



ELECTRICITY REGULATION

Karnataka HC strikes down Centre's rules

STATES » PAGE 5



NEWS » PAGE 12



COMBINED ENDEAVOUR

U.S. to join India to make sonobuoys

NEWS » PAGE 10

DATA POINT

Maoists losing ground but threat persists

Recent attacks show they remain dangerous

OPINION » PAGE 7



NEW HORIZON

V. Narayanan named new ISRO Chairman

NEWS » PAGE 12

Delhi votes on Feb. 5 in crucial Assembly polls

Voting will be held in a single phase in national capital; bypolls in the Assembly constituencies of Erode (East) in TN. and Milkpur in U.P. will be held the same day; counting will be held on Feb. 8

Sreeparna Chakrabarty

NEW DELHI

Voting for the 70-member Delhi Assembly will be held in a single phase on February 5, the Election Commission announced on Tuesday.

Byelections to the Assembly constituencies of Erode (East) in Tamil Nadu and Milkpur in Uttar Pradesh will be held on the same date.

Counting of votes will take place on February 8.

While the last date for filing nominations is January 17, the scrutiny of nominations will be completed by January 18. The last date for withdrawal of nominations is January 20. The entire poll process will be completed by February 10.

The term of the current



Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar and the Election Commissioners announcing the poll schedule. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Assembly in the national capital ends on February 23.

Choice of date

Announcing the dates at a press conference here, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said the polling date had been deliberately placed on a Wednesday (weekday) as in Maharashtra so that more people could vote.

According to the final electoral rolls published on Monday, Delhi has a total of 1.55 crore voters, of which 83.49 lakh are men, 71.74 lakh women, and 1,261 transgender people. There are 25.89 lakh young

voters, 2.08 lakh first-time voters, and 830 above 100 years of age.

Intense battle

An intense battle is on the cards as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), led by former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, is seeking a third term in office. In the 2020 Assembly polls, the AAP won 62 seats, BJP eight, and the Congress nil.

The byelection was necessitated in Milkpur as Awadhesh Prasad of the Samajwadi Party quit the seat after being elected to the Lok Sabha from Ayodhya, and in Erode (East), due to the death of Congress MLA E.V.K.S. Elangovan.

CONTINUED ON

» PAGE 10

THREE-CORNERED FIGHT

» PAGE 2

GDP growth projected to fall to four-year low at 6.4%

Vikas Dhoot

NEW DELHI

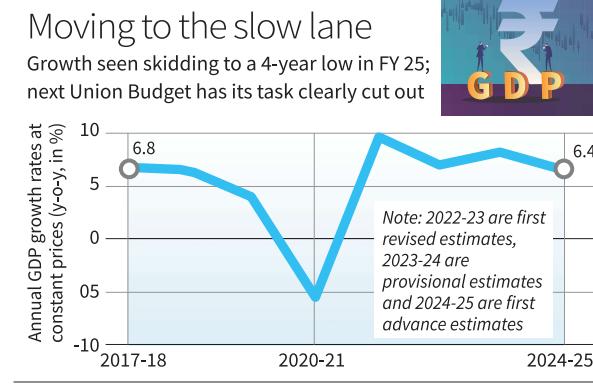
India's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is expected to rise at a four-year low pace of 6.4% in this financial year, down from 8.2% in 2023-24, the National Statistics Office (NSO) said on Tuesday in its first advance estimates of GDP for 2024-25.

This implies that the country's economy, that grew 6% in the first half of this financial year, is expected to rebound with a 6.8% surge in the second half.

The real Gross Value Added (GVA) in the Indian economy is reckoned to rise 6.4% as well, relative to a 7.2% uptick in 2023-24. Just two of eight broad economic sectors are seen to be clocking a higher growth than last year – Agriculture that is expected to rise 3.8% from 1.4% last year, and Public Administration, Defence and

Moving to the slow lane

Growth seen skidding to a 4-year low in FY 25; next Union Budget has its task clearly cut out



Source: MOSPI

Other Services, seen growing 9.1% from a 7.8% increase recorded in 2023-24.

Fresh investments in the economy, is expected to grow at a pace of just 6.4% compared with a 9% rise in 2023-24.

Manufacturing GVA growth is expected to nearly halve from 9.9% in 2023-24 to 5.3% this year, while GVA in Mining and Quarrying is estimated to rise just 2.9% from 7.1% a year ago.

Investment growth

A broader worry is the NSO's projection that gross fixed capital formation (GFCF), an indicator of

IN BRIEF



Bharatpol to help get fugitives back to India: Shah

NEW DELHI
Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the Bharatpol portal on Tuesday and said that the system will help bring criminals hiding in other countries within the ambit of justice. » Page 10

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas to begin today in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR
Over 3,000 delegates from across 70 countries have arrived in Odisha ahead of 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, which will get under way here on Wednesday. » Page 12

OPPORTUNITIES » PAGE 17

126 killed, 188 injured as earthquake hits Tibet

Agence France-Presse
BEIJING

Nepal's capital Kathmandu and parts of India.

Around 188 people were injured as the earthquake struck the rural, high-altitude Tingri county, about 80 km north of Mount Everest, near China's border with Nepal.

The China Earthquake Networks Center measured the quake's magnitude as 6.8, while the U.S. Geological Survey reported it as 7.1.

FULL REPORT ON
» PAGE 14



Efforts under way to rescue the trapped miners in Dima Hasao of Assam on Tuesday. PTI

Search on for nine trapped coal miners in Assam

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

Deep divers from the Navy on Tuesday joined the operations to rescue nine miners trapped in a water-filled coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao district since Monday morning.

One person, Punish Nu-nisa, was arrested in connection with the incident.

The district administration said three bodies were seen from the ground. "The bodies are yet to be recovered. Dewatering has been stopped for the time being," the administration said in a statement.

"The Navy team is now spearheading the rescue efforts," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma posted on X.

Assam's Special Director-General of Police, Harmeet Singh, told journalists that the Navy team came along with deep diving equipment. "There are tunnels inside the mine and more equipment will be required to go there," he said.

Mr. Sarma said the mine, *prima facie*, appeared to be illegal.

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AAP campaign song seeks 'Kejriwal again'

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Tuesday released the campaign song for the February 5 Assembly election. The song highlights party chief Arvind Kejriwal and the Delhi government's schemes and subsidies.

The 3:29-minute song, 'Phir Layenge Kejriwal' (Will bring back Kejriwal again), aims to strike a chord with voters by emphasising continuity in governance.

Training his guns on the BJP after the launch of the song, Mr. Kejriwal said, "There is also a party in our country that can be referred to as the *gaali-galau* (verbal abuse) party. I'm sure that its members will also like the song."

Stage set for three-cornered fight in Delhi

AAP, battling incumbency, promises more subsidies; BJP pitches 'double-engine govt' model for the city; Congress pegs its campaign on bringing back the 'Sheila Dikshit era'

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Battle lines have been drawn for a three-cornered contest between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the BJP and the Congress for the February 5 Delhi Assembly election.

While the ruling AAP is eyeing a third consecutive term to retain its home turf, the BJP and the Congress are trying hard to make a comeback. The BJP last ruled the Capital in 1998, while Congress lost the reins in 2013 to AAP and failed to open the account in the 2015 and 2020 Assembly polls.

"This election will be a contest between the politics of work and the politics of hurling abuses. The trust of Delhi's people will



Posters of the Congress, AAP, and the BJP pasted on autorickshaws in the Capital. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

remain with our politics of work. We will surely win," AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal said on Tuesday in a post on X.

Alleging that AAP "was a disaster" for the city, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said, "The voice of Delhi's people resonates with the need for change and transformation, reflecting the desire for a BJP-

led government. Hence, AAP-da (disaster) is leaving, and BJP is coming to power."

Targeting AAP and the BJP, Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said, "Be it the world-class metro or the massive infrastructure that brought connectivity, Delhi had its golden period under Congress rule. The

present regime, be it the Centre or the State, has failed to address the basic concerns of the people with pollution, crime, poor infrastructure and urban decay becoming the norm."

Graft allegations

In an attempt to overcome 10 years of anti-incumbency and negate the "cor-

rupt" tag labelled by the Opposition over excise policy "scam", Mr. Kejriwal resigned from the chief ministerial post and hit the streets through *padyatras* (foot march) to reach the masses.

AAP was the first to announce candidates on all seats. The party introduced fresh faces and changed the constituency of its key leader, Manish Sisodia. However, several party leaders have said that unlike the elections in 2015 and 2020, this poll will be tougher owing to anti-incumbency and corruption allegations against several top leaders.

Attempting to diversify its reach, AAP has announced news schemes for women, senior citizens, Dalit students, and priests in temples and granthis in gurdwaras.

The BJP leaders have also targeted AAP over sanitation and water crisis and, as a part of their poll campaign, have spent nights at various slum clusters in the city.

No CM face

On the other hand, targeting both AAP and the BJP, the Congress has been trying to remind voters, through a series of *padyatras*, about the "development and infrastructure growth" under the Sheila Dikshit government in the Capital.

While the party is yet to announce a CM face, it has promised ₹2,500 every month to women on coming to power.

The party has fielded former MP Sandeep Dikshit against the AAP chief in New Delhi seat.



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7. विश्वविद्यालय, भोपाल के भू-विज्ञान विभाग हेतु Microwave Digestion System क्रय हेतु ई-निविदा वर्ष- 2024	21,00,000.00	302/भण्डार/24 26.12.2024	16.01.2025
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IN BRIEF

**Aadujeevitham** among eligible picks for Academy Awards

Malayalam film *Aadujeevitham*, directed by national award-winning filmmaker Blessy, has been shortlisted among 207 feature films eligible for best picture nomination at the Academy Awards. "We are excited to share that *Aadujeevitham* (*The Goat Life*) has been officially selected for consideration in the Best Picture category at the 97th Academy Awards. The nominations voting period will take place from January 8 to January 12," read a release issued on Tuesday. It has also been nominated for sound editing and foley artistry in the "Feature International" category at the 72nd Annual MPSE Golden Reel Awards.

Allu Arjun visits hospitalised boy a month after stampede

Actor Allu Arjun visited KIMS Hospital in Secunderabad on Tuesday to check on the condition of Sritej, 8, who remains hospitalised following injuries sustained in the stampede during the premiere of *Pushpa-2* at Sandhya Theatre on December 4, 2024. "Allu Arjun sought permission from the police to visit the boy. Once it was approved, he informed the hospital about his plans. The actor spent about 15 minutes at the hospital," the KIMS authorities said. Sritej has been admitted to the ICU since the incident. His 35-year-old mother Revathi was killed in the stampede that happened when the actor visited the theatre during the screening of the movie.

EC to write to Cabinet Secretary to ensure no Delhi-specific sops in Union Budget**The Hindu Bureau**
NEW DELHI

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday said that the Election Commission of India (EC) will write to the Cabinet Secretary, informing that no Delhi-specific provision can be made in the Union Budget that can disturb the level playing field.

It made the decision taking into consideration the Union Budget that is scheduled days before the Delhi Assembly poll. While addressing a press conference to announce the schedule for the election, the CEC dismissed allegations of manipulation in electoral roll, saying no deletion can occur without thorough documentation, field verification, and giving the individual concerned an opportunity to be heard.

"Every step of the electoral roll process is rooted in transparency and ac-

The CEC said claims and objections are not only reviewed but also shared with all the political parties

countability. Deletion of names is not possible without adhering to strict protocols, and every party has the right to raise objections at various stages," Mr. Kumar said.

The remarks come against the backdrop of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) raising allegations that names of people who have been long-time residents are being deleted at the behest of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). AAP claimed it has submitted all the evidence to the EC for action.

Transparent process
The CEC asserted that claims and objections are not only reviewed but also

shared with all the political parties and made accessible online to ensure transparency. "Where every vote matters, raising doubts about deletion of thousands of names without evidence is misleading. The processes we follow leave no room for manipulation," he said.

Mr. Kumar also urged candidates and political party leaders to refrain from making remarks against women and involving children during poll campaigns.

He was responding to a question about a comment made by BJP candidate Ramesh Bidhuri on Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. "Any remarks against women should not be made. We have issued very strict guidelines... we condemn this but only when model code of conduct is in place," he said.

Hope EC will prevent vile campaigns:
Mayawati**Press Trust of India**
LUCKNOW

BSP supremo Mayawati on Tuesday expressed hope that the Election Commission would ensure that the Delhi polls were not tainted by the "misuse of government machinery, communalism, and vile propaganda". In a post on X, Ms. Mayawati said, "BSP... expects from the Election Commission...it will protect the elections from being contaminated by communalism and other disgusting propaganda along with misuse of government machinery," she said.

SEE ALSO
» PAGE 11



Delhi
Votes

This police station housed Sukhdev, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru in 1920s**Samridhi Tewari**
NEW DELHI

Inside the bustling lanes of north-east Delhi lies a police station with a storied past. It witnessed thick action during India's struggle for independence, with political prisoners like Sukhdev, Bhagat Singh, and Rajguru serving detention there at various times. The Shahdara police station completed 110 years of existence on Tuesday.

Founded on January 7, 1915 during the heyday of colonial rule, the police station has transitioned from its role as the occasional site for housing freedom fighters and a repository of historical memories to playing a vital role in law enforcement and crime prevention over the years.

The station was originally established with jurisdic-



Then and now: The Shahdara police station in north-west Delhi completed 110 years of existence on Tuesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



tion extending over the entire trans-Yamuna area of Delhi. Police records show that the first FIR was lodged in Urdu language on the very day of its establishment under Section 457 of the IPC regarding a break-in at the house of a person named Khazan Singh.

The complainant alleged that the accused, Sukhdev Mali, drilled a hole in the back of his residence along

with an accomplice but ran away when the owner woke up. There was no loss reported.

Senior police officers said that in 1928, Sukhdev, a prominent member of the Hindustani Socialist Republican Association (HSRA), was arrested and lodged at the Shahdara police station in the aftermath of the assassination of British police officer John Saunders.

Sukhdev and Chandrashekhar Azad were involved in the plot while Bhagat Singh and Rajguru shot Saunders on December 17, 1927; Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were later hanged to death.

Brutal interrogation
"During his detention, Sukhdev, like many other political prisoners, faced brutal interrogation meth-

ods at the police station. His incarceration here was just one chapter in his long resistance against British repression. Eventually, he, Bhagat Singh, and Rajguru were transferred to other prisons and their trials became a focal point for the growing demand for independence," said DCP (Shahdara) Prashant Gautam.

The records at Shahdara police station attest to its

role as a centre for intense interrogation of revolutionaries of the freedom struggle. Members of the HSRA were detained here after their involvement in the Kakori train robbery case of 1925, one of the most significant revolutionary acts against British rule. Others associated with the Chittagong uprising of 1930 and other resistance movements also spent time within its walls.

Modern building
The old structure that housed the who's who of freedom struggle made way for a modern building that was inaugurated in February 2022.

"The station became a symbol of the suffering endured by revolutionaries who had sacrificed their lives for the nation's freedom," said Mr. Gautam.

Tamil Nadu will oppose draft UGC regulations: Stalin**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

government's behest," Mr. Stalin said.

Tamil Nadu, which has the highest number of top-ranking higher educational institutions in the country, "will not stay silent as our institutions are stripped of autonomy", the Chief Minister said.

The draft University Grants Commission (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment and Promotion of Teachers and Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulations, 2025 has given powers to Chancellors or Visitors to constitute the three-member search-cum-selection committee to appoint Vice-Chancellors.

Three days later, Subarnath (23), serving with Basar Fighters, a unit of Chhattisgarh Police, died when Naxalites carried out the blast.

He had joined the police force in 2022 to fulfill his dreams of wearing the uniform and serving his motherland, said his friend Manmohan Yadav.

Subarnath's mother and three sisters are in shock, Mr. Manmohan Yadav said, adding that dead jawan was the sole breadwinner of the family.

Inconsolable kin

At Gumalnar village, also in Dantewada district, relatives were seen consoling the family members of Sudarshan Vetti, another Basar Fighters jawan who died in the blast. Vetti, in his early twenties, had got married in 2023, a year after joining the force, and the couple has an infant son. "I want them (assailants) to meet the same fate," said his wife, as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Dal Khalsa opposes Congress, Akali Dal requests for Sikh honours to Manmohan Singh**Vikas Vasudeva**
CHANDIGARH

Radical Sikh outfit Dal Khalsa has strongly opposed Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring's appeal to Akal Takht – the highest Sikh temporal seat – to confer the 'Panth Rattan', a title of honour, on the late former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

The outfit has also objected to the Shiromani Akali Dal's proposed plans to request the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to install Singh's portrait in the Sikh Museum at the Golden Temple complex.

Rattan' title or installation of ex-PM Manmohan Singh's portrait in the Sikh museum. He hasn't served the Sikh community," Dal Khalsa spokesperson Kanwar Pal Singh told *The Hindu* on Tuesday.

"We strongly object to the Congress seeking Panthic title for a person who hardly served the Sikh interests and identity while remaining at India's top executive post for 10 years," said Dal Khalsa working president Paramjit Singh

Mand. "If the Congress wants any title for Dr. Singh, it should approach Narendra Modi government and seek the Bharat Ratna for him," he added.

Title and portrait

The Punjab Congress president had written to Akal Takht Jathedar (chief priest) Giani Ragbir Singh, requesting that the 'Panth Rattan' title be bestowed on the former PM in recognition of his contributions to the nation and the Sikhs.

Asserting that the party values and respects the extraordinary services which the late Prime Minister rendered to the nation and the pride he brought to the Sikh quom (community) all over the world, Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal had recently said: "We will request the SGPC for the installation of his portrait in the Sikh Museum situated at Darbar Sahib complex."

BJP aims to enrol 1.5 crore new members in Maharashtra**Snehal Mutha**
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday announced that it will launch the second phase of its membership drive on January 10, aimed at enrolling 1.5 crore new members.

Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule said the party under the 'Ghar Chalo Abhiyan' aims to reach out to all households falling under 1 lakh polling booths in Maharashtra.

"We are also trying to expand party membership through the 'Sangathan Parv' initiative, that started on January 1," Mr. Bawankule said, adding that workers and chiefs from booth to State level and MPs, MLAs and State Ministers will visit 50 to 60 houses on January 10, and organise similar drives later.

Ambedkar's statue in Varanasi vandalised: police file FIR, detain 3**Mavank Kumar**
LUCKNOW

Hundreds of protesters blocked the busy Anai-Batpur road in Varanasi for two hours on Tuesday, protesting against the vandalism of a statue of B.R. Ambedkar in their village.

"We have registered a case regarding the incident, which happened in the early hours of Monday. Three persons have been detained, and further investigation is underway," said Baragaon SHO Atul Kumar Singh.

He added that additional police personnel have been deployed in Lachhipur village.

"The protesters called

off their agitation after being assured that a thorough probe will be carried out and the guilty will be punished. The situation is under control, and the statue has been reinstated with the support of the area's residents," the SHO said.

The Congress accused the ruling BJP government of "spreading hatred" that resulted in such incidents "aimed at demoralising the Dalit community".

Several Ambedkar statues have been vandalised in Uttar Pradesh recently. Feudal elements are getting emboldened by the BJP, alleged the party national secretary, Shahnaaz Alam.

P.V. Anvar offers support to UDF

The Hindu Bureau

MALAPPURAM

P.V. Anvar, Independent MLA from Nilambur in Kerala who broke away from the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) recently, has offered his unconditional support to the United Democratic Front (UDF).

"The CPI(M) and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan should be trounced. Kerala badly needs the return of the UDF," said Mr. Anvar in Malappuram on Tuesday.

Mr. Anvar said he would stand with the Congress-led UDF at any cost.

"I left the ruling Front for the people of Kerala, and I will work for the UDF to ensure the CPI(M)'s defeat. Let the UDF decide



P.V. Anvar

whether they want me or not," he said.

However, IUML leader Syed Sadikali Shihab Thangal evaded questions about facilitating Mr. Anvar's entry into the UDF.

"The UDF will discuss and decide it. Whole of Kerala wants the UDF to come back to power in 2026. The UDF needs to be strengthened. We will do whatever possible to strengthen it," he said.

Formula-E case: HC rejects KTR's plea

Marri Ramu
HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court on Tuesday dismissed Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president and former Minister K.T. Rama Rao's criminal petition seeking direction to quash the criminal case registered against him by the Anti-Corruption Bureau over 'misappropriation of HMDA funds' to conduct Formula-E races in Hyderabad during BRS rule.

Justice K. Lakshman of the High Court did not agree with the contention of Supreme Court senior counsel Siddhartha Dave, who appeared for KTR, that the essential ingredients of criminal breach of trust were the entrust-

ment of property or entrustment of dominion of property. Mr. Dave maintained that Ministers dealing with State largesse/public funds do not act as 'trustees' and there is no 'entrustment' of public money in elected legislators.

The senior counsel relied on Supreme Court's decision in *Common Cause A Registered Society vs Union of India* and stated that there was no trust created in a Minister to deal with public money.

The apex court's decision cannot be applied in KTR's case, the judge said in the verdict.

The former Minister was accused of abusing his authority to misappropriate HMDA's funds.

Nine BJP-RSS men get life sentence for killing DYFI activist Rijith 20 years ago

The Hindu Bureau

KANNUR

The Thalassery Additional Sessions Court (III) in Kannur sentenced nine Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-Bharatiya Janata Party activists to rigorous life imprisonment on Tuesday for the murder of Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) activist Rijith, 26, from Kannapuram in 2005. Judge Ruby K. Jose also imposed a fine of ₹1.1 lakh on the convicted individuals.

Of the 10 accused in the case, the third accused, Ajesh, died in a car accident during the trial. The remaining nine convicted are V.V. Sudhakaran, 57, of Vayakodan in Kannapuram, K.T. Jayesh, 41, of Kothilathazhe, C.P. Ranjith, 44, of Chankulaparambil, P.P. Ajeendran, 51, of Puthipuram, I.V. Anilkumar, 52, of Illikkavalappul, P.P. Rajesh, 46, of Puthipura, P.V. Srikanth, 47, of Vadakeveettil in Kannapuram, his brother V.V. Sreejith, 43, and Thekkaveettil P.V. Bhaskar, 67.

Rijith was hacked to death on October 3, 2005 in a politically motivated assault.

Family's reaction
Reacting to the verdict, Rijith's mother, Janaki, and sister, Sreeja, expressed disappointment, saying they had hoped for the maximum punishment of the death penalty for all



Rijith

the accused.

"The judgment brings no happiness or satisfaction as I will not get my son back," Ms. Janaki said. "However, I expected the death penalty for all of them. None of them should be allowed to return to society." She said no mother should have to endure such loss and urged political parties to refrain from violence and weaponised conflict to settle political disputes.

Ms. Janaki reflected on the long wait for justice, saying, "I waited for 19 years. My husband, who waited 17 years for this day, passed away two years ago. Now, I am left to witness this moment alone."

Ms. Sreeja echoed her mother's sentiments, saying, "We expected the death penalty." When asked if the family planned to appeal against the judgment, she said they were yet to decide.

Special public prosecutor B.P. Saseendran represented the prosecution.

Karnataka HC strikes down Centre's Electricity Rules

Court says Centre lacks legislative competence to frame Green Energy Open Access Rules; they were framed in a bid to reach net-zero emission by 2070 as per international climate commitment

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In a major setback to the Centre, the High Court of Karnataka has struck down the Electricity (Promoting Renewable Energy Through Green Energy Open Access) Rules, 2022, which were framed for promoting generation, purchase, and consumption of green energy, including the energy from waste-to-energy plants through open access in a bid to reach the goal of net-zero emission by 2070 as per international climate commitment.

The court said the Centre lacked the legislative competence under the Electricity Act, 2003,



The power to regulate the transmission and all aspects relating to open access is conferred exclusively on the State Electricity Commission
KARNATAKA HIGH COURT

to frame the rules (commonly known as the Green Energy Open Access [GEOA] Rules, 2022).

"Since the power to regulate the transmission, determination and, more specifically, all aspects relating to open access is conferred exclusively on the State Electricity Commission under Sections 42 (2) and 181 of the Act, it is obvious that all aspects of open access lie within the

exclusive domain of the State Commission," the court said.

Justice N.S. Sanjay Gowda passed the order while partly allowing the petitions filed by Brindavan Hydropower Pvt. Ltd., and 12 other hydropower generating companies, who have subsisting agreements for wheeling and banking with electricity transmission and distribution companies.

The Centre, in the guise of exercising its residual power under Section 176 (2) of the Act, cannot contend that it can frame rules to carry out the provisions of the Act, the court said while also striking down the Karnataka Regulatory Commission (Terms and Conditions for Green Energy Open Access) Regulations, 2022, as it was framed on the basis of the GEOA Rules, 2022.

"Unless the Electricity Act is amended and the Central government is empowered to frame rules under the said amendment, the Union cannot use the commitment given by it to achieve net-zero emission to frame rules in transgression of an existing law," the court said.

Implement criminal laws in 7 commissionerates by March 31: Shah to Yogi

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

courts, prosecution and forensics in the State were reviewed in the meeting. Senior officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and Uttar Pradesh government, including Union Home Secretary, Director General of the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) and Director General of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) were also present in the meeting.

Use of technology
On increasing the use of technology, Mr. Shah said there should be more than one forensic mobile van available in every district.

Mr. Shah said full implementation of new criminal laws in States with large populations like Uttar Pradesh will send a positive message across the entire country. The implementation and current status of various new provisions related to police, prisons,



Government of India

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• IN THE AUGUST PRESENCE OF •

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Shri Manohar Lal Union Minister of Power and Housing & Urban Affairs	Shri Piyush Goyal Union Minister of Commerce and Industry	Shri Pralhad Joshi Union Minister of New & Renewable Energy, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution		Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw Union Minister of Railways, Information & Broadcasting, Electronics & Information Technology
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Strong setback

The IED blasts in Bijapur are the act of a flailing insurgency

When an insurgent organisation is faced with a precipice, it has two options – it can either go down with a fight and pull some of its adversaries across the cliff or it can see the futility of its aims and give up the fight for good. Ideologically motivated insurgent organisations rarely choose the second option, especially those that are engaged in decades of conflict. Even those organisations such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) that gave up violent insurgency and entered into an armistice find it difficult to convince factions or cadres who are committed to the violence as a means of not just rebellion but also of their existence. Since the merger of various Naxalite currents into the party in the early 2000s, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) has rarely ventured to speak of peace and ending the violent conflict except for tactical reasons. Its ideology not just talks of the utilisation of violence for its aims but also makes it central to its existence. The dastardly killing of eight security personnel and a civilian driver in an improvised explosive device blast in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh on Monday might seem like a sign that the potency of the CPI(Maoist) in inflicting such acts remains, and, therefore, the Maoists are a dangerous insurgent force. While there is a grain of truth to that, especially in the Abujmarh jungles and adjoining areas of the Bastar region in the State, it is also accurate to suggest that these are acts of a flailing outfit struggling to retain what was the only bastion for the left extremist organisation.

The deaths of the security personnel, who belonged to the District Reserve Guard and Bastar Fighters of the Chhattisgarh Police, are certainly a setback to the anti-Maoist operations that have picked up pace and resulted in significant deaths of Maoist cadres and other tribal people caught in the conflict. In 2024, an estimated 296 insurgents died in the operations while security forces lost 24 people and there were 80 civilian deaths. To suffer eight casualties early in 2025 is a major blow and one of the severest losses for the security forces in recent years. The heavy use of explosives and the camouflaged nature of the planted IEDs suggest that the Maoists had planned this attack for a long time; the last such IED blast was in April 2023 in Dantewada. The knee-jerk reaction to this incident will be the security forces intensifying their operations to identify the culprits, potentially targeting innocent civilians. While stepping up the security campaign is inevitable considering the fact that the Maoists have refused to abjure violence, the security personnel and the government should not get carried away in retaliation and target civilians as this would play right into the hands of Maoist propaganda about state repression. As tempting as it is to wipe out the Maoist movement through military means, as the Union Home Minister has promised, it is still prudent to use civil society actors to work out a ceasefire agreement and utilise it to end the conflict.

Wayward liberal

Justin Trudeau's exit comes at the end of a period of misguided politics

Justin Trudeau's rise and fall as a global progressive icon is representative of the crisis of liberalism in general. After being in power as Prime Minister of Canada for a nine-year tenure over three terms, Mr. Trudeau announced his resignation on January 6. He had risen as the central figure of Canadian politics in 2015, leading the Liberal Party to an impressive victory in the federal election but that turned out to be the peak of his popularity. Born a child of privilege and power – his father Pierre Elliott Trudeau was Prime Minister for 15 years – Mr. Trudeau had rhetoric that was music to the ears of the global liberal elite, but his sense of the country's public mood has been poor. As his unshaded liberalism translated into unchecked policies of the federal government, Canadians turned against him and the Liberal Party collapsed into a low point in its history, with its popularity now barely touching 15%. His fiscal policy riled conservatives and moderates, and the generous immigration policy that he approved created a spurt in the population, straining housing, health care, employment opportunities and wages. His cultural liberalism was far off the centre of Canadian politics. When signs of discontent began to manifest as public protest and criticism, he resorted to strong arm state measures and dismissed his critics.

Mr. Trudeau said he hoped his exit would arrest the decline of the Liberal Party but that sounds overly optimistic. But a post-Trudeau Canada may be able to mend its ties with key partners including the United States and India. It might be months before the Liberal Party manages to install his successor or its minority government falls and a fresh election is held. The Conservative Party led by Pierre Poilievre is on an upswing and appears headed for a landslide victory, whenever elections are held, unless there is yet another turnaround in public mood. Mr. Trudeau's successor may help rescue Canada-India ties. Mr. Trudeau's compulsions to pander to Sikh extremists in Canada led to bizarre situations during his tenure. By escalating tensions with India on suspicion of Indian agents being involved in the murder of a Khalistani activist in Canada, Mr. Trudeau showed poor statesmanship and diplomacy. In being publicly judgmental and dismissive of Donald Trump in the run-up to the elections in the United States, Mr. Trudeau acted unwisely. He was ushered in with wide fanfare in 2015, but nobody seems to cry over this exit.



In December 27, 2024, the Director-General of Pakistan's Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that 383 officers and soldiers in the Pakistani security forces had lost their lives in counter-terrorism operations during 2024. He also claimed that 925 terrorists and Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists had been eliminated in approximately 60,000 intelligence-based operations. Giving a detailed account of Pakistan's generosity towards Afghanistan, he nonetheless asserted that Pakistan would not allow its citizens to be targeted by the TTP, which is alleged to enjoy safe haven in Afghanistan. It is, however, ironic given that Pakistan has itself, for long, provided logistical, military and moral support to the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network, the two formerly insurgent-cum-terrorist groups now leading the outcaste regime in Kabul, during their fight against the West-backed Afghan government and American security forces.

Pakistan's special representative for Afghanistan Muhammad Sadiq Khan had visited Kabul in December 2024, where he had held parleys with top-ranking Taliban leaders to de-escalate the tensions between two countries. But this is likely to be a diplomatic failure as it was during his stay in Kabul that the Pakistan Air Force conducted air strikes against alleged TTP targets in eastern Paktika province on December 24. The Afghan authorities claimed that 46 people were killed in the air strikes which were apparently in response to the TTP's attack, on December 21, on a security post in South Waziristan, killing 16 Pakistani soldiers.

Getting into a deeper mess

The two countries seem to be locked in a dangerous stalemate. On December 28, Afghanistan's so-called Ministry of Defence claimed attacks on multiple locations inside Pakistan in retaliation for the air strikes. Interestingly, the ministry did not mention the fact that Pakistan's territory was targeted, but, instead, chose to highlight that the strikes were executed beyond the 'hypothetical line' – a term used by the Afghan government to refer to the Durand Line. These incidents serve to highlight the limits of Pakistan's ability to exercise its influence over its former proxy by virtue of either coercive methods or diplomatic persuasion.

Pakistan's Afghan strategy has now become a victim of its own success. Instead of evolving as a "strategic depth" for Pakistan, the return of the Taliban has made Afghanistan a "strategic ditch" for Pakistan's security establishment, which seems to be getting deeper and deeper with no sight of escape. The tit-for-tat killing frenzy has dangerous implications as Pakistan's already tense relationship with Afghanistan has plunged into a deep crisis.

Pakistan has been facing significant challenges from the TTP which shares many ideological

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Vinay Kaura

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affinities with the Afghan Taliban, leading to a growing perception that both constitute the sides of the same coin. Against a backdrop of inflamed passions and growing suspicion, Pakistan has been under constant public pressure to demonstrate retaliatory action. But nothing could be more ironic and ridiculous than the entreaties from a section of the Pakistani government to Washington to come to its rescue. In response to the deadly attack on a military camp in Pakistan in December 2023, claimed by the Tehreek-i-Jihad Pakistan (TJP), Balochistan's caretaker Information Minister, Jan Achakzai, suggested the Pakistan government propose offering U.S. "drone bases to target militant sanctuaries in Afghanistan". Other measures included "special targeted operations, air strikes, border closure with Afghanistan, return of Afghan refugees, anti-TTA [Tehrik-e-Taliban Afghanistan] political opposition gathering in Islamabad." However, Mr. Achakzai later deleted this controversial tweet. When Pakistan's Army chief, General Asim Munir, had callously asserted in January 2024 that, "When it comes to the safety and security of every single Pakistani, the whole of Afghanistan can be damned", it merely fed the narrative that Pakistan's security establishment is largely ignorant of the subtleties required to persuade the Afghan Taliban by means other than fire-power. It is another matter that in a conciliatory tone afterwards, Gen. Munir pleaded with Afghan rulers not to prioritise the TTP "over their long-standing and benevolent brother Islamic country".

When it comes to Afghanistan's messy political dynamics, Pakistan's ruling elite has been living in a fantasy land, ignoring Afghanistan's notoriety as a 'graveyard of empires'. Instead of trying to extract Pakistan from the Afghan conflict after 9/11, Rawalpindi overstretched its involvement, chasing a wild dream of unbreakable Pakistan-Afghan alliance against India. An explosion was bound to happen, but Pakistan was extremely slow to react to the gathering threats. Perhaps the only surprise is that this explosion came out of the Taliban-led Kabul, which was supposed to be a pliant regime. It is shocking that Pakistan got the Afghan Taliban-TTP nexus utterly wrong.

The creator of its own terror problem

The terrorism problem that Pakistan faces is one that is of its own making. It is Pakistan's Afghan policy and the unnecessary obsession about a threat from India which should be blamed for fuelling jihadist extremism and terrorism. Pakistan has been pursuing an ill-considered policy of supporting violent extremist groups that are seen capable of hurting India and keeping Kabul under its thumb. It is not that Pakistan's military was oblivious to Afghan Taliban's intransigence. Rather, it thought of it as an expedient chess piece in the great game against India. Imran Khan, Pakistan's former Prime

Minister, in prison for defying the powerful military, had compared the Taliban's triumphant return with Afghans having "broken the shackles of slavery". Now, the excitement heralding the Taliban's recapture of Kabul has been surpassed in intensity by the inexorable realpolitik, interspersed with the ideological rigidities of the Taliban movement. The unsurprising outcome is confusion and paralysis for those in Pakistan who are charged with understanding how the military and political aspects of their response should fit together.

A pushback

The tension in the Afghanistan-Pakistan relations goes well beyond cross-border terrorism. No Afghan regime has ever accepted the 1893 Durand Line as a legitimate border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. And, Kabul claims Pakistan's Pashtun territories near the border. The problem with international boundaries in conflict zones is that they are not red lines inscribed on stone. After all, it was Rawalpindi which was complicit with the mujahideen in violating the very sanctity of the Durand Line during the so-called Afghan jihad against the red

Islamic country". The Afghan Taliban's fierce opposition to border fencing has come as a shock to Pakistan which was hopeful that the return of the Taliban would also bury the demand for a 'greater Pashtunistan' – an idea of creating a Pashtun homeland by uniting the frontier region of Pakistan with Afghanistan. The Taliban have not done anything to suppress Pashtun nationalism with Islamist ideology, fuelling Pashtun nationalist sentiments against Pakistan. Of course, Islamabad's 'Pashtunistan' puzzle is not new, but given the vicious potential of the militants that Pakistani security forces are now facing, the stakes of resolving the puzzle are much higher. If not meant as an intentionally sarcastic snipe, the Afghan Taliban's disdains refusal to treat Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as a Pakistani province is tantamount to calling for Pashtun unity, which is going to exacerbate Pakistan's fears about Afghan irredentism. The reality of confronting irredentism is often far messier. In all probability, the Afghan border security personnel will continue to challenge Pakistani attempts to fence the border.

Given the alarming rise in terrorism being blamed on the Afghan Taliban's inaction, Pakistan is reluctant to unilaterally recognise the new regime in Kabul as it had done previously in early 1990s. The magnitude of the challenge posed by the TTP to the legitimacy and authority of the Pakistani state, along with the utter disregard of the Afghan Taliban to Pakistan's persistent demands for credible action against the TTP, may have left Rawalpindi with diminishing options to create the terms for political engagement with the Taliban-led Afghanistan.

The imperilled life of the district journalist in India

The brutal murder of an independent young journalist, Mukesh Chandrakar, in Chhattisgarh, has once again highlighted the threats to life and the precarious nature of journalism at the district and mofussil levels. Journalists at the grass-root level in many parts of the country face similar challenges. Police and other reports suggest that Mukesh was murdered by a local contractor who was enraged by the journalist's reports questioning the quality of a road built by the contractor. This case brings to mind the killing, in 1988, of another young journalist, Umesh Dobhal, from Uttarakhand's Garhwal town, who was allegedly murdered by the powerful and politically connected liquor mafia that was angered by his exposés.

Limitations of the law

Mukesh's murder has also exposed the irony that Chhattisgarh is probably the first and only State to have enacted a law, namely The Chhattisgarh Protection of Media Persons Act, 2023, to prevent violence and ensure the safety and the security of journalists while carrying out their duties. This case shows that laws alone are not enough to save independent and courageous journalists such as Mukesh, who was actively reporting from Bastar, Chhattisgarh, and exposing wrongdoing and corruption in developmental work in the region.

There is no doubt that district-level or mofussil journalists such as Mukesh and Umesh play a crucial role in bringing "unseen and unheard" stories from the hinterland. They are truly the "voice of the voiceless" as they belong to local communities, understand their pain, grievances, and struggles, and are deeply moved by stories of suffering and deprivation. Most of these journalists are not formally trained in journalism schools. Yet, they pursue their journalism out of a passion and a commitment to raising local issues and exposing corruption and wrongdoing in developmental work.

Despite their dedication, the nature of their job and working conditions for most mofussil



Anand Pradhan

Professor of Journalism at the Indian Institute Of Mass Communication (IIMC), Dhenkanal, Odisha

They play a crucial role as watchdogs and in uncovering the abuse of power, inviting the ire of powerful vested interests

journalists are precarious. Many journalists work as stringers or retainers, with no job security, minimal and undignified salaries, and extremely hostile working conditions. But they often provide vital leads and act as local guides and facilitators for journalists from the metro cities and big media houses who occasionally visit these places to cover stories. However, they rarely receive bylines, recognition, or respect for their contributions. Like their stories, they too are mostly "unseen and unheard".

The lifeline

However, one cannot imagine flourishing regional language journalism without these stringers and retainers who feed the regional, district, and local pages and bulletins with their stories. In contrast, most stories in mainstream language newspapers and news channels revolve around routine crime reports, press releases, press conferences, or sound bites issued by local administrations and politicians. Occasionally, some manage to cover civic issues and local community problems.

Unfortunately, the space for such stories in mainstream language news media is shrinking due to various factors, including pressure from local advertisers and increasing dependence on and alignment with State governments. It is well known that a significant portion of advertising revenue for these outlets comes from the same powerful and vested interests and their nexus, which have been thriving on the misappropriation of developmental funds.

This situation has led many young journalists such as Mukesh to pursue independent journalism, leveraging the opportunities provided by technology and platforms such as YouTube, social media, and a few independent digital news sites. Unsurprisingly, some of the most hard-hitting, critical, and investigative stories now appear on these platforms, which irritate and anger the powerful nexus of contractors, criminals, officers, and politicians at the district and regional levels. This nexus, mentioned in the

report of the N.N. Vohra Committee – it was constituted by the Union government in the 1990s to investigate the criminalisation of politics – remains powerful and active, particularly in resource-rich States such as Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. It is no surprise that the main accused in Mukesh's murder is a politically ambitious contractor.

The end note

But the role of independent journalists such as Mukesh Chandrakar at the district level is crucial – they are the watchdogs for developmental projects and social welfare schemes. As routine and limited reporting by mainstream news media at the district level often avoids covering these issues in a critical way, it is journalists such as Mukesh who take huge risks to expose the powerful nexus operating at the grassroots level. Their independent, investigative, and critical reporting challenges this nexus, ensuring transparency and accountability in development projects and welfare schemes, and empowering local communities.

The presence of independent and critical journalists such as Mukesh must be encouraged and protected, particularly at the local levels where accountability mechanisms are often weaker. Journalists play a crucial role in uncovering the abuse of power, but their work frequently attracts the ire of powerful vested interests, resulting in threats, attacks, and even murder. The impunity enjoyed by such attackers not only endangers the lives of journalists but also fosters a culture of fear and self-censorship, undermining investigative reporting. This erosion of press freedom jeopardises the public's right to know, weakening democratic institutions and leaving citizens vulnerable to unchecked corruption and injustice.

It is high time that we ensure that Mukesh Chandrakar's sacrifice does not go in vain.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Governor walks out

The friction between the Tamil Nadu Governor, R.N. Ravi, and the Tamil Nadu government is disheartening. Both the State's invocation to Tamil and the National Anthem symbolise unity and respect: one is cultural and

the other is national. They should not be treated as conflicting. Public walkouts and confrontations between constitutional authorities weaken democratic values. Let us focus on harmony, not headlines.

E.A. Sarayu Berkavin,
Bengaluru

The Governor has conducted himself well in keeping with the dignity and the glory of the office he occupies despite the criticism heaped on him by local politicians. Media criticism is uncalled for. The State government needs to be severely chastised for its unconstitutional and irresponsible conduct.

Ravi Mathur,

Noida, Uttar Pradesh

It would have been a miracle had his excellency, known for his obduracy, read out the customary address and remained in

the House. This is the third consecutive year where he has aired his odd views. Does the Governor not deserve a pat on his back?

Mani Natarajan,

Chennai

Justin Trudeau resigns
The downfall of Canadian

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was primarily due to internal political strife. But it may redirect India-Canadian relations, when there is a successor and also after Donald Trump assumes office.

R.S. Narula,
Patiala, Punjab

More flexibility, but also greater challenges

The latest guidelines of the University Grants Commission (UGC) herald a transformative shift in higher education in India. Among other reforms, the UGC has introduced an accelerated degree programme and an extended degree programme for undergraduate students, which will allow them to complete their degrees either earlier or later than the standard duration.

Advantages and challenges
This new paradigm aims to create a globally competitive educational framework that allows students greater autonomy and flexibility in charting out their academic trajectory. In a rigid education system such as India's, this is particularly revolutionary.

While an accelerated degree programme will be advantageous for students who are keen to join the workforce quickly or who wish to gain early professional experience or save money on tuition fees, the extended degree programme will allow students the leeway to explore a broader range of subjects, undertake internships, engage in research projects, travel and learn new skills, and balance academic pursuits with personal and professional commitments. As the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, advocates for a multidisciplinary approach to learning, this approach could produce graduates who are not only proficient in their chosen fields, but are also equipped with more soft skills, creative skills, and ideas for innovation.

In addition, by aligning the structure of undergraduate education with international standards, the reforms aim to create greater mobility for Indian students, both within India and abroad. The flexible credit system introduced under these reforms will allow students to progress at their own pace. They can tailor their academic experiences to their specific needs, interests, and future career goals. This autonomy is important for the



Milind Kumar Sharma

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students.

However, there are challenges. The accelerated format raises questions about the depth and rigour of the education provided to students. If students are taught the same curriculum within a shorter period of time, they may have a superficial understanding of key concepts; this could compromise educational outcomes. In contrast, students who opt for the extended degree programme may lack academic urgency. Some may take longer than necessary to complete their studies, which would diminish the value of the degree.

Adapting to the new structure

It is especially difficult for technical education to adapt to the new structure. Engineering programmes demand a deep understanding of both theory and practice. While the push for interdisciplinary education is beneficial for students, engineering programmes are traditionally structured to provide students with a specialised education that prepares them for specific career paths.

Accelerated engineering degrees could risk oversimplifying technical learning. Engineering degrees require an in-depth study of subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and advanced engineering principles. Compressing this content could reduce the time available for practical projects, lab work, tutorial sessions, and project work and internships, which are crucial for developing technical competencies required in the field. Engineering students are often required to solve real-world problems, and any pressure to finish their studies quickly may hinder their ability to master problem-solving techniques that are integral to their profession.

Conversely, while the extended degree option in engineering could provide students with more opportunities for specialisation, research, and practical experience, it may also be more of

a financial burden for students and could discourage those who already face economic constraints.

Practical issues

The transition to accelerated and extended degree formats requires substantial restructuring of curricula, teaching methods, and approval from competent bodies of universities and administrative systems. This could be daunting for universities that already face resource constraints. Further, the shift towards greater digitalisation in education, which is likely to accompany these reforms, could deepen the digital divide.

The introduction of accelerated and extended degrees necessitates robust systems for tracking student progress, evaluation, managing credit transfers, and ensuring the appropriate recognition of academic achievements. Institutions will need to develop sophisticated administrative frameworks to manage these complexities.

The equity implications of these reforms are also concerning. Students from underprivileged backgrounds may struggle to navigate the new system without adequate guidance and support and may even drop out if they are not able to catch up with the rest.

The adaptation of faculty to these new pedagogical models is another potential obstacle. Teachers will need to undergo professional development to adjust to the demands of flexible, interdisciplinary curricula. The success of these reforms hinges not only on the students' ability to navigate the new systems but also on the capacity of educators to support them effectively.

If these challenges are addressed with strategic planning, adequate investment, timely recruitment of faculty and staff, and a commitment to inclusivity, these reforms could lay the foundation for a more dynamic higher education system, which is better aligned to market needs, and would help India realise the dream of Vicksit Bharat by 2047.

The accelerated and extended degree programmes herald a transformative shift in Indian education but also raise many questions

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Maoist strongholds are shrinking, but deadly threats persist

With nine security personnel killed in the first week of 2025, the toll has already surpassed a third of last year's total

DATA POINT

Vignesh Radhakrishnan Nitika Francis

On Monday, eight security personnel were killed when Maoists blew up their vehicle with an improvised explosive device (IED) in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh. While the insurgents have faced a series of setbacks in recent years, and their geographical influence has sharply contracted over the last decade, the latest attack is a stark reminder that their firepower remains a threat in areas where they are still active.

While there have been isolated attacks that have claimed the lives of security forces in Chhattisgarh, no single incident in the past 600 days has claimed the lives of eight or more security personnel. The last deadly incident was in April 2023, when an IED blast in Dantewada killed 10 District Reserve Guard personnel and a civilian driver. The most devastating incident before that occurred in April 2021, when 22 personnel were killed in an encounter in Sukma.

Chart 1 shows the deaths of security personnel in individual incidents since 2000 in Chhattisgarh. The April 2010 attack in Dantewada, which claimed the lives of 74 Central Reserve Police Force personnel and two police officers, remains the deadliest single incident for security forces in their operation against the insurgents. The second biggest incident took place in March 2007 when hundreds of Maoists attacked a remote police station and killed over 50 security personnel.

Individual incidents that saw massive casualties have significantly decreased over the past decade in the State. This is why the latest attack is significant.

In recent months, many left-wing extremists have been killed in "encounters", primarily in Chhattisgarh but also in other States, as paramilitary forces and State police have intensified their

operations. Deaths among civilians and security forces have remained limited. Chart 2 depicts fatalities among civilians, security forces, and insurgents over the years across all States in incidents involving Maoists. Last year was the third deadliest year for the Maoists since 2000 as 296 insurgents were killed. The deadliest year for the insurgents was 2006, when 343 were killed.

In contrast, 24 security personnel died in Maoist incidents last year, the second-lowest number since 2000. The year 2022 was the worst year for the forces, as 15 lives were lost. However, this year has already crossed one-third of last year's total, with nine personnel dead so far.

Most of the recent incidents were concentrated in south Chhattisgarh, particularly the Bastar region, possibly the Maoists' last stronghold. Table 3 highlights the district-wise share of left-wing extremism-related deaths in Chhattisgarh over five-year periods. Nearly 30% of all such deaths between 2020 and 2025 occurred in Bijapur. Over 65% of the remaining fatalities were reported from other districts in the Bastar region, including Narayanpur, Sukma, Dantewada, Kanker, and Bastar.

Chart 4 displays State-wise left-wing extremism-related deaths since 2000. In 2024, nearly 80% of all fatalities occurred in Chhattisgarh. Incidents in the forested districts of Andhra Pradesh/Telangana, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, and West Bengal saw a significant decline.

The geographical contraction of Maoist influence has been largely driven by tribal communities, who have increasingly distanced themselves from the cause. This shift is reflected in the sharp decline in NOTA (None of the Above) votes during the 2023 elections in Chhattisgarh, with only 1.3% opting for it. Historically, regions with higher NOTA vote shares have often had areas that were greatly affected by left-wing extremism.

A clear and present danger

The data for the charts were sourced from the South Asia Terrorism Portal

Chart 1: The chart illustrates the deaths of security personnel resulting from individual incidents since 2000 in Chhattisgarh

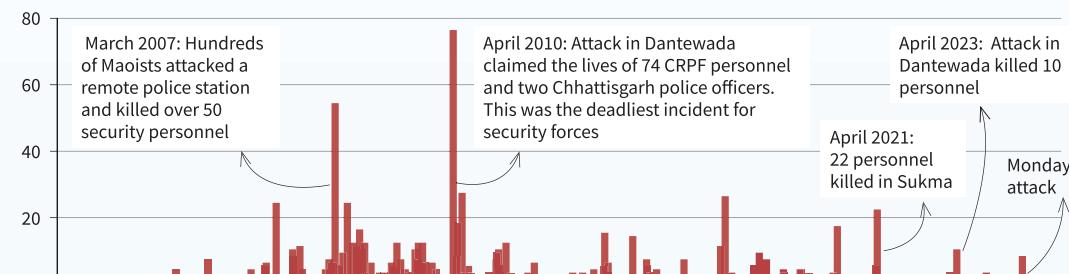


Chart 2: The chart depicts fatalities among civilians, security forces, and insurgents over the years across all States in incidents involving Maoists

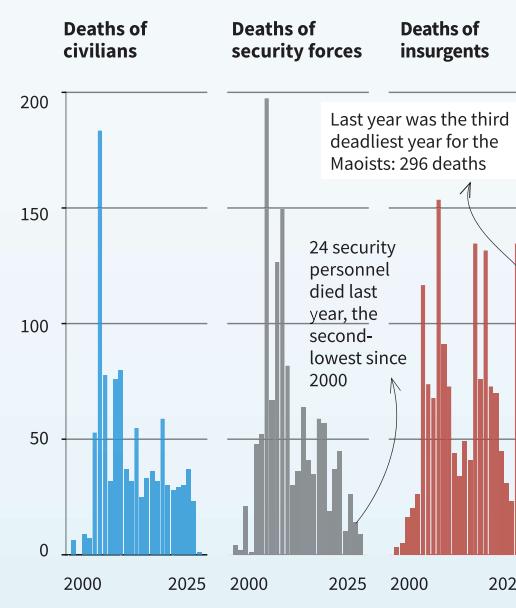
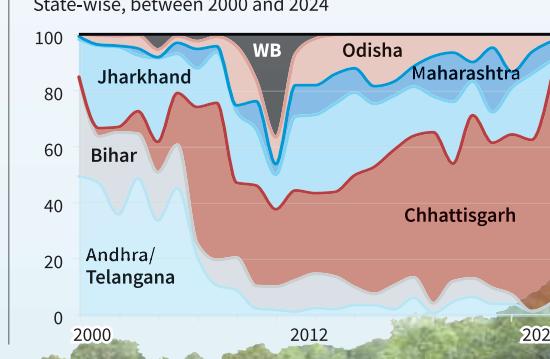


Table 3: District-wise share (%) of left-wing extremism-related deaths in Chhattisgarh over five-year periods

District	2000-04	2005-10	2011-14	2015-20	2021-25
Bijapur	4.1	24.1	28.6	24.3	29.2
Narayanpur	0.0	5.7	6.2	8.6	22.8
Sukma	0.0	0.0	23.8	33.9	18.8
Dantewada	56.0	50.5	19.7	12.7	13.3
Kanker	3.7	6.2	4.7	7.2	10.2
Bastar	21.6	4.8	8.0	3.9	1.2
Others	14.7	8.7	9.0	9.4	4.5

Chart 4: The chart shows left-wing extremism-related deaths, State-wise, between 2000 and 2024



Politics on the menu

A dinner meeting in Karnataka has rekindled talk on factions

STATE OF PLAY

Nagesh Prabhu

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In January 2, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and four Dalit Ministers met for dinner when Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar was abroad. The meeting highlighted once again factionalism in the ruling Congress in Karnataka.

The main subject of discussion at dinner was apparently the implementation of a specific reform mentioned in the Congress's Udaipur Declaration, which is the principle of 'one person, one post'. Given the hints and the buzz that Mr. Siddaramaiah and Mr. Shivakumar would be at the helm for two-and-a-half years each, of the full five-year term, this debate was a veiled attempt to corner Mr. Shivakumar, who also heads the State Congress.

Ministers loyal to the Chief Minister, mainly Cooperation Minister K.N. Rajanna and Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi, who is a strong claimant to the post of president of Karnataka Congress, have renewed the demand for applying the principle.

With the Congress government completing two years this May, and Mr. Shivakumar gunning for the post of Chief Minister, there is pressure being built on him to step down as State party head as he also holds two important portfolios – Water Resources, and Bengaluru Development.

Differences between the loyalists of the two leaders reportedly surfaced again when Mr. Shivakumar changed the name of the party's convention in Hassan on December 5, 2024, to 'Jana Kalyana Samavesha' (public welfare rally) from 'Siddaramaiah Swabhavi



mani Janandola Samavesha (Siddaramaiah self-respect rally). The Chief Minister was keen on using the convention to refurbish his image, which has been dented by the Mysuru Urban Development Authority scam, currently under investigation.

Mr. Siddaramaiah's loyalists are keen to have someone they like as Congress State president. Congress General Secretary (Organisation) and MP K.C. Venugopal announced at the time of government formation in 2023 that Mr. Shivakumar would continue as State Congress chief only till the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. To justify their demand, Mr. Rajanna recalled the 1979 precedent when the then Chief Minister, D. Devaraj Urs, was stripped of the party post after refusing to comply with the 'one person, one post' policy.

They believe that the appointment of a new State Congress chief would put a break on the "commanding" power of Mr. Shivakumar, who, they allege, is now holding party programmes without holding consultations with leaders.

There is resentment that Mr. Shivakumar single-handedly managed the celebrations on December 26, 2024, to mark the centenary of Mahatma Gandhi presiding over the Congress session in Belagavi. There are also allegations that he directed the Belagavi police to arrest BJP MLC C.T. Ravi for making "derogatory" remarks

against the Women and Child Development Minister. This is said to have angered senior Ministers, particularly Home Minister Dr. Parameshwara and Mr. Jarkiholi. Dr. Parameshwara is also reportedly miffed with Mr. Shivakumar's "interference" in Mr. Ravi's case and has apparently sought a change in his portfolio.

Differences among top leaders are also reportedly stalling appointments of directors to many government-owned boards/corporations. While Mr. Siddaramaiah was keen on appointing legislators for these posts, his Deputy has been insisting on prioritising party workers. The appointment of presidents to about 20 District Congress Committees has also been delayed.

Mr. Siddaramaiah's loyalists argue that if Mr. Shivakumar is relieved of the party post, it would help expedite the process of appointment of directors to boards/corporations and presidents to DCCCs, who will not be beholden to him. They say the new party president would devote his time to strengthening the organisation ahead of polls to rural and urban local bodies.

Mr. Shivakumar also caused a stir when he said in an interview with a TV channel that "some formulas" between him and the Chief Minister on the change of guard had been worked out. After Mr. Siddaramaiah asserted that there was no such formula, Mr. Shivakumar withdrew the statement.

The dominant view among Ministers is that Mr. Siddaramaiah, who has fashioned himself as the champion of AHINDA (Kannada acronym for minorities, backward classes, and Dalits), should continue in office. This means that Mr. Shivakumar does not stand much of a chance in occupying the top job.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 8, 1975

U.S. fleet moves as NLF captures provincial capital

Saigon, Jan. 7: The United States ordered a Navy task force, including the world's biggest aircraft carrier, the 'USS Enterprise', to sail towards South Vietnam to-day, as the National Liberation Front (NLF) troops took full control of the provincial capital Phuoc Binh, U.S. diplomatic sources said.

The Pentagon denied that the Enterprise and its 10 escort vessels intended to sail into Vietnamese waters although a spokesman acknowledged the huge vessel was on a course in the general direction of southern South Vietnam.

The diplomatic sources said there appeared to be no imminent plan for U.S. warplanes to intervene in the Vietnam war.

But they said the Enterprise, two guided missile

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Microsoft's projected investment in AI, cloud expansion in India

3 In \$ billion. Microsoft will invest \$3 billion (about ₹25,700 crore) to expand its cloud computing and artificial intelligence capabilities in India, its chief executive officer Satya Nadella said on Tuesday. The tech giant will also train 10 million people in AI skills in India by 2030, Mr. Nadella said. PTI

The number of people reportedly executed in Iran in 2024

901 More than 900 people were reportedly executed in Iran last year, including around 40 in a single week in December, the UN rights chief said. The Islamic Republic executes more people per year than any other nation except China, for which no figures are available. AFP

India's estimated economic growth rate in 2024-25

6.4 In per cent. India's economic growth rate is estimated to slip to a low of 6.4% in 2024-25, mainly on account of a poor show by the manufacturing and services sector. The first advance estimates of national income for 2024-25 is lower than the 6.6% projected by the RBI. PTI

Number of product launches expected at the Auto Expo

40 More than 40 new product launches are expected at the upcoming Auto Expo which will be held under the umbrella of Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 from January 17 to 22. It is organised by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry by joining hands with sectoral industry bodies. PTI

The total office space absorption in the year 2024

719 In lakh square feet. Demand for office space across eight major cities was at an all-time high last year, beating the previous high in 2019, according to Knight Frank. In 2020 and 2021, office space demand had plunged. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Why is there a drop in school enrolments?

What does the data from the Unified District Information System for Education Plus reports tell us about student dropouts and school reduction? Why has the Ministry of Education said that 2022-23, 2023-24 UDISE+ report data is not strictly comparable with the years before it?

EXPLAINER

Maitri Porecha

The story so far: The total enrolment of students in schools across India studying from grade 1-12, dropped by over a crore in 2023-24 as compared to 2018-19. After a gap of two years, the Ministry of Education (MoE) released the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) for 2022-23, 2023-24 on December 30, 2024.

What do the figures say?

Since 2012-13, when the MoE started maintaining UDISE+ data, it was believed that the total number of students studying in India were 26.3 crore. Till November 22, 2022 when the 2021-22 data was released, the number hovered around 26 crore, until last month, when the 2022-23 data reflected enrolment at 25.18 crore, which has further fallen to 24.8 crore in 2023-24 (a drop of 6% or 1.22 crore students) as compared to earlier years.

How did such a drop happen?

MoE officials in the UDISE+ reports have given a disclaimer that the UDISE+ reports of 2022-23 and 2023-24 are not strictly comparable to previous years reports because of a change in the 'methodology' of data collection. However, former professor and HOD, Department of Educational Management Information System at Delhi-based NIEPA, Arun Mehta, said that the UDISE+ reports are silent on the sharp dip in total enrolment of students, and the dip in government schools. "The reports do not explain the reasons behind the dip. Only change in methodology of data collection is not reason enough," said Prof. Mehta, who has worked on UDISE reports for 15 years.

What is the change in methodology?

While the MoE claims that the exercise of individual data collection from each student, which includes their Aadhaar



Low numbers: Students go for school during a cold morning in Srinagar in November 2024. IMRAN NISSAR

number, was implemented from 2022-23, Prof. Mehta said that a similar exercise was initiated in 2016-17 and went on for a year. "We had anticipated even back then that there was no way of verifying data that was sent by schools regarding the number of students studying in their facilities, and so for one year NIEPA had attempted to collect individual student data with consent from the MoE. However, over subsequent years this exercise was discontinued and restarted only in 2022-23."

Prof. Mehta explains that the enrolment decline since 2022-23 can be attributed to the elimination of duplicate enrolments (of students changing schools, but their records being maintained at two or more places), inflated enrolment figures and so on. "The new data collection system suggests that previous

enrolment figures were overestimated by 5-6%. So what happened to these students who no longer reflect in UDISE data? Were they previously included for funding or incentive purpose like scholarships, free meals, text books and cash benefits? If so much how much funding was allocated to these students and was it effectively utilised?" he asks.

For instance, in 2022-23, ₹32,515 crore (actual) was incurred under the Samagra Shiksha scheme, during the time when enrolment dropped (the latest figure reveals). In the current financial year of 2024-25, the allocation under the scheme is higher at ₹37,010 crore.

How comparable is UDISE+ data of last years with 2022-23, 2023-24 data? While the MoE cautions that UDISE 2022-23 and 2023-24 data is not

comparable with previous years, upon reviewing the UDISE+ 2022-23 report, Prof. Mehta noted that efficiency indicators like dropout, transition, and retention rates of students were computed depending on UDISE+ 2021-22 data. "Despite differences in data collection methodology, indicators, rates, and ratios remain comparable as this reflects the situation at a specific point of time, regardless of the methodology used," he says. Even after revamped data collection methods were put in place, there has been a decline in the enrolment of students between 2022-23 and 2023-24 by 37 lakh. "The UDISE+ report is silent on this steep decline, nor is there an explanation for declining number of schools covered under UDISE+; whether this decline of schools is due to merging or closing down of schools is not clear," Prof. Mehta says. There is also a stark decrease in the number of schools covered under UDISE+. There was a drop in the number of schools covered – from 15, 58, 903 (2017-18) to 14,71,891 (2023-24), a decline of 87,012 schools. Most of these schools are government-run, with 76,883 lesser schools recorded in the latest 2023-24 data. "MoE must furnish reasons for the decline of schools. Was this due to the shutting down and merger of schools? and while shutting down schools, were the Right to Education norms of having one primary school within a kilometre followed?" Prof. Mehta said.

Which States are the most affected? Jammu and Kashmir experienced the most decline in total schools, with a decline of 4,509 schools, while in Assam 4,229 schools reduced, and in Uttar Pradesh 2,967. Other affected States are Madhya Pradesh (2,170) and Maharashtra (1,368). "With the shutting down of schools, parents seek re-admission of their children to another nearby school. It is not an automatic transfer. Students drop out during this process, where parents are not comfortable seeking re-admission because of longer distances," said Prof. Mehta.

THE GIST

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Why the location of China's earthquake matters

What is a terrane? Was China's construction of the world's largest hydroelectric-power dam near the area where the 7.1 quake happened? What is the significance of the location?

The Hindu Bureau

The story so far:

At 6:35 am IST on January 7, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.1 struck Tibetan China and Nepal. The epicentre was located 10 km below a spot around 80 km north of Mt Everest. As of 7 pm, Chinese state media had reported 95 people dead, 130 injured, and hundreds of houses flattened on its side of the border. Updates on damage and casualties from other areas, including Nepal, are awaited. There have also been reports of the tremors being felt as far away as Kathmandu, Thimphu, and Kolkata.

Where did the quake occur?

According to the China Earthquake Networks Centre, the point on the surface below which the epicentre lay was located in Tingri county in the Shigatse region of

Tibet. This region lies 4-5 km above sea level on average and is home to some eight lakh people; the county itself is home to around 7,000 people.

The region's capital city is the seat of the important Panchen Lama of Tibetan Buddhism and thus bears considerable spiritual significance. The Dalai Lama issued a statement in which he said: "I offer my prayers for those who have lost their lives and extend my wishes for a swift recovery to all who have been injured." Tingri county is also a 'gateway' to Mt Everest and the surrounding terrain, which is a popular tourist destination. Local authorities have said however that the number of tourists is lower in winter. According to Xinhua, China has already closed tourists' access to the region since the earthquake struck.

Does the quake's location matter?

According to preliminary assessments,

the quake's mainshock may have emerged in the Lhasa terrane. A terrane is a specific fragment of the crust.

The Lhasa terrane includes sites involved in China's construction of the world's largest hydroelectric-power dam. The Chinese government approved the project last month. Once completed, the project will straddle the Yarlung Tsangpo River and generate around 300 billion kWh per year.

The project has elicited expressions of concerns from India since the river subsequently flows into Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, where it becomes the Brahmaputra.

Experts have said the dam could affect the river's perennial status.

Second, the wider Himalayan region is considered to be the planet's 'third pole' for the amount of water it holds in its rivers, glaciers, and lakes and the effects their natural cycles have on the millions

of people who depend on this water. Earthquakes have been known to force rivers to change course and to destabilise glaciers and lakes and increase the risk of flooding.

Third, the cause of the quake is also related to the significance of its location.

What caused the quake?

The tale of how the Himalayan mountains were created is well-known. Around 50 million years ago, the Indian plate collided with the Eurasian plate, causing rocks to fold and rise to create the mountains.

The tension between the two plates has continued to build as the Indian plate is still pushing in at around 60 mm/year. Earthquakes and tremors occur when the rock formations in the region shift ever so slightly as they adjust to the tension.

Since 1950, geologists have recorded more than 21 earthquakes of magnitude 6 or higher in the Lhasa terrane alone. The strongest of these occurred near Mainling in 2017 with a magnitude of 6.9, according to Reuters. Mainling is 960 km east of Tingri county.

To understand where the next quake might occur in the region and how powerful it might be, geologists need to understand the ancient plate collision in great detail, estimate how much tension is accumulating in different parts today, and how much of it has been released in past events.

THE GIST

According to preliminary assessments, the quake's mainshock may have emerged in the Lhasa terrane. A terrane is a specific fragment of the crust.

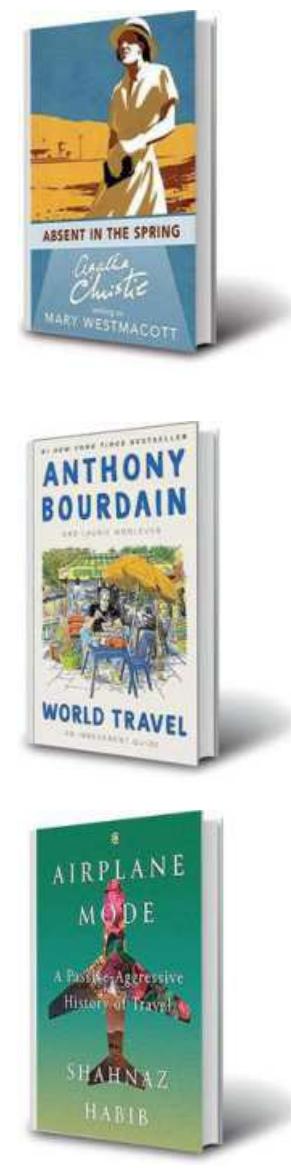
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BIBLIOGRAPHY



Myriad hues: Front view of an open shop in the spice bazaar, in Istanbul, Turkey. GETTY IMAGES



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian**S. Upendran**

"You look tired. Why don't you pull up a chair and plunk yourself down?"

"PI... What?"

"Plunk. p.l.u.n.k. The 'u' in 'plunk' is pronounced like the 'u' in words like 'cut'.

'but' and 'nut'. It is also spelled 'Plonk'."

"Plunk! Sounds like 'slunk' and 'flunk'.

What does it mean by the way?"

"When you plunk yourself down, it means you 'sit or fall down hard! For example, I can say, Siddharth plunked down on Sekhar's lap. During the storm, the tree plunked down on the house."

"Is it OK to say, when I get angry at school, I plunk down my books?"

"That's what many people do with their books even when they're not angry!"

"That's true. You see..."

"...Why don't you sit down and have some of this ice cream?"

"I think I will. Wow... This stuff tastes great. It's Superb."

"It's not Superb, but suPERB. The stress is on the second syllable. Tendulkar hit a suPERB cover drive."

"Edberg hit a suPERB backhand. How's that?"

"Excellent."

"I cotton on to things pretty quickly, don't I?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I understand things pretty quickly. So when you 'cotton on' to something, you understand it yourself. Other people shouldn't help you, correct?"

"Correct. Here is an example. Finally, Mohan cottoned on to the fact that Malathy was a better cook than him. In American English, 'cotton to something' means 'to take a liking to something.' Even at the meeting, he cottoned to her."

"By the way, what's the meaning of 'plethora'?"

"It is a formal word meaning 'over-abundance'. There is a plethora of sycophants in the party. The 'e' is pronounced like the 'e' in 'set'. The 'o' and the 'a' are pronounced like the 'a' in 'China'. The stress is on the first syllable. The word does not have a plural."

Published in The Hindu on August 23, 1994.

Curious, intrepid, confused, lonely: seeing travel through many layers

Some new and old travelogues prove to be genre-benders as they take on the whole gamut of the leisure industry, complete with guide books, on what it takes to 'do' a country and why a raindrop on a leaf in Mongolia could move one to tears or have another throw a hissy fit

Mini Anthikad Chhibber

One of the most striking things about Shahnaz Habib's *Airplane Mode* (Westland) was its subtitle, "A Passive-Aggressive History of Travel." Was, because now the copies online sport different subtitles. There is "An Irreverent History of Travel", which brings to mind Anthony Bourdain's *World Travel: An Irreverent Guide* (more on the rockstar chef later), and "Travels in the Ruins of Tourism".

Much in Habib's stream of consciousness style, one wonders at the subtle change. Was passive-aggressive too esoteric or too belligerent? Was 'irreverent' more accessible or SEO friendly, and 'ruins of tourism' suitably grim for all the mournful Malleshs and Mollies of the internet?

Habib's book, like all gripping, glorious books, is simultaneously intensely personal and interstellar. There are her travels including landing in Istanbul, diffident and lonely, made even more so by Megan who she meets in Hagia Sophia, which was a museum in 2007. Megan, a young white backpacker, who wanted to 'do' Turkey in a week, has already 'done' Topkapi Palace, the Grand Bazaar, and the boat ride across the Bosphorus in the two days she has been in Istanbul.

Megan's industry makes Habib feel even more inadequate as she wanders about the bazaars. "I want to be curious and intrepid; instead I am confused and

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lonely," she writes.

Through her personal travels, Habib looks at the history of travel, of 'militorism', where soldiers go to pretty paradises including Goa to let off steam, and the effect of colonialism, Euro-centric ideals and capitalism on travel.

Wrong-coloured passport

Habib's decision to go to Paris with her husband before the birth of their child, has her delving into the history of passports and 'passortism', and how the wrong coloured passport is as much a deterrent to travel as the wrong skin colour. So while her husband, a white American, needed nothing for his visa application to Paris, Habib needed a host of documents, that Indians travelling are unfortunately familiar with including a letter from her employer, bank statements, letter of invitation and an application fee of 60 Euros.

The Paris trip also has Habib revealing the Marshall Plan to prop up Paris, brought to its knees post World War II, by selling Paris to middleclass Americans. The recipe of "infrastructure and advertising" has succeeded from the 1950s till date – what is *Emily in Paris* but another hard sell of the City of Lights, a title, which Habib wryly comments was hard won by the French government who kept the Notre Dame and Place de la Concorde lit up despite post-War electricity shortages.

While in Istanbul, Habib's muses about guide books from the venerable Baedeker

Guides published from the 1830s to the Lonely Planet books, which started off as counter-cultural keys to unlocking the secrets of a space and morphed into the behemoth it is now.

The irony of Baedeker dying of overwork while writing books on leisure travel is not lost on Habib.

Top-down view

Guide books take the top-down view of travel, telling what you need to see to understand or in Megan's word, 'do' a country. There is a snobbery attached to carrying guide books, which Habib highlights with an example from E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View*. If Eleanor had not taken away Lucy's Baedeker, Habib muses, might she not have had an adventure that did not end in marriage?

While one might not want to be caught dead with a guide book, (if you are that kind of cool traveller), what about one written by the ultimate cool traveller, Anthony Bourdain, who Habib hastens to admit she is far from.

Bourdoin, chef, television host and writer extraordinaire has travelled the world and eaten everything. The book, put together by his long-time assistant, Laurie Woolever, is a look at the world "through Tony's eyes" in Woolever's words. Guide books and guided tours tell you what to see and not see and also how to feel and negate the subjective to a certain extent. Then you have personal views of the world, where a raindrop on a leaf in Mongolia could move one to tears

or have another throw a hissy fit.

Travelling through books

Habib writes of her father who prefers to travel through books, which brings to mind the decision to visit Uzbekistan after reading of Emperor Babur's homesickness for pomegranates from Ferghana in *Raiders from the North* by Alex Rutherford. Istanbul also brings to mind Agatha Christie who is supposed to have written *Murder on the Orient Express* at Pera Palace, a claim debunked as urban legend in Charles King's remarkably thrilling history, *Midnight at the Pera Palace: The Birth of Modern Istanbul*.

Rather than Christie's novels set in Baghdad, Mesopotamia or Egypt, or her charming account of accompanying her archaeologist husband on digs in Iraq and Syria in *Come, Tell Me How You Live*, Habib chooses *Absent in the Spring*, a non crime book by Christie writing as Mary Westmacott to talk of the queen of crime's attitude towards the Other. Habib's thoughts on the invisible Indians serving in hotels far away from home are fascinating – I.S. Johar played the manager on *The Karnak* in the 1978 version of *Death on the Nile* and there was also Gaurau (Raza Jaffrey) as Carrie's personal butler in *Sex and the City 2*.

Travel cannot be isolated, the traveller and the travellee come together, giving and taking from each other just like Habib draws a line from Charles Baudelaire's posh Flâneur to the Malayalam equivalent of 'vayanokkal.'

THE DAILY QUIZ

The curtains just came down on the 2025 Golden Globe Awards. A quiz on the awards

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1
This film about a Mexican drug lord who changes gender won the highest number of nominations this year. What is it called?

QUESTION 2
This TV series is set amid the emerging threat of civil war in Japan in 1600. The writer of the book, on which the series was based, was a young officer in the Royal Artillery, who ended up in Changi, the infamous Japanese prisoner of war camp in Singapore. Name the series that brought home all the four awards it was nominated for in the television category this year and also the novelist.

QUESTION 3
Pia Zadora was named the new star

of the year in 1982. The decision affected the awards' reputation. What was the controversy about the film for which she won the award?

QUESTION 4
This actor refused his Golden Globe award and later, the Academy Award in the 1970s to protest "imperialism and racism" of the U.S. Name him and the cult film for which he was nominated.

QUESTION 5
Payal Kapadia lost her Best Director Award this time to Brady Corbet. Which film did he win the award for?

QUESTION 6
This actor holds the highest number of nominations at the Golden Globe awards and the highest number of awards in the acting category. Who is she?



Visual question:
Name the three people in this photo at the 1979 awards ceremony.

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. The cartoons that led to the attack on Charlie Hebdo first appeared here. Ans: *Jyllands-Posten*, a Danish daily.

2. Name the 1939 cartoon by David Low and the two figures in it. Ans: *Rendezvous; Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin*

3. Name the *New Yorker* cartoon that came under fire over its depiction of Barack Obama and Michelle Obama. Ans: *The Politics of Fear*

4. Name the cartoonist and the cartoon which appeared in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1754. Ans: *Benjamin Franklin; Join or Die*

5. Name the *Washington Post* cartoonist who quit last week. Ans: *Ann Telnaes*

Visual: These are Indian author's cartoons. Ans: *O. V. Vijayan*

Early Birds: Tamal Biswas| Dodo Jayadev| Sonali Das| Piyali Tuli| Sumana Dutta

Word of the day

Beleaguer:

annoy persistently; surround so as to force to give up

Synonyms: badger, bug, pester, tease, besiege, circumvent, hem in, surround

Usage: As the number of protesters grew, the policemen became increasingly beleaguered.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/beleaguerpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /bɪ'lɪ:.gə/, /bə'lɪ:.gə/

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

From Page One**Delhi votes on Feb. 5 in crucial Assembly polls**

Of the 70 seats in Delhi, 58 are general and 12 reserved.

More than 13,000 polling stations will be set up in Delhi, Mr. Kumar said.

The CEC said that bypolls due in two other Assembly constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir – Budgam and Nagrota – would be held later because of heavy snowfall there. "We have time till April and we will complete those elections before that," he said.

Mr. Kumar said that bypolls were due in two more constituencies – Basirhat Lok Sabha seat in West Bengal and Visavadar Assembly seat in Gujarat. However, as there were pending election petitions in both cases, the by-polls have to wait.

GDP growth projected to fall to four-year low

The NSO's first advance estimates of GDP growth for the year, used for framing the Union Budget for the next fiscal to be presented on February 1, suggest reviving the economy's engines back to the 7%-plus growth recorded in the preceding three years will be the key challenge for Budget 2025-26 to address.

India's GDP growth had slipped to a seven-quarter low of 5.4% in the July to September 2024 quarter. Following this, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had pared its growth projection for the full year to 6.6% from 7.2% estimated earlier. Subsequently, the Finance Ministry also reframed its growth expectation for 2024-25 from 'a range of 6.5% to 7%' to 'around 6.5%'.

Crisis chief economist Dharmakirti Joshi attributed the expected deceleration in 2024-25 to the sharp slowdown in the second quarter, lower fiscal stimulus, high interest rates and stricter lending norms.

'Sluggish investment'

"The decline in government capital expenditure, a key driver of post-pandemic recovery, during the second quarter, is unlikely to be compensated for in the rest of the fiscal. Further, private sector investment remains sluggish despite favourable conditions," he said, noting that the NSO's projection of a dip in investment growth offers 'little surprise' in these circumstances.

On the expenditure side, private final consumption spends are expected to expand 7.3% from 4% in 2023-24, indicating the NSO expects households to loosen their purse strings between October to March. Government final consumption expenditure is also seen rising 4.1% from 2.5% last year.

Construction GVA growth is pegged at 8.6%, from 9.9% in 2023-24 and another key employment-generating sector – trade, hotels, communication and services related to broadcasting – is estimated to grow 5.8% as opposed to 6.4% last year.

The NSO advised those interpreting the advance estimates to bear in mind that they are likely to undergo revisions thanks to improved data coverage and revision in input data made by source agencies.

Madhavi Arora, lead economist at Emkay Global Financial Services, echoed the sentiment, stating advance estimates have a short shelf life. "They are largely an extrapolation of indicators available till November and are, thus, susceptible to significant revisions," she said.

Search on for trapped coal miners in Assam

The Assam Chief Minister added that the Umrangso police had been asked to investigate the incident.

"Punish Nunisa was arrested in connection with a case registered by the police under Sections 35(5)/105 BNS, read with Section 21(I) of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957," the Chief Minister said.

The Navy team flew from Visakhapatnam after the Army, Assam Rifles, National Disaster Response Force, State Disaster Response Force, and police personnel made a recce of the mine in a jungle at 3 Kilo, about 30 kilometres from the nearest police station in Umrangso, in the morning.

Officials said the water level in the mine, about 20 feet in radius and 300 feet in depth, rose to more than 100 feet when the rescue operations started in the morning.

The Chief Minister released the names of the trapped miners on Monday night. They are: Ganga Bahadur Shresth (38) from Nepal, Sanjiv Sarkar (35) from West Bengal, Hussain Ali (30), Jakir Hussain (38), Sarpa Barman (46), Mustafa Seikh (44), Khushi Mohan Rai (57), Lijan Magar (26) and Sarat Goyary (37), all from Assam.

Coal mine mishaps are quite frequent in the northeast.

In January 2024, a fire in a coal mine in Nagaland's Wokha district left six workers dead and four others injured. In May of the same year, a mine in Assam's Tinsukia district caved in, killing three miners.

In September 2022, three coal miners were killed in the Tinsukia district by inhaling suspected toxic gas.

The biggest coal mine disaster in about a decade was the death of 15 miners in a flooded rat-hole coal mine in Meghalaya's Ksan area on December 13, 2018.

India, U.S. to jointly manufacture interoperable sonobuoys for Navy

These underwater instruments are niche equipment effective in detecting submarines lurking deep in the oceans; both countries are cooperating on high-end technology amid rapid expansion of Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean

Dinakar Peri

NEW DELHI

In a significant development, India and the United States announced cooperation on co-production of U.S. sonobuoys for undersea domain awareness (UDA) for the Indian Navy, a high-end technology that allows tracking submarines in the deep seas and oceans.

This is the latest in a series of cooperation measures between the two countries as both grow wary of the rapid expansion of Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region.

"Welcoming the advancement of discussions between Ultra Maritime (UM) and Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) to enhance undersea domain awareness through a first-of-its-kind partnership on co-production of U.S. sonobuoys in support of the U.S. and Indian defence industrial bases," said a fact sheet titled 'The U.S. and India committed to strengthening strategic technology partnership' issued on Tuesday at the end of U.S.



State of the art: Discussions are on between Ultra Maritime and Bharat Dynamics Ltd. on a partnership for the co-production of sonobuoys. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan's visit to India on the aspect of deepening defence innovation and industrial cooperation.

Mr. Sullivan, on his final trip to the region as NSA, held a capstone meeting with his Indian counterpart, Ajit Doval.

"In line with the U.S.-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) launched in May 2022, the Ultra Maritime and BDL teams will also pursue new sonobuoy technologies to optimise their acoustic performance in the unique environment of the Indian Ocean, enabling wide area search through bespoke multi-static active solutions," Ultra

Maritime, a U.S.-based world leader in the design and production of undersea warfare capabilities, said in a statement.

They will jointly manufacture and supply sonobuoys for the Indian Navy as per U.S. Navy standards, with production split across the U.S. and India, in accordance with "Make in India" principles, it stated.

"The announcement today by NSA Jake Sullivan reflects Ultra Maritime's commitment to the Indian Navy in partnering with BDL for production and delivery of world-class sonobuoys, and our resolute commitment to continue to develop forward-leaning

solutions to unique undersea challenges," said Ultra Maritime CEO Carlo Zaffanella in the statement.

BDL Chairman Commodore A. Madhavarao (retd.) said BDL was completely aligned with the Indian Navy to meet the operational demand for 'Make in India' sonobuoys and committed to joint production with Ultra Maritime in Visakhapatnam.

Highlighting the aspect of interoperability, a key focus area, Rear Admiral Mark Kenny (retd.), senior vice-president at Ultra Maritime for strategy and business development, said: "The UM sonobuoys co-produced in India are interchangeable and interop-

Research and development has no relevance if it does not meet timelines: IAF chief**Dinakar Peri**

NEW DELHI

Research and development loses relevance if it does not meet timelines, Indian Air Force (IAF) chief Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh said on Tuesday, pointing out that the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) was conceived in 1984 but today in 2025, the first 40 aircraft were still not available.

His comments come amid the crisis the IAF is facing, in terms of depleting strength in fighter jets and long delays in development and delivery of indigenous fighter aircraft.

"R&D loses its relevance in case it is not able to meet timelines. Technology delayed is technology denied. There has to be an increased aptitude for acceptance of risks involved and failures in R&D. There is an amount of risk inherent to R&D – and we should cater to absorb it [to] a certain



Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh

degree," Air Chief Marshal Singh said while speaking at the 21st Subroto Mukherjee seminar organised by the Centre for Air Power Studies.

"Atmanirbarta will come at a cost and we should accept it – we may have to spend more and buy at a higher rate if required – amortising of the R&D part and limited numbers will push the cost up – but will give the much needed self-reliance."

"The world today is in a precarious position dominated by conflicts and contests. We have our own se-

curity concerns on the western and northern borders with increased militarisation by China and Pakistan. China is investing heavily in its air force – the recent unveiling of its new stealth aircraft is a case in point," he said.

Referring to the LCA programme that has seen development and manufacturing delays, he said:

"Actually, we should go back to 1984 when we first conceived that aircraft. First aircraft flew in 2001 - 17 years. Then the induction started another 15 years later, in 2016. Today, we are in 2025, I do not have the first 40 aircraft also. This is the production capability."

"We need to do something. I am very convinced that we need to get some private players in. We need to have competition, we need to have multiple sources available so that people are wary of losing orders... Otherwise, things will not change."

Referring to the LCA programme that has seen development and manufacturing delays, he said:

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He said the new law

Bharatpol to aid in nabbing fugitive criminals 'wherever they hide': Home Minister**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI



Union Home Minister Amit Shah with CBI Director Praveen Sood at the launch of the 'Bharatpol' portal in New Delhi on Tuesday. PTI

would simplify the process of extraditing convicted criminals to India.

He urged the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to take the lead in implementing Bharatpol and ensuring widespread training in its use at the grassroots level. The portal has been developed by the CBI.

The five key modules of Bharatpol – Connect, Interpol notices, References, Broadcast, and Resources – provide a technological platform to support all In-

dian law enforcement agencies, the Home Minister said.

He said that through Connect, all Indian law enforcement agencies would essentially function as an extension of Interpol's National Central Bureau (NCB-New Delhi). The system would ensure quick and structured transmission of requests for Interpol notices, enabling a scientific mechanism to swiftly locate criminals from India and across the globe.

SC to hear same-sex marriage review pleas**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

fused to legalise same-sex marriage.

The other judges on the Bench comprise Justices Surya Kant, B.V. Nagarathna, P.S. Narasimha, and Dipankar Datta.

The hearing would be held in the chambers of the judges.

Congress will move to new headquarters on Jan. 15**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Congress announced on Tuesday that the party would move to its new headquarters at 9A Kotla Road in New Delhi on January 15.

The new All India Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters, named after India's first woman Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, will be formally inaugurated by the Chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party, Sonia Gandhi, in the presence of party president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, the party said in a statement.

Congress will move to new headquarters on Jan. 15

Court dismisses plea against judge's impeachment motion**Ishita Mishra**

NEW DELHI

The Allahabad High Court on Tuesday dismissed a public interest litigation (PIL) petition against the impeachment motion submitted in the Upper House of Parliament over the communal speech delivered by Justice Shekhar Yadav at an event organised by the legal cell of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

A Bench of Justice Attai Rahman Masoodi and Justice Subhash Vidyarthi dismissed the petition filed by lawyer Ashok Pandey, stating that the cardinal principle within which a PIL plea is entertained is for representation of the cause of vulnerable sections of people.

However, we do not see that the cause espoused in the present writ petition relates to any vulnerable section of people. Thus, on the touchstone of maintainability, the present PIL does not qualify the very test of initiation of proceedings on its threshold," the court noted.

Justice Yadav, in a speech delivered on December 8, made several veiled attacks on Muslims while talking about Uniform Civil Code. He said the country would run as

per the wishes of the 'majority'. Without referring to the Muslims, he asked how would their children be kind and tolerant when animals were being slaughtered in front of them.

Soon after the video of the speech went viral, the Supreme Court had asked for a detailed report on the matter by the Allahabad High Court.

The speech drew widespread criticism. Days after his speech, a six-member delegation of Opposition MPs in the Rajya Sabha submitted a motion seeking impeachment of Justice Yadav. He was accused of engaging in "hate speech" and "incitement to communal disharmony" in violation of the Constitution.



ASHER ISAAC DANIEL IS 2 YEARS OLD, SUFFERING FROM B-CELL LYMPHOCYTIC LEUKEMIA AND REQUIRES TREATMENT AT MEENAKSHI MISSION HOSPITAL & RESEARCH CENTRE, MADURAI. THE TOTAL EXPENDITURE IS Rs 1,00,000/- PER MONTH. HE CANNOT AFFORD THIS HIGH COST. PLEASE HELP HIM TO MEET THIS CRISIS. DONATIONS SENT BY CH.D/D/NETT TRANSFER & GOOGLE PAY (CANARA BANK, NUNGAMBAKAM BRANCH, A/C NO. 60182010063310, IFSC NO: CNRB001018) FAVOURING 'WOMEN'S WELFARE SYNDICATE' WILL BE ACKNOWLEDGED. THE DONATIONS SENT THROUGH CH.D/D/NETT TRANSFER & GOOGLE PAY ARE EXEMPTED FROM TDS. ALL CORRESPONDENCE IS DONE THROUGH 'WOMEN'S WELFARE SYNDICATE', FLAT NO. GF-1, CORDILL APARTMENTS, O.N.O. 13, N.O. 29, PYROTECH GARDEN LANE, CHENNAI-600006. PH: 044-42137401/28235324/7338978027/31523781. E-MAIL ID: WOMENS.WELFARE.SYNDICATE@GMAIL.COM. WEBSITE: WWW.WOMENS.WELFARE.SYNDICATE.ORG.

Centre allots site at Rajghat for Pranab's memorial

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Centre has earmarked a designated site at the Rashtriya Smriti complex, a part of the Rajghat precinct, for erecting a memorial to the former President Pranab Mukherjee.

"The Competent Authority has approved the earmarking of a designated site within the 'Rashtriya Smriti' complex for erecting a Samadhi of Late Shri Pranab Mukherjee, former President of India," the Union Housing and Urban Development Ministry said in a letter to his daughter Sharmishtha Mukherjee.

The announcement comes amid a controversy over a Congress's demand when former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh died on December 26 that the government declare a site for a memorial to him and conduct his funeral in the same place.

The former President's daughter met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday after receiving the letter and thanked him for honouring her father.

Sharing her pictures with Mr. Modi on X, she said: "Called on Hon'ble PM Narendra Modi to express thanks and gratitude from core of my heart for his government's decision to create a memorial for baba. It's more cherished considering that we didn't ask for it."

"Baba used to say that state honours shouldn't be asked for, it should be offered. I'm so grateful that Modi did this to honour baba's memory," she said.

Pranab Mukherjee passed away on August 31, 2020. He was awarded the Bharat Ratna in 2019.

Ahead of Delhi polls, CEC clarifies on electoral rolls

He says allegations of mass deletions were misleading and undermined trust in system; Kumar, who is set to retire in February, also issues rebuttal to other concerns raised by Opposition parties

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

With the Delhi Assembly election set to be the last election to be conducted under his watch, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday gave clarifications on a host of electoral practices questioned by the Opposition parties such as additions and deletions on the voter list and possible manipulation of electronic voting machines.

Mr. Kumar, who has been at the top job in the Election Commission since May 2022, is scheduled to retire in February.

Addressing a press conference here, the CEC said that in one full cycle of elections since 2020, 15 different parties emerged with most seats in different States.

This reflected how deep-rooted fairness was



Addressing concerns: Rajiv Kumar, Chief Election Commissioner, dismissed claims of EVM tampering. FILE PHOTO

in the country's democratic system, he said.

Mr. Kumar said there were two key reforms which were ready but would need political consensus for implementation. The first one was the "totaliser", a technology to link a number of EVMs and hide booth-wise voting patterns. The second one, he said, is a prototype to enable migrant workers to vote remotely.

Mr. Kumar gave a point-by-point rebuttal on concerns raised by the Opposition parties and activists under largely six points – wrong additions or deletions on electoral rolls, manipulation of EVMs, increase in voter turnout from 5 p.m., mismatch in votes polled and counted in some constituencies, slowing down of counting and amendment in rules to restrict transparency.

On electoral rolls, he said the process for additions and deletions was transparent, rigorous, and immune to arbitrary changes. He said allegations of mass deletions were misleading, without evidence and undermined public trust in the system.

Apart from Delhi elections, where electoral rolls have become a fraught subject between the AAP and the BJP, the Congress has petitioned the EC over a jump in additions to the rolls just before the Maharashtra polls.

On the recent amendments in the election rules which restrict public from accessing CCTV footage of polling booths, the CEC said it was meant to protect voters' privacy and prevent use of data for creating fake narratives.

Citing several court judgments on EVMs, he rejected suggestions that they could be tampered.

ID tokenisation will help minors pass age test under new data rules: Minister

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Draft rules require platforms to verify the age of applicants for age-restricted services

"What we luckily have in our country – thanks to Aadhaar, payment systems, and digitisation – is a good digital architecture," he said adding that this was better than what rich countries had.

Privacy advocates have raised concerns on the child verification requirement, as it may potentially require every individual – whether a minor or not – to verify their age.

He pushed back on this, saying, "With today's technology, it is possible, without disruption, to see if an individual is old enough."

PM's view
Sharing an explanation of the draft rules by Mr. Vaishnav, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday, "The rules aim to safeguard personal data while driving growth and inclusivity."

Mr. Modi said the draft "prioritises India's commitment to citizen-centric governance."

functioning in India must verify every new applicant's age using a "token" that reliably confirms either their age or, in the case of minors, their parent or guardian's age.

No copy

Tokenisation is a process that creates a digital representation of a piece of data, without creating a copy that can expose the data completely.

"Nobody has one. We have attempted one," the Minister said at a press conference, referring to tokenisation of identity documents as a solution.

Currently, most platforms allow users to simply declare that they are at least 13 years old and have parental consent if they are below 18. The proposed rules dictate that platforms

Top court slams delay in appointing Information Commissioners

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday slammed the chronic delay shown by the Centre and States in appointing Information Commissioners to decide citizens' rights under the Right to Information Act.

The court asked what was the use of creating the transparency-in-governance institution if there were no people to work for

the law. A Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant noted that the Central Information Commission had eight vacant posts of Information Commissioner, while 23,000 appeals filed by citizens seeking information from various departments have been pending.

Several Information Commissions in the States have been defunct since 2020, and some have stopped accepting petitions under the Right to In-

formation Act.

"An institution has been created... What is the use of this institution if you do not have persons to perform the duties under the law," Justice Kant asked Additional Solicitor-General Brijender Chahar, appearing for the Centre.

Justice Kant cautioned the government about how only people from a certain milieu, bureaucracy, get to be appointed as Information Commissioners.

"We can take judicial notice of how many people from different walks have been appointed... The entire Commission is overloaded with one set of candidates," Justice Kant said.

No change

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner-activist Anjali Bharadwaj, said the unabated appointments of retired bureaucrats continue despite a February 2019 apex

court judgment highlighting the need to appoint people from all walks of life.

Mr. Bhushan said repeated prods from the Supreme Court in the 2019 judgment, and orders passed in October 2023 and November 2024 to make timely and transparent appointments of Chief Information Commissioners and Information Commissioners, had hardly made a difference.

"There has been only regression and no progress after the Supreme Court's intervention. They are killing the RTI because nobody is interested in giving information. So the best way to kill the law is to render the Information Commissions defunct," Mr. Bhushan submitted.

File affidavit

The court directed the Department of Personnel and Training to file an affidavit in two weeks specifying ti-

melines for completion of the process.

The Bench directed the States which had initiated the appointments process, "but without any commitment to a timeline", to notify the list of applicants and the composition of the search committee in two weeks, and complete the process in a total of eight weeks thereafter.

The Chief Secretaries were ordered to file compliance reports.

Apollo ProHealth and *The Hindu* to offer actionable health insights

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI



In today's world, lifestyle diseases or non-communicable diseases are on the rise, making access to accurate health information crucial. Misconceptions and lack of credible sources hinder people from making informed health decisions.

To address this, Apollo ProHealth and *The Hindu* have launched "Sincerely, Your Doctor", a year-long initiative aimed at providing reliable information on health. This collaboration brings together Apollo Hospitals' top doctors and *The Hindu* to offer science-backed insights on critical health topics such as gut health, heart health, mental well-being, cancer prevention, and stress management.

Each month, the initiative will deliver articles with actionable advice and emerging healthcare trends, empowering readers to make informed, proactive health decisions and embrace preventive care in their daily lives.

Srinidhi Chidambaram, head of health communications at Apollo Hospitals, said that preventive healthcare is essential for a healthier society. "This series will help readers separate fact from fiction, make informed decisions and embed preventive care into daily life."

Shreevidya V., medical

director of preventive health services at Apollo, emphasised that early awareness can prevent lifestyle diseases.

Trusted information
Suresh Balakrishna, chief revenue officer of The Hindu Group, added that the collaboration aims to empower audiences with trusted health insights, inspiring informed choices for a healthier future through credible journalism and expert healthcare.

Ramya Kannan, Health Editor of *The Hindu*, says, "Getting to the root of the issue before it becomes a problem is at the heart of preventive healthcare. In a country where the number of people with non-communicable diseases is growing, sending out messages that will help people prevent the onset of health complications must be counted as a nation-building activity. That is what *The Hindu*'s campaign with Apollo Hospitals aims to achieve."

Readers can look forward to the first instalment of the series in *The Hindu* from January 9. They can also write in with questions to sincerelyyyourdoctor@thehindu.co.in or on WhatsApp on 8939 283283.

KERALA WATER AUTHORITY E-TENDER NOTICE
E-Tender No. SE/SC/KKD/02/2024-25
AMRUT-SEWERAGE SYSTEM TO KOZHIKODE CORPORATION – ZONE B PHASE 1 – Package 1 – AMRUT 2.0 – Design, Construction, Commissioning, Operation and Maintenance of 27 MLD capacity Sewage Treatment Plant with Co-treatment at Sarovaram & Network in Kozhikode Corporation.-General Civil Work

Cost of Tender form: Rs. 19518 (Inclusive of GST), EMD: Rs.5000/-, Date and time of opening

Tender: 14/02/2025 at 11.00 am, Last date of receipt of Tender: 12/02/2025 at 5.00 pm,

Phone: 8547638488

E-mail - seppdkd@gmail.com

Superintending Engineer, PPDIU, KWA, Kozhikode-20

For more Details: 8667359360, 7358857633, 9600776611

Disclaimer: Be aware of fraudulent activities. We never ask to make payment on any personal account.

For more Details: 8667359360, 7358857633, 9600776611

E-Certificate will be Awarded

Date: 11, 12, 18, 19 & 25, 26 Jan 25

Time: 06:00 P.M - 09:00 P.M

Fees: 4720/- (Inclusive of GST)

From Beginners to Advance level training

For more Details: 8667359360, 7358857633, 9600776611

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IN BRIEF



Pak. pilgrims arrive at Ajmer dargah to participate in Urs

A group of 89 pilgrims from Pakistan arrived in Ajmer early on Tuesday to participate in the ongoing 813th *Urs* at the dargah of Sufi mystic Khwaja Moiuddin Chishti. Strict security arrangements were made for the pilgrims, who were taken to the Government Central Girls' Senior Secondary School at Purani Mandi for the stay. The pilgrims, accompanied by two officers of the Pakistan High Commission, travelled to Ajmer by train from New Delhi after crossing the border at Attari. They will offer a ceremonial *chadar* (sheet of cloth) at the 13th century shrine and are likely to stay in Ajmer till January 10.

Students' body, teachers question new UGC draft rules

The SFI said in a statement on Tuesday that it rejects the draft University Grants Commission (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment and Promotion of Teachers and Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulations, 2025. The SFI said the regulation was yet another attempt to "centralise and corporatise" campuses. Delhi University Teachers' Association EC member Rudrashish Chakraborty said that the recruitment criteria endorsed the NEP's emphasis on the common courses, which are poor and substandard.

Collegium recommends Patna HC Chief Justice to SC

The Supreme Court Collegium on Tuesday recommended Patna High Court Chief Justice K. Vinod Chandran for appointment as a judge of the Supreme Court. The collegium noted that there was currently no judge in the Supreme Court with the Kerala High Court as the parent court. Justice C.T. Ravikumar, who was from the Kerala High Court, retired last week. Justice Chandran is now the senior-most among the High Court judges hailing from Kerala. The collegium has also recommended the transfer of Bombay High Court Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya to Delhi and the Telangana High Court Chief Justice Alok Aradhe to the Bombay High Court.

States have no money to give doles but not to judges: SC

States have enough money to give freebies to people who do not work but they claim financial constraints when it comes to paying salary and pension to judges of the district judiciary, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday. A Bench of Justices B.R. Gavai and Augustine George Masih made the oral observation after Attorney-General R. Venkataramani submitted that the government has to consider financial constraints when deciding the pay and retirement benefits of judicial officers. "Come elections, you declare Ladli Behna and other new schemes where you pay fixed amounts. In Delhi, we have announcements saying they will pay ₹2,500 if they come to power," the Bench remarked. PTI

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas to begin today in Odisha

Over 3,000 delegates from 70 nations have arrived in the State; event will be inaugurated by Modi; Trinidad and Tobago President Christine Carla Kangaloo will be the chief guest of the 18th edition

Satyendar Barik

BHUBANESWAR

Over 3,000 delegates from 70 countries have arrived in Odisha ahead of the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), which will get under way here on Wednesday.



S. Jaishankar and his wife Kyoko Jaishankar during their visit to Raghuji artists' village in Puri district on Tuesday. PTI

The three-day event, based on the theme "Diaspora's contribution to a *Viksit Bharat*", will be formally inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the second day of the convention. The previous edition was held in Indore in January 2023, in partnership with the Madhya Pradesh government.

"Christine Carla Kangaloo, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, will be the chief guest of the 18th PBD, and she would be virtually addressing the convention. Dr. Dev Prasad, CEO and co-owner of *Newsweek*, will be the guest of honour at the Youth PBD on January 8," Arun Kumar Chatterjee, Secretary (Consular Passport, Visa, and Overseas Indian Affairs) said at a press conference here.

"We will have ministerial-level delegations from Mauritius, Malaysia and South Africa. There will be big delegation of diaspora from several other countries, including from Malaysia, Mauritius, Oman, Qatar, the UAE, the U.K. and the U.S."

"Mr. Modi has given us the vision of a *Viksit Bharat* by 2047. We have taken the initiative of not only sharing this vision with our esteemed diaspora, but have also urged them to partner our journey towards this cherished goal," he said.

"The Indian diaspora has an important role to play in the vision of *Viksit Bharat*. It acts as a living bridge between their

motherland and their adopted homeland. That is why the Government of India has chosen the diaspora's contribution to a *Viksit Bharat* as the overarching dream of the 18th PBD."

He said Union Ministers would chair plenary sessions while eminent Indians from various fields would moderate the sessions.

Tourist train

The PM will remotely flag off the inaugural journey of the Pravasi Bharatiya Express, a special tourist train for the Indian diaspora which will depart from Delhi and travel to multiple destinations of tourist and religious importance for

three weeks.

The PBD will feature the spread and evolution of the Indian diaspora in the world with special focus on Mandvi to Muscat. This will showcase the rare documents of people who had migrated from Mandvi in Gujarat to Muscat in Oman.

President Droupadi Murmu will chair the valedictory session and confer the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman on 27 distinguished members of the Indian diaspora to recognise their outstanding contribution and achievements in diverse fields both in their countries of residence as well as in India.

Awards will be given to Indian diaspora members from 24 countries.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said the event is an opportunity for Odisha to showcase its rich cultural heritage and tradition before the world.

Odisha Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja said, "We have been working to make this event comfortable and pleasurable. We have identified about 21 tourist sites."

The States were asked to strengthen awareness of preventive steps and intensify surveillance

review surveillance.

The Ministry reiterated that prevalence of respiratory illnesses was usually high during winter, while adding that the country was well prepared for any potential surge.

HMPV is one of the many respiratory viruses that can cause infections in people of all ages particularly during winter and early spring. The viral infection is usually a mild and self-limiting condition and most cases recover on their own.

The meeting was informed that adequate diagnostic facilities are available with the ICMR-VRDL laboratories.

The States were advised to enhance awareness among the population regarding prevention of transmission of the virus with simple measures such as washing hands often with soap and water; avoiding touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands and so on.

Inter-ministerial committee is needed to strengthen AI governance: IndiaAI Mission

Aroon Deep

NEW DELHI



The IndiaAI Mission is seeking feedback on a report released on Monday. GETTY IMAGES

In a recognition that artificial intelligence (AI) has impact on a wide range of fields, a Union government panel mandated to develop AI guidelines has recommended that an inter-ministerial committee be set up to enforce AI rules and ensure effective governance of the country's emerging AI ecosystem.

An advisory group of the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's IndiaAI Mission, headed by the Principal Scientific Adviser, is seeking public feedback on a report released on Monday by its AI guidelines sub-committee.

The panel's report is notable as it is the most detailed articulation yet of the government's approach towards AI in India.

It appears that the Centre seeks to maximise gains from investments in AI, while having light regulatory frameworks to act as guardrails against any potential harm.

Apart from an inter-ministerial AI coordination committee or governance group to oversee AI in India, the panel recommended that the IT Ministry should house a "technical secretariat" to bring in officers on deputation from other departments and

regulators. This would help to "pool together multi-disciplinary expertise", map stakeholders in the AI ecosystem, and assess risks, along with other research, it recommends.

The report outlines the following principles for AI governance: transparency of AI systems with "meaningful information on their development" and capabilities; accountability from developers and deployers of AI systems; safety, reliability and robustness of AI systems by design; privacy and security of AI systems; fairness and non-discrimination; human-centred values and "do no harm"; inclusive and sustainable innovation to "distribute the benefits of innovation equitably"; and "digital by design" governance to "leverage digital technologies" to operationalise these principles.

V. Narayanan, spacecraft and rocket propulsion expert, appointed ISRO Chairman

The Hindu Bureau

BENGALURU



V. Narayanan

He will take over from Somanath, who oversaw landmark missions such as Chandrayaan-3

namely GSLV Mk-II & GSLV Mk-III.

"As the Chairman of the National Expert Committee constituted to study the reasons for hardlanding of Chandrayaan-2 lander, contributed in pinpointing the reasons and corrective actions required to overcome the observations. Realised and delivered all the Propulsion Systems for Chandrayaan-3," Dr. Narayanan's profile says.

During the initial phase of his career he worked in the solid propulsion area of sounding rockets and Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle (ASLV) and Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). He has also contributed significantly for the ISRO's geosynchronous launch vehicles

FAITH

Thiruchengode's speciality

In the Thiruchengode temple, Lord Murugan is known as Sengottuvelan. He stands alone on top of a hill, and faces East. In His right hand, He holds a spear, and in His left hand He holds a rooster, which faces His feet. This is a unique form of Murugan, not seen anywhere else. The vighraha is made of an amalgam of nine ingredients and is white in colour. Murugan is generally referred to as Sevvel, the red hued One. But He is white in colour here, because of the specially made idol. The vighraha shows the symbolic meanings behind Soora samhara, said T. Rajarathinam in a discourse.

The asura Soorapadman, even after being killed by Murugan, reappeared in the form of a mango tree. Murugan used His spear to split the tree into two. One half turned into a peacock, which became Murugan's vahana. The other half turned into a rooster, which became the emblem on Murugan's flag. There is rich symbolism behind the Soorapadman story. The spear indicates jnana sakthi, and the rooster is representative of naada. The peacock becoming Murugan's vahana indicates Murugan destroying Soorapadman's illusion. The rooster becoming the emblem on the flag indicates the destruction of Soorapadman's karma. The spear shows the destruction of Soorapadman's ego.

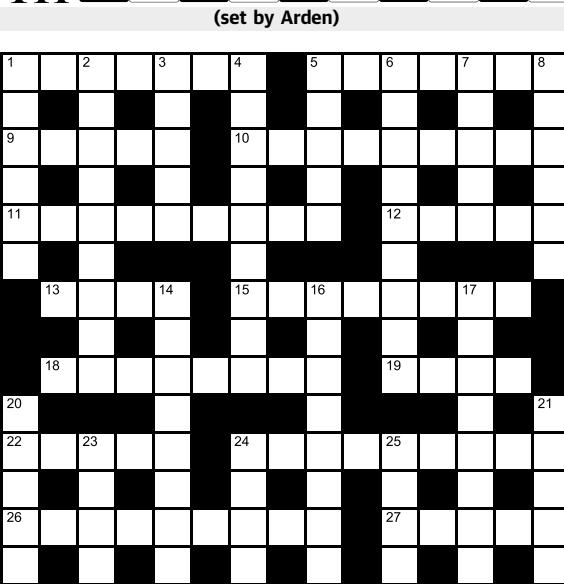
Pamban Swamigal has praised Thiruchengode as the place that brings out all the deep meanings of the Soorapadman story. Arunagirinatha's Kandar Alankaram is entirely about Lord Murugan of Thiruchengode. Arunagirinatha wishes that Brahma had given him 4,000 eyes to see Sengottuvelan.

TH CROSSWORD

14377

(set by Arden)

To solve this puzzle online, get across to our crossword site. @ <https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn>



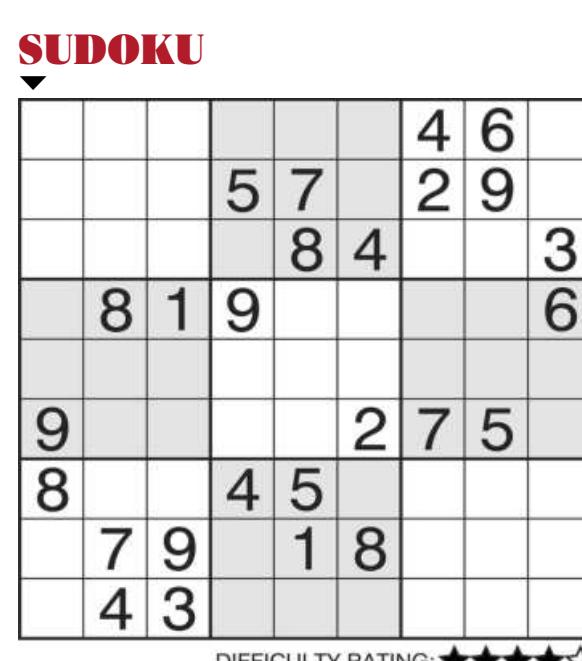
Across

- Country song describing soldiers (7)
- Feel sorry having to carry rifle - showing honesty (7)
- Instrument on board to detect crime - take up the issue first (5)
- He denies profit, years wasted (9)
- Metal frame all around is a painting done in monochrome (9)
- Living banks on John at whitehouse (5)

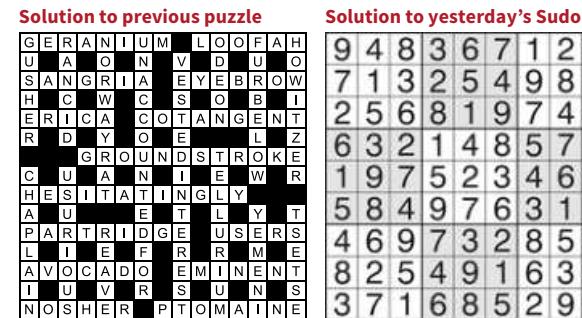
Down

- Where one may be from originally (4)
- Regularly furnish on board if wobbly (8)
- Complaint? It's urine problem (8)
- Some retired planter, still active (4)
- A service store (5)
- State university team ordered to participate in the festival (9)
- Crazy speed on winding road - it's criminal (9)
- Praise the old lot that returned (5)
- Sea cow had hair all over (7)
- Don't play guitar - that's a remedy (7)
- Wrong diagnosis - do I leave and appoint someone? (6)
- It's silly to give extra protection for a legendary creature (9)
- Usual short opera (5)
- Criminal dealt with guns, and drug (5,4)
- Ask about interest balance (5)
- Nothing beats analysis before investing money - bullish? (9)
- A tranquil place coming up in a hilly district (5)
- Fret over a growing plant (6)
- Flyer's abode may find itself in a soup (5,4)
- Shortly acquiring - enquire at a Canadian city (9)
- Waste cans filled after some time in British town (9)
- Police team outside New Delhi - going one after another (6)
- Here, in New York border, every other barrel is stored (6)
- An issue about never ending crime (5)
- People after midnight show good manners (5)
- Bet the poles support the first lady (5)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆



Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

IN BRIEF



ASK Property, India Sotheby's float ₹1000-crore fund

ASK Property Fund and India Sotheby's International Realty on Tuesday announced the launch of a ₹1,000-crore fund for investments in luxury housing projects across major cities. In a joint statement, the firms said they have done a "strategic collaboration to launch India's first luxury real estate investment platform – ASK Curated Luxury Assets Fund." The size of this fund will be ₹1,000 crore equity, with a green shoe option of ₹500 crore. PTI

Gems, jewellery sector seeks to reduce GST to 1% in Budget

The gems and jewellery sector has urged the government to reduce the goods and services tax (GST) to 1% on revenue equivalence ratio to ease the cost burden on the industry in the upcoming Budget. "We seek rationalisation of taxes and availability of finance to support business," the All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) Chairman Rajesh Rokde said on Tuesday. Currently, both natural and lab-grown diamonds are taxed at the same GST rate. PTI

MobiKwik reports ₹3.6 cr. loss in Q2 on higher investment

Digital wallet provider MobiKwik, listed last month, on Tuesday reported a loss of ₹3.59 crore during the second quarter ended September 2024, as against ₹6 crore standalone profit recorded in the same quarter a year ago, on account of continued investments in the business for the next growth phase. Total income increased to ₹294 crore as against ₹207 crore at the end of September 2023, One MobiKwik Systems Ltd. said in a regulatory filing. PTI

Kandla port to get ship building facility, cargo terminal at ₹57,000 cr.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways on Tuesday announced two major investments at the Kandla port – a mega ship building and repair project at an investment of ₹30,000 crore, and a new cargo terminal outside Kandla Creek for ₹27,000 crore, which will add 135 mtpa to the port's capacity.

"The new shipbuilding facility at the Kandla Port will develop technical capability in the country to manufacture 'Very Large Crude Carrier' or similar class of vessels with capacity up to 3,20,000 tonnes DWT. The facility will have capacity to produce 32 new ships and repair 50 old ships every year," the Ministry said in an official statement.

Spread across an area of more than 8,000 acres, the new facility will have components like marina, fishing harbour, townships and marine industrial cluster. The projects were announced by Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal.

"Ports are critical hubs for the nation's economy, serving as vital links to support growth and drive economic development. Enhancing capacity in port infrastructure is essential to meet our expanding ambitions," he said.

The new facility at Kandla Port will not only significantly augment its operations, but also enhance efficiency through the segregation of dry and liquid cargo," the Minister added.

CM YK

December auto sales skid 12%

Barring tractors, all segments take a hit last month; two-wheeler sales suffered a substantial drop of 17.6% over December 2023, and 54.2% over November figures; dealers attributed this to delayed crop payments and typical year-end factors

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI

Auto retail sales in December slid 12% year-on-year (y-o-y) and 45.26% month-on-month (m-o-m), as per Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) data, signalling a persistent demand crunch in a slowing economy.

All categories, except tractors, saw a contraction with two-wheeler (2W), three-wheeler (3W), passenger vehicle (PV) and commercial vehicle (CV) sales sliding 17.6%, 4.5%, 2% and 5.2%, respectively.

Slippery slope

Sales remained weak for all segments except tractors last month; however, overall 2024 sales still grew 9.1% to over 2.61 crore units

Category	Dec.24 (Y0Y)	CY24
2W	-17.64%	10.78%
3W	-4.57%	10.49%
PV	-1.97%	5.18%
Tractors	25.78%	2.55%
CV	-5.24%	0.07%
Total	-12.49%	9.11%
Units sold	17,56,419	2,61,07,679



Source: FADA Research

Tractors managed to buck the trend with a 25.7% growth with the farm sector seeing a healthier year.

The 2W segment suf-

fered a substantial drop of 54.2% from November, and FADA said this was the impact of delayed crop payments, halted govern-

ment disbursements and typical year-end factors, Supply challenges for popular models and growing growth weighed on volumes.

PV retail sales slid 1.9% yoy and 8.8% m-o-m, primarily due to high inventory levels following the festive season and aggressive discounting aimed at clearing stock, said C. S. Vigneshwar, president, FADA.

"Poor market sentiment, limited new model launches and intense price competition among co-dealers further impacted growth, 41.22% expecting stable demand, and 10.69% fearing a decline."

5.2% yoy and 12.1% m-o-m due to low market sentiment, delayed government fund releases and slow financing approvals, he said. Many customers postponed purchases, opting to wait for 2025 models.

However, despite multiple headwinds like heatwaves, elections and slowing growth, retail vehicle sales grew 9% in 2024.

Looking ahead, dealer sentiment for January is cautiously optimistic, with almost half (48.09%) of surveyed dealers anticipating growth, 41.22% expecting stable demand, and 10.69% fearing a decline.

Goldman Sachs unit, Everstone sell Omega stake

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI

Goldmans Sachs Alternatives and Everstone Capital said on Tuesday they have signed an agreement to sell a co-control stake in Omega Healthcare to Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan for an unspecified amount.

Omega Healthcare provides revenue cycle management and clinical services to U.S. healthcare organisations.

Founded in 2003, it has about 35,000 employees at 14 delivery centres in the U.S., India, Colombia and Philippines, a release said.

Smartphone parts' duty cut to hit local firms and jobs: GTRI

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

Any reduction in the customs duty on smartphone parts in the forthcoming Budget will harm India's developing component ecosystem, discourage investment, raise imports, and make local firms uncompetitive, potentially resulting in job losses, think tank GTRI said on Tuesday.

India's smartphone industry is a 'Make in India' success story, with 2023-24 production reaching \$49.2 billion and exports at \$15.6 billion, making smartphones the fourth-largest in exports after diesel, aviation fuel and polished



diamonds. However, a few industry groups are pushing for a further import tariff cut on smartphone components in the Union Budget for FY26.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) warned this could harm India's local manufacturing ecosystem and long-term ambitions in electronics.

"Instead of cutting tariffs, GTRI recommends the setting up of component hubs near ports to cut import delays and warehousing costs. This approach, used by countries like Vietnam and China would support local manufacturing and also reduce import dependency," said the think tank's founder Ajay Srivastava.

"Lower tariffs could encourage unsustainable assembly-based operations. Besides, mid- and low-end segments depend on local components and provide employment. Duty cuts would make local firms uncompetitive, resulting in job losses," he added.

India's fuel demand grew by 2.1% in December

Reuters

India's fuel demand rose 2.1% in December compared with the same month in 2023, data from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) of the Oil Ministry showed.

Consumption of fuel totalled 20.67 million metric tonne, the data showed. Petrol sales rose 10.8% from a year earlier to 3.3 million tonne.

Diesel consumption was up 6% at 8.1 million tonne in December. Cooking gas or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) sales increased 5.8% to 2.78 million tonne.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	TUESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	78,199	0.30
US Dollar	85.74	-0.07
Gold	79,700	0.88
Brent oil	76.80	-0.14

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	2520.55	46.10
Adani Ports	1174.00	10.95
Apollo Hosp	7436.75	7.60
Asian Paints	2292.60	25.45
Axis Bank	1067.50	4.10
Bajaj Finance	8810.30	-13.55
Bajaj FinServ	1682.75	-1.85
Bajaj Finance	7353.95	4.60
Bharat Elec.	287.00	4.85
Bharti Airtel	1590.85	2.40
BPCL	282.80	-2.05
Britannia Ind.	4832.25	41.00
Cipla	1497.45	6.05
Coal India	379.80	1.05
Dr Reddys Lab.	1351.55	1.20
Eicher Motors	5177.30	-72.80
Grasim Ind.	2467.25	6.70
HCL Tech	1915.90	-37.15
HDFC Bank	1713.40	2.90
HDFC Life	619.85	13.90
Hero MotoCorp	4162.05	-40.75
Hindalco	584.50	10.40
Hind Unilever	2390.80	14.60
ICICI Bank	1279.25	15.15
IndusInd Bank	983.60	13.55
Infosys	1930.85	-7.00
ITC	441.10	-1.55
JSW Steel	911.80	10.90
Kotak Bank	1772.05	-7.60
L&T	3643.30	40.10
M&M	3108.85	3.15
Maruti Suzuki	11721.30	-34.35
NestleIndia	2212.65	27.65
NTPC	328.60	1.10
ONGC	263.49	9.13
PowerGrid Corp	305.05	-0.95
Reliance Ind.	1240.85	22.85
SBI Life	1477.75	-43.10
State Bank	778.75	2.35
Shriram Finance Ltd.	2958.40	-11.15
Sun Pharma	1853.40	6.00
TataConsumerProduct	955.00	8.10
Tata Motors	793.25	17.00
Tata Steel	133.38	1.20
TCS	4028.30	-66.70
Tech Mahindra	1671.15	-15.15
Titan	3505.10	34.70
Trent Ltd.	6874.30	-124.05
UltraTech Cement	11618.55	114.95
Wipro	294.05	0.25

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on January 07

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	85.51	85.83
Euro	88.99	89.33
British Pound	107.20	107.61
Japanese Yen (100)	54.18	54.39
Chinese Yuan	11.67	11.72
Swiss Franc	94.30	94.66
Singapore Dollar	62.81	63.05
Canadian Dollar	59.73	59.95
Malaysian Ringgit	19.05	19.15
Australian Dollar	53.68	53.89

FLUID CONTROL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

KANJIKODE WEST, PALAKKAD – 678 623, KERALA, INDIA

(Under Ministry of Heavy Industries, Government of India)

Phone: 0491-2566120/2566206 Fax: 0491-2566326

Email: purchase@fcriindia.com Web: http://www.fcriindia.com

A Premier Research Institute in Fluid Flow Measurement & Control

TENDER NOTICE

1) Tender No. PUR/FCRI/W-24107/2024-25

Scope: Providing Casual Manpower at FCRI Kan

SEOUL

South Korea graft body obtains new warrant to arrest Yoon



South Korea's anti-corruption agency said it received a new court warrant to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol after its previous attempt was blocked by the presidential security service last week. The officials plan to question the embattled President about his short-lived martial law decree of December 3. AFP

GENEVA

Iran reportedly executed at least 901 people in 2024, says UN



Iranian authorities reportedly executed more than 900 people last year, including around 40 in a single week in December, the United Nations rights chief Volker Turk said on Tuesday. That compares to at least 853 people executed in Iran in 2023. "It is high time Iran stemmed this ever-swelling tide of executions," Mr. Turk said. AFP

SEOUL

New hypersonic missile will deter 'rivals', says North Korean leader



North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un said the country tested a new hypersonic missile this week aimed at deterring the country's Pacific rivals. The test came two weeks before the inauguration of U.S. president-elect Donald Trump and coincided with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to the South. AFP

PALM BEACH

Trump refuses to rule out action over Panama Canal and Greenland



Donald Trump refused to rule out military intervention over the Panama Canal and Greenland, both of which he has said he wants the U.S. to control. "I can say this, we need them for economic security. I am not going to commit to that (no military action). It might be that you have to do something," Mr. Trump said. AFP

Tremblor hit mountain terrain

Houses collapse as 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck high-altitude Tingri, 80 km north of Everest, near China's border with Nepal, around 9 a.m.; at least 185 injured, of which 28 are in critical condition; Xi Jinping, Dalai Lama express condolences

Agence France-Presse
BEIJING

A devastating earthquake in China's remote Tibet region killed at least 126 people and damaged thousands of buildings on Tuesday, state media reported, with tremors also felt in neighbouring Nepal's capital Kathmandu and parts of India.

Rescue workers waded through rubble strewn across the ruins in the aftermath, footage showed, while some gave locals thick blankets to keep warm in subzero temperatures.

The quake struck rural, high-altitude Tingri county, about 80 km north of



Shock episode: Rescuers transfer the injured at Zhacon Village in Xigaze, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region on Tuesday. AP

Mount Everest near China's border with Nepal, at around 9 a.m. (0630 IST) on Tuesday.

34-year-old Sangji Dangzhi, whose supermarket in Tingri suffered considerable damage.

At least 126 people have been confirmed dead and 188 others injured as of 7 p.m., CCTV said.

Twenty-eight people in critical condition were transferred to hospital for treatment and 3,609 houses had collapsed, it added.

The China Earthquake Networks Center (CENC) measured the quake's magnitude as 6.8, while the U.S. Geological Survey reported it as 7.1.

The area most affected is surrounded by mountainous terrain on the Chinese side of Mount Everest.

Tingri, the epicentre, is home to around 62,000 people, and is much less developed than urban centres like Tibet's capital Lhasa.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has called for "all-out search and rescue efforts".

The Dalai Lama said he was "deeply saddened".

As well as Kathmandu, areas around Lobuche – in the high mountains near Everest in Nepal – were also rattled by the tremor and aftershocks.

Some tremors were felt in Bihar state in India but no injuries were reported.

Tuesday's quake was the most powerful recorded within a 200-km radius in the last five years, the CENC said.

A quake in December 2023 in northwest China killed 148 people and displaced thousands in Gansu province.

It was China's deadliest since 2014, when more than 600 people were killed in southwestern Yunnan province.

French far-right politician Jean-Marie Le Pen dies at 96

Associated Press
PARIS

Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of France's far-right National Front who was known for fiery rhetoric against immigration and multiculturalism that earned him both staunch supporters and widespread condemnation, died on Tuesday. He was 96.

A polarising figure in French politics, Le Pen was convicted numerous times of antisemitism, discrimination and inciting racial violence.

Le Pen was eventually estranged from his daughter



Jean-Marie Le Pen

er, Marine Le Pen, who renamed his National Front party, kicked him out and transformed it into one of France's most powerful political forces while distancing herself from her father's extremist image.

Bangladesh revokes ousted PM Sheikh Hasina's passport

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Bangladesh on Tuesday revoked the passport of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and 96 others in connection with their role in the crackdown against protesters during the uprising of July-August 2024.

"The Passports Department cancelled the passports of 22 people involved in enforced disappearances while passports of 75 people including Sheikh Hasina were revoked due to their involvement in the July killings," said Abul Kalam Azad Majumdar, the Chief Adviser's Deputy



Sheikh Hasina

Press Secretary. The official did not reveal the names of the 96 others whose passports were also revoked.

The interim government of Bangladesh had made it clear after the swearing-in of Professor

Mohammad Yunus as the Chief Advisor that the ousted Prime Minister's passport would be revoked.

Cancellation of the passport is expected to create hardships for India where Ms. Hasina is presently stationed since leaving Dhaka on August 5.

Apart from the cancellation of the passports, the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit on Tuesday ordered all banks and financial institutions of the country to share with it the information and transaction details of Sheikh Hasina, her sister Rehana and son Sajeeb Wazed Joy, and daughter Saima Wazed Putil among others.

Mr. Dissanayake will be accompanied by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment, and Tourism Vijitha Herath, and Minister of Transport, Highways, Ports, and Civil Aviation Bimal Rathnayake, Cabinet spokesman Nalinda Jayatissa told media.

Debt treatment and bilateral development cooperation are among key issues expected to be discussed in Beijing.

Mr. Dissanayake's visit to China marks his second major bilateral engagement after he rose to the country's top office in September. In November, his National People's Power [NPP] coalition swept the polls with an unprecedented two-thirds majority and soon after, Mr. Dissanayake undertook his first state visit abroad to India.

The NPP's chief constituent, the Janatha Vimuktika Peramuna (JVP or People's Liberation Front), which Mr. Dissanayake leads, has Marxist-Leninist roots and a history of opposing India, prompting many to describe it as a pro-China party.

However, the JVP has sought to refashion itself in the last decade, in a bid to widen its appeal while retaining its traditional base.

Further, Mr. Dissanayake and the NPP have pledged

to follow a non-aligned foreign policy that prioritises Sri Lanka's national interests. Regardless of the party in power in Sri Lanka, all past governments have maintained cordial and close ties with China, widely seen by Sri Lankans as a long-term ally, both in bilateral cooperation and at multilateral fora including UN bodies.

Ties with India

Meanwhile, addressing Colombo-based media on Tuesday, Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha said India opened the year "being extremely positive and buoyant" about its Sri Lanka partnership.

President Dissanayake's recent visit added "renewed vigour" to ties, and deliberations have put the relationship on a "higher plane", he said.

New Delhi has remained highly sensitive to the visit of Chinese research vessels that it believes are essentially spy ships and, on multiple occasions, raised concern with Mr. Dissanayake's predecessor government, prompting Colombo to introduce a moratorium. The Dissanayake government has said it will address the matter diplomatically and take decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Outlining highlights of the Sri Lankan President's December visit to India, including ongoing discussions on possible collaboration in the energy sector and connectivity, he said with India's recent move to convert some of its earlier loans to Sri Lanka into grants, the total grant assistance stood at \$780 million.

Asked if India held any

Sport



Sportstar of the Year (Female)

2024 was a landmark year for Indian sports with a host of achievements across several disciplines. The annual *Sportstar Aces Awards* seek to honour the trailblazers.

MANU BHAKER



- Won bronze in the 10m air pistol and 10m air pistol mixed team events at the Paris Olympics
- Became the first Indian after independence to win multiple medals in a single edition

PREETHI PAL



- of the Summer Games
- Bagged bronze in the women's 10m air pistol at the ISSF World Cup 2024 Stage II in Granada
- Nominated for the Khel Ratna Award
- Won bronze medals in the 100m and 200m events in the Paris Paralympics
- Became India's first track medalist in Paralympic history
- Her feat

AVANI LEKHARA



- Defended her Paralympic title by winning the women's 10m air rifle shooting standing SH1 event at the Paris Games
- Won bronze medals in the two sprint events at the World Championships in Kobe
- Created a new Paralympic record with a score of 249.7 in the 2024 final
- Became the

SMRITI MANDHANA



- Led Royal Challengers Bangalore to maiden WPL title
- Finished with 1659 runs in the calendar year, most by a woman
- Scored five centuries in a calendar year, most by a woman
- Nominated for the ICC ODI Player of the Year Award

DEEPTHI JEEVANJI



- Won the 400m T20 bronze at the Paris Paralympics
- Clinched gold at the World Championships in Kobe
- Set a world record time in the 400m during the Worlds in Japan which was eventually broken during the Paralympics
- Nominated for the Arjuna Award

Voting lines open for 2025 Sportstar Aces Awards. Scan the QR code



Prannoy's match suspended due to a leaking roof; Treesa-Gayatri duo in last-16

Press Trust of India
KUALA LUMPUR

India's H.S. Prannoy experienced a frustrating start to the season-opening Malaysia Super 100 badminton tournament as his match against Canada's Brian Yang was suspended midway due to a leaking roof at the Axiata Arena here on Tuesday.

Prannoy had raised the issue with the chair umpire after water started pooling on the left front section of the court.

The organisers inspected the area and decided to postpone the match.

Earlier in the day, India's women's doubles duo

of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand easily overcame Ornicha Jongsathapornpan and Sukitta Suwachai, beating the Thai pair in straight games in the opening round.

The Indian pair, seeded sixth here, won 21-10, 21-10 in just 30 minutes to secure a place in the round of 16.

The results:

Men: H.S. Prannoy leads Brian Yang (Can) 21-10, 21-10 (play suspended, to resume on Wednesday).

Women: Doubles: Treesa Jolly & Gayatri Gopichand bt Ornicha Jongsathapornpan & Sukitta Suwachai (Tha) 21-10, 21-10.

IN THE RECKONING

Bumrah nominated for ICC Men's Player of the Month award



Jasprit Bumrah was on Tuesday nominated for the ICC Men's Player of the Month award for December 2024, after his standout performance against Australia in the just-concluded Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Competing with Bumrah for the award is Australian skipper Pat Cummins and South Africa's Dane Paterson.

GETTY IMAGES

MISSING A TRICK

Shastri, Ponting express surprise over Shami's long absence



Ravi Shastri and Ricky Ponting feel pacer Mohammed Shami could have tilted the series in India's favour in Australia. "I was surprised with the communication going on in the media as to what exactly happened to Shami," Shastri said. "I was really surprised when he wasn't flown out even halfway through the series," said Ponting.

INTENSE RIVALRY

We know how to beat Aussies, says Rabada about WTC final



South Africa pacer Kagiso Rabada says facing Australia in the WTC final in June has sparked anticipation and motivation in his side. "South Africa versus Australia has always been an intense rivalry because of the way we play. We play hard, and they're going to come hard at us. But we also know how to beat them," Rabada said.

PTI

DIFFERENT PARTS

Neeraj does not need Zelezny 365 days a year: Sumariwalla



Neeraj Chopra will not train with his coach Jan Zelezny throughout the year and seek his guidance only when required, outgoing AFI president Adille Sumariwalla said. "There are different parts to coaching — strength conditioning, technique, biomechanics, etc. These days, there is no coach attached to one athlete for 365 days," Sumariwalla said.

PTI

Lancers bring high-flying Bengal Tigers down

Brinkman stars with a brace while the young Dhami unleashes a spectacular reverse hit to help their side register a maiden win while the opponent suffers its first loss this season

HIL

Y.B. Sarangi

ROURKELEA

Dutch forward Thierry Brinkman struck a brace as Vedanta Kalinga Lancers trounced table-topper Shrikrishna Raghunath Bengal Tigers 6-0 to script its first win in the Hockey India League at the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium here on Tuesdays.

The host, with just one point so far, bounced back in style after three consecutive defeats to upset the off-colour Tigers, who tasted their first loss, and spread cheers in the stands.

Exploring the gaps

Lancers switched flanks and explored the gaps through their fine distribution to have a stunning start, pumping in three goals within six minutes.

Captain Aran Zalewski sent in a pass from the right to Dilpreet Singh and the Indian crossed it to an unmarked Brinkman on the left to shoot home in the third minute.

Within a minute, Sanjay pounced on a rebound to convert Lancers' first penalty corner.

Alex Hendrickx used a



Surging ahead: The Kalinga players celebrate after taking a 3-0 lead. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

diagonal angle to convert another short corner before Tigers could get their act together.

In the second quarter, Tigers moved better and closed the gaps to make Lancers work harder.

They also threatened the home citadel but could not beat a tight defence, led by an alert Krishan Pathak under the bar.

After missing out on six potential goal-scoring chances, Lancers made it 4-0 on the stroke of half-time when Nicholas Ban-

durak hit home from Antoine Kina's pass from the right. The ball got deflected from defender Jasjit Kumar's stick.

Tigers missed a couple of opportunities, including the brilliant run of Sukhjeet Singh and Afan Yousuf in tandem and a penalty corner, as Pathak held his nerve and guarded his post.

Dilpreet spoiled a golden chance for Lancers too.

Lancers displayed some superb counters and ex-

tended their lead in the fourth quarter. The ever-active Brinkman traded passes with Bandurak on the left and completed his brace.

Young Bobby Singh Dhami made it half a dozen of goals. He spectacularly unleashed a reverse hit from the circle line with his back to the goalpost.

The result:
Vedanta Kalinga Lancers 6
(Brinkman 3 & 47, Sanjay 4,
Hendrickx 6, Bandurak 29, Dhami
49) bt Shrikrishna Raghunath Bengal
Tigers 0.

Hardik riddle to dominate CT selection meeting

Amol Karhadkar

MUMBAI

The hardcore Indian cricket fans may still be coming to terms with a prolonged season of Test cricket that turned out to be a bitter pill to swallow. But the team management and the national selection panel have started planning for the next big test that's lying ahead for the men's cricket team, albeit in a different format.

With the ICC Champions Trophy – popularly touted as the mini World Cup – starting in six weeks, the deadline for submitting the squad is fast approaching. As a result, the selection panel is set to pick the preliminary squad for the marquee event on Friday, two days ahead of the January 12 deadline set by the International Cricket Council.

In his first assignment as the India head coach, Gautam Gambhir saw a full-strength ODI squad – barring Jasprit Bumrah – suffer a 2-0 reverse in the three-match series in Sri Lanka last July. Since then, the Men in Blue haven't



Diktat: Hardik has been asked to prove his match-fitness via domestic white ball tournaments. FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

played an ODI.

As a result, the selectors are unlikely to tinker around with the combination. However, the biggest talking point will be around the possible inclusion of Hardik Pandya. The enigmatic all-rounder will feature on top of the agenda with regard to the balance of the squad.

Barring Hardik and Jasprit Bumrah's anticipated return as a vice-captain, the selection committee is unlikely to tinker too much with the combination despite the series loss in Sri Lanka.

However, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Tilak Varma are likely to feature in the discussion for a possible slot in the batting group.

Sindhu, Lakshya and Satwiksairaj-Chirag pair to spearhead the Indian challenge

Sports Bureau

NEW DELHI

P.V. Sindhu, Lakshya Sen and R. Satwiksairaj and Chirag Shetty will spearhead the country's challenge at the third Yonex-Sunrise India Open next week with India fielding its largest-ever contingent in the competition.

The Super 750 event from January 14 to 19 at the Indira Gandhi Stadium – with a prize pool of \$9,50,000 and 11,000 ranking points for the winners will have 21 Indian entries – men's singles (three), women's singles (four), men's doubles (two), women's doubles (eight), mixed doubles (four) – but it won't be a cakewalk for any of them with most of the top names confirming their participation at the biggest event in the country's badminton calendar.

Eight of the top-10 men in the world, including the medalists, will be in action with World No. 1 Shi Yuqi, Indonesian Jonatan Christie and Olympic champion Dane Viktor Axelsen top-



At the helm: Lakshya, Sindhu, and the duo of Satwiksairaj and Chirag will lead the Indian charge. FILE PHOTOS: SANDEEP SAXENA, PTI

ping the seedings in the men's singles.

While Lakshya, who won here in 2022, will likely run into fifth seed Li Shi Feng in the second round, he will first have to get past another Chinese challenge in Weng Hong Yang in the opening round, against whom he has a 3-3 record.

H.S. Prannoy will be up against Christie in round two and Priyanshu Rajawat will face Japan's Kodai Naraoka in the opening match.

Among the women, 14 of the top-20 have con-



At the helm: Lakshya, Sindhu, and the duo of Satwiksairaj and Chirag will lead the Indian charge. FILE PHOTOS: SANDEEP SAXENA, PTI

firmed participation including Olympic champion and World No. 1 An Se Young of Korea and bronze medallist Gregoria Marisa Tunjung of Indonesia. With Sindhu, returning to competition after her marriage, drawn against compatriot Anupama Upadhyaya, at least one Indian is confirmed in the second round but it won't be as easy for Malvika Bansod and Akashrishi Kashyap.

Chirag and Satwiksairaj (2024), currently participating in the Malaysia Open, will also look to re-

gain their top position in the world, opening their campaign against the Malaysian pair of Man Wei Chong and Kai Wun Tee. The duo participated in only one tournament since the Paris Olympics with Stawik struggling with shoulder injury.

They are the only ones to have reached the medal round since the event was upgraded to a Super 750 event in 2023 as part of the BWF World Tour.

Indian participants: Men:
Lakshya Sen, H.S. Prannoy, Priyanshu Rajawat; **Doubles:** Chirag Shetty & R. Satwiksairaj, K. Sai Prathuthvi K. Roy; **Women:** P.V. Sindhu, Malvika Bansod, Anupama Upadhyaya, Akashrishi Kashyap; **Doubles:** Treesa Jolly & Gayatri Gopichand, Ashwin Ponappa & Tanisha Crasto, Rutuparna Panda & Swetaparna Panda, Mansa Bhat & Shikha Gautam, Sakshi Gahlawat & Apoorva Gahlawat, Sania Sikandar & Rashmi Ganesh, Mrunmayee Deshpande & Prerana Alvekar; **Mixed doubles:** Dhruv Kapila & Tanisha Crasto, K. Sathish Kumar & Aadya Varithay, Rohan Kapoor & G. Ruthvika Shivani, Ashith Surya & Amrutha Pramuditha.

IN BRIEF



Forest tames Wolves to maintain title challenge

Nottingham Forest's stunning season continued with a 3-0 victory at Wolves on Monday to give manager Nuno Espírito Santo a winning return to Molineux. Forest remains third in Premier League but moved level on points with Arsenal.

The result: Wolves 0 lost to Nottingham Forest 3 (Gibbs-White 7, Wood 44, Awoniyi 90+4).

Maulyaraj hits ton as Gujarat piles it on against Tamil Nadu

Maulyaraj Chavda (161) and Rudra Pritesh Patel (47) added 141 runs for the fourth wicket which propelled Gujarat to 287 for seven against Tamil Nadu at the end of day one in the under-19 Cooch Behar Trophy final in Ahmedabad on Tuesday.

The scores: Gujarat 287/7 in 90 overs (Maulyaraj Chavda 161, Rudra Pritesh Patel 47, Nishit Gohil 39) vs. Tamil Nadu.

Qualifier Sumit Nagal exits early in Auckland

Qualifier Sumit Nagal lost 6-7(8), 6-4, 6-2 by eighth seed Alex Michelsen of USA in the first round of the \$766,290 ATP tennis tournament in Auckland. Sumit, who had won two rounds in the qualifying event, collected 13 ATP points and \$7,295.

Other results: \$766,290 ATP, Adelaide: Doubles (first round): Sriram Balaji & Miguel Reyes-Varela (Mex) bt Nicolas Barrientos (Col) & Rohan Bopanna 4-6, 6-2, [10-7].

\$100,000 Challenger, Nonthaburi, Thailand: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan & Vijay Sundar Prashanth bt Pawit Somlaksup & Thantub Suksumram (Tha) 7-6(3), 6-4.

\$60,000 ITF women, Nonthaburi, Thailand: Singles (first round): Sahaja Yamalapalli bt Punnin Kovapitukted (Tha) 6-3, 7-5.

Sinner warms up for title defence with tough exhibition match victory

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Agence France-Presse

MELBOURNE

World No. 1 Jannik Sinner said on Tuesday his "amazing" 2024 was history as he warmed up for the defence of his Australian Open title with a tough exhibition match victory on Melbourne's centre court.

The Italian is coming off a breakthrough year in which he backed up his maiden Grand Slam title at Melbourne Park by winning the US Open and ATP Finals.

He then starred for Italy as they claimed a second consecutive Davis Cup triumph, ending as the world's undisputed top player.

The 23-year-old skipped any lead-up events to the opening major of the year and instead flew straight to



Hard-fought win: Sinner was stretched by Popyrin. GETTY IMAGES

Melbourne for his first match of 2025.

He faced a testing battle on a hot afternoon against Australian world No. 25 Alexei Popyrin, eventually prevailing 6-4, 7-6(2), rallying from 5-2 down in the second set on Rod Laver Arena.

"2024 was an amazing

season for me, but it has already gone now," said Sinner, who spent Christmas at home in the snow and arrived in Melbourne to a 40 degree Celsius day. "So many things have happened for me on this court and off the court," he added.

"I'm very happy to be

back, even if it is a kind of exhibition. For us it's always very important trying to feel the court, the pace."

"In my mind, I know how much work we have put in, which hopefully will give me confidence and we will see how it goes," he added.

The Australian Open starts on Sunday.

Sinner is kicking off his campaign with a doping cloud hanging over him after twice testing positive for traces of the steroid clostebol in March.

He was exonerated by the International Tennis Integrity Agency, which accepted his explanation that the drug entered his system when his physiotherapist treated a cut.

But the World Anti-Doping Agency appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) and the Italian player is still awaiting the verdict.

Former England captain Vaughan bats for two-tier Test structure

Agence France-Presse

SYDNEY

Former England captain Michael Vaughan threw his support on Tuesday behind a two-tier structure "to save" Test cricket with the ICC reportedly meeting this month to discuss the issue.

Vaughan joined former India coach Ravi Shastri in urging a shake-up which would include relegation and promotion to help ensure the survival of the red-ball game.

"It has been a series that

has only served to strengthen my views on where the game is headed and what administrators should be looking at," Vaughan said in a column for *The Telegraph* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. "I believe it is a four-day product with a set number of overs each day enforced, three matches minimum per series and two divisions of six, including promotion and relegation."

The ICC has been contemplating a two-tier system for years but the plans have never got off the ground.

could see the Ashes staged twice every three years," said Vaughan.

"I have been saying for a long time this is the way to keep Test cricket relevant by ensuring the best play the best as often as possible, and we get fewer mis-matches."

"There is much to iron out before any major changes are made for 2027, but there is time."

The ICC has been considering a two-tier structure from 2027 which

Tottenham triggers Son's contract extension

Agence France-Presse

LONDON

Tottenham has exercised the option to extend captain Son Heung-min's contract until 2026. The South Korean, 32, joined the club in 2015 from Leverkusen and has made 431 appearances, scoring 169 goals – fourth on Tottenham's all-time list. Son shared the Premier League's Golden Boot with Mohamed Salah in the 2021-22 season after scoring 23 goals.

Pramveer, ISL's youngest starter, aims to kick on

The teenaged defender, who debuted for Punjab against MBSG, is eager to become a regular starter and be a key part to his club's plans

Vivek Krishnan

NEW DELHI

At 17 years and 189 days, Punjab FC's Pramveer Singh became the youngest starter in 11 seasons of the Indian Super League (ISL) when he made his debut against Mohun Bagan Super Giant at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium on December 26.

Though a 3-1 defeat for Punjab FC didn't make for a memorable initiation, the lanky centre-back from Haryana made a solid enough impression with four interceptions and a block to earn the trust of his manager for his side's next game against Kerala Blasters.

The debut came about only due to an injury to Croatian centre-back Ivan Novoselec against East Bengal. But now that he has got a glimpse of the arc lights, the left-footed defender is eager to become a key part of his club's plans.

"I felt I was ready, but it was against a very big team like Mohun Bagan. I was fearful at first that if I didn't play the first match well, the coach wouldn't trust me and it would be difficult to get another opportunity," Pramveer told *The Hindu* on Tuesday.

"But I thought I played well. The coach also said that I should just keep per-



Pramveer...making an impression. PUNJAB FC

forming like that. My aim is to now become a regular starter for the club."

Belonging to Behlba village in Rohtak district, Pramveer's association with football began early despite opposition from his parents. His father, who earns his livelihood from farming, was an aspiring boxer who perhaps wanted his son to take that route.

"I started playing football in my village at the age of 9. My parents weren't supportive. My father wanted me to get into boxing or wrestling. But a lot of people used to play football in my neighbourhood.

There was a ground, but nobody had made it professionally. So my parents didn't see a future," Pramveer recalled.

A successful trial in 2017 with former I-League team Minerva Punjab FC, which now plays in the ISL as Punjab FC, set Pramveer on his way. "A couple of friends told me that Minerva was conducting trials. I was selected. Then when it became Punjab FC, I got into the academy," he said.

The teenager was part of the junior India squad for the AFC U-20 Asian Cup Qualifiers in Laos last September.

Delhi women beat MP in a thriller

BASKETBALL

Sports Bureau

Delhi women scored a thrilling 76-71 victory over Madhya Pradesh in a Group-A league match of the 74th National basketball championship at Bhavnagar on Tuesday.

It was the second victory for the Delhi team, which was well served by Garima Gosain, Preeti Kumar, Prakriti Ranjan and Namrata.

In the men's section, Rajasthan scored a 82-70 victory over Kerala, with Ayush Choudhary top scoring with 19 points.

The results (league): Men:

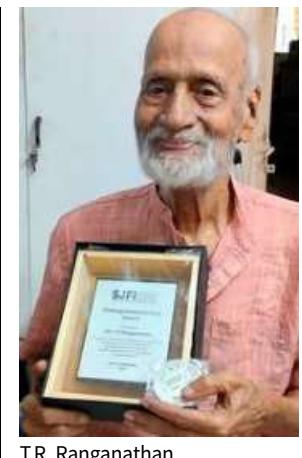
Group-A: Rajasthan 82 (Ayush Choudhary 19, Piyush Meena 14, Mahaveer 14, Sharad Dadich 10, Jaideep Rathore 10) bt Kerala 70

(Sejin Mathew 20, Vaisak Manoj 13, Antony Johnson 12).

Group-B: Karnataka 75 (Prathyusha Tomar 18, Aaron Michael 14) bt Madhya Pradesh 51 (Harshvardhan Singh 15), Punjab 89 (Gurwinder Singh 20, Amritpal Singh 17, Kanwar Gurbaz Singh Sandhu 17, Amijot Gill 14) bt Chandigarh 47.

Women: **Group-A:** Punjab 73 (Manmeet Kaur 25, Priyanka Behal 23, Komalpreet Kaur 11) bt Karnataka 62 (T Mohanabala 18). Delhi 76 (Garima Gosain 19, Preeti Kumar 15, Prakriti Ranjan 15, Namrata 12) bt Madhya Pradesh 71 (Yashika Singh 22, Riya Khungadhar 16, Priya Goswami 10).

Group-B: Chhattisgarh 89 (Divyani Gangwal 28, Nisha Kashyap 21, shanti Xaxa 15) bt Uttar Pradesh 81 (Jasmeen Kaur 27, Manali Vora 20, Rakhi Rai 11). Gujarat 65 (Aahana George 14, Hemangnee Gamit 14, Talveer Kaur 11) bt Uttar Pradesh 60 (Anushka Chouhan 18, Nancy Gupta 16, Manali Vora 11).



Veteran sports journalist Ranganathan passes away

Sports Bureau

CHENNAI

T.R. Ranganathan (91), former assistant editor (Sports Desk) of *The Hindu*, who served the organisation for 32 years, passed away here on Tuesday.

He is survived by wife, son and daughter. Cremation will take place at Besant Nagar on Wednesday at 10 a.m. TRR, as he was fondly called, mentored quite a few young journalists. Recently, the Sports Journalists' Federation of India and the Tamil Nadu Sports Journalists' Association honoured him with a memento for his meritorious service.

LIVE TELECAST

New Zealand vs Sri Lanka: 2nd ODI, Sony Sports Ten 5 (SD & HD), LIV & Prime Video, 6.30 a.m.

Badminton: Malaysia Open, Sports 18-1 & Hotstar, 6.30 a.m.

Hockey: HIL, DD Sports, Sony Sports Ten 1, 2, 3 & LIV, 6 & 8.15 p.m.

ISL: Sports 18-3 & JioCinema, 7.30 p.m.

Maaya Rajeshwaran glides past fourth seed Ada Kumru

TENNIS

Sports Bureau

NEW DELHI

Maaya Rajeshwaran demonstrated a strong composure to defeat fourth seed Ada Kumru of Turkey 6-1, 7-6(1) in the girls first round of the ITF junior tennis tournament at the DLTA Complex, here on Tuesday.

Serving well and stroking with flair, Maaya called the shots from the start.

She could have finished the match a lot quicker, but the 74th ranked Kumru was



Maaya. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

quite audacious with her recovery after being down a break in the second set. However, Maaya handled

the tie-breaker with aplomb, running up a 5-0 lead before closing it out without any fuss.

In the pre-quarterfinals, Maaya will play qualifier Manon Favier of France.

Top seed knocked out Top seed, the 51st ranked Yoana Konstantinova, was knocked out 6-3, 6-1 by qualifier Yuka Naito of Japan, ranked 481.

In the boys section, lucky-loser Maximus Zavier Wong of Singapore, taking the place of second seed, raced past Sehaj Singh Pawar 6-1, 6-1. Arjun Rathi went down fighting

SNAPSHOTS

East Bengal ropes in Venezuelan Celis

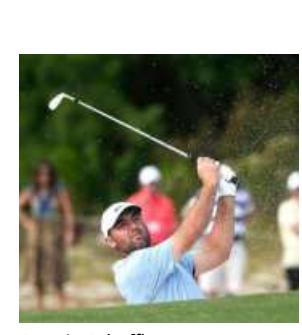
KOLKATA: Struggling East Bengal on Tuesday announced the signing of Venezuelan National team forward Richard Enrique Celis Sanchez for the remainder of the Indian Super League (ISL) season.

Celis last played for Venezuela's first division team Academia Puerto Cabello in October 2024. A versatile attacker, who can play as both a left-winger and centre-forward, Celis has represented several top-tier clubs in Venezuela. He has also represented Venezuela in the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers and the Copa America in the past.

Scheffler withdraws from The American Express

Scottie Scheffler withdrew from The American Express on Monday, saying his right hand has not fully recovered from minor surgery to repair a glass puncture over Christmas.

World No. 1 Scheffler injured his hand preparing Christmas dinner, forcing him to miss the start of the PGA Tour season at The Sentry in Hawaii. The American Express in Palm Desert, California, is scheduled from January 16 to 19. He remains hopeful of starting his year at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, a signature event that starts on Jan. 30.



Express on Monday, saying his right hand has not fully recovered from minor surgery to repair a glass puncture over Christmas. World No. 1 Scheffler injured his hand preparing Christmas dinner, forcing him to miss the start of the PGA Tour season at The Sentry in Hawaii. The American Express in Palm Desert, California, is scheduled from January 16 to 19. He remains hopeful of starting his year at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, a signature event that starts on Jan. 30.

Former England captain Vaughan bats for two-tier Test structure

Agence France-Presse

SYDNEY

Former England captain Michael Vaughan threw his support on Tuesday behind a two-tier structure "to save" Test cricket with the ICC reportedly meeting this month to discuss the issue.

Vaughan joined former India coach Ravi Shastri in urging a shake-up which would include relegation and promotion to help ensure the survival of the red-ball game.

Tottenham triggers Son's contract extension

Agence France-Presse

LONDON

Two-time National champion Siddharth Vishwakarma got past fourth seed Florent Bax of France in the first round of the \$30,000 ITF men's tennis tournament at the Arera Club on Tuesday.

Siddharth led 6-2, 4-3 when the Frenchman retired. Bax later retired early in the second set of the doubles as well.

The doubles champions of the last tournament in Indore, Parikshit Somani and Dhakshineswar Suresh ousted the second seeds, Egor Agafonov and Bogdan Bobrov 7-6(8), 7-6(5) in the pre-quarterfinals.

India realised the need to do more and created something new

By roping in experienced international coaches who have made tactical changes and brought in the European or Australian style of play, the Indians have improved and started to win medals in big tournaments: Zwicker



Ludwig and Zwicker... a special bond. R. RAGU

INTERVIEW

Martin Zwicker Moritz Ludwig

K. Keerthivasan

Germans Martin Zwicker and Moritz Ludwig share a great friendship despite their age difference. Midfielder Zwicker is 37 while defender Moritz is 23. Representing Tamil Nadu Dragons in the Hockey India League (HIL), their recent training sessions in Chennai were marked by jokes and banter as they narrated their experiences with the young Indian players.

As part of the men's team that won silver in the Paris Olympics and the 2023 FIH World Cup in Bhubaneswar, the two have huge admiration and respect for each other.

In an interview with *The Hindu*, the two spoke about, among other things, the Paris journey and their experience of playing in India.

What were your expectations when you signed up for Tamil Nadu Dragons in the HIL?

Zwicker: Not so many expectations, but that's because I haven't experienced the HIL before. I was really excited to be part of Dragons, especially after we met the whole group. It was really nice.

You have played in the German league before. What are the differences between that and the HIL?

Zwicker: I think it (German league) is kind of intense, especially about the techniques than the Indian style is. And I think it's (HIL) going to be sometimes a bit more of a rush, like a kick and rush thing. I'm looking forward to that but in the end, it's more like we need to bring our German experience to that. And maybe to control the game and I think that will be good for us. Both leagues are similar, I think, but I think the Indian league is a bit faster and more straightforward whereas German hockey is more tactical.

HIL is multi-cultural where players from different nationalities play. How does it help to have two players from the same nationality on the team?

Moritz: It's a big challenge to create a team with all the cultures and all the different styles. It helps when people know each other. We got chemistry. So if more guys share chemistry, I think it's easier to build a whole group. **Zwicker:** It is great to have players from all nationalities in a league especially because we can talk about details and then you can bring it to the whole team. I think it's really helpful, especially when you know the head coach (Rein van Eijk) as well. We are on the same page, we're talking a lot. And you can talk to the other international players because they have experience as well. It's always helpful for the whole team. It's more like an exchange of a lot of facts that can help the whole team.

You spoke about Rein, the Tamil Nadu Dragons head coach. He was part of the team that won the Junior World Cup in 2023. How has it been working with him?

Zwicker: I see a lot of benefits because he coached me some years ago at my home club, Berliner HC. And it was easy to talk about things. It's good because I know him so well and he knows me so well as well. And we can talk about a lot of things and that can be helpful. He's an experienced coach now because he coached at an international level, especially with the youth. And we have a lot of young guys on our team.

Tell us about working with a senior pro like Zwicker. He's been a Champions Trophy winner, a double Olympian, and has extensive international experience (more than 300 matches)...

Moritz: I think it's a huge benefit that he's really experienced. I have learned a lot from him as he has seen nearly everything in hockey, so that's going to help us.

How do you see Moritz's growth so far and how do you see his future

shaping up?

Zwicker: I think his future is bright, that's for sure. Over the last [few] years, he's become such a good player, especially at the highest level. Not every young player can do that. Over the last year or two, he's experienced a lot in international hockey. That's why he's here and that's why he's been so successful over the past two years. I think it can be helpful to give him some advice, but he knows it better, he has his own goals and reaches them. I think it's most important that he keeps his focus.

What do you think are Moritz's strengths?

Zwicker: I think he needs to learn to be a little calm. If you're a young guy, you're forced to try something. That's really good, but sometimes it can be helpful to be a little calm. He has a lot of strengths, especially in defence. Take a look at him, he's such a big guy. He can reach the ball from everywhere. That's really nice for a team like us. He has a lot of offensive skills as well. If you play against Moritz as a striker, it's not a fun game!

How disappointing was it to win silver in Paris, losing to The Netherlands in a shoot-out in the final?

Zwicker: Of course, it's disappointing as it's the biggest tournament, the biggest medal we can win. We've learnt our lesson. We hope to do better the next time and maybe beat Holland.

Tell us about beating India in the semifinal at the Paris Olympics. It was a tough match.

Zwicker: It was a really intense match. India played really great. We didn't win in some stages of the game. In the end, I think it was a 50-50 game.

Moritz: We were sure that we were going to win a medal. It's always a tough situation when you play in a semifinal. In the end, [we had] a little bit more luck for us. But that's how the game is.

You've played more than a decade of international hockey. How have

you seen the Indian team grow in the last 10 years?

Zwicker: They realised over the last 15 years, the need to do more. They realised the need to bring in some experienced coaches, maybe some international coaches. That's what they've done. They created something new, they trained, maybe, differently. This effort bore fruit. Now, it's more like they have improved so much that they can play really well and win medals in big tournaments.

You've played at the FIH World League against India. Any definite change you've seen in the team?

Zwicker: I think it's mostly the tactical things. You can see that especially when they brought some international coaches. That's what they are looking for. Some experienced international coaches to bring, maybe, a European style or an Australian style to the squad.

Germany won the World Cup in Bhubaneswar in 2023 after 15 years. How big was that for the country?

Zwicker: It was huge, really huge. The last time we won it was in 2006. It was nice that we won it in India. It was quite a relief, especially for a lot of guys like us who were searching for that kind of success.

Moritz: It couldn't have got any better for me. First tournament, first win. I think you can be more relaxed for the rest of your career. You know you've won something. No, I'm joking. It was really great. A big tournament, great conditions. Just great.

What are your thoughts about countrymate Gonzalo Peillat, who is also playing in the HIL?

Moritz: He's a great guy, a great drag-flicker. He's also really experienced. He's always been a team man, a huge advantage if he's in your team.

Zwicker: As Moritz said, he can do a lot on the pitch. The good thing about him is that he brings so much energy and effort to a whole squad. That's a really good thing for any team and

that's what makes him so special. He's a nice drag flicker, but he's [also] a good person. He brings so much into a team, especially on the quality side and the social life. That's always helpful if you're new to a team.

When the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028 comes up, you will be 41. Germany won a bronze (2016 Rio Olympics) and silver (2024 Paris) most recently. Is there a sense of disappointment that you've come close twice but couldn't win gold?

Zwicker: No, that's not a big disappointment. When you think about it, it's more like, how many players have won an Olympic medal? I'll be 41 in LA, but that's so far away. I'm not thinking about that.

Looking back, winning the Champions Trophy in 2014 must have been a huge thing for you, right?

Zwicker: That was quite a big win because the Champions Trophy has a lot of tradition. It was quite a small relief because so many players had played the tournament earlier and didn't win it. We did it with a nice squad in the end, that was really nice.

The German hockey team is one of the strongest teams in the world. What are the reasons for that?

Zwicker: We like to play hockey. We have a different system than other countries. We always step up, especially in the big tournaments. We have a nice mindset and we put so much effort into our training. It's more like we are a hockey nation.

Despite being so young, you already have a lot of experience and have won the World Cup in 2023 and bagged silver in Junior World Cup in 2021, both in Bhubaneswar. How do feel about that?

Moritz: I hope I can make the next step in the German team, maybe become a leading person there and hopefully win some more tournaments, play good matches, and have fun.

An adult *C. elegans* worm glows after a GFP coding sequence was inserted into it. DAN DICKINSON, GOLDSTEIN LAB, UNC CHAPEL HILL (CC BY-SA 3.0)

How curiosity-driven research into a worm won four Nobels

Advances in health often arise from solving fundamental biological problems. One difficulty is identifying the right place where the answer can be found. *Caenorhabditis elegans* provides such a setting: a versatile model whose results often reveal general principles with parallels in humans

Rohini Karandikar

Sandhya P. Koushika

Victor Ambros and Gary Ruvkun won the 2024 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for discovering microRNAs and their role in controlling gene expression. This pioneering discovery was made using the roundworm *Caenorhabditis elegans*. This 1-mm long, slender, and transparent nematode has been the star of many pathbreaking discoveries in biology, four of which have won Nobel Prizes.

How did *C. elegans*, a tiny invertebrate, become such a crucial tool for biological research? What insights did this worm yield? What is the value of such research for society when one can argue that our focus should be on studying human biology?

Advances necessary for human health and welfare often arise from solving fundamental biological problems. One major difficulty isn't just finding the right question to ask but also finding the right place to ask it where it can be solved. *C. elegans* provides exactly such a setting: a relatively simple yet versatile model for biological investigations whose results often reveal general principles that remain valid or have parallels in other organisms, including humans.

The worm's story also highlights how breakthroughs can arise from research driven by curiosity.

Humble beginnings

In 1963, biologist Sydney Brenner wrote to his peer Max Perutz his thoughts on research in the fields of development and neurobiology. He believed that as the nature of problems in these areas wasn't clearly defined, there was a gap in identifying the right experimental approach that would lead to "defining [the] unitary steps of any given process."

Brenner suggested the use of genetic analysis in defining these steps in both animal development and the nervous system. He chose the nematode *C. elegans* for its simplicity and because it has several organ systems akin to those found in humans, allowing a chance to identify principles in development.

In 1963, Brenner requested another scientist, Ellsworth Dougherty, for a culture of *C. elegans* and sought his guidance on its growth conditions. This culture of sharing resources and unpublished information continues to this day.

Cell death

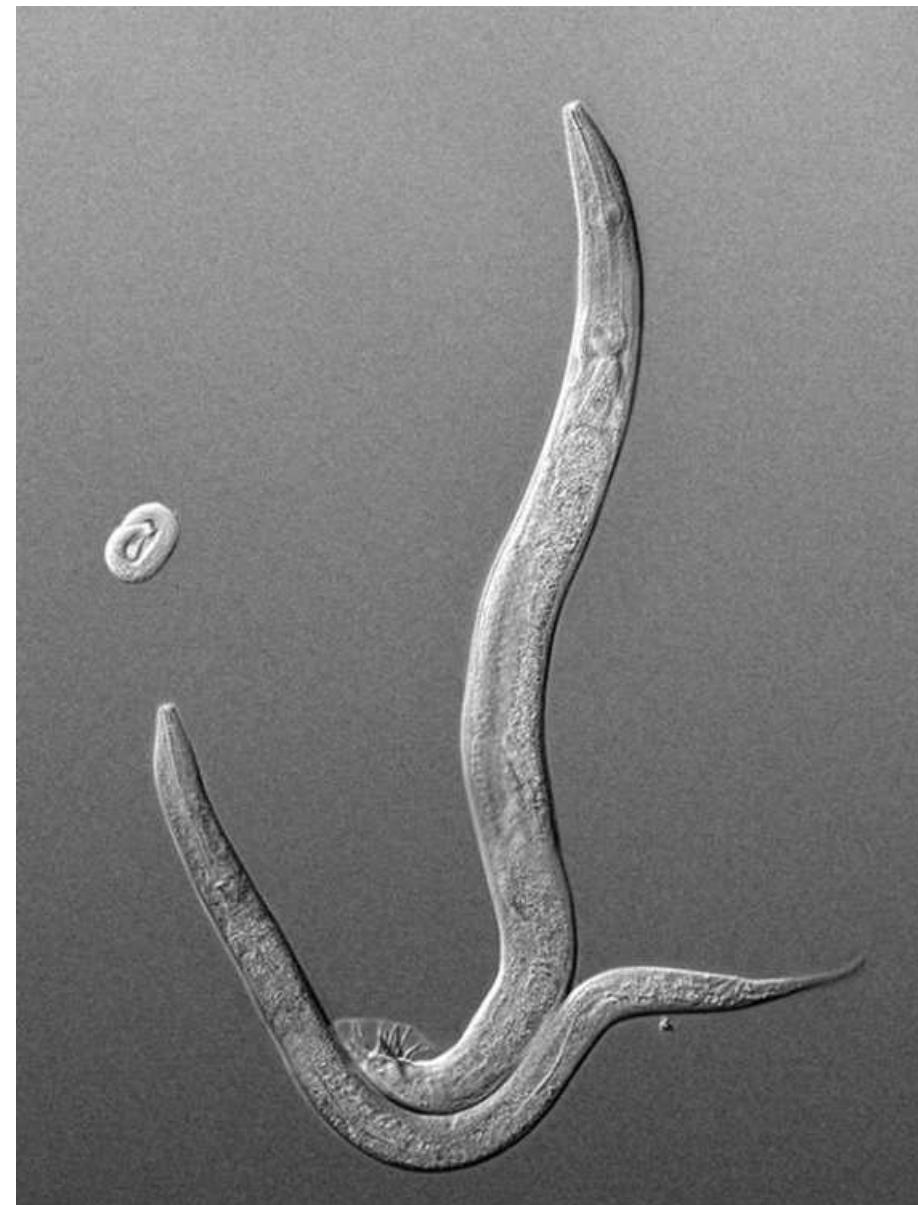
Brenner shared the 2002 Nobel Prize for medicine with H. Robert Horvitz and John Sulston "for their discoveries concerning genetic regulation of organ development and programmed cell death." In his award ceremony, Brenner said, "Without a doubt, the fourth winner of the Nobel Prize this year is *Caenorhabditis elegans*: it deserves all of the honour, but, of course, it will not be able to share the monetary award."

Brenner established *C. elegans* as a genetic model and demonstrated that genes in the worm could be mutated, resulting in observable changes in development and behaviour.

In 1976, Sulston elucidated the cell lineage of *C. elegans*, which is the developmental history of all cells of this nematode. He tracked cell divisions from the fertilised single cell to the final 595 cells in the adult organism. This was possible because of the worm's transparency but nonetheless was a daunting task.

Sulston showed that precisely 131 of the 1,090 cells born died during development and that cell death was genetically controlled. He described the steps involved in programmed cell death, where healthy cells killed themselves.

Horvitz identified the genes essential for cell death and the genes that



An image of *Caenorhabditis elegans* worms. MEGA RA/SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT
Join FREE WhatsApp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Van2VRb6RGJOKH6oBd0F> prevented it. He found that the process of cell death arose from interactions among key genes and followed a specific molecular pathway.

His team's work in *C. elegans* showed that many genes involved in cell death also have counterparts in humans. Thus, research in *C. elegans* was particularly important in advancing understanding of the role of programmed cell death in human development, e.g., of fingers, the nervous system, and in some cancers.

Ageing and genome sequencing
Work in *C. elegans* also revealed insights into the pathways that regulate ageing. The early work of Michael Klass, Tom Johnson, and Cynthia Kenyon in the 1980s and 1990s identified some of the genes leading to longer lifespans than seen in normal worms. Further work in this direction led to the appreciation of the role of insulin signalling pathways in ageing. This has led to *C. elegans* being used as a key model for discovering the molecular mechanisms of ageing and as a test bed for drugs that might influence this process.

The genomic information of any organism is invaluable in linking the observable characteristics to a particular gene. Sequencing the *C. elegans* genome started in 1990 and was an exemplar for the larger Human Genome Project. The whole genome sequence of *C. elegans* was carried out by a consortium working together across continents. It was led by Robert Waterston at the Genome Sequencing Center at Washington University, U.S., and Richard Durbin at the Sanger Centre in the U.K.

The technology and the software tools developed to sequence the *C. elegans* genome led the way in achieving the scale and efficiency critical to sequencing larger genomes.

It was debated if human whole-genome sequencing data should be publicly available, as private sequencing efforts wished to patent some of the genes. The open sharing of *C. elegans* data and community feedback provided a model

Gene silencing
A geneticist's dream is to control gene expression, which is the ability to turn genes "on" or "off" in a controlled manner. Andrew Fire and Craig Mello discovered using *C. elegans* that providing double-stranded RNA could lead to destruction of a much larger amount of the corresponding cellular RNA, suggesting double-stranded RNA was a catalyst for RNA interference. For their work, Fire and Mello jointly received the 2006 Nobel Prize for medicine.

The discovery of RNA interference led to technologies for a highly specific approach to gene-silencing that work in all known organisms. They also have applications in therapeutics for cancer and some inherited gene disorders.

Glowing worms
A dream of biologists is to track biological processes and gene products in living cells. The green fluorescent protein (GFP) revolutionised our ability to do this. How this came about is another success story of curiosity-driven research.

Osamu Shimomura was trying to understand why jellyfish are fluorescent. In the 1960s, he identified bioluminescent proteins like GFP from the jellyfish *Aequorea victoria*. In 1994, Chalfie was able to introduce GFP into live *C. elegans*. The transparency of the organism meant he could see green glowing cells when the organism was illuminated by blue light.

GFP was soon widely used in many organisms and has transformed biological research. Together with Roger Tsien's success in making fluorescent proteins of multiple colours, scientists today can follow multiple processes and proteins simultaneously in a variety of organisms.

Shimomura, Chalfie, and Tsien received the 2008 Nobel Prize in chemistry for developing GFP.

The microRNA prize
The discovery of microRNAs (miRNA)

miRNAs are molecules that turn off gene expression. This fundamental advance, which won Victor Ambros and Gary Ruvkun a Nobel Prize in 2024, is another example of an unexpected finding arising from curiosity

challenged the central dogma, which said RNAs were mere conduits of information that flowed from DNA to proteins.

miRNAs are a class of molecules that turn off gene expression at the right time and place. This fundamental advance, which won Victor Ambros and Gary Ruvkun a Nobel Prize in 2024, is another example of an unexpected finding arising from curiosity. The duo discovered in *C. elegans* that miRNAs could bind corresponding cellular RNAs to reduce protein expression.

It is established that gene regulation by miRNAs is an essential process during development and for organisms to have normal physiological processes. There is increasing recognition of the value of miRNAs in diagnostics and therapeutics as well.

A prize for neuronal circuits
C. elegans has just 302 neurones, yet exhibits complex behaviour. Thus it offers a promising model to study a nervous system simple enough to analyse while still yielding valuable lessons about general principles.

Naturally, a useful step is to build a layout of all its neurones. Brenner began such a reconstruction of the *C. elegans* nervous system in the 1970s. It was a formidable challenge, never attempted before. John White, Brenner's PhD student, set up a computer system for neuron reconstructions from electron micrographs. He stayed on after his PhD to reconstruct the *C. elegans* connectome, a map of all neuronal connections.

This was well before sophisticated tools were available and was the first such effort for any organism. The connectome immediately opened the door to questions about how neural circuits function. For example, in the 1980s, Chalfie used laser-based neurone-killing experiments to determine the circuit for the escape response to touch.

Holding promise
We can ask questions about the relationship between the genetics of neural circuits and behaviour. The answers, when we can find them in specific contexts, are difficult to obtain, extremely complex, and yet vital for our understanding.

Cornelia Bargmann won the 2013 Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences for her research on the olfactory system of *C. elegans*. The sense of smell is very important for many organisms. *C. elegans* has a large number of olfactory receptors and uses complex machinery to sense smells and respond, adapt, and learn.

Bargmann took on this complex problem and unearthed remarkable insights in all these aspects through elegant experiments. She identified smell neurones in *C. elegans*. Her lab also showed that despite there being a fixed template for sensing attractive and repulsive cues, individual genetic variation and an ability to integrate environmental cues allowed the olfactory circuit to be very flexible as well.

Many of these findings also hold true in organisms like mice, with promise for understanding the human brain.

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Lava erupting over the Mount Etna volcano in Sicily in July 2024. AFP

The latest science on climate change

Agence France Presse

After another record-breaking year for global temperatures in 2024, pressure is rising on policymakers to step up efforts to curb climate change. The last global scientific consensus on the phenomenon was released in 2021, but scientists say evidence shows the effects of global warming are unfolding faster than expected.

Here is some of the latest climate research.

The world may already have hit 1.5 degrees C of warming above the average pre-industrial temperature – a critical but also arbitrary threshold beyond which it is at risk of irreversible and extreme climate change, scientists say.

A group of researchers made the suggestion in a study released in November based on an analysis of 2,000 years of atmospheric gases trapped in Antarctic ice cores.

Scientists have typically measured today's temperatures against a baseline temperature average for 1850-1900. By that measure, the world is now nearly 1.3 C warmer.

But the new data suggests a longer pre-industrial baseline, based on temperature data spanning the year 13 to 1700, which put warming at 1.49 C in 2023, the study published in Nature Geoscience said.

The Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), which transports warm water from the tropics to the North Atlantic, has helped to keep European winters milder for centuries. Research in 2018 showed AMOC has weakened by about 15% since 1950, while research published in 2024 in the journal *Science Advances* suggested it could be closer to a critical slowdown than previously thought.

Globally, forests appear to be struggling. A July 2024 study found that forests overall failed in the year before to absorb as much carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as in the past

In addition, with the world in the throes of a fourth and the largest mass coral bleaching event, scientists fear the world's reefs have passed a point of no return.

Ocean warming is causing storms to intensify faster, with some leapfrogging strength categories in just hours.

Likewise, global warming is drying waterways and sapping moisture from forests, creating conditions for bigger and hotter wildfires. Research published in October in *Nature Climate Change* calculated that about 13% of deaths associated with toxic wildfire smoke during the 2010s could be attributed to the climate effect on wildfires.

The Amazon in 2024 was in the grip of its worst, most widespread drought since records began in 1950. River levels sank to all-time lows while fires ravaged the rainforest. That added concern to findings last year that 10-47% of the Amazon will face combined stresses of heat and drought by 2050.

That could push the Amazon past a tipping point, with the jungle no longer able to produce enough moisture to quench its own trees, at which point the ecosystem could transition to degraded forests or sandy savannas.

Globally, forests appear to be struggling. A July 2024 study found that forests overall failed to absorb as much carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as in the past.

Scientists fear climate change could even boost volcanic eruptions. In Iceland, volcanoes appear to be responding to rapid glacier retreat. As ice melts, less pressure is exerted on the earth's crust and mantle.

For feedback and suggestions
for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'