years. The 'Chaser' has a high-resolution camera. The 'Target' has a miniature multispectral payload and a radiation monitor. Earlier, an Indian private space company named Ananth Technologies



The PSLV-C60 launch vehicle after integration with Chaser and Target ahead of its launch on December 30. ISRO-X

became the first of its kind to integrate and test the two satellites.

POEM's two dozen payloads

PSLV-C60's fourth stage, called the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module (POEM-4), carries 24 payloads: 14 contributed by various ISRO centres and 10 by academia and private industry. POEM-4 will begin operations after satellite separation.

Of these, the Relocatable Robotic Manipulator-Technology Demonstrator, a.k.a. the 'Walking Robotic Arm,' developed by ISRO Inertial Systems Unit (IISU), is expected to demonstrate a robotic arm that can move to defined targets on the POEM using an inchworm walking technique.

The Vikram Sarabhai Space Center (VSSC) developed the Debris Capture Robotic Manipulator. In a proof of concept, it will attempt to capture tethered space debris with a robotic manipulator. The VSSC also built the Compact Research module for Orbital Plant Studies to study the germination and growth of eight cowpea seeds in a five- to seven-day experiment in a controlled environment.

The other experiments from ISRO centres include – to quote from a press release – the Gradient Control Reaction Wheel Assembly (IISU), the Multi-Sensor Inertial Reference System with in-house gyroscopes (IISU), the MEMS-based High Angular Rate Sensor (VSSC), the Lead Exempt Experimental System (VSSC), the Highly Configurable Onboard Common Controller (Space Physics Laboratory), and the PILOT-G2 payload (Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology) "that hopes to qualify in-house equipment for small satellites."

One experiment of note is the Amity Plant Experimental Module in Space (APEMS) payload developed by Amity University, Mumbai. It will compare growth-related changes in plant callus cells using spinach plants (*Spinacia oleracea*) in microgravity and earth gravity. For this, two parallel experiments will be carried out – one on POEM 4 and the other at Amity University.

Another biological payload of note is the RVSat-1 developed by R.V. College of Engineering, Bengaluru. It will measure the growth of the gut bacterium *Bacteroides thetaiotaomicron* in space. The experiment is expected to provide data to understand human physiology in space and astronaut health during crewed missions.

There are two notable communications payloads called the BGS Amateur Radio Payload for Information Transmission (ARPIT) and Swetashat. BGS ARPIT was developed by the S.J.C. Institute of Technology, Karnataka, and the Upagraha Amateur Radio Club at the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre. It can transmit audio, text, and images from a satellite to the ground with frequency modulation in the VHF band. It is designed to provide amateur radio satellite services worldwide.

The Swetashat payload, developed by Nspace Tech, a private entity in Andhra Pradesh, plans to demonstrate an onboard UHF transmitter's capability to store data and establish a communication link and transmit data and telemetry with the ISRO Telemetry and Tracking

On December 18 ISRO began assembling the LVM-3 for its first uncrewed mission. This was done by stacking the nozzle end segment of the S-200 motor with the full flex seal nozzle at 8.45 am. This marked the official launch campaign for HLVM-3 G1/OM-1

Command ground station

There are two propulsion payloads developed by private industry. RUDRA 1.0 HPGP, developed by Bellatrix Aerospace, will test a green propulsion system with a thrust of 1 newton and a specific impulse of 220 seconds. Likewise, the VYOM 2U developed by Manastu Space will test a monopropellant the company has said is a safer and better performing alternative to hydrazine, which is the most widely used propellant in the Indian space programme at present. VYOM has a thrust of 1.1 N and a specific impulse greater than 250 seconds.

Two payloads will also be hoping to demonstrate synthetic aperture radar (SAR) capabilities. SAR creates high-resolution images of objects on the ground by moving a radio-emitting antenna over the objects of interest. The SAR Imaging Demonstration Payload (GLX-SQ) from GalaxEye Space will test the generation, capture, and processing of SAR images in a space environment. The Varuna payload, from Piersight Space, will demonstrate SAR in a cubesat form factor and test the performance of seven advanced subsystems – including a deployable reflectarray antenna – that can help monitor all human and industrial activities at sea.

Finally, the MEMS-based Inertial Measurement Unit (STeRG-PI-1.O) was developed at the MIT World Peace University, Pune, and the MOI-TD by the private company TakeMe2Space. STeRG-PI-1.O will perform attitude determination and higher efficiency data processing. The MOI-TD payload is a technology demonstrator planning to perform real-time data processing for earth observation. It will attempt to receive three machine learning models through an uplink from ground to orbit, conduct in-orbit computation, and downlink the models' inferences.

Onward to 2025

The year 2025 will be a pivotal year in Indian spaceflight with the launch of the first uncrewed HLVM-3 missions to orbit.

Indians will potentially get to see the sight of the first Indian in space since Rakesh Sharma in 1984 when Shubanshu Shukla flies – schedule permitting – to the International Space Station on board a Falcon 9 rocket as part of the Axiom 4 mission in 2025.

We will also have the launch of the innovative NASA-ISRO SAR mission.

In all, 2025 promises to be an action-packed and, by all means, a defining year for space for India.

(*Pradeep Mohandas is a technical writer and space enthusiast in Pune.
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(*India in Space is a monthly column collecting and analysing developments in the country's space, spaceflight, and allied sectors.*)



A pumpjack at an old oil field in Emlichheim, Germany. AP

Oil companies backtrack on renewables

Reuters

Major European energy companies doubled down on oil and gas in 2024 to focus on near-term profits, slowing down – and at times reversing – climate commitments in a shift that they are likely to stick with in 2025.

The retrenchment by oil majors comes after governments around the world slowed the rollout of clean energy policies and delayed targets as energy costs soared following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Big European energy companies that had invested heavily in the clean energy transition found their share performance lagging U.S. rivals Exxon and Chevron, which had kept their focus on oil and gas.

Against this backdrop, the likes of BP and Shell this year sharply slowed their plans to spend billions on wind and solar power projects and shifted spending to higher-margin oil and gas projects.

BP, which had aimed for a 20-fold growth in renewable power this decade to 50 gigawatts, announced in December it would spin off almost all its offshore wind projects into a joint venture with Japanese power generator JERA.

Shell, which once pledged to become the world's largest electricity company, largely stopped investments in new offshore wind projects, exited power markets in Europe, and China and weakened carbon reduction targets.

"Geopolitical disruptions like the invasion of Ukraine have weakened CEO incentives to prioritise the low-carbon transition amid high oil prices and evolving investor expectations," Rohan Bowater, analyst at Accela Research, told Reuters. He said BP, Shell, and Equinor reduced low-carbon spending by 8% in 2024.

Shell said it remained committed to becoming a net zero emissions energy business by 2050 and continues to invest in the energy transition.

Equinor said: "The offshore wind

European energy companies that had invested heavily in the clean energy transition found their share performance lagging U.S. rivals Exxon and Chevron, which stayed focused on oil and gas

segment has been through demanding times in the last couple of years due to inflation, cost increase, bottlenecks in the supply chain, and Equinor will continue to be selective and disciplined in our approach."

BP did not respond to a request for comment.

The oil companies' retrenchment is bad news for efforts to mitigate climate change. Global heat-trapping carbon emissions are forecast to climb to a new high in 2024, which will be the warmest year on record.

And 2025 is shaping up to be another tumultuous year for the \$3 trillion energy sector, with climate-sceptic Donald Trump returning to the White House. China, the world's biggest crude oil importer, is trying to revive its faltering economy, potentially boosting oil demand.

Europe faces continued uncertainty over the war in Ukraine and political turmoil in Germany and France.

All those tensions were laid bare at the annual United Nations climate conference in Azerbaijan in November, when the host country's President Ilham Aliyev hailed oil and gas as "a gift from god."

That summit yielded a global climate finance deal but disappointed climate advocates who had hoped governments would coalesce around a phase-out of oil, gas, and coal.

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