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Nation mourns former PM Manmohan Singh, the economist-ruler credited with liberalisation

He passed away at AIIMS on Thursday night after falling unconscious at home

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, 92, passed away at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences here on Thursday evening.

Dr. Singh was admitted to the hospital in the emergency ward around 8 p.m. in a critical condition. "He was treated for age-related medical conditions and had sudden loss of consciousness at home. Resuscitative measures were started immediately at home. He was brought to the medical emergency at AIIMS Delhi at 8.06 pm. Despite all efforts, he could not be revived and was declared dead at 9.51 p.m.," an AIIMS bulletin said.

He is survived by his wife, Gurcharan Singh, and three daughters.

Dr. Singh, who was PM

President Droupadi Murmu describes Singh as 'one of the greatest sons of Bharat'

A lasting imprint on India's external relations

NEW DELHI
Although he was sometimes criticised by the Opposition for being "maun" or silent, Manmohan Singh was a prolific communicator when it came to his foreign policy. His engagement with the Quad made way for two of his biggest foreign policy breakthroughs: with Japan, that ended India's isolation over the nuclear tests of 1998, and with the United States, which allowed for the civil nuclear deal. » PAGE 13

est sons of Bharat".

"Dr. Manmohan Singh Ji was one of those rare politicians who also straddled the worlds of academia and administration with equal ease. In his various



Modi says as PM, Singh made extensive efforts to improve people's lives

roles in public offices, he made critical contributions to reforming Indian economy. He will always be remembered for his service to the nation, his unblemished political life and his

utmost humility. His passing is a great loss to all of us. I pay my respectful homage to one of the greatest sons of Bharat and convey my heartfelt condolences to his family, friends

A forthright FM who effected social change

NEW DELHI
It is well known that Manmohan Singh made way for foreign investments in myriad sectors. Yet, few would remember his maiden Budget also set the foundations of India's modern stock market boom with the creation of SEBI. Or that he passionately batted for consumer interests as well as wealth creators, even as he held reservations against "mindless and heartless" conspicuous consumerism. » PAGE 13

and admirers," she said.

Offering tributes to his predecessor, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India mourns the loss of one of its most distinguished leaders whose wisdom and

Government functions cancelled and seven-day national mourning declared

humility were always visible. "Dr. Manmohan Singh Ji. Rising from humble origins, he rose to become a respected economist. He served in various government positions as well, including as Finance Minister, leaving a strong imprint on our economic policy over the years. His interventions in Parliament were also insightful. As our Prime Minister, he made extensive efforts to improve people's lives," Mr. Modi said on X.

Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi and her daughter Priyanka Gandhi Vadra reached the hospital as soon as news of his hospitalisation became known. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, who were in Karnataka's Belagavi for an extended

meeting of the Congress Working Committee, rushed back to Delhi.

In a post on X, Mr. Kharge said India has lost a visionary statesman, a leader of unimpeachable integrity, and an economist of unparalleled stature, and asserted that "history will undoubtedly judge him kindly". "A man of action rather than words, his immense contribution to nation-building will be etched in the annals of Indian history."

"Manmohan Singh Ji led India with immense wisdom and integrity. His humility and deep understanding of economics inspired the nation. My heartfelt condolences to Mrs. Kaur and the family. I have lost a mentor and guide. Millions of us who admired him will remember him with the utmost pride," Mr. Gandhi said.

IN BRIEF



Kolkata doctors firm on demand to continue sit-in

KOLKATA
Protesting doctors have approached the Calcutta HC seeking an extension for their stir at Esplanade. Two groups of doctors met CBI officials after raising concerns regarding their probe. » Page 3

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RBI's monetary policy may have slowed demand: Finance Ministry



Looking ahead: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman chairs the fourth pre-Budget consultation in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

in the second half of the year than it has been through April and September, when GDP rose 6%, the Ministry's economic division officials rejigged

their growth expectations for 2024-25 to "around" 6.5%.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12

Cong. Belagavi meet demands caste census, opposes simultaneous polls



Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge at the Congress Working Committee meeting in Belagavi on Thursday. ANI

The Hindu Bureau

BELAGAVI
The Congress Working Committee (CWC) that met in Belagavi, Karnataka on Thursday adopted resolutions committing the party to Mahatma Gandhi's legacy and opposing several policies of the Union government.

The meeting reiterated the party's demand for Home Minister Amit Shah's resignation over "insult" to B.R. Ambedkar in Parliament, expressed its opposition to the plan for simultaneous elections and amendment to election conduct rules, and de-

manded a caste census and removal of the 50% limit on reservation. The party plans to take out three rallies to revamp and strengthen the organisation.

Party general secretary Jairam Ramesh gave details of the first resolution that read, "It is ironic, and even reprehensible, that the ideologies that bitterly op-

Cong. will fight for Ambedkar's respect: Kharge

NEW DELHI
Asserting that Congress would fight for the respect of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mallikarjun Kharge said BJP government at the Centre was not ready to admit that Amit Shah had made "extremely insulting" remarks about the leader. » PAGE 12

posed Gandhiji during his lifetime are now hypocritically invoking him."

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12

Over 10.58 lakh votes were rejected in Lok Sabha polls: EC data

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Over 10.58 lakh votes were not counted or rejected in the Lok Sabha election held earlier this year, says a detailed statistical report released by the Election Commission on Thursday.

Of these, 5,35,825 were postal votes and 5,22,513 were votes cast in electronic voting machines.

The data, which was released as part of a comprehensive set of 42 statistical reports for the Lok Sabha election, show that more than 97.97 crore citizens had registered themselves as voters as against the over 91.19 crore in 2019.

which is an increase of 7.43%.

Out of these registered electors, 64.64 crore voted in 2024. Of the votes cast, 63.89 crore were valid.

While three were proxy votes, 9,634 were "tendered" votes, which means that there were incidents where impersonators voted in the name of genuine voters and there were complaints. Only one Lok Sabha constituency of Surat (Gujarat) was uncontested.

Polling stations numbered at 10,51,016 and average number of electors per polling station was 930.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12

AAP threatens to seek Congress's ouster from INDIA bloc over Maken's comments

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI



Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and AAP leader Sanjay Singh addressing a press conference in New Delhi on Thursday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

BJP's scripts, gives statements on BJP's directions, and targets AAP. Yesterday, he crossed all limits and said [AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal] is 'anti-national'. Ajay Maken or the Congress till now had not called any BJP leader in Delhi 'anti-national', the AAP leader said.

Mr. Singh said the Congress had on Wednesday registered an FIR against Mr. Kejriwal, who had campaigned for Congress candidates in Delhi during the Lok Sabha election, and even went to Chandigarh to campaign for the party.

"We fought the election in Haryana, but we did not

criticise Congress leaders. Today, it feels like the Congress's statements are coming from the BJP office. I am demanding the Congress to take action against Mr. Maken within 24 hours, else we will demand other parties in the INDIA bloc to remove the Congress from the alliance."

BJP funding Cong. Speculation mounts about cause of crash

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi alleged that the BJP was funding Congress candidates for the election. "We have come to know that Sandeep Dikshit is getting funds from the BJP. We have come to know that Farhad Suri, who is fighting from Jangpura, is getting crores of rupees from the BJP," she said.



17 children honoured for achievements

NEWS » PAGE 14



WORLD » PAGE 16

Cong. will fight for Ambedkar's respect: Kharge

NEW DELHI
Asserting that Congress would fight for the respect of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mallikarjun Kharge said BJP government at the Centre was not ready to admit that Amit Shah had made "extremely insulting" remarks about the leader. » PAGE 12

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CONTINUED ON
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AZERBAIJAN MOURNS VICTIMS

Speculation mounts about cause of crash

Speculation mounts about cause of crash

Over 10,000 personnel to be deployed for New Year festivities in city

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi police have intensified checking across the city and will be deploying over 10,000 personnel ahead of New Year celebrations, a senior officer said on Thursday.

The officer said paramilitary personnel have also been deployed at the city's borders to rein in cross-border illegal activities.

"We want everyone to welcome the New Year with great zeal but no one will be allowed to breach the law," he said, adding that they have increased security at over 20 border points where additional pickets and barricades will be erected to "tackle nuisance" by people from the adjoining States.

Delhi shares its border with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and lies close to Rajasthan. A large number of people from these three States come to the Capital for New Year celebrations.

More than 10,000 police personnel, including traffic police, are being deployed to "keep hooliganism and traffic violations to the minimum", the officer added.

"The traffic police have already chalked out a plan to rein in motorcycle

Delhi police teams intensify checking at border points to rein in illegal activities ahead of celebrations

stunts and drunk driving. Additional forces from different police stations will be deployed to further help the traffic police personnel," the officer added.

A senior police officer of the traffic police said their major focus will be in Connaught Place, Hauz Khas, India Gate, and areas surrounding markets and malls. "A campaign against drunk driving will also be carried out by the traffic police and those found violating rules will be penalised," he said.

Curbs in place

At Connaught Place, only vehicles having a valid sticker distributed by the Delhi police will be allowed to enter the Inner Circle area, he added. The officer said police teams are checking bus stands, railway stations, hotels, dharamshals, night shelters, and other locations in the city to identify if anyone is staying without providing proper documents.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) on Thursday passed a resolution condemning the Delhi government and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal for playing a "fraud on people" in the name of "registration" for the proposed Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana and Sanjeevani Yojana.

The resolution was passed in a weekly meeting of the NDMC in the presence of BJP's New Delhi Lok Sabha MP Bansuri Swaraj, who is an ex-officio member of the civic body, whose members are nominated by the Centre.

NDMC vice-chairperson Kuljeet Singh Chahal said the resolution was passed "unanimously".

Delivered on promises'

Hitting back, AAP in a statement said, "In the past three to four days, a staggering 22 lakh registrations done under monthly stipend scheme for women, vows to fulfil pre-poll promises



BJP Mahila Morcha members protesting outside the residence of AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

tions have been done under the Mahila Samman Yojana." It said people know that Mr. Kejriwal is the "only leader in the country" who has consistently delivered on promises.

"When Kejriwal has promised ₹2,100 every month for women in Delhi, they know he will fulfil it."

The development came a day after the Delhi government's Women and Child Development Department and Health Department distanced themselves from both schemes

through public notices in several newspapers.

In separate notices, both departments cautioned people against filling any forms for the schemes, saying no such schemes exist and people "should not entertain such promises". AAP had earlier launched drives to collect personal details of people for the proposed schemes.

The scheme to provide monthly stipend of ₹1,000 to women was announced in the 2024-25 Delhi budget. Mr. Kejriwal had promised ₹2,100 every month for women in Delhi, they know he will fulfil it."

Meanwhile, BJP Mahila Morcha members protested outside Mr. Kejriwal's residence – 5, Ferozeshah Road. They were detained by the police and later released with a warning, a police officer said.

mised to hike the amount to ₹2,100 on retaining power in the upcoming Delhi Assembly poll. He had also promised to provide senior citizens free treatment at all city hospitals under the Sanjeevani Yojana on winning the election.

Dikshit seeks probe

Meanwhile, Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit, who is pitted against Mr. Kejriwal in the New Delhi Assembly constituency, urged Lieutenant-Governor V.K. Saxena to launch a probe into the issue, saying women's personal details are being collected for a scheme that "doesn't exist".

"A case should be filed against the two persons – Atishi [Chief Minister] and Arvind Kejriwal," he said in a letter to the L-G.

Meanwhile, BJP Mahila Morcha members protested outside Mr. Kejriwal's residence – 5, Ferozeshah Road. They were detained by the police and later released with a warning, a police officer said.

Uncertainty looms over special session to table CAG reports

Nikhil M Babu
NEW DELHI

Uncertainty looms over the tabling of the 14 Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports related to several policy initiatives of the Delhi government ahead of the Assembly poll due in February next year.

On Thursday, Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel said he is waiting for the High Court's directions to convene the special session. "Since the matter is in the court, I will wait for the court's directions to call the session," Mr. Goel told *The Hindu*.



Speaker Ram Niwas Goel

code comes into effect.

On Tuesday, the Delhi government had informed the court that Chief Minister Atishi had forwarded the CAG reports to the Delhi Assembly Secretariat. The High Court directed the Delhi government and the Speaker to file counter-affidavits within 10 days.

Date not requested'

Sources said Ms. Atishi had not requested a date for the session. "The usual process is that the CM writes to the Speaker that the Cabinet has taken a decision to hold a session on a particular date. The CM could have done it while sending the CAG reports, but she did not," a source said. Delhi L-G V.K. Saxena had earlier urged the CM to call the session on either December 19 or 20.

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WEBINAR

Jammu woman and popular RJ found dead in Gurugram

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

A freelance radio jockey allegedly died by suicide at her rented accommodation in Sector 47, Gurugram, the police said on Thursday.

The deceased has been identified as Simran Singh, a native of Jammu and Kashmir with nearly seven lakh Instagram followers. The police found the body in her room on Wednesday night, and no note was recovered from the spot.

Her last post on Instagram was on December 13. She had been living at the rented accommodation for the last few months. SHO Sadar police Sunil Kumar said Simran's friend, who stayed with her in the flat, informed them at 9.30 p.m. on Wednesday.

"A police team reached the spot and found Simran's room locked from inside. The team broke open the door and found her. Simran's family members, who reached Gurugram after being informed, said she had been upset for some time," an officer said.

Simran's body has been handed over to her family after the post-mortem. Further probe is under way, the officer said.

Meanwhile, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, president of the JKNC, and J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah along with Deputy CM Surinder Choudhary issued a statement on the incident. They expressed grief over the tragic demise of Simran Singh, popularly known as RJ Simran and lovingly referred to as "Jammu ki Dhadkan".

"Dr. Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah... pray for peace to the departed soul and strength to her loved ones to bear this unimaginable loss," the statement said.

"Simran's voice and charm resonated with the spirit of Jammu and Kashmir. Her contribution to the cultural fabric of our region will always be remembered," said the joint statement.

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

Doctors firm on continuing protest, meet CBI officials

The medics have not secured any extension from the court; next hearing on Monday; they may approach Calcutta HC again; Senior Doctors' Forum raises concern about 'actual crime scene'

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

Protesting doctors have approached the Calcutta High Court seeking an extension for their agitation at Dorina Crossing, Esplanade. Two delegations of doctors met officials from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) after raising concerns regarding the investigation process.

"We would like to extend our protest till December 31, would move the court again," one of the doctors said. They plan to stay on the site till the 31-year-old



Members of the Joint Doctors' Forum demanding justice for R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital rape and murder victim, in Kolkata on Thursday. DEBASISH BHADURI

doctor gets justice, they said.

No resolution was passed at the Calcutta High Court on Thursday and the next hearing in the matter

is on Monday.

Justice Tirthankar Ghosh had given the protesting doctors permission to continue their agitation till Thursday. The future of the

agitation remains in doubt, however, as they did not get an official extension.

On Thursday, two delegations of doctors headed to two CBI offices at Nizam Palace and CGO Complex to meet the investigating officers and voice their concerns over the process. The meeting came after two accused in the case were granted bail after the CBI officials failed to file a chargesheet within the 90 days of the arrest.

Those who were granted bail were former R.G. Kar principal Sandip Ghosh and Tala Thana officer-in-charge Abhijit Mondal.

sa, a former Rajouri Garden MLA, said he was "helping the needy and would continue to do so".

However, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh told reporters after lodging the complaint that ₹1,100 each was distributed among women voters at Mr. Verma's home in the New Delhi Assembly constituency. "Crores of rupees would be recovered if the ED raids his residence," he said.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor accused AAP of trying to divert people's attention from its "dirty politics". He said BJP governments in several States have supported women through their stipend plans.

L-G asks DDA to continue with PM-UDAY camps

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI



Delhi L-G V.K. Sasena

Lieutenant-Governor V.K. Sasena has directed the Delhi Development Authority to extend single-window camps for the PM-UDAY beneficiaries up to March 2025, Raj Niwas officials said on Thursday.

The camps were held on weekends between November 30 and December 12 for residents of the city's unauthorised colonies to secure ownership rights under the Pradhan Mantri - Unauthorised Colonies in Delhi Awas Adhikar Yojana.

"At camps, 152 conveyance deeds and author-

isation slips were issued and 283 properties registered by the sub-registrars, providing final ownership rights to the property holders," an official said.

A total of 19,313 applicants visted the camps, of which 3,599 were new, they added.

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Delhi City	24 08
Safdarjung	24 08
Palam	22 09

Delhi Palam Today
16°C Morning will be cold with shallow to moderate fog. Few spells of light to moderate rain and thunder shower with gusty winds to occur.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
18°C Morning will be cold. Day will be slight cool with cloudy sky. Night will be cool and foggy. Mostly dry weather to prevail.

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Timings	
DELHI	
FRIDAY, DEC. 27	
RISE 07:13	SET 17:33
RISE 03:49	SET 14:26
SATURDAY, DEC. 28	
RISE 07:13	SET 17:33
RISE 04:47	SET 15:07
SUNDAY, DEC. 29	
RISE 07:13	SET 17:34
RISE 05:47	SET 15:56

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Corrigendum					
Subject: Amendment to Advertisement No. SYS-CSS-CSSP-0008-2021-36846 dated 17th December 2024					
In reference to Advertisement No. SYS-CSS-CSSP-0008-2021-36846 dated 17th December 2024, for the posts of Head of Sports and Exercise Science and Sports Medicine Doctor, the following amendment is hereby issued.					
Revised Age Criteria : Candidates applying for the afore-mentioned posts should not have completed the age of 64 years as on 31.01.2025.					
All other terms and conditions mentioned in the original advertisement shall remain unchanged.					
We regret any inconvenience caused and request all applicants to adhere to the revised criteria. For further details, please refer to the official notification on our website https://sports.odisha.gov.in/					
Deputy Secretary OIPR-29001/10035/2425					

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Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated Cost (in Rs.)	Starting Date for downloading Bid	Earnest Money (in Rs.)	Deadline for Submission of Bid
1.	Restoration of Rain damages on Mandi Kamand Kataula Bajoura road in Km 0/00 to 51/00, (Portion from Km 0/00 to 35/00). (Sub Head:- Construction of Retaining walls, Breast walls, Wire Create Walls, 2.00 mtr. R.C.C. Slab Culvert, Road Side Drain, Parapets & Crash Barrier at R.D. 00/00 to 35/00).	4,50,16,085.15	30.12.2024 at 11:00 A.M.	9,00,300/-	09.01.2025 upto 1:00 A.M.
2.	Restoration of Rain damages on Mandi Kamand Kataula Bajoura road in Km 0/00 to 51/00, (Portion from Km 35/00 to 51/00). (Sub Head:- Construction of Retaining walls, Breast walls, Wire Create Walls, Hume pipe Culvert, Road Side Drain, Parapets, Metalling & Tarring & Crash Barrier at R.D. 35/00 to 51/00).	5,54,48,707.16	30.12.2024 at 11:00 A.M.	11,09,000/-	09.01.2025 upto 1:00 A.M.
The tender shall be awarded to the lowest bidder without any negotiation if his tendered amount is within limit of (+) 5% of the amount put to tender, otherwise the tender will be cancelled and recalled.					
The bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the department website www.hptenders.gov.in .					
Executive Engineer, Mandi Division No. I, H.P.P.W.D., at Padhar Distt. Mandi (H.P.) On behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh.					

Govt. of Bihar Bihar Urban Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. A Government of Bihar Undertaking					
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(Through e-procurement mode only- www.eproc2.bihar.gov.in) NIT.No. BUIDCO/ Yo- 2999 / 2024 -32					
Bihar Urban Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (BUIDCo) invites bids from eligible experienced Firms / Contractors / Agencies / Bidders registered in appropriate category in any government organisation/PSUs for execution of works as given below :-					
Sl. No.	Name of Work	Estimated Cost (INR)	Bid Security (EMD) (INR)	Bid Document Cost (INR)	Bid Processing Fee with GST (INR)
1	2	3	4	5	6
A	Construction of Vishwanath Park in Begusarai Municipal Corporation under AMRUT 2.0 in Bihar	1,72,44,721.00	3,45,00,000	17,700.00	As per Eproc2
B.	Date of Downloading of Bid Document	From 01.01.2025 to 22.01.2025 up to 03:00 P.M. Through website : www.eproc2.bihar.gov.in .			
C.	Place & Date of pre-bid meeting	Date-08.01.2025, Time 03.00 P.M; BUIDCo Office, West Boring Cannal Road (Rajapul) Patna, Bihar, India, PIN-800 001			
D.	Last date of Receiving Queries	Date-08.01.2025, Time 05.00 P.M. Query may be send on e-mail id pdhqbuidco@gmail.com No Query will be entertained after the last date of submission of queries & other than the given e-mail.			
E.	Last Date and time for uploading of bid.	Date-22.01.2025 up to 03:00 P.M. Through website : www.eproc2.bihar.gov.in .			
F.	Last Date and time for submission of hard copy of EMD	Date-23.01.2025, Time 03.00 P.M			
G.	Time & Date of opening technical bids	Date-23.01.2025, Time 04.00 P.M			
H.	Time & date of opening financial bids	To be communicated later on.			
I.	Place of opening of Bid	Through website : www.eproc2.bihar.gov.in .			
J.	Periods of bids validity	120 Days.			
K.	Officer inviting bids	Chief General Manager, BUIDCo			
T.	Further details of works can be obtained from the office of Chief General Manager, BUIDCo For clarification, regarding the E-tendering process, please contact e-procurement, Help Desk Address: ijunction services limited RJ Complex, 2nd Floor, Canara Bank Campus, Khajuria, Ashiana Road, P.S. - Shastri Nagar, Patna 800 014, Bihar, Telephone no. 0612-2523006, Mobile No - 07542028164.				
#West Boring Cannal Road (Rajapul) Patna, Bihar, India, PIN-800 001 (Tel: +91 612-2558412, Web: http://buidco.in , Email: mdbuidco@gmail.com)					
For further details please visit : www.state.bihar.gov.in/prdbihar					
सुरक्षित जीवन अपनाओ, अपनी नियमित एच.आई.पी. जी. करोगा।					
Chief General Manager, BUIDCo, Patna.					

IN BRIEF



Dalit, OBC outfits in Gujarat to protest against Shah's remarks'

Dalit, Adivasi, and Other Backward Classes outfits in Gujarat will join the December 28 nationwide protests against Union Home Minister Amit Shah for his remarks on Babasaheb Ambedkar in Parliament, Congress MLA Jignesh Mevani said on Thursday. A non-political rally will be held by Dalit, Adivasi, and OBC outfits from Khokhra area till the statue of Ambedkar in Sarangpur on December 28 to seek Mr. Shah's resignation, said Mr. Mevani, the working president of the Gujarat Congress. The Home Minister, while speaking in Parliament, had claimed it was now a "fashion to invoke Ambedkar's name", Mr. Mevani said. PTI

M.P. govt. to translocate 15 tigers to 3 States, says official

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has directed the translocation of 15 tigers from Madhya Pradesh to Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha, an official said on Thursday. As per the order, 12 tigresses and three tigers will be handed over to the three States after taking permission from the Centre, he said. No time period has been specified for the process of shifting the felines. Under the process, the big cats will be translocated from the Bandhavgarh, Pench, and Kanha tiger reserves, the official said. Six tigresses and two tigers will be translocated to Chhattisgarh, while Rajasthan will get four tigresses. Besides, a tiger and two tigresses will be sent to Odisha, he said. PTI

Families of four T.N. fishermen stuck in Kuwait seek govt. help



Awaiting repatriation: Family members of the fishermen who were arrested in Kuwait in 2023. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

It has been a harrowing year for the families of four Tamil Nadu fishermen arrested in Kuwait.

Muniya Jothi, sister of 21-year-old M. Chandru, one of the four fishermen, endures the daily heartbreak of her five-year-old asking, "Where is mama?" Chandru, the youngest of the group, only studied up to 9th grade, never travelled far from home, and learnt to sign his name only when the Kuwait opportunity came up.

The fishermen – Karthik, 23, Jesu, 44, M. Chandru, 21, and S. Vinoth Kumar, 27 – went to Kuwait in September 2023 on contract to work in the fishing industry. With Jesu, the eldest, having prior overseas work experience, their families felt reassured.

For three months, they worked diligently, but the last time their families

heard from them under normal circumstances was on December 5, 2023, before they embarked on a boat with an Egyptian captain. The same day, they were arrested by the Kuwait Coast Guard for transporting illegal substances. Since then, the men have faced immense challenges in defending themselves. Their families maintain they were deceived by malicious parties.

Speaking at a press event organised by the Tamil Nadu Domestic Work-

ers Welfare Association, the families detailed their struggles and appealed for government intervention. "We have no resources left. Our loved ones are innocent, and we need help to bring them back," says Krishna Anandhi, Jesu's wife.

Vinod Kumar's mother, Nainar Ammal, who is in her late 60s, is equally distraught. "I have three sons, but he is the only one who cared for me. Now, I work as a domestic help to survive," she says.

Patnaik demands thorough probe into EVM 'discrepancies'

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Former Chief Minister and Biju Janata Dal (BJD) supremo Naveen Patnaik, known for his restrained public statements, has called for an inquiry into alleged discrepancies in EVM voting during the 2024 Assembly and Lok Sabha elections.

Mr. Patnaik said that his party lost the elections as it could not effectively counter 'lies and false promises' allegedly spread by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the social media. He was speaking at party's 28th foundation day celebrations here on Thursday.

When asked about his party's submission of a petition highlighting suspected electoral discrepancies in the last elections with Election Commission of India, the veteran leader remarked, "It certainly seems to point in that direction."

This matter must be examined carefully and thoroughly. I don't understand why the BJP is worried about EVMs. No one has accused them of anything yet. This needs to be investigated." He said his party is in favour of use of ballot papers in elections.

Serious concerns' The BJD on Monday had raised serious concerns about alleged discrepancies in the voting patterns observed during the 2024 general and Assembly elections. The party's claims came after analysis of voting data of Election Commission of India (ECI).

Reflecting on his party's loss, which ended its uninterrupted rule in Odisha, Mr. Patnaik stated, "We have neither lost the polls nor the trust of the people. The BJP has come to power by misleading the public with a barrage of lies."

When ex-PM turned nostalgic after visiting Panjab University

Press Trust of India
CHANDIGARH

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had turned nostalgic after visiting Panjab University's (PU) Department of Economics in Chandigarh over six years ago, recalling his journey there as a student and later as a senior lecturer.

After delivering the first S.B. Rangnekar Memorial Lecture on 'The Seventieth Anniversary of our Independence – Strengthening the roots of our Democracy', Singh and his wife Gursharan Kaur had in April 2018 visited the Economics Department. He had also interacted with students and faculty members there.

On Thursday, Vice-Chancellor Renu Vig said, "We are deeply saddened by the passing of our esteemed alumnus and former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh."

"His legacy as an academic, economist and leader will forever remain etched in the history of Panjab University and our nation," Prof. Vig, the university's first woman Vice-Chancellor, said.

She said Singh's visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to the nation have left an indelible mark on India's progress.

His contributions to academia and public service remain a source of immense pride for Panjab University, Prof. Vig said.

"We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones. May his soul rest in peace," she added.

The former Prime Minister donated large number of books from his personal collection to the Guru Teg Bahadur Library at PU.

Punjab bandh call getting good support: farmer leader

Press Trust of India
CHANDIGARH

Punjab farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher on Thursday said the call for a 'Punjab bandh' on December 30 is getting good support from various sections.

The decision to give a call for the bandh was taken last week by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM).

To ensure the success of the bandh, SKM (N) and KMM convened a meeting of transporters and traders at Khanaura protest site on Thursday. "The bandh will be observed from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. on December 30," Mr. Pandher said.

The culinary powerhouse: biryani is a ₹10,000-crore market in Tamil Nadu

Sangeetha Kandavel
CHENNAI

The biryani market in Tamil Nadu is a culinary powerhouse, with a staggering valuation at ₹10,000 crore. Those tracking the food business in Tamil Nadu explained that the organised market is pegged at ₹2,500 crore while the unorganised market stands at over ₹7,500 crore. Chennai is the largest market for biryani with 50% of business coming from this region.

Prominent players in the biryani industry in Tamil Nadu, include Dindigul Thalappakatti, Junior Kuppanna, Buhari, Anjappar, Salem RR Biryani, Ponnuwamy, and SS Hyderabad Biryani, among others. In addition to these well-known brands, there is a vast network of mid-sized establishments operating un-

der various names. Furthermore, countless push-cart vendors serve biryani throughout the day and night, contributing to the widespread availability of this popular dish.

"The primary regions known for biryani in Tamil Nadu are the Kongu region – the Coimbatore belt, as well as the Ambur and Dindigul regions. Some of the famous styles are Chennai Muslim biryani (basmati rice), Kongu biryani (Seeraga samba rice), Chettinad biryani, Ambur style biryani, Wallajah style biryani and Dindigul style biryani," explained Balachandar R., executive director, Junior Kuppanna who has done an extensive research on the biryani market in Tamil Nadu. Junior Kuppanna sells around 1.2 million biryanis per year.



There are countless push-cart vendors serving biryani, contributing to the widespread availability of this popular dish.

With 65 outlets across Tamil Nadu, the famous Mount Road Bilal, one of the biggest players in this space sells around 5,000 to 6,000 kg of biryani per day. It's Managing Director, Sathish D. Nagasamy, said that the numbers vary depending on festival days and weekends. Mr. Nagasamy pointed out that the unorganised market is

growing year on year. Abdul Rahim, founder of Mount Road Bilal, said: "I'm not a quantity player - I focus more on quality and we cook biryani every two hours and then serve. We don't make it in the morning and keep it the whole day. We make around 300-400 kg of biryani each day," he added.

Price points for biryani

vary widely depending on the establishment and type of meat (chicken, mutton). At roadside shops, a chicken biryani can be priced as low as ₹100 per plate, with a quarter plate available for ₹60. Mutton biryani is typically priced higher due to the cost of the meat. Popular brands offer biryani in the range of ₹250 to ₹400 per plate. Some premium brands sell biryani at ₹600 per plate, while high-end hotels and restaurants charge over ₹1,600 per plate. Those tracking the food business say that despite the pricing, mutton is the clear favourite while chicken is considered a pocket-friendly option.

Taj Coromandel's Gilli Biryani, crafted over two decades ago, remains a favourite choice among biryani enthusiasts in Chennai. "Gilli Biryani's demand

is very impressive and high, especially considering its signature status at Taj Coromandel's Anise in Chennai. On a regular day, we sell approx. 60 to 70 portions, including mutton, chicken and vegetarian options," said Ronald Menezes, Hotel Manager, Taj Coromandel.

'Biryani mountain' According to a report by Swiggy titled, 'How Chennai Swiggy'd in 2024', "The city devoured 46.1 lakh Chicken Biryani. Enough for a biryani mountain. A user laid the foundation of this mountain by ordering 66 of them in one single order." This statistic is based on data collected from January 01, 2024 to November 22, 2024.

Given the growing demand for biryani, start-ups and masala brands are also

seizing the opportunity to capitalise on this booming market. Chennai-based start up Cookd is selling about 30k Biryani kits every month, that helps make Biryani for about 1 lakh people every month. "We wanted to build a product that people could use almost every week and in most of the households biryani is a weekend ritual. This influenced us to create our biryani kits," said Aathitiyan, founder and CEO, Cookd.

The founder of a popular masala brand in Tamil Nadu said that he was currently working on introducing five different biryani masala packs in the coming year. Whether enjoyed at a modest roadside stall or a sophisticated restaurant, biryani in Tamil Nadu is not just a meal for food lovers..... it's an experience!

Oppn. targets DMK govt. over Chennai sexual assault case

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

AIADMK workers staging a protest in Chennai on Thursday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ment run Anna University with such security lapses? How was a history-sheet allowed to enter the campus?" Mr. Palaniswami asked.

BJP workers detained

The police also detained BJP functionaries, led by former Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundarajan, who attempted to stage a protest at Valluvarkottam. They were lodged in a private wedding hall.

BJP State president K. Annamalai posted on social media that the identity of the complainant had been compromised. "The DMK government failed to protect the complainant's personal details as the First Information Report (FIR) was leaked. Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has to take full responsibility for the crime."

(With inputs from PTI)

According to a Panjab University statement, Singh's journey there was marked by excellence and dedication. Giving details, the statement, while going into his academic achievements, said he did Bachelors degree in Economics (1952), Masters degree in Economics (1954), standing first in his class.

About his faculty contributions, the university said he was a Senior Lecturer (1957-1959), Reader in Economics (1959-1963) and Professor of Economics (1963-1965).



Manmohan Singh

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Malayalam bids adieu to MT, the master storyteller



Police personnel giving a gun salute to M.T. Vasudevan Nair before he was cremated in Kozhikode on Thursday. K. RAGESH

The Hindu Bureau
KOZHIKODE

The mortal remains of M.T. Vasudevan Nair, a colossus who straddled Malayalam literature and cinema for around six decades, were consigned to flames here on Thursday evening with full State honours.

The State government has declared a two-day mourning from Thursday.

The writer-director, popularly called MT, passed away at the age of 91 on Wednesday night after being hospitalised for around 10 days.

The body was later taken to "Sitar", his house at Nadakkavu in the city.

Tributes pour in
Numerous visitors arrived at the residence from the morning to pay homage to their beloved writer.

Indian Union Muslim League State president Panakkad Syed Sadikali Shihab Thangal and actor Mohanlal were among the first to arrive there, along with director T.K. Rajeev Kumar. They were followed

by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Goa Governor P.S. Sreedharan Pillai, Assembly Speaker A.N. Shamseer, and Ministers K.N. Balagopal, Saji Cherian, P.A. Mohamed Riyas, M.B. Rajesh, P. Prasad, K. Krishnankutty, Kadannappally Ramachandran, and A.K. Saheedran. Directors and actors joined thousands of others in paying tributes.

Around 4.35 p.m., the body was taken to "Smrithi Patham", the crematorium of the Kozhikode Corporation. A large number of people had gathered there too. The police then gave a guard of honour. MT's daughter Aswathi, nephews T. Satheesan and M.T. Ramakrishnan, and relatives led the funeral rituals around 5.30 p.m. Later, a condolence meeting was held on the crematorium premises.

Condoling MT's demise, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said in a social media post that he was the face of modern Malayalam literature, and he would be hailed across many generations for his contributions.

Mr. Siddaramaiah recalled the contribution of

Deshpande to the freedom struggle and the 1924 session. "Deshpande, the proud son of Hudali village near Belagavi, was known as the 'Lion of Karnataka' for his unwavering stance against the British. He was a supporter of division of States on linguistic lines, and dreamt of a unified Karnataka. He served as AICC general secretary in the 1920s. Born in a rich, landed family, he chose to live a simple life as a khadi activist," he said.

Deshpande memorial
The Chief Minister also inaugurated the Gangadhar Deshpande's Memorial Bhavan in Belagavi. The memorial has been built to commemorate the Gandhian and freedom fighter who organised the 1924 session that was chaired by Mahatma Gandhi. The hall is built on an area of around 15 guntas at a cost of ₹1.58 crores. The premises has a hall, a bust of Mr. Deshpande, a photo gallery and a garden.

Mr. Siddaramaiah re-

called the contribution of

Shivakumar inaugurated Asmitte Khadi Fair 2024 on Sardar's High School Grounds in Belagavi.

Women members of self-help groups (SHGs)

from various districts are

showcasing their products

at the fair. A total of 150

stalls have been set up.

They include 10 food stalls

and 50 for Khadi products.

The exhibition will be

open to the public from

10.30 a.m. to 9.30 p.m. ev-

ery day from December 26

to January 4. Entry is free.

Groups will present cul-

tural programmes every

evening from 6.30 p.m. to

9 p.m. Members of SHGs

are running various 'Akka Cafes' at the venue.

Earlier, the Chief Minis-

ter paid respects to Army

soldiers killed in an acci-

dent. He placed wreaths

on the caskets containing

the bodies of Subedar

Dayananda Tirakannanvar

and Mahesh Marigonda at

the Army War Memorial.

He announced that the

State government would

provide all assistance to

the families of the de-

ceased soldiers. Describing

the deaths in the accident

in J&K as a "very painful"

incident, he said he shared

the pain of the families of

the deceased.

his laconic style, he

would say, "Let's work to-

gether within our

limitations."

Though a man of few

words and unsmiling,

people used to see MT at his

cheerful best whenever

he sat to initiate children

into the world of letters.

He may have initiated

hundreds of children

since his association with

Thunchanparamba. "Still

he always displayed the

curiosity and anxiety of a

beginner when a child is

brought to him on the

day of Vidyarambham,"

says Mr. Rajanbabu.

Once asked about

what he wanted to be-

come in his afterlife, the

poet replied: "I am not

sure about afterlife. If

there is one, I want to be-

come a writer, a poet who

loves his metres."

MT used to write to pe-

ople, including celebri-

ties, on behalf of Thun-

chan Memorial Trust. In

the past, he would

ask for a sum of money

and national borders be-

cause of MT. Most cele-

brated writers in the

country and abroad visit-

ed Thunchanparamba in

response to Nair's invite.

He started his association

with Thunchanparamba

by donating one of his top

award sums to it. He used

to set a precondition be-

fore those who invited him for talks to donate to

Thunchanparamba.

Former Minister for

Culture T.K. Ramakris-

nan once said: "If MT

raises such a demand, peo-

ple will be happy to

make the payment to

Thunchan and get him as

their guest. If other writ-

ers say so, no one will

bother."

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SPOTLIGHT



Players inside Mohammed Naeem Ansari Hero Boys Carrom Club-cum-Naeem Coaching Academy in Old Delhi, where games start at 7 p.m. and sometimes wind up only by 4 a.m. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Pocketing the queen, and other carrom connections

The board game is a part of every Indian city's unexplored cultural life. Its universal appeal has kept handmade carrom board manufacturers in business. Many of them migrated from Sialkot, now in Pakistan, to Meerut in Uttar Pradesh post-Partition. When the sports market was hit by the pandemic, carrom makers thrived and continue to remain buoyant, finds **Soma Basu**

In Old Delhi's labyrinthine streets of Sadar Bazar, where spices and silver jewellery are sold in wholesale markets, noise is a default setting. The best way to get there is by travelling on the Delhi Metro, and then in a (back-breaking) autorickshaw ride over potholes. The "multitudes" that Walt Whitman speaks about can also be used to describe Delhi's Mughal quarter: traffic and cows dodge each other, people grab a bite on the roadside, thick electricity cables hang low, and there are loud negotiations for money and space.

Off Idgah Road, where it is best to walk because the lane narrows to single-scooter width, a back-street leads to a ramshackle building. Within its 16x16-square-foot hall, there is an unexpected quiet. Behind the closed doors of the Mohammed Naeem Ansari Hero Boys Carrom Club-cum-Naeem Coaching Academy, three dozen men pore over carrom boards illuminated by bulbs hanging over them. Wooden coins – in ivory and black – that dart across the boards make the only sound as players focus on their next move.

There are about 30 carrom clubs in the city, registered with the Delhi Carrom Association, mostly across the Walled City near the Jama Masjid, Ballimaran, Chawri Bazaar, Lal Kuan, and Paharganj; besides a few in Wazirabad in west Delhi and Seelampur in east Delhi. Most of them, though not the Ansari boys' club, are 40-50 years old, and operate out of crammed low-ceiling rooms. To play competitively, clubs must be registered.

"Over the last three years, the number of clubs has doubled and the membership multiplied manifold," says Mohd. Naeem Ansari, who runs three carrom clubs in Sadar Bazar. "Until the early 1990s, there were about 60 clubs in the city; by the 2000s, hardly a dozen were left," he says. The nature of entertainment had changed, with multiplexes and mall-crawl culture thriving. The low patronage of the informally played game copied itself out in towns and cities across India until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

With historical roots in India, carrom is today played in living rooms, public spaces, clubs, cafes, game halls of school and colleges, and recreation rooms of hotels and offices across 75 countries. "It is an enthralling game with no age bar and provides both entertainment and quality time with family and friends. There is an element of competition too," says Rashmi Kumari, three-time world champion and winner of 11 national titles. Kumari, who works with the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, a public sector company, says people do not realise that there are those who play it at a highly competitive level.

As per export data from the Commerce and Industry Ministry, ₹39 crore worth of Indian carrom boards were exported between April 2022 and January 2024. There was a 6% growth between just February and August 2024.

Crafting carrom boards

Ansari's observation about the revival of interest in carrom is reflected 80 km away in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, where *kaarigars* (craftpeople) make carrom boards. "Our boards are for everyone who plays carrom for fun and bonding," says Aman Grover, who runs his grandfather's 55-year-

RASHMI KUMARI
Three-time carrom world champion, winner of 11 national titles

old Swati Sports in Bansipura, which is dotted with shops selling sports equipment.

In 2022, Grover says, his annual turnover of ₹4 crore was three times more than the previous year's. Then, making carrom boards was seasonal, doing good business six months a year and peaking during the summer, vacations, and festivals like Ramzan. "Now, the spike in demand keeps us busy even during the challenging monsoon and winter months," he says.

Meerut was one of the places where families fled Sialkot during the Partition settled. Now, people who manufacture carrom boards – a skill they brought back from Sialkot – live in Surajkund Colony, Sports Colony, and Gandhi Nagar. Nearly 78 years ago, they had set up small enterprises in their backyards, manufacturing all kinds of sports goods.

"Initially, there were hundreds of us here; now only 50 families are left that make carrom boards," says Madan Bhatia, whose family business was set up by his grandfather in Sialkot in 1926. His workshop in Surajkund Colony buzzes with the skills of daily wage workers who make 250-300 carrom boards a day.

The corridor to Bhatia's office is stacked, Jenga-like, with towers of 16x16-inch plyboards that come from Kolkata, and kikar (babul wood) frames from Rajasthan. From here, the sky is just a ribbon. In the mini factory, carrom boards are being assembled manually. Four pieces of kikar wood are cut to make a square frame, then glued, and clamped with iron fasteners.

"Earlier, we used nails, but now use corrugated fasteners as they join the corners better," says Deepak Kumar, who has been working in the factory for 15 years. The frame is then layered with *marammat* (a mixture of chalk powder and a wood adhesive) and smoothed before it is painted black, varnished, and left to dry.

In the next section, the ply, already coated

with a sealer and dried to make it waterproof, is smoothed with sandpaper and fitted into the frame. Roshan Singh focuses on the rotating cutter to drill holes for the four corner pockets in less than a minute. He has done this for 20 years.

Bhatia says until a decade ago, skilled artisans held an important position in the carrom-making team as the black-and-red marking on the playing surface was hand-painted on each board. "It was time-consuming. Stencilling has made the process quicker," he explains.

The next step is to paste the back support or the *chaakdi*, which is sourced from the wood market in Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, on to each prepared board. Bharat Kumar then attaches the crochet pockets made by women at home in Uttar Pradesh's Tejgarhi, 4 km away.

His sister-in-law, Rajeshwari, earns ₹5 for each pocket she crochets. Depending on her domestic chores, she does 20 dozen or so in a week. Now, he fears her small earnings may go away because factory owners have started importing nylon pocket nets from China for ₹3 a dozen. "Handmade crochet pockets are better and it is easy to hammer bulletin board pins on them around the four holes," he says.

Board intelligence

Carrom board-making is a lengthy process; at each stage of its making it has to be sun-dried well so that the frame and the board do not warp, bloat, or bubble over time. It takes at least five persons to make one carrom board, and inside Meerut's small factories, daily wage workers put in shifts of eight hours each. They are paid between ₹32 and ₹100 per piece depending on the type of work they do and the size of the board.

"It takes two months for a carrom board to get to the market for sale," says Bhatia, supervising the day's consignment of 100 boards, each packed with carrom coins procured from Rajkot and



A daily wage worker making carrom boards at a factory in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh. ZEESHAN AKHTAR



Over the last three years, the number of clubs has doubled and the membership multiplied

MOHD. NAEEM ANSARI
Runs three carrom clubs in Sadar Bazar, Delhi

Vadodara in Gujarat, and carrom powder that is produced locally. His boards will be delivered to Reliance stores in a neighbouring district.

"The most-bought size for playing at home is 16x16 inches," says Deepak Aggarwal, who owns a shop in the market. Selling at ₹180 each five years ago, they now cost ₹250 given the rising cost of raw materials. Boards smaller than this usually have a two-year life. Depending on the order, carrom manufacturers in Meerut make the boards in sizes from 16x16 inches to 42x42 inches.

"After COVID, there has been year-round demand. We would sell 300 to 350 pieces a month in the hectic six-month period, which would drop to 125 pieces a month for the rest of the year," says Abhishek Jalan, Aggarwal's business partner.

"The abundance of orders is good money, but it also means working long hours in difficult weather conditions. The wood has to be always well protected from water and dampness," says Manohar Lal, a skilled solo manufacturer, who makes his own boards, roughly two dozen a week, and sells them only in the local market.

Taking it abroad

In 1947, thousands of skilled craftsmen had migrated across the border and established sports goods manufacturing units predominantly in Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Meerut, Moradabad, and Mumbai. While Punjab and Maharashtra grew as the hub for carrom boards used in competitions the world over, Meerut's small manufacturers remained inundated with opportunities for handmade, indoor games.

Arjun Kohli, 28, is the CEO of Stag, which was founded by his great-grandfather Arjun Das Kohli in 1922 in Sialkot to make sports equipment for schools. Though the company today is a trusted brand in table tennis, the demand for carrom boards in domestic markets and overseas, including the U.S., the U.K., and Europe, where the Indian diaspora lives in large numbers, has made Arjun stick with it.

He is a regular supplier of high-quality, medium-density fibreboard carrom boards to Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE; and within India to Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and the northeastern States. On an average, 3,000 boards move out of his factory once every three weeks, he says. Arjun makes them on white boards, laminated particle boards, and high-density plywood that cost between ₹2,500 and ₹12,000. "The price depends on the thickness of the plain surface, thickness and width of the border, the finishing touches, and the quality of screen printing and polishing," he says.

With carrom becoming a part of many Indian celebrations in recent years, Arjun began innovating. Last Deepavali, he launched a convertible carrom board, a folding model that also turns into a mini table tennis set and comes on wheels for easy mobility. For Ramzan, he made boards with extra pockets on the frames to hold teacups, and adjustable stands for playing comfort and posture. This Deepavali, he created a black board with neon coins for Australian and U.S. markets.

Grover caters to weekly orders of 50 pieces of 32x32-inch boards, and 80 pieces of 16x16-inch boards from Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Afghanistan, and Iran. Bhatia sends 100 pieces a month to Nepal and also receives bulk orders from Yemen, Malaysia, and Qatar.

Vivek Narayan, former secretary general of the All India Carrom Federation, says despite India being among the top playing carrom nations in the world, and a quality exporter of carrom boards, the game has not been elevated the way chess has. However, he says because players can apply for government jobs and university scholarships using carrom wins under the sports quota, it holds value. "Multiple carrom competitions at district and State levels, the national league tournaments, and world championships have catapulted carrom to a recognised tabletop sport. The live-streaming of carrom tournaments on YouTube is slowly making a difference," he adds.

Going clubbing

Back inside Delhi's carrom clubs, the games typically begin at 7 p.m. and go on until the crack of dawn. Mohsin Qureshi, 62, who plays competitive veteran tournaments, says the clubs are helping produce better players. "A decade ago, the clubs collectively produced barely two teams to play in the annual State tournament. Today, Delhi boasts 128 players at the inter-State level," he says.

Faiz Qureshi, 15, was ranked third in the National Junior Championship held in February this year in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. The Class 11 student of N.P. Boys Senior Secondary School, Gole Market, has been practising at Ansari's coaching academy with one of the seniormost coaches, Haji Swalin, who started playing carrom in 1948. "I used to occasionally play carrom at home with my father, but really got into it during COVID. It helped me wean myself off mobile phone games," says Faiz. Now, he says, many of his schoolmates enjoy a game of carrom more than making and watching reels.

Khubei Qureishi, 13, and Siddarth Ujjainwal, 15, have joined Ansari's academy with five other children to learn and upskill their game. For a monthly fee of ₹500, Ansari gives them a three-hour class daily from 4 p.m. He also serves them some light refreshments as the children come straight from school.

"Coaching by veteran players and multiple district-level tournaments round the year give them enough opportunities to prove their mettle in the game," says Ansari.

There are also carrom players who walk in after midnight just for a round. Ansari charges them ₹20 per game. "On an average, newcomers take 40 minutes to an hour to finish a rally; I keep the club open until 4 a.m. daily," he says.



An avoidable tragedy

India must take measures to reform crowd management

As tragic as it is, India is arguably the country with the highest number of stampedes and resultant injuries and fatalities. Data from the National Crime Records Bureau reveal that between 1996 and 2022, India recorded 3,935 stampede incidents, resulting in more than 3,000 deaths. These numbers show a chronic failure in ensuring public safety during religious festivals, political rallies, and celebrity appearances. Religious gatherings account for a significant proportion of these tragedies. In 2011, in Sabarimala, 106 people died on a narrow pathway. In 2013, during the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, 36 people were killed at a railway station due to overcrowding. Political rallies have also proven deadly – in 2014, more than 30 people were killed in a stampede at Gandhi Maidan in Patna. While stampede fatalities during celebrity appearances have been rare, they point to the dangerous combination of fan fervour and poor planning.

During a promotional event for the film *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, at Hyderabad's Sandhya Theatre, a "surprise" appearance by Telugu actor Allu Arjun led to a stampede. A 35-year-old woman, Revathi, lost her life, and her eight-year-old son, Sri Tej, is battling for survival. Allu Arjun, the film's production team, and the director have collectively decided to donate ₹2 crore to Revathi's family. In the aftermath, blame has been laid on the Hyderabad police, the actor, and his production team. Questions surrounding protocol, security arrangements, and crowd control have yet to yield clear answers. Was the police force prepared for the size of the crowd? Did the actor and his production team respond swiftly when they got news of the stampede? Revathi's death points to a recurring pattern of negligence, mismanagement, and inadequate planning. India must prioritise crowd safety with actionable measures. It is important to consider spatial and thermal comfort when planning events and provide sufficient hydration facilities to prevent exhaustion. There should be multiple and clearly designated entry and exit points, capable of handling the projected crowd size. Emergency preparedness, including the deployment of medical aid, trained personnel, and effective chaos management protocols, must be a non-negotiable standard. India ought to ensure the safety of its citizens, whether they gather for faith, fandom, or politics.

Pushed through

Political expediency must not be allowed to drive mega projects

Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagging off work on the Ken-Betwa river interlinking project signalled that the national government is unbothered by the wide-ranging opposition to it. At a budgeted cost of ₹44,605 crore, the project will draw supposedly "excess" water away from the Ken river basin towards the Betwa river basin and thereon to farmland and human settlements. When the Union Cabinet approved the project in 2021, the National Green Tribunal was still deliberating a challenge to its green clearance. This was typical of the state's tendency to pardon businesses found in violation of environmental laws after they had made considerable investments. The government itself has ignored critical comments from experts, including members of an empowered committee appointed by the Supreme Court, and bypassed due process. The law has strict terms for allowing hydroelectric power projects in ecologically sensitive areas – the Daudhan Dam will be erected inside the Panna Tiger Reserve – but there is little evidence of such scrutiny. Work on the dam will destroy lakhs of trees and destabilise fragile ecosystems. The government has also refused to release hydrological data of the basins claiming they are sensitive by virtue of being subsets of the international Ganga basin.

That a river interlink will water fields and quench thirst is irrefutable, but for how long? Various studies have asserted that the Ken and the Betwa basins suffer floods and droughts together, that the subcontinent's rainfall and sedimentation patterns stand to be altered, and that the Betwa basin can be replenished more affordably by maintaining environmental flows and bolstering natural storage. The government's principal claim is that the Ken and the Betwa basins are respectively water-surplus and water-deficient. This is disingenuous: the Betwa basin is water-deficient strictly because it hosts several lakh hectares of irrigated cropland. Should the demand in the Ken basin increase, both areas will suffer. Experts have instead suggested that the project is a ploy to pacify the electorate in Bundelkhand – as its approval months ahead of State polls in Uttar Pradesh also suggested – and/or to improve water supply to reservoirs in the lower Betwa tanks to other upstream blockades. The project seems more the product of political expediency and self-image than current ecological sense. The more resources the government sinks into it, the more unlikely changing or reversing course will become in the face of adverse developments. When they come to pass, the responsibility and costs of mitigating the adverse consequences of this and other projects, including the recently launched Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal link, will fall to the people.

There is a famous dialogue from the Hindi film *3 Idiots*: "Dekho hum kahan nikal aaye aur tum kahan reh gaye" (See where we have reached and where you are left)." The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) cohorts could be saying this to the Communists in India.

The RSS will complete 100 years in 2025. The Communist movement in India is also a century old. The Left produced some of the most valiant fighters during the independence movement even as the Right was cosying up to the British empire. It is no secret that a large share of prisoners in Cellular Jail in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were Communists. Despite such a glorious past, the reality is that the Indian Left is now in a labyrinth.

Today, the Right clearly dominates Parliament: the BJP alone occupies 240 Lok Sabha seats. The Left parties combined occupy just eight seats. Compare this to the first general elections in independent India in 1951-1952 when the Congress was in power and the Communist Party of India (CPI) was the principal opposition party.

At present, the Right is also far ahead in terms of organisational strength and structure. The total membership of the Left parties (those who contest elections) is not more than 2 million and the mass organisations that they represent number around 30 million. The RSS alone has a membership of over 7 million, and the BJP has a membership of more than 100 million.

The trajectory of the Left and Right

The rise and fall of these political entities depends on various historical episodes, the foremost being changes in the social production system. The initial years of development after the 1950s saw the establishment of industrial towns and the emergence of a strong Left-leaning working class. Major cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Kolkata witnessed a robust presence of the Left, which was reflected in their political strength. However, the capitalist production system underwent significant changes after the mid-1980s. The rise of fragmented production, a diminishing organised working class, and the corresponding growth of informal sector workers pushed the Left out of the political scene.

Meanwhile, the Right maintained its presence through cultural interventions – a space largely neglected by the Left. Informal sector workers



Tikender Singh Panwar

Former Deputy Mayor, Shimla, and Member, Kerala Urban Commission. He served as political secretary of Sitaram Yechury

The Left is still fixated on the idea of revolution and is reluctant to embrace the multi-layered demands of electoral politics

became fertile ground for identity politics based on caste and religion. Consequently, there has been a parallel rise of the Right and the decline of the Left in Indian cities.

Another critical factor was the strong presence of the Left in rural India, driven by the 'land reforms' slogan and related movements. These were influential across the country for a long time. However, over the past few decades, newer classes within the peasantry have emerged and many of them have shifted towards the Right.

Beyond land reforms, the Left struggled to build sustainable layers of governance, except in West Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala. It remained overly preoccupied with the imminence of a revolution and the idea of capturing state power. It sidelined all other essential matters. And the revolution never materialised.

The national question is crucial for both the Left and the Right, though their approaches differ. For the Left, it involves uniting all democratic sections of society against external enemies, particularly imperialism. This was evident during the colonial period. However, in independent India, the narrative of a foreign enemy could not be sustained as strongly due to obvious reasons.

In contrast, for the Right, the national question is less about unity among the people and more about promoting the narrative of 'Hindu nationalism' against perceived 'others'. During the independence movement, this narrative did not gain much traction, as Indian nationalism against British rule was able to mobilise larger sections of society. Over the last few decades, however, this second form of 'nationalism' has increasingly dominated the narrative and has become more and more pronounced with time.

Another major element relates to the idea of modernism and the role of the Constitution. Undoubtedly, the Constitution is rooted in the finest modernist values of equity, secularism, socialism, and more. However, the nation-state remained influenced by feudal and semi-feudal values, which continue to shape its character.

Unlike in the West where modernism evolved out of the defeat or destruction of class feudalism, which was preceded by the Renaissance, religious reformation and enlightenment, in India no worthwhile renaissance could take place. The religious reformation that took place in some parts of the country could not disintegrate the caste system

which affected all Indian religions, and the Brahmanical enlightenment could not produce a new anti-caste equalitarian philosophy. India has a peculiar situation now, where the Constitution is far ahead of the polity and human values, which are still evolving. This gives fertile ground for the Right to make advances on both post-truth narratives and campaigns on religious and identity issues.

Leadership and organisational strategies

Jyoti Basu, former Chief Minister of West Bengal, once spoke of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s "historic blunder". He was referring to the party's decision not to allow him to be the Prime Minister after the 1996 Lok Sabha polls threw up a hung Parliament. His remark warrants deeper reflection. The Left is still fixated on the revolution and is reluctant to embrace the multi-layered demands of electoral politics. If the Left is unwilling to take full responsibility, why should people trust them with their votes? This disconnect is evident in Kerala, where voters support the Left in Assembly elections but turn to other parties in general elections. On the other hand, the Right maximises every electoral success to further its agenda. In every national and Assembly election over the last 10 years, it has been clear that the Right tries to ensure that no opportunity is left unutilised.

This divergence also highlights the contrasting leadership styles of the Left and Right. The generation of Left leaders who built mass movements and endured state repression is nearly gone. Leaders such as H.K.S. Surjeet, who spent over a decade in jail, represent a fading legacy. Today's Left leadership often emerges from educational institutions – a natural progression – but lacks the experience of building movements on the ground. In China, the Communist Party believes in building cultural consciousness. Even Xi Jinping was sent to work in the farmland for years away from his university. But this is not the case in India. On the other hand, leaders of the Right spend time with their cadre and help build leadership. Before he became Prime Minister, when Narendra Modi was in charge of States, he would constantly spend time with the cadre and even stay in their homes.

Globally, the pendulum of social and political ideologies has swung to the extreme Right and India is no exception. The question is: when will it swing back, and what will catalyse that shift?

How the Right overtook the Left in India

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Meanwhile, the Right maintained its presence through cultural interventions – a space largely neglected by the Left. Informal sector workers



Avishi Saini

Junior Research Fellow and a final year PhD candidate at JNU, specialising in Central Asia

India's over-reliance on China and possible global shifts after the U.S. regime change underscore the need for diversification.

– mainly antimony concentrates used in wind and solar energy production – have intensified China's concerns as both the largest producer and consumer of rare earths. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further exposed the risks of concentrated supply chains, resulting in India and Western nations to seek sustainable, diversified alternatives.

Why Kazakhstan is important

In this context, Kazakhstan, a close ally of India, offers a viable alternative to meet India's rare earth demands. Kazakhstan is among the richest sources of rare earths. With New Delhi's increasing engagement with Astana through the 'Connect Central Asia' policy and connectivity initiatives such as the International North-South Transport Corridor, a rare earth partnership could unlock significant economic benefits for both nations. Kazakhstan holds 15 of the 17 known rare earth elements and, with advanced extraction technologies, could dent China's dominance in this sector. Astana already has extraction agreements with Japan and Germany, while the U.S., South Korea, and the European Union have recently joined exploration and production deals to tap its rare earth reserves.

Kazakhstan's extraction of rare earth elements like dysprosium is projected to grow significantly between 2024 and 2029. The country's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev recently highlighted rare earths as the "new oil" for Kazakhstan's economy. The country hosts one of the world's three full-cycle beryllium and scandium factories, crucial for telecommunications, and is among the four global manufacturers of tantalum and niobium, essential for nuclear reactors and clean energy. Astana is expanding its role in rare earth and strategic mineral production with investments in tungsten, battery materials, and magnets. Its vast mining potential in rare earth

elements can complement India's efforts in this sector. The Kazakh government is prioritising advanced technologies and partnerships to strengthen its presence in emerging fields like lithium and heat-resistant alloys. Additionally, Kazakh metallurgical plants extract bismuth, antimony, selenium, and tellurium, and use imported technologies to produce gallium from alumina and indium from polymetallic ores, all of which are essential for renewable energy production.

The way forward

India's COP29 pledge to achieve 500 GW of renewable energy by 2030 highlights the importance of rare earth elements like dysprosium in advancing clean energy technologies. India lacks capacity across the rare earth supply chain but plans a 400% increase in mining output over the next decade.

India's over-reliance on China and possible global shifts after the U.S. regime change underscore the need for diversification. India-Kazakhstan collaboration can enhance India's resource security, reduce dependence on China, and support sustainability by procuring rare earth through domestic extraction and import sources through partners in closer proximity. Apart from India's direct connectivity challenges with Kazakhstan, there is a lack of necessary extraction technologies in both countries. Nevertheless, the 'India-Central Asia Rare Earths Forum', proposed by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval during the second India-Central Asia Summit in Astana, aims to boost partnerships and private sector investment, potentially combating these challenges. It could facilitate bilateral training, joint mining ventures, shared geological data and expertise, sustainable extraction practices, and create a regional market to reduce reliance on China.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A literary legend

The demise of M.T. Vasudevan Nair marks the end of a glorious era in Malayalam literature ("M.T. favourite storyteller of modern Kerala, no more", December 26). His magnum opus, *Randamoozham*, is a masterful retelling of the Mahabharata from the perspective of Bhima, the most overlooked character among the five Pandavas. Similarly, his portrayal of Chathiyar Chandu as a hero filled with love and compassion challenged the conventional depiction of him as a cheat. Among his numerous works, *Nalukettu*, a timeless classic, holds a

special place in the Malayalam literary landscape. His characters echoed the voices of the poor and the marginalised. A master storyteller, eminent writer, renowned director, powerful orator, and editor, M.T. was a multifaceted personality. His passing is a tremendous loss to Malayalam literature, cinema, and the media.

T.N. Venugopalan
Kochi

I read M.T. Vasudevan Nair's *Randamoozham* while I was recovering from dengue a year ago. M.T. was a literary genius. Before reading his masterpiece

work, I was introduced to him through films such as *Murapennu*, *Oru Vadakan Veeragatha*, *Vaishali*, and *Perumthachan*. His death has left a void in Malayalam literature and cinema.

Amil Varghese
Ernakulam

At the Kerala Literature Festival last January, M.T. expressed his concern over the deterioration of political leadership and the rise of hero worship among the masses. He rightly said, "Freedom is not the crumbs of generosity that the ruler throws at people."

A. Munee
Kannur

While many filmmakers often portrayed rape victims as outcasts or killed them on screen, M.T. asserted that survivors should never carry the burden of shame for crimes committed against them.

M. Jeyaram
Sholavandan

An assault and criticism
It is good that the police have arrested the man who assaulted the woman at Anna University. The Opposition has raised a hue and cry over this and has said that there is no law and order in Tamil Nadu ("One held for sexual assault on student at Anna

varsity", December 26). While the people welcome criticisms of the flaws and blunders of the government, is it necessary to carp and cavil at each and ever action of the ruling party?

Mani Nataraajan
Chennai

Partisan Governors
Arif Mohammed Khan as Governor was a disaster for Kerala. He acted more as an agent of the Centre than a constitutional functionary. That he has been shifted to poll-bound Bihar is ominous ("Ajay Bhalla named new Manipur Governor; Arif Mohammed Khan shifted to

Bihar", December 25). The Governor's office has degenerated into a slot for rewarding outdated and unwanted politicians. It is time to consider abolishing this post.

Manohar Alembath
Kannur

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Should the wealth tax be reinstated in India?

**PARLEY****Ajay Shah**
Senior Research Fellow and Co-founder Xkdr Forum**Rahul Menon**
Associate professor at the Jindal School of Government and Public Policy

At a recent panel discussion in New Delhi, French economist Thomas Piketty suggested that a wealth and inheritance tax be imposed on the super-rich in India, which, in turn, could fund health and education. India's Chief Economic Advisor, Anantha Nageswaran, opposed the idea, arguing that higher taxes could encourage fund outflows. Should the wealth tax be reinstated in India? Ajay Shah and Rahul Menon discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Samreen Wani. Edited excerpts:

Is it a good idea to reintroduce a wealth tax in India?

Ajay Shah: I'm not an enthusiast. We should never think about public policy from a standpoint of moral outrage. We should think about means and ends and the effectiveness by which certain objectives can be met. There are two kinds of difficulties. First, how are you going to measure the wealth of a person? If the government says that the measurement of wealth is the value of the assets of a person that are held in liquid assets like equities or debt, then people will get a strong bias in favour of holding assets like real estate and gold. In fact, it is harmful for the country when people emphasise holdings of real estate and gold because the productive assets of the economy are equities and the bonds. Second, people would just leave. If we say that we will tax the elite at a high rate, many will just leave and all the prospects of progress will get damaged.

Rahul Menon: It is time to start talking about it. Just announcing a wealth tax in a budget is not going to do anything. There needs to be a large institutional framework around it. There is a case for it right now simply because the levels of concentration of wealth are extremely high. I don't think it is a moral problem to call out the inequality right now. It is a fundamental development problem, because an increase in inequality reduces capabilities and opportunities for many people. We have a sophisticated and strong system right now to track economic activity. We have implemented it for people at the bottom half of the pyramid. I don't see why we can't start thinking about using it at the top, which is a smaller population.

India had a wealth tax before it was abolished in 2016-17, but the collections were less than 1% of the gross tax collections. The government had said that the cost of collection of the wealth tax was really high. What were the issues then?



A view of Mumbai. GETTY IMAGES

RM: Much of the problem was what afflicts most economies when they undertake something like that, which is, how do you define this wealth? How do you define who is the owner of this wealth? It is easy to shift my wealth from one form of holding to another. I exercise effective control and in name alone it is with someone else. So, that enables me to evade tax. These problems will continue to persist [if we impose a wealth tax again]. This problem has also affected the developed world. Collections from wealth taxes are very low. In much of the literature that has been motivated by Piketty's ideas, there are other interesting propositions that have come up to plug all these loopholes – have a comprehensive tax, don't distinguish between labour and capital, tax real estate at the same rate as equity assets, etc.

AS: I'm not convinced that inequality is an important problem for India. Growth is the only problem that we should focus on. All measures of well-being – infant mortality, female empowerment, or any measure of well-being – respond to growth alone. Redistribution never made a country better. There is no Marxian theory of value. There is only a market theory of value. So, a company is worth whatever a buyer is willing to pay for it. When there is a dislike of the elites, it creates unliveable countries and that is not a path to progress. So, we have really got to tamp down this rhetoric and get back to a more Gandhian approach. Let's live together, make a good country. That is about building prosperity rather than getting into warfare about distribution.

Piketty's work was based on data on income tax, consumption, wealth, national accounts, and rich lists, which might have issues, but those are not India-specific. How



We have a sophisticated and strong system to track economic activity. We have implemented it for people at the bottom half of the pyramid. I don't see why we can't start thinking about using it at the top, which is a smaller population

RAHUL MENON**can we address this problem of data issues to get better approximations of inequality?**

AS: At the upper end of the distribution, there is no hope of meaningful data. So, the field investigator is never going to get this data and people are not going to realistically report on their income. Household survey data really does not capture the upper end of the distribution. I don't know any other way to improve the data. There is the *Forbes* magazine ranking of the richest people in the world but that's not a description of a country.

RM: Yes, the surveys don't give you a true picture of what's happening at the top end. But there are ways. Piketty and other academics use the data from various wealth lists. Then, using economic techniques of interpolation, they combine these with surveys to get some amount of data over a period. Now it's very clear that these are approximations, but they do give us a picture. One of the most important ways to do it is through international collaboration. The U.S. has tried doing that by signing agreements with other economies to develop more transparency.

There are two main contentions against the wealth tax. The first is flight of capital and the second is that when certain thresholds are imposed, some people/organisations will be incentivised to stay below that, which will widen the gap between the bottom half and the top half. How do you respond to these?

RM: Yes, there may be flight of capital but there are some research papers that say that the scale of this is not too large in countries such as the U.K. and in Norway. In Norway, for instance, there is a lot to keep people there; there is a lot of public infrastructure. There is a reason to stay there even if your taxes rise. That is not the case in India. Wealth tax by itself means nothing unless it is used properly. So, the idea is to use this wealth tax and invest in health and education to create a more educated and healthy workforce. That gives a reason for people to continually invest here, even if the wealth tax is raised.

On the question of thresholds, thresholds for MSMEs don't matter if I'm taxing just 0.04% [of the population]. They can grow until they reach 0.04% and that is when they will be taxed. Again, no one is talking about bringing about perfect equality. Some amount of inequality will always be there. But how much is too much?

AS: The emergence of democracy in the U.K., starting from the Magna Carta in 1215, happened with generation after generation having enormous wealth and power concentrated with a few. That was way beyond anything that we see today. So, inequality is a fact of life.

Finally, I want to come to this idea that we should impose a wealth tax because it can be used for, say, health or education. This is wrong. It is a fundamental feature of public finance that you have a complete decoupling of expenditure and the revenues. I am disappointed that Piketty, a skilled economist, does not get this. We ask ourselves what are the good uses of public money and basically, they are public goods. I think there are only three good taxes in India – personal income tax, GST, and property tax. It is possible to implement these under Indian conditions as long as the rates are kept low with reasonably low distortions. Every other tax in the Indian public finance literature is termed 'bad tax'.

Wealth tax might give some revenue for the social sector. But how do we address the issues in allocations in the same sectors?

RM: There are huge problems with it. We have seen it in education. All the ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) and Pratham surveys say students are not up to the mark. There is a very legitimate question that if we tax billionaires and we put money there, are we just throwing good money after bad? But levying a tax and using it for spending allows us to finance a lot of development goals. It also allows us to do this without necessarily running a deficit, without necessarily borrowing from the public.

AS: There is no merit in that idea. The education system is terrible. It is not efficient to put more money into that problem; we have a management crisis. I feel that the wise approach in India is to choke expenditure until you prove bang for the buck. A meaningful expenditure ratio for India at the present level of development is about half of what is spent today.



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NOTEBOOK

Our dial-a-quote saviours

Subject experts who can weigh in on any problem often come to the rescue of journalists, especially on slow news days

Sobhana K. Nair

At the end of the year, newsrooms are generally half-empty. Many journalists happily go away on holiday, leaving news editors patrolling deserted aisles and staring at empty news lists and blank pages, wondering how to fill them. The panicked editors sometimes terrorise the few unfortunate reporters left behind, who then furiously start working the lines.

It is especially at this difficult hour that people with capacious minds and precise memories come to our rescue. They have no billowing capes, no colourful spandex costumes, no shields, and no swords, but they are our saviours. In a reporter's lexicon, they are 'dial-a-quote' sources – subject experts who can weigh in on any problem and provide context for stories.

Two days ago, I went around the newsroom speaking to reporters. My colleagues said they swear by a student leader-turned-activist-turned-politician, who is now an academic, for quotes on anything from the travails of the homeless in Delhi's bitter cold winters, to trade union protests, to trouble at universities.

For the security beat reporters, former officers of the Army, Air Force, and Navy are the go-to guides. They explain the topography of a border area where a conflict has broken out or the tortuous process of buying weapons than may span over decades. Their on-the-record comments add gravitas to the story.

Then there are historians. Every time a road is renamed or a heritage structure comes crumbling down, they take us through the dusty bylanes of a bygone era. Without them, our stories would have no roots and simply become dull 'he said, she said' exchanges.

While writing about rural development, I lean on activists who spend months in the field and are in touch with the workers every day. They trawl through the gigabytes of data on government websites to spot trends. Often, I feel guilty for sponging off their hard work, but we reporters draw solace from the fact that as the medium, we have success-

fully managed to put the message across. Political commentators are always ready to talk. Generally, the more they are sidelined within their party, the more enthusiastic they are to be quoted.

'Dial a quote' is not a new fad; it is as old as newsrooms. The scientist, J.B.S. Haldane, was a darling of journalists and would be ready to comment on anything under the sun, from weather to submarines. In Haldane's biography, *A Dominant Character*, Samanth Subramanian quotes an apocryphal story about him. A journalist, probably on a slow news day, called Haldane to ask him what his studies about nature had taught him about the Creator. Haldane replied, "He has an inordinate fondness for beetles." If dial-a-quoters are witty, it is an added bonus.

Editors, of course, hate some of these stock names that appear often in stories. Once, a harried news editor, tired of seeing the same names crop up in copies on cost of living, gave a standing instruction: the names of the people who supply tea and snacks should never find their way to print. Also, the views of these sources can sometimes be jaded and out of date. So, we keep searching for new 'dial-a-quote' sources who offer newer and different perspectives.

The most invaluable sources are those whose names never appear in print, but who provide background information; the scaffolding that supports our stories. During elections, they provide tutorials on caste equations, political rivalries, and the shifting loyalties of local leaders in various constituencies. There are also those who we may not call for months, but still go the extra mile to arrange interviews.

The dial-a-quote sources may come from different fields but they have some things in common. They are passionate about their area of expertise, kind enough to pick our call at any time, and answer basic queries with patience. They are also brave enough to be quoted on record. As we take stock of the year gone by, we would like to pay our gratitude to all our 'dial-a-quote' sources – thank you.

*sobhanak.nair@thehindu.co.in***PICTURE OF THE WEEK****Life in deep freeze**

A boy holds an ice sheet in the Drung area of north Kashmir's Tangmarg on the first day of 'Chillai Kalan'. Kashmir's intense 40-day cold spell began on December 21. Srinagar recorded its coldest December night in five decades at minus 8.5 degrees Celsius, according to the meteorological department. IMRAN NISSAR

FROM THE ARCHIVES**FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 27, 1974****Portugal eager to preserve cultural ties with Goa**

New Delhi, Dec. 26: The Portuguese Foreign Minister, Dr. Mario Soares, who is arriving in New Delhi to-morrow accompanied by an 11-member delegation, will sign a treaty on December 31 formally recognising India's sovereignty over Goa, Diu, and Daman and re-establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries, which were snapped in 1957, long before the liberation of the former

Portuguese possessions. After he has called on the President, Mr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, and the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Portuguese Foreign Minister will have a detailed discussion with the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Kewal Singh, to-morrow afternoon on the exact phraseology to be used in the treaty document for completing this formality in accordance with the relevant international precedents that would be applicable in this case. The treaty signed by France had transferred the sovereignty to India over Pondicherry, Karaikal, Yanam and Mahe, while in the case of Goa, Diu and Daman, there is need for only a formal recognition by Portugal of the de facto position.

The *Hindu***A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 27, 1924****Cotton factories regulation**

Rangoon, Dec. 27: The Burma Chamber of Commerce has communicated to the Director of Agriculture the reason which guided the Chamber in its decision that Burma should not be included in the proposed legislation for regulation of cotton ginning and pressing factories. The reasons are that the conditions at present obtaining in Cotton trade in this province are somewhat different from those in India where such malpractices as dumping and adulteration of cotton are prevalent.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Indian economy's expected growth in FY25

6.5 in per cent. India's economy is expected to grow at around 6.5% in fiscal year 2024-25, closer to the lower end of its 6.5%-7% projection, the Centre said. The growth outlook for October to December appears bright, the Finance Ministry's monthly economic report said. REUTERS

Number of Syrians to return home from Jordan

18,000 Interior Minister Mazen al-Faraya said the returnees included 2,300 refugees registered with the United Nations. Amman says it has hosted about 1.3 million Syrians who fled their country since civil war broke out in 2011. AFP

Number of banking frauds in first half of the current fiscal

18,461 The number of bank frauds witnessed a significant on-year increase in the first half of the current fiscal to 18,461 cases and the amount involved jumped more than eight-fold to ₹21,367 crore, according to RBI data. PTI

Fine imposed on Uttar Pradesh by National Green Tribunal

10,000 ₹ The NGT has imposed a ₹10,000 fine on Uttar Pradesh for not filing the compliance report in a matter over the restoration of a water body. The matter was posted on February 7, 2025. PTI

Vote share of national parties in 2024 Lok Sabha polls

63 in per cent. The six national parties bagged over 63% share of the total valid votes polled in the Lok Sabha elections held this year. The BJP, Congress, BSP, CPI(M), Aam Aadmi Party and National People's Party are the six national parties. PTI

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Should assisted dying be legalised?

What concerns do opponents of the assisted dying Bill in the U.K. raise? What changes does the proposed law seek to introduce? How does India's legal stance on euthanasia compare to the UK's position?

EXPLAINER

Garimella Subramaniam

The story so far:

Britain's House of Commons on November 29 voted by a majority to legalise assisted dying – a less controversial synonym for assisted suicide in England and Wales. The step signals a seismic social shift on an emotive issue. Advocates regard the new Bill as a humane and compassionate intervention that should – for those who want to exercise the option – bring closure to a painful, debilitating and degrading dependence on the immediate family. Opponents, who include the head of the Church of England, are apprehensive that the severely disabled and vulnerable patients may feel forced to end their lives to relieve the burden on relatives. "It should never become easier to seek help to die than to live," they say. The debate on the Bill's merits has also brought to the fore concerns that the delivery of hospice and palliative care services could be undermined. Portrayed sometimes as a "Give us our last rights" campaign, about 75% of the public has backed the liberalisation of assisted dying, as per a U.K. National Centre for Social Research survey.

How controversial is the move? The U.K. courts have time and again maintained that given the sensitive ethical, philosophical, and social questions involved, the subject of assisted dying was not a matter on which the judiciary could pronounce a decision based on concrete evidence. Successive British governments have similarly maintained that any change to existing law was for parliament to consider and a matter of their conscience for individual MPs and that the government would officially adopt a neutral stance. The Terminally Ill Adults (end of life) legislation was thus brought forward as a private member Bill by the Labour MP Kim Leadbeater. Among its supporters



Moral debate: Opponents are apprehensive that the severely disabled and vulnerable patients may feel forced to end their lives to relieve the burden on relatives. AP

were Prime Minister Keir Starmer, the Home Secretary, the chancellor of the exchequer, and the Opposition leader Rishi Sunak. Six Cabinet Ministers opposed the proposal.

What is the current law in this area? Suicide, (self-inflicted death), or attempted suicide are not in themselves criminal offences in England and Wales. Conversely, an act that encourages or assists a person to commit suicide or attempted suicide is a criminal offence that carries a 14-year prison sentence under the 1961 Assisted Suicide Act.

What is the proposed law? The Bill before parliament seeks to give terminally ill, mentally competent adults who have less than six months to live – which assumes that a reliable method exists of forecasting survival – the option to end their life. Under one stipulation, any such request must be authorised by two doctors and a High Court judge.

What were the petitioners' prayers? Since 2001, severely disabled applicants have petitioned the U.K. courts that the

1961 law, as well as the prosecution's refusal to allow them to end their lives under medical assistance, was incompatible with their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). At issue was the right to life (Article 2), which the petitioners viewed as entailing the right to self-determination and an entitlement to end life with assistance. They have also argued that the denial of the option to die with assistance – insofar as it failed to alleviate suffering – amounted to cruel and degrading treatment prescribed under Article 3. It moreover constituted an infringement of the right to privacy and freedom of conscience enshrined in Articles 8 and 9. Finally, as persons with disabilities who needed assistance to end their lives, the denial of permission by the prosecution amounted to discrimination, in breach of Article 14 of the ECHR.

What did the court rule? The U.K. House of Lords in 2002 unanimously overruled these contentions. But, in a 2014 Supreme Court decision, the majority opined that although the 1961 law was incompatible

with the rights of two incurably suffering but not terminally ill petitioners, it was for parliament to modify the law. In 2015, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the U.K. Supreme Court was under no obligation to examine the merits of a challenge to primary legislation and that Britain's government was open to concluding that this was a matter for parliament to arrive at a suitable determination. It is thus crystal clear that only new legislation can alter the *status quo* in this matter.

What is the position in India? In *Common Cause vs. Union of India* (2018), the Supreme Court affirmed that the "right to die with dignity" is integral to the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution. The court also legalised "passive euthanasia," which involves the withdrawal of life support from terminally ill patients or those in a permanent vegetative state. This allows individuals to die a natural death in the absence of medical interventions. The top court also issued comprehensive guidelines to facilitate passive euthanasia. For instance, if a patient leaves behind a living will, it must be executed in the presence of two witnesses and attested by a Judicial Magistrate. In 2019, the Indian Society of Critical Care Medicine filed an application seeking modification of these guidelines, arguing that they were onerous and impractical. Accordingly, a five-judge Constitution Bench in 2023 simplified the process by imposing strict timelines at each stage and limiting the role of the Judicial Magistrate.

In September, the Health Ministry released draft guidelines on withdrawing medical support for terminally ill patients, addressing a regulatory gap that had left healthcare professionals in the lurch. These specify that doctors must refrain from initiating life-support measures when they offer no benefit to the patient and are likely to cause suffering and a loss of dignity.

Garimella Subramaniam is Director, Strategic Initiatives, AgnoShin Technologies Pvt. Ltd
(With inputs from Aaratrika Bhaumik)

THE GIST

▼ The U.K. House of Commons recently voted to legalise assisted dying, marking a significant shift. Supporters view it as compassionate, while opponents worry about vulnerable patients feeling pressured to end their lives.

▼ Current law criminalises assisting suicide, but the proposed Bill allows terminally ill patients with less than six months to live to choose assisted death, with strict safeguards involving doctors and a High Court judge.

▼ India has legalised passive euthanasia (withdrawing life support for terminally ill patients) through the Supreme Court's ruling.

Why is strengthening fisheries extension services crucial?

What support do Matsya Seva Kendras provide to fish farmers?

Abhilash Likhi

The story so far:

India possesses diverse fisheries resources that provide livelihood opportunities to approximately three crore fishers and fish farmers. The country has witnessed an 83% increase in the national fish production since 2013-14, that stands at a record 175 lakh tons in 2022-23. With 75% of this coming from inland fisheries, India is the second-largest fish and aquaculture producer globally. In this backdrop, strengthening last-mile fisheries and aquaculture extension services is of paramount importance. Experts contend that such extension should provide request-based services to fishers/fish farmers on the life cycle of improved species cultured, water quality, disease, and available rearing technologies; address issues faced by seed growers and hatcheries; and conduct need-based

training to promote sustainable practices and fisheries-based activities that have the potential to be viable business models.

What is the role of Matsya Seva Kendras?

Under the flagship Pradhan Mantri Matsya Samapada Yojana, 'Matsya Seva Kendras' (MSK) has been envisioned as one-stop solution to provide a range of extension services by trained aquaculture professionals. The governmental assistance to set up such Kendras for women and weaker sections is available to the extent of 60%. Funds have been provided to State governments and Union Territories for operationalising 102 such Kendras. For example, the MSK in Thrissur, Kerala has a well-equipped lab for water, soil, and microbial analysis to conduct request-based disease tests, while the MSK in Nasik and Sangli districts in Maharashtra focuses on capacity building for fishers/fish farmers

on varied seed/feed inputs backed with the required technology infusion.

Fostering a 'whole of government approach,' the Government of India advises MSKs to mobilise start-ups, cooperatives, fish farmers' producer organisations, joint liability groups, and self-help groups to share best practices. The latter includes regenerative and conservation management practises for both inland and marine fisheries in view of the effects of climate change.

How do Sagar Mitras support fishers? Another innovative extension initiative by the government is the deployment of "Sagar Mitras" in coastal States and U.T.s as a vital interface between the government and sea-borne fishers. They compile information and data on daily marine catch, price fluctuations, and requisite marketing needs at fish landing centres/harbours. They disseminate information to fishers on local

regulations, weather forecasts, natural calamities, hygienic fish handling, and potential fishing zones in the seas.

How can extension services be improved?

To make the extension and advisory services in fisheries and aquaculture more robust the need of the hour is twofold. First, the above initiatives should be institutionally converged with the already networked field extension machinery of over 700 Indian Council of Agricultural Research-driven Krishi Vigyan Kendras and the State governments and U.T.s extension services. Second, promoting digital outreach. The National Fisheries Development Board has initiated a nationwide virtual learning platform, 'AquaBazaar,' that enables experts to clarify basic concepts and provide practical demonstrations to fishers on breeding/seed production of commercially important fish.

In this context, the World Bank-assisted Government of India project to formalise the fisheries and aquaculture sector is a boon indeed. It aims to create work-based digital identities for all fishers and fish farmers in the country, thereby strengthening their extension, capacity building, and awareness generation needs.

Abhilash Likhi is Secretary, Department of Fisheries, Government of India. The views expressed are personal

THE GIST

▼ Strengthening fisheries extension services is essential for supporting fishers and promoting sustainable practices, with initiatives like Matsya Seva Kendras and Sagar Mitras playing key roles.

▼ Matsya Seva Kendras and Sagar Mitras help fishers by providing critical support, training, and information to improve productivity and sustainability.

IN THE LIMELIGHT

Still from *The Archies*. COURTESY OF NETFLIX

Mixed feelings: the Anglo-Indian identity and its portrayal in film

Films frequently rely on stereotypes and visual metaphors to portray Anglo-Indians, with characters reflecting societal prejudices and colonial legacies. While some films offer more nuanced depictions of the community's complexities, others continue to romanticise colonial-era aesthetics

Shruthi Darbhannula

Films trade in visual shorthand and stock characters. An evil slinkiness to the dress, a tantalising redness to the lip. A Swaminathan rendered funny by his Tamil accent, a Ms. Braganza leading a convent school choir in a hymn. Movies take liberties with portrayals and stereotypes – a modern young woman is rendered Christian or Parsi to justify a perceived Westernness (even more recent movies, such as 2012's *Cocktail*, give their free-spirited heroine a Western name, as if offering a soothing justification to the more orthodox).

Some, perhaps braver, filmmakers have ventured into a more nuanced territory, peering into the worlds of minority communities often relegated to the background of the film universe. Of these, some narratives have centred on the Anglo-Indian community, the increasingly dwindling group of people in India who claim both British and Indian parentage.

'Air of permissiveness'

1975's *Julie* trades in these visual metaphors. Like many minority depictions, it both describes and circumscribes. Anglo-Indian heroine Julie, portrayed by Lakshmi, is sweet of face, charming of disposition, and short of skirt. Her characterisation is what old-timers would deem everything wrong with "kids these days," a glimpse at a persistent present prejudice with very traceable roots. Her father is an alcoholic and her family drinks to celebrate occasions. As with all heroines, many flirt with her, but there is an air of permissiveness seemingly explained by her Anglo-Indian identity.

A similar feeling is apparent in *Bhowani Junction* (1956), a Hollywood adaptation of an eponymous novel that follows the path of Anglo-Indian Victoria Jones (played by Ava Gardner) on the cusp of India's independence, as she struggles to find a place where she belongs. Multiple slurs (with shocking terms such as chee chee

for Anglo-Indians and wog for Indians) pepper the melodramatic storyline, which weaves through a web of romance, intrigue, patriotism, and a (mis)use of the sari to both accentuate the alluring Ava Gardner and her identity crisis. It does make an honest attempt to portray a fraught identity, caught in the cross-fire, but is undercut somewhat by the choice of white actors to play multiple Anglo-Indian and Indian roles. The actor playing town collector Govindaswami – Marne Maitland – is seemingly the only one of Indian heritage with any significant screen time.

Different portrayals

Coming back to the subcontinent, a more restrained portrayal of post-war Anglo-Indians is found in Aparna Sen's 36 *Chowringhee Lane* (1981). Lonely Violet Stoneham is a widowed English teacher, fond of Shakespeare, and quite solitary in 36, Chowringhee Lane in Kolkata, with black cat Toby for company. Her brother Eddie is ailing and in an old-age home, her niece Rosemary has married and relocated to Australia. Companionship and warmth arrive in the form of old student Nandita and her boyfriend Samresh, but they too, have better things to do than keep an old English teacher company. Violet's loneliness is not just the product of social exclusion, but her belonging to the Anglo-Indian community throws her right into stark relief. She is left more alone than she might have been otherwise, more gullible to the charms of a friendly face.

Miss Stoneham is portrayed with a neat reserve and restraint by Jennifer Kendal, the British actress who married Shashi Kapoor and founded the Prithvi Theatre, bringing a touch of authenticity to the narrative.

Following deftly in her mother's footsteps, Konkona Sen Sharma sets *A Death in the Gunj* (2016), her directorial debut venture, in 1970s McCluskiegunj, an Anglo-Indian town in Jharkhand. The film traces the gradual unravelling of Vikrant Massey's Shutu, a young student on

vacation with his extended family. Here the heritage serves to set the scene, explaining the certain colonial hang-ups among the family, and has an intentional class demarcation effect eerily similar to *Parasite*. Yet again, a jibe emerges against Kalki Koechlin's Mimi, with Shutu's aunt muttering something about her promiscuity and a foreign mother.

The most recent and (unintentionally) camp of Anglo-Indian portrayals comes from *The Archies* (2023), the "nepo-baby-laden" venture set in a fictional, idyllic Anglo-Indian town called Riverdale. Here the choice of an Anglo-Indian setting seems to justify pastel-hued settings and the uncertain Hindi of the main cast, with a smidge of patriotism thrown in to balance what is very clearly nostalgia for a colonial-era aesthetic. The fact that its characters channel South Bombay vibes is also revelatory of some colonial class coding that has seeped into present-day perceptions of the glamorous, the wealthy, and the elite.

An old narrative trick

The use of outsider-ness as a mode to depict purported immorality or lack of integrity is an old narrative trick, and most of these films employ it in some form. That the targets of this narrative feel it keenly is often stressed in the movies, with Julie's mother wanting to join her son Jimmy in London, Patrick Taylor in *Bhowani* viewing himself as more aligned with the cause of the British, and even Archie Andrews seeking to study abroad.

The linguistic choices are interesting, if not completely representative: they range from a casually thrown-in "man," or "hoyega" to Miss Stoneham's crisp, clipped received pronunciation tones, reminiscent of the ghost-of-a-Wren-and-Martin past. It is hard to pin down a uniform Anglo-Indian accent from this sampling, but some cadences are intentionally chosen.

Some professional commonalities emerge in a few of the movies too. Julie's father is an engine driver for the railways,

while Victoria's father and Patrick are employed in the railways too. As revealed in a paper about *Bhowani Junction* by John Masters (the book on which the movie is based), Anglo-Indians in the British era did have close links with the railways, along with infrastructure elements created by the British.

Whether the movies provide a clear picture of an inherently complicated identity is questionable. But indeed, the very idea of who can be described as an Anglo Indian is wavering, a little uncertain. Before Independence, the Government of India Act of 1935 described an Anglo-Indian as a person "whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is a native of India." This definition was more or less retained when Anglo-Indians were listed as a minority in the Constitution in 1950 and had two seats reserved for the community in the Lok Sabha (this was ended via a constitutional amendment in 2020.) Does this bring within its ambit Portuguese-Indians, French-Indians, and those of British ancestry who stayed back in India? This would cover a wide range of lived experiences far beyond the popular realms etched by Ruskin Bond's misty Mussoorie tales and William Dalrymple's *White Mughals*.

Other noted films delve into the allied, equally complex equation between British subjects and Indians during colonialism, including several Merchant Ivory productions like *Heat and Dust* (1983), or *A Passage to India* (1984). Others touch upon the Indians who benefitted or flourished under the Raj. There is a contemporary current which seeks clean-seamed compartmentalisation into a before and an after, ignoring the presence of a complex interwovenness that cannot be unravelled or forgotten so easily. Sadly, history was never that neat. Films like Julie have dialogues which would not seem out of place today, almost 50 years later. Perhaps a neat tincture of these films is what we really need to placate our colonial hangover.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Some significant events occurred on December 27. Here is a quiz on observances, birthdays and everything else that happened today

Abhinaya. K

QUESTION 1

This person who was born on this day in 1882 is well known for his scientific contributions related to milk and other notable discoveries related to chemistry. Identify the scientist.

QUESTION 2

December 27 is celebrated as International Day of Epidemic Preparedness to advocate the importance of the prevention of, preparedness for, and partnership against epidemics. When was it first observed?

QUESTION 3

This naturalist set sail on the

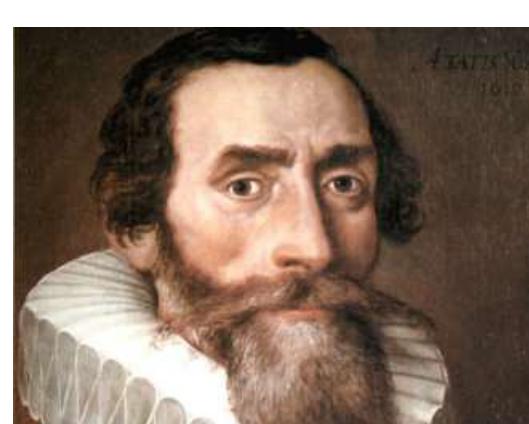
_____ ship on December 27, 1831. His scientific theory became the foundation of modern evolutionary studies. Name the ship.

QUESTION 4

The National Anthem was sung for the first time publicly at a session of the Indian National Congress on this day. Around 40 years after its first rendition, it was adopted as the National Anthem. Where was the session held and in which year?

QUESTION 5

The first woman to head a democratic government in a Muslim-majority country was assassinated on this day in 2007. Identify the person. How many terms did she serve as the Prime Minister?



Visual Question:

Identify this astronomer who discovered three major laws of planetary motion. There is a telescope named after this person who was born on this day in 1572. Is this statement true or false?

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Many people use Advent calendars to count the days until Christmas. In which country did this tradition originate? **Ans: Germany**

2. Noche de las Velitas (Day of the Little Candles) is a widely observed religious holiday in which country? It is celebrated on December 7 on the eve of the Immaculate Conception. It is the unofficial start of the Christmas season in the country. **Ans: Colombia**

3. In which country, Christmas is celebrated on January 7 as the day of Jesus' birth, alongside the Russian, Greek, Eritrean, and Serbian Orthodox Churches? **Ans: Ethiopia**

4. In Mexico, this flower, which bloom in winter, are given to people, during Christmas. **Ans: Poinsettia**

5. In France, Réveillon de Noël is celebrated.

Traditionally when is this celebrated? **Ans: Christmas Eve**

Visual: Identify this tradition. In which country this is celebrated? **Ans: Burning of the Devil in Guatemala**

Early Birds: Tamal Biswas | Tito Shiladitya | Sonali Das | Sumana Dutta | Piyali Tuli



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"Although he's been here for only six months, he has a good command over Hindi, don't you think?"

"When it comes to language, you say 'command of'."

Varsha has a good command of Punjabi."

"She certainly does. Talking about Varsha, what do you think of her latest short story?"

"I don't particularly care for it."

"That's not surprising. You don't like her, do you?"

"Not particularly. She thinks she knows everything – a know-it-all."

"Know-it-all?"

"Yes. A 'know-it-all' is a person who behaves as if he knows everything. You can also say 'know-all.' Both are used in a derogatory sense."

As soon as he became the Vice-Chancellor, he stopped taking suggestions from his friends; he thinks he is a know-it-all."

I don't like Varsha's know-it-all attitude."

"Others have said the same thing. But why don't you like the short story?"

"It lacks zing."

"Sing?"

"Not sing, zing. It means 'liveliness, zest, vigour.'

Last night I saw the zingiest show in town."

Most movies these days are crummy."

"What is crummy?"

"'Crummy' means 'worthless.' The 'c' is pronounced 'k' and the 'u' like the 'u' in 'but'."

"By the way, do you have comestibles?"

"What 'bles'?"

"Comestibles. Things to eat. That is what the word means. It is always used in the plural. That is, you don't ever say 'Do you have a comestible?' It is a formal word. The stress is on the second syllable. The 'o' and the 'i' are pronounced like the 'a' in 'China,' the first 'e' is pronounced like the 'e' in 'bed.' The final 's' is pronounced 'z': 'bles' is pronounced 'blz.' The 'c' is pronounced 'k'."

"What is 'comfy'?"

"'Comfy' is a contraction of 'comfortable.' It is used in informal contexts. By the way, do you know the names of the planets?"

"Let me see."

"I'll give a sentence. My very educated mother just showed us nine planets. You take the first letter of every word in the sentence. You get the names of all the planets. Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto."

"Wonderful! A useful sentence for children."

Published in *The Hindu* on July 19, 1994

Word of the day

Ebullient:

joyously unrestrained

Synonyms: cheerful, enthusiastic, lively

Usage: She felt ebullient after receiving praise for her hard work.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/ebullientpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ə'bʌlɪənt/

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

From Page One

Cong. Belagavi meet demands caste census

"The patronage provided to his killers and their glorification in recent years reveals the true colours of these ideologies and institutions. The politics of polarisation and divisiveness is a rejection of Gandhian beliefs. The CWC calls upon all party members to stand united and work tirelessly to protect, preserve and promote Gandhiji's precious legacy," the resolution said.

The second resolution encompassed several points, including demand for the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah for his alleged insult of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, opposition to 'One Nation, One Election' plans and the amendment to election conduct rules, demand for caste census and removal of the 50% limit on reservation and three rallies to revamp and to strengthen the Congress.

A party leader said that Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had asked party workers to create awareness of the BJP's plans to undermine the Constitution and the alleged insult of Dr. Ambedkar by Mr. Shah. According to party sources, the meeting discussed in detail the alleged insult of Dr. Ambedkar by Mr. Shah in Parliament.

The meeting is said to have discussed "widespread state-sponsored communal and ethnic hatred targeted at minorities" and Manipur violence since 2023 and the "indifference" of Prime Minister and the Union government towards it. It demanded a caste census at the national level.

RBI measures may have slowed demand: FinMin

Till late October, the Ministry's monthly economic reports had maintained this year's growth would be in the range of 6.5% to 7%. The last review, released a month ago and days before the second quarter growth estimates revealed the GDP had risen at a seven-quarter low of 5.4%, had been silent on growth estimates but had expressed cautious optimism about coming months' economic outlook.

The Ministry's latest review also flagged that credit growth had slowed this year in India "too much and quickly", and termed the RBI's move to lower the cash reserve ratio from 4.5% to 4%, in its December review of the monetary policy as "good news that should help boost" credit flows.

"Sustaining growth will require a deeper commitment from all economic stakeholders to growth," the review for November underlined, citing new uncertainties that cloud the outlook for 2025-26. The remarks assume significance amid a growing clamour in the government for the central bank to cut interest rates in order to spur investments and growth.

While global trade growth is looking more uncertain than before, the review noted that elevated stock markets continue to pose a big risk. "The strength of the US dollar and a rethink on the path of policy rates in the United States have put emerging market currencies under pressure. In turn, that will make monetary policy makers in these countries think more deeply about the path of policy rates. Recent exchange rate movements may have lowered their degrees of freedom," it averred.

"India's growth outlook in 2025-26 for the coming years is bright when viewed through the lens of Indian domestic economic fundamentals, but is also subject to fresh uncertainties," the review emphasised. The Ministry noted that elevated global edible oil prices and India's high dependence on imported edible oil would warrant close monitoring to keep inflation under check.

10.58 lakh votes were rejected in LS polls: EC

2024 LS election in numbers

As many as 86% of the over 8,360 candidates who contested the Lok Sabha elections lost their deposits

	
Total electors: 97.97 crore	Women voters: 47.63 crore
Total voters: 64.64 crore	Female voter turnout: 65.78%
■ Women candidates: 800	■ Number of Independent candidates: 3,921
SOURCE: ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA	

There was re-polling in 40 polling stations.

While the number of nominations filed in the Lok Sabha polls stood at 12,459, only 8,360 qualified to contest after rejection of nominations and withdrawals. Of those who contested, 7,190 candidates (86%) lost their deposits as they failed to garner more than one-sixth of the votes polled.

There were 3,921 Independent candidates of whom only seven managed to win. None of the 279 women Independent candidates won.

As compared to 726 in 2019, the number of women candidates increased to 800 in 2024, while the number of women voters rose to 47.63 crore in 2024 from 43.85 crore in 2019. The female voter turnout increased from 65.55% to 65.78%.

Six national parties, including the BJP, Congress and CPI(M), bagged over 63% share of the total valid votes.

Cong. will continue fight for Ambedkar's respect: Kharge

He lashes out at BJP for not admitting Shah had made 'insulting' remarks about Ambedkar and for 'controlling' institutions; Gandhiji's legacy and institutions are under assault, says Sonia

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

Asserting that the Congress would fight for the respect of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, party president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday said the BJP government at the Centre was not ready to admit that Union Home Minister Amit Shah had made "extremely insulting" remarks about the architect of the Constitution.

Mr. Kharge was addressing the Congress Working Committee meeting at Belagavi in Karnataka.

Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi, who could not travel to Belagavi, called for fighting the forces which had "created a toxic atmosphere that led to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination".

In her message, read out at the meeting, Ms. Gandhi said Gandhian institutions across the nation were under assault, noting that it was fitting that the meet was called the "Nava Satyagraha Baithak".

Lashing out at the government for "controlling" constitutional institutions, Mr. Kharge cited the Election Commission as an example. "The matter of concern is that people's faith in the electoral process is gradually decreasing because questions are being raised on the impartiality



Top brass huddle: Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and others during the Congress Working Committee meeting in Karnataka's Belagavi on Thursday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

of the commission. A few days ago, they changed the election rules so that the information that the court had ordered to be shared could be stopped. What is it that they are trying to hide?" he said.

"Sometimes the names of voters are deleted from the list, sometimes they are prevented from casting their vote, sometimes there is a sudden increase in the number of voters, sometimes at the last moment of voting, the voter percentage increases unexpectedly. These are some questions that keep arising for which no satisfactory answer is found," he said.

Mr. Kharge said Karnataka now had a government

that believed in the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, Basaveshwara, Mahatma Phule, and Dr. Ambedkar.

Raising the issue of Mr. Shah's remarks on Dr. Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha earlier this month, Mr. Kharge said, "We raised objections, protested, demonstrated. Now protests are taking place all over the country.

But the Prime Minister and the government are not ready to accept their mistake. Far from seeking an apology and resignation from Amit Shah, they supported the objectionable statement."

He said while Mr. Modi defended the Home Minister, a false case was filed

against Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha. "This is the attitude of today's rulers towards the Constitution and its architect. But we are not going to be afraid of anyone nor are we going to bow down. We will fight till the last breath for the ideology of Nehru-Gandhi and the respect of Babasaheb," Mr. Kharge added.

He asserted that 2025 would be the year of the party's organisational empowerment by filling vacant posts and implementing the points made in the Udaipur Declaration. He said only hard work was not enough, timely concrete strategy and direction were necessary.

Karnataka Minister Pritam Kharge said the con-

(With inputs from Belagavi)

Cong. showing utter disrespect: BJP on 'distorted' India map

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI



The BJP on Thursday accused the Congress of showing "utter disrespect" to the nation's sovereignty, pointing to the use of an alleged "distorted" map of India on the welcome banners put up in Belagavi for the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting.

BJP spokesperson and Rajya Sabha member Sudhanshu Trivedi made the charge while addressing a press conference at the party's national headquarters in New Delhi. He said the banners had been posted on the BJP's X handle to flag the distortion. "Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Aksai Chin appear to be missing from the map used by the Congress. The important thing is that it has been used with Mahatma Gandhi's picture," he said.

Karnataka Congress leaders later clarified that they removed some posters in Belagavi following complaints of "wrong depiction" of the map.

"Once the mistake was noticed by Congress workers, the posters were immediately removed. The BJP is making a big issue out of it needlessly," Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president D.K. Shivakumar told presspersons.

Karnataka Minister Pritam Kharge said the con-

troversial posters were put up by a private company and not the Congress. He said the KPCC president had announced that the posters were taken down. "The BJP is doing what it is good at - creating problems where there are none," he said.

Mr. Trivedi alleged that this was not the first time that the Congress had used a distorted map. It had done so several times in the past, he said. "Why is India's map being shown after removing different parts of the country? Is it just a coincidence or part of a systematic anti-India experiment? At whose behest is this happening?" he asked. "Is there a signal coming from some Soros secret service or from other anti-India forces based abroad with whom you always get along well?"

He said the Congress's "nexus" with such forces that dream of disintegrating India had become "absolutely clear", with the party using a "distorted" map of the country. (With inputs from Belagavi)

There would be no row had Hindus 'got Kashi, Mathura': VHP

Ishita Mishra NEW DELHI

Had the temples of Mathura and Kashi been given to the Hindu community, like Ayodhya, many of the present temple-mosque disputes would not have occurred, said Vishva Hindu Parishad organising general secretary Milind Parande. "The current situation would not have arisen if Hindus had Kashi and Mathura," he said.

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat had last week expressed concern over the resurgence of temple-mosque disputes. He had also said that no one would become a "leader of Hindus" by fanning communal divide.

Mr. Parande, who spoke on the sidelines of the launch of a campaign to "liberate Hindu temples from government control", said Mr. Bhagwat's statement was "misinterpreted".

"His statement must be looked at in full context and not in isolation. We must look at his statements made in 1984, when he had said that if we got the three temples [Kashi, Mathura and Ayodhya], the entire issue would come to an end. It's almost 2025 but this is yet to happen," Mr. Parande said.

"The kind of resent-

Mr. Bhagwat's advice wasn't even welcomed by the RSS's mouthpiece, *The Organiser*

ment we are seeing right now is important if we take into context the full perspective."

Mr. Bhagwat's advice wasn't even welcomed by the RSS's mouthpiece, *The Organiser*, which in an editorial argued that knowing the history of disputed sites is important for "civilizational justice".

"The time is ripe to address this quest for civilisational justice. Babasaheb Ambedkar went to the root cause of caste-based discrimination and provided constitutional remedies to end the same. We need a similar approach to end religious acrimony and disharmony," the magazine's editorial read.

To recall, the RSS chief, at a lecture in Pune on December 19 had said there is a spree which is going on in India to disrespect gods of other religion.

"Extremism, aggressiveness, forcefulness, and insulting others' gods are not in the nature of our country and are unacceptable. To become the 'Vishwaguru', India should not forget its nature that is 'accommodative of all', he added.

Singh's contribution to India's progress will always be remembered: Rajnath

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

Condolences poured in on Thursday for former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh from across the aisles, both who worked with him and those who sat in the Opposition.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh credited him for rebuilding India's economy during a difficult time. "He was widely respected for his service and intellect. His contribution to India's progress will always be remembered," Mr. Singh said.

Road Transport Minister and former BJP president Nitin Gadkari said, "A leader of unparalleled humility and quiet strength, he always placed the country's welfare above all else. During my tenure as BJP president, I had the privilege of engaging with him on several occasions, each interaction leaving a lasting impression."

Union Minister for Agriculture and Rural development Shivraj Singh Chouhan said Dr. Singh was synonymous with "clean politics".

Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) President Nitish Kumar, who had a brief alliance with the Congress, called Dr. Singh a "skilled politician and economist".

NCP leader Praful Patel, who served in Dr. Singh's Cabinet, said the former Prime Minister "reshaped the destiny of millions".



Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. FILE. SANDEEP SAXENA

who gave the Indian economy a new direction.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and TDP president N. Chandrababu Naidu credited Dr. Singh for serving the nation tirelessly and uplifting millions.

"He was truly an intellectual giant, an accomplished economist but above all he was a thorough gentleman," Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said.

Former Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal, in a post on X, said, "The demise of Dr. Manmohan Singh is an irreparable loss for the country. It is impossible to put his qualities of wisdom and simplicity into words."

NCP leader Praful Patel, who served in Dr. Singh's Cabinet, said the former Prime Minister "reshaped the destiny of millions".

had the honour and privilege of working as a Minister during his tenure and witnessed his intellect, humility, and dedication to the nation. As Finance Minister and later as Prime Minister, he transformed India's economic landscape and left an enduring legacy of progress and reform," Mr. Patel said.

As condolences poured in, it was also time for some to reflect on the criticism he faced during his second term as Prime Minister. "This Cabinet led by the Prime Minister may have words to express their grief on the passing of Dr. Singh but their words and action against him will never be forgotten – the vilification, the shameful charges, the character assassination and the hounding of a great man," said Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Priyanka Chaturvedi.

The committee on Thursday heard the representatives of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. "We had called the Principal Secretary of the Minority Affairs Departments of these States and asked them to bring information on properties that have been registered and other details. But we haven't got a satisfactory reply so far," he said. The panel will meet on Friday when officials from Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Delhi.

Reimpose ban on *Satanic Verses*: AIMIM

The Hindu Bureau MUMBAI

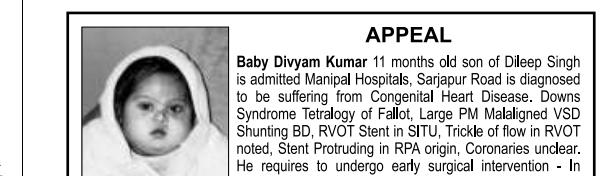
The All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) has joined several Muslim organisations in condemning the return of Salman Rushdie's controversial

book *The Satanic Verses* to Indian bookshelves. They have appealed to the Centre to reinstate the ban.

Former AIMIM MLA from Mumbai Warish Patel expressed outrage over the resumption of sales of the book.

"Now that the Delhi High Court has lifted the ban, we urge the government to intervene and appeal against this decision. The ban must be reinstated to prevent further provocation of people's beliefs," he said.

Mr. Pathan also raised concerns about the lack of action against Ramgiri Maharaj, who allegedly made derogatory remarks about Prophet Muhammad. "Despite these comments, he is yet to be arrested," he added.



Baby Divyan Kumar, 11 months old son of Dileep Singh, is admitted Manipal Hospital, Saipuri Road. He is suffering from Congenital Heart Disease. Down Syndrome Tetralogy of Fallot, Large PM Malfixed VSD Shunting BD, RVOT Stent in STU, Trickle of flow in RVOT noted. Stent Protruding in RPA origin. Coronaries under. He requires to undergo early surgical intervention - In view of severe cyanosis and recurrent cyanotic spells. The estimated cost of the surgery is Rs. 6,00,000/-

favouring Poor Lives A/C Diyam Kumar, Our Account Details: SIB/Account No. 20000913487, State Bank of India, Puram, and IFSC Code: SIBN0001855. All donations are exempted under 80G of I.T. ACT. SAVE POOR LIVES REGISTERED PUBLIC CHARITABLE TRUST, Flat No. A1, Ceebros Garden, Ground Floor, Old No. 76 Kamara Sabai, Anna Nagar, Chennai - 600 028. Contact No. 044 42044165 & 044 3561948. Mobile: 9884607377. Email: savepoorlives



Manmohan Singh and P. V. Narasimha Rao, the architects of the economic reforms in the early 1990s. THE HINDU ARCHIVES



Manmohan Singh, with Sonia Gandhi, shows the letter of support from Congress and allies to form a government in 2004. R.V. MOORTHY



Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi meets Manmohan Singh to congratulate him for his second term as Prime Minister in 2009. PTI



Manmohan Singh and the then U.S. President, George W. Bush, had a special bond as they worked on the nuclear deal. FILE PHOTO

History will be kinder to you, say ex-colleagues

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's parting shot – "history will be kinder to me than the contemporary media" – spoken in January 2014 at the last press conference he addressed before demitting office resonated on Thursday night as condolences poured in following his death, with many of his former Cabinet colleagues and UPA allies quoting his words, to say indeed it will.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee recounted her time in the Union Cabinet, when the two closely worked together. "His erudition and wisdom were unquestionable, and the depth of the financial reforms ushered in by him in the country are widely acknowledged," she said.

Calling Dr. Singh the father of economic reforms in the country, former deputy Chief Minister of Bihar Tejashwi Yadav said that the former Prime Minister presided over a historic period of unprecedented growth and development of the country. His "wisdom, patience, foresight, humility and dedication will always be remembered."

"Undoubtedly, history shall judge you kindly, Dr. Manmohan Singh ji!" senior RJD leader and Rajya Sabha member Manoj K. Jha wrote on X.

Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram said that Dr. Singh's work from 1991 till 2014 will be remembered as a "golden chapter in the history of India". "I worked closely with him for many years. I have not met a person more humble and self-effacing than Dr. Singh. He wore his scholarship lightly and never claimed credit for any of his historic achievements," he wrote in a post on X. "I am sure when we look back upon the 23 years that Dr. Singh was in active politics, we will realize his true contribution," he said.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh commended Dr. Singh's "steely resolve" while remaining "soft spoken, sober and always dignified".

Nationalist Congress Party (SP) leader Sharad Pawar called Mr. Singh a "global statesman" whose legacy will inspire generations to come.

K.T. Rama Rao, working president of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi, which was part of UPA-I, called Dr. Singh a silent architect of modern India, a visionary, a true intellectual and a gracious human being, said, "History will indeed be kinder and grateful to you."



A storied CAREER

Charting Manmohan Singh's five-decade long career in bureaucracy and politics

1954
Completes a Master's in economics from Panjab University

1957
Economics trips at Cambridge University

1962
D.Phil. from Oxford University

1971
Joins Government of India as Economic Adviser in Commerce Ministry



1972
Appointed Chief Economic Adviser in Finance Ministry

1980-82
Member, Planning Commission

1982-1985
Governor of the Reserve Bank of India

1985-87
Served as Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission



1990
Appointed Adviser to Prime Minister on Economic Affairs

March 1991
Appointed Chairman of University Grants Commission (UGC)



1991-96
Finance Minister in P.V. Narasimha Rao government

1998-2004
Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha

2004-2014
Prime Minister

From nuclear deal to Quad, he left a lasting imprint on external relations

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

When the tsunami hit India on December 26, 2004, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, then just a few months at the helm, faced not only a grave national tragedy, but also a moment where India would be tested internationally. Contrary to his quiet demeanour, he made several bold decisions in the hours that followed, recounts officials who served with him.

The first was that India would not accept aid from abroad. The second, that India would help others who had been hit by the giant waves that took more than 2,30,000 lives across the Indian Ocean. Within hours, the government cleared naval and Air Force missions to Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, with a total of 32 Indian ships and 5,500 troops joining the international effort, which announced India's arrival on the global scene as a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) first responder. The third decision was to coordinate regularly with others involved in the effort, most notably the U.S., Japan and Australia, in



Manmohan Singh with then Japanese PM Shinzo Abe. PTI

meetings that led to the formation of the Quad.

Within a year, however, Dr. Singh's government was hit by a political tsunami, as his External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh had to resign over the Volker oil-for-food bribery scandal. He replaced him with Pranab Mukherjee, and later with S.M. Krishna, but Dr. Singh never really gave up control of Indian foreign policy, and his imprint on each foray was unmistakeable.

Twin breakthroughs

The engagement with the Quad also laid the path for two of Dr. Singh's biggest foreign policy breakthroughs: first, with Japan, that ended India's isolation over the nuclear tests of 1998. The other was the engagement with the U.S. for

the civil nuclear deal. Without agreeing to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Dr. Singh's team of negotiators were able to win waivers at the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and freed up India's access to nuclear energy. Dr. Singh's personal ties with U.S. President George W. Bush, and with his successor President Barack Obama were a key part of the relationship.

In an interview to *The Hindu* when former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpeyi died, Dr. Singh said in a non-partisan moment - now quite rare in Indian politics - that he had followed the path shown by Mr. Vajpeyi in two areas. "In relations with the United States, and ties with Pakistan, I took more or less the same line as Mr. Vajpeyi had taken," he said.

A forthright FM who unleashed the animal spirits of Indian economy

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

Less than a month after he took over as India's 22nd Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh presented a Union Budget in July 1991 that changed the country's economic trajectory with some of the hard decisions that were desperately needed.

It is rare for a Finance Minister of any regime to make even a nuanced critique of their own party's predecessors in office, especially if the party swore by those leaders' indelible imprint. Manmohan Singh, arguably India's most educated leader, was not one to be weighed down by such expectations.

In his historic speech to Parliament on July 24,

The leader could also take on staunch criticism with a dose of humour or literary references

1991, Dr. Singh explained in painstaking detail the need for India to embrace a new era of industrial delicensing and economic liberalisation.

Noting that the efforts of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, had given India a 'well-diversified industrial structure', Dr. Singh, however, didn't hesitate to link the genesis of the crisis firmly to policies of the past.

It is well known that Dr. Singh opened up the doors for foreign investments in myriad sectors during his time as Finance Minister,

and subsequently as Prime Minister, when he pushed back on Left allies' resistance on issues like easing telecom and insurance FDI limits and pursuing the critical India-U.S. nuclear cooperation deal.

However, few would remember his maiden Budget also set the foundations of India's modern stock market boom as he announced the formation of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to protect investor interests. Or that he talked passionately against protectionism and batted for consumer interests as well as wealth creators, even as he held strong reservations against "mindless and heartless" conspicuous consumerism – issues that resonate today as well.

It speaks volumes for his sagacity that he could take on the stanchest criticism with a dose of humour or literary references. So when the Left attacked him for drafting a Budget policy on the diktats of the World Bank, he joked that the WB's interests were indeed at work – elaborating it as West Bengal instead.

In his 2007 autobiography *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World*, former U.S. Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan credited Dr. Singh for tearing a modest hole in India's regimented economy in 1991.

His exit leaves a vacuum in public policy discourse, the absence of which may make it tougher for India to rip apart the hole he managed to tear, in what Mr. Greenspan called India's Fabian socialism fabric.

IN BRIEF



BSF rescues African wild cat from a 'smuggling attempt'

The South Bengal Frontier of the Border Security Force (BSF) rescued an African wild cat (*Leptailurus serval*) from an alleged wildlife smuggling attempt along the India-Bangladesh border of Nadia district of West Bengal on Wednesday. According to a statement by the BSF, personnel of 56 Battalion on the second shift duty at the Bhattacharjee Border Outpost on Wednesday had noticed around three to four suspected miscreants carrying a big box and approaching the Indo-Bangladesh Border Road in Indian territory.

IRCTC website crashes during Tatkal booking window

The website and app of the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) faced technical issues for close to an hour and a half during the peak Tatkal booking time on Thursday morning. "There was a technical issue in the Next Generation E-ticketing (NGeT) system from 10.01 a.m. to 10.40 a.m. and from 10.51 a.m. to 11.23 a.m. During this time, reserved tickets were available across the Passenger Reservation System (PRS) counters," a senior IRCTC official said. A few users complained that the snag had thrown their weekend travel plans into disarray.

26th edition of Shaastra, hosted by IIT-Madras, to be held from Jan. 3-7

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The 26th edition of Shaastra, hosted by the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras, will be held from January 3 to 7. The Hindu is the media partner for the event.

With the theme "Fractal Frontiers", Shaastra 2025 draws inspiration from the intricate shapes and patterns found in nature.

Preparations are under way and over 60,000 people are expected to participate in India's largest student-run, technology and entertainment festival.

Sathyaranayana N. Gummadi, Dean (Students), IIT-Madras, said, "This year, we are introducing two new areas in the Shaastra Summit and Research Conference: 'Future Cities' and 'Smart Manufacturing'. We are looking forward to the contributions from all the stakeholders towards sustainable approaches in these domains."

With over 110 events ranging from dynamic



hackathons and biotechnology challenges to exciting workshops by industry experts, the festival serves as a hub for intellectual engagement.

Co-curricular adviser Murugaiyan Amirthalingam said, "Shaastra serves as a dynamic platform for learning and innovation, bringing together over 50 workshops on several topics. It offers students and tech enthusiasts a unique chance to gain invaluable hands-on experience in cutting-edge domains."

Shaastra's Spotlight lecture series, presented by title sponsor the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), features 10 eminent speakers, including Arokiaswamy Velumani, Founder-CEO, Thyrocare Technologies; Ruchira

17 children receive award for exceptional achievements

President Murmu lauds the winners of Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar, saying they have set an example; the awardees, 10 of them girls, were selected from 14 States and Union Territories

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday conferred the Prime Minister's National Award on 17 children for exceptional achievements.

The Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar celebrates extraordinary accomplishments in seven categories – art and culture, bravery, innovation, science and technology, social service, sports, and environment.

Congratulating the award winners, the President said the entire country was proud of them. She told the children that they had done extraordinary work and achieved amazing accomplishments. The children have limitless capabilities, possess incomparable qualities, and have set an example for the children of the country, Ms. Murmu said.

"Providing opportunities and recognising children's talents have always been a part of our tradition. This tradition should



President Droupadi Murmu presents the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar at a ceremony in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

be further strengthened to ensure that every child realises its full potential," she said.

"Examples of courage and patriotism in children strengthen the nation's confidence in its future. Such acts are truly commendable," she said.

The awardees – seven boys and 10 girls – were selected from 14 States and Union Territories.

ing memorised over 5,000 slokas. Jignesh has cerebral palsy.

In the bravery category, nine-year-old Saurav Kumar was recognised for saving three girls from drowning and 17-year-old Loanna Thapa was honoured for rescuing 36 residents from a fire.

In the innovation category, Sindhoora Raja, 15, was awarded for creating self-stabilising devices for Parkinson's patients, and cybersecurity entrepreneur Risheek Kumar, 17, was honoured for launching Kashmir's first cybersecurity firm.

In sports, Hemant Nag, a judo player from a Naxalism-affected area, was awarded for overcoming numerous challenges to win a silver medal at the Khelo India National Games. Chess prodigy Anish Sarkar, the youngest FIDE-ranked player at just three, was also honoured.

"Hemant's resilience amidst adversity is an example of unmatched courage and determination," the President said.

Modi observed that the energy of youth has played a significant role in India's progress

and sacrifice of Guru Gobind Singh's four sons, who are among the most revered figures in Sikhism.

Mr. Modi said that all policies, whether for the start-up ecosystem, the future of space economy, the sports and fitness sector, the fintech and manufacturing industry, or skill development and internship schemes, were youth-centric and aimed at benefiting young people. He added that the new National Education Policy modernised education.

He also announced the launch of Suposhit Gram Panchayat Abhiyan (mission for proper nutrition in village panchayats), which will promote a healthy competition among village panchayats to eliminate malnutrition. He urged the youth to work towards making their respective sectors, be it railways, semiconductors, travel, or astronomy, the best.

Pawan Hans seeks Centre's approval to acquire 23 more helicopters

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

After multiple attempts to privatise the government's helicopter company failed, Pawan Hans Limited (PHL) has submitted a proposal to the Centre for acquiring 23 new helicopters to replace its ageing fleet comprising 42 helicopters.

The proposal from Pawan Hans also includes an undisclosed amount of capital needed for replenishing its fleet, Vummidi Vualnam, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, told The Hindu. PHL is a joint venture of Government of India (GoI) and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) providing helicopter services. GoI holds 51% of shares in the company and ONGC holds the remaining 49%.

The senior official did not disclose the estimate provided by Pawan Hans, but said that the Central public sector undertaking has been asked to review it.

PHL will also explore the financing mechanism



Pawan Hans announced a 10-year contract worth over ₹2,000 crore to provide four helicopters to ONGC last week. C.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

needed to raise the funds required for the exercise, such as through bank loans, or budgetary support from the government or any other option, the official said.

Last week, Pawan Hans announced a 10-year contract worth over ₹2,000 crore to provide four helicopters to ONGC for transporting its personnel to off-shore duty locations.

Under the contract, Pawan Hans will deploy four HAL-manufactured Dhruva NG helicopters for ONGC off-shore operations. Dhruva NG is the ci-

vil version of HAL's Advance Light Helicopter Mk III used by the defence forces. The Pawan Hans agreement is the first time that the indigenously designed and developed civil helicopter in India will take to the skies.

Expressing support for revival of Pawan Hans, Mr. Vualnam said: "We are at a stage where helicopter usage needs to expand, including heli-emergency medical services (HEMS), disaster relief, and other public service roles." The Pawan Hans fleet includes 17 Dauphin Ns that are 37 years-old, and two Bell 206 that are 29-years-old.

On July 3, 2023, the Centre called off the strategic disinvestment of Pawan Hans after the successful bidding consortium Star9 Mobility Pvt Ltd was disqualified in view of a pending case against one of its consortium members – Almas Global Opportunity Fund SPC – before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for the sale of GoI's entire shareholding (51% of shareholding) of Pawan Hans Limited (PHL) and transfer of management control.

This was the fourth attempt to sell the helicopter company since the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved the strategic disinvestment of the entire Government of India stake in it in October 2016. ONGC had also earlier decided to offer its entire shareholding to the successful bidder identified in the GoI strategic disinvestment transaction, on the same price and terms as GoI.

FAITH

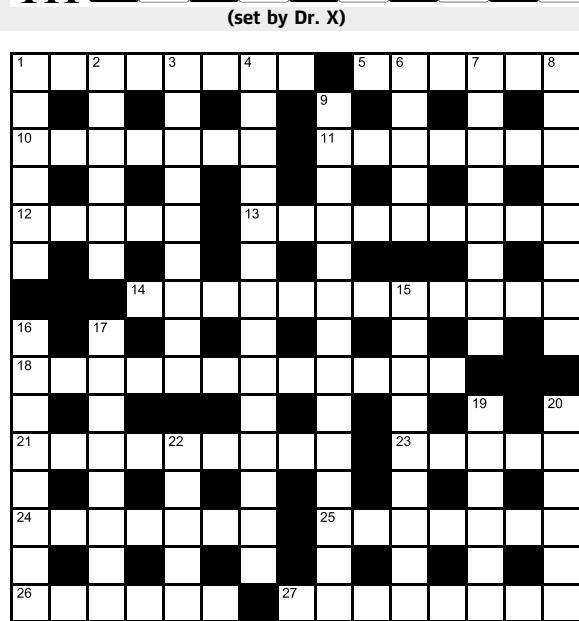
Maha Periyava: ideal guru

Saints and preceptors arrive on earth regularly, especially during times of stress, to guide man on how to lead a simple but effective life of virtue. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, the 68th Pontiff of Kanchi Math (Kanchi Kamakoti Peetathipathi), was one such, said P. Swaminathan in a discourse.

Born in 1894 in Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu, the only saint to have the sobriquet of Maha Periyava, is renowned for traversing the entire nation to carry his message of leading a life of goodness and godliness to people struggling to make ends meet in the remotest parts. Shunning the palanquin, he chose to walk everywhere, like a true hermit. Many of his rich devotees aspired to present him with a car. Once, when the saint was camping in Madurai, the then temple trustee of Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple, who was also a political bigwig there, simply bought a new car and parked it outside the camp, confident he could persuade the saint to drive to Meenakshi Amman temple. Naturally, the more powerful mind prevailed, and the Madurai politician walked alongside the temple.

An ascetic from a very young age, he became the Math head when only 13 years. Very well versed in scriptures, he was also endowed with worldly wisdom. He gathered hordes of devotees within a short span of time. Fluent in many languages, he had a good grounding in world affairs and could hold forth on any topic, be it material or spiritual. Such was his yogic power that a number of devotees soon began to seek him out for help when their loved ones fell ill; and Maha Periyava pulled off a few miracles.

TH CROSSWORD + 14367



Across

- 1 How girl uses silly hands-over-eyes question (5,3)
- 5 Appears suddenly with soda and drink (4,2)
- 10 Bit of gossip in press is about Italian gentlemen (7)
- 11 Oblique patellar fractures need plaster initially (7)
- 12 Sailor wants second line at right angles to length of ship (5)
- 13 Brief catchy phrase in Spooner's dance scene (5,4)

Down

- 1 In any case, want a hotter model to entertain members at inauguration (2,6,4)
- 18 Kinky male having sex with very passionate head waiter (6,6)
- 21 Scoring ecstasy, blither any rubbish in confusion (9)
- 23 Winged mammal at estate captured (5)
- 24 Catch one criminal in Italian river (7)
- 25 Introduce band in retro bar (5,2)
- 26 Coming back, survives blunder on a mountain range (6)
- 27 / 4 What person applying gel might do to terrify (4,4,4,5,2,3)
- 28 Talkative person's gossip about top star, extremely amusing (6)
- 29 Young bird is elegant, flying out of a little nest (6)
- 30 Extra weather protection in new dorm inside grounds reviewed (5,4)
- 31 See 27 Across
- 32 Selected newspaper article about model (5)
- 33 Stumped accurately, having advanced instantly (8)
- 34 Tot playing behind exotic maple tree (8)
- 35 An irrational fear of touch, beginning to suspect a bipolar disorder (14)
- 36 Fantastic firemen save female, taking chopper up to double-check (2-7)
- 37 Begs brats to acquire knowledge (8)
- 38 Unknown male abducts one attractive female touring western country (8)
- 39 Outlaw killing European disappeared? Exactly right (4,2)
- 40 Woman getting endless pain in viral infection (6)
- 41 Competitor in Rolls-Royce overtakes champion (5)

(set by Dr. X)

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



SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

E	L	E	T	R	I	C	S	H	O	C	K
G	A	C	K	T	S	O	M	W	E	R	H
R	A	E	I	P	L	N	N	O	T	T	E
U	E	O	N	G	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
N	O	S	T	R	U	M	E	N	T	E	E
F	A	T	H	E	A	D	T	R	I	G	R
L	R	S	D	M	N	O	E	T	T	T	T
O	D	I	U	I	L	I	N	O	S	A	N
O	E	S	E	M	N	T	E	T	R	H	T
R	E	S	T	H	O	M	E	T	T	E	E
T	U	A	E	B	H	L	E	L	L	I	N
B	E	L	L	I	N	G	2	7	8	9	0

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

IN BRIEF



Rupee plunges 12 paise to new all-time low of 85.27/\$

The rupee stayed weak for the third straight session and fell 12 paise to fresh all-time low of 85.27 (provisional) against the U.S. dollar on Thursday, amid a strong greenback and rising crude prices. Anuj Choudhary, research analyst, Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee fell to a fresh all-time low on strong dollar and rising U.S. treasury yields that are at the highest levels in seven months. Crude price surge, dollar demand and FII outflows may also weigh on the rupee. PTI

'Housing sales in top seven cities declined 4% in 2024'

Housing sales are estimated to have fallen 4% this year in seven major cities to almost 4.6 lakh units on lower launches while sales in value terms are up 16% to ₹5.68 lakh crore, as per Anarock. Average housing prices grew 21% this year on rising land, labour and building raw-material costs. The housing brokerage firm attributed the fall in sales volumes to a drop in new launches of housing projects due to a delay in regulatory approvals amid General and Assembly polls.. PTI

Haier Appliances set to cross \$1 bn in 2024 India revenue

Haier Appliances India is set to cross the milestone of \$1 billion revenue in 2024 aided by a strong summer, festive season and ongoing trend of premiumisation and expects ₹11,500 crore revenue in 2025, company president N.S. Satish said. Besides, the appliances and consumer electronics maker company, which has so far invested ₹2,500 crore in India, has plans to set up a third manufacturing facility in the southern part of the country, he said. PTI

Bureau of Immigration imposes penalties on IndiGo

InterGlobe Aviation, parent of India's largest airline IndiGo, said the Bureau of Immigration imposed fines worth ₹2 lakh for visa-related violations of two passengers. In a filing, the airline said it was exploring the possibilities of filing an appeal against the orders passed by the Bureau of Immigration. PTI

Ride-hailing apps' pricing disparities: probe ordered

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Consumer protection watchdog CCPA will investigate ride-hailing apps for allegedly charging different fares for identical rides on Android and Apple devices, Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said on Thursday.

"This prima facie looks like unfair trade practice," Joshi wrote on X, formerly Twitter, calling it a "blatant disregard" for consumers' right to transparency.

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has been directed to hold a detailed inquiry and submit a report at the earliest. The investigation will extend to other sectors including food delivery and ticket booking apps. "Zero tolerance for consumer exploitation!" Mr. Joshi added. The probe follows media reports highlighting price disparities between mobile platforms for the same journey.

Leave banking to RBI, avers SC

RBI alone enacts mandate for banks. "The function of a court is to examine whether an authority was abusing its powers, and not to appropriate to itself the task entrusted to that authority," the Supreme Court said in a judgment

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court made it clear the judiciary must not assume expertise and jurisdiction over banking and should leave the job exclusively to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

"It is RBI alone which enacts the mandate for the banks. In this sphere, the only function of courts is to examine the lawful authority is not abused, and not to appropriate itself the task entrusted to that authority," a Bench of Justices Bela M. Trivedi and Satish



Courts can examine if there was any abuse of lawful authority.

Chandra Sharma underscored in a judgment.

The judgment, delivered on December 20 but published days later, was based on appeals filed by

HSBC, Citibank, American Express Banking Corporation, and Standard Chartered Bank along with an intervention by HDFC. The banks had challenged a National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission decision of July 2008 which capped interest on credit card dues at 30%.

'Exorbitant' rates
The Commission found the 36% to 49% charged by the banks "exorbitant", unusual and an "exploitation of the borrowers". Justice Sharma, who authored the verdict, set aside the Commission's judgment.

Justice Sharma highlighted the RBI, as the prime banking institution of India, was entrusted with the supervisory role over banking and conferred with the authority of issuing binding directions having statutory force.

"No other entity or banking institution has been conferred by the legislature the power of subordinate legislation to formulate and enact new directives/guidelines in public interest and for the growth of the Indian economy," the apex court said.

The function of the courts was restricted to ex-

amine if there was any abuse of lawful authority and not to appropriate itself the task entrusted to that authority.

"However, the National Commission has done just that. The National Commission assumed jurisdiction and expertise over the Reserve Bank of India," Justice Sharma pointed out.

Capping interest at 30% was a violation of the provisions of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949. Section 2IA of the Act, specifically, mandates the rates of interest charged by banking companies must not be subject to court scrutiny.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	THURSDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	78,472	0.00
US Dollar	85.27	0.00
Gold	78,850	0.00
Brent oil	73.56	0.00

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	2400.25	+2.78
Adani Ports	1243.95	+61.75
Apollo Hosp	7261.15	+21.15
Asian Paints	2262.40	-21.60
Axis Bank	1076.70	-2.20
Bajaj Auto	8878.50	+100.45
Bajaj Finserv	1559.30	+5.25
Bharti Finance	6815.75	+7.55
Bharat Elec.	295.20	+2.75
Bharti Airtel	1599.50	+15.60
BPCL	255.60	+3.60
Britannia Ind.	4761.65	+17.55
Cipla	1490.55	+14.80
Coal India	386.60	+2.10
D Drreddy Lab	1355.15	+4.25
Eicher Motors	4801.35	+8.45
Gasim Ind.	2482.05	+19.80
HCL Tech	1900.75	+3.80
HDFC Bank	1790.70	+7.35
HDFC Life	626.40	+3.90
Hero MotoCorp	4275.00	+15.90
Hindalco	628.75	+1.30
Hind Univer.	2332.75	+2.80
ICICI Bank	1297.35	+0.10
IndusInd Bank	931.95	+3.35
Infosys	1097.40	+1.65
ITC	476.95	+1.50
JSW Steel	914.45	+7.40
Kotak Bank	1752.80	+3.75
L&T	3629.50	+10.25
M&M	2975.65	+46.95
Maruti Suzuki	10896.00	+159.40
NestleIndia	2149.90	+16.80
NTPC	334.65	+0.65
ONGC	240.25	+1.30
PowerGrid Corp	310.30	+0.20
Reliance Ind.	1216.55	+6.20
SBI Life	1409.05	+22.05
State Bank	812.45	+0.40
Shriram Finance Ltd.	2926.90	+43.95
Sun Pharma	1841.35	+22.35
TataConsumerProduct	900.95	+6.35
Tata Motors	740.80	+4.70
Tata Steel	140.36	+0.02
TCS	4169.10	+10.40
Tech Mahindra	1698.70	+6.20
Titan	3323.05	+30.35
Trent Ltd.	7063.70	+56.55
UltraTech Cement	11460.65	+70.30
Wipro	305.05	+0.25

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on December 26

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	85.06	85.38
Euro	88.47	88.81
British Pound	106.60	107.01
Japanese Yen (100)	54.03	54.24
Chinese Yuan	11.65	11.70
Swiss Franc	94.56	94.93
Singapore Dollar	62.61	62.86
Canadian Dollar	59.14	59.37
Malaysian Ringgit	19.03	19.11
Australian Dollar	53.01	53.22

Source: Indian Bank

RBI flags lenders' high attrition, use of dark patterns and top-up loans

Lalatendu Mishra

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it has constituted a committee to develop a Framework for Responsible and Ethical Enablement of Artificial Intelligence (FREE-AI) in the financial sector.

The committee will be led by Pushpak Bhattacharya, professor, department of computer science and engineering, IIT Bombay, as chairman.

The panel will also assess the current level of AI adoption in financial services, review regulatory and supervisory approaches on AI with focus on financial sector globally and identify potential risks associated with AI, if any and recommend an evaluation, mitigation and monitoring framework and consequent compliance requirements for financial institutions, including banks, NBFCs, FinTechs and PSOs, among others.



On dark patterns or design interfaces and tactics used to trick users into desired behaviour, the RBI said, "The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) notified guidelines on prevention and regulation of dark patterns on November 30, 2023, with the objective of identifying and regulating such practices."

"The RBI is looking into the prevalence of such practices among REs (regulated entities) and considering appropriate policy actions," the banking regulator said in the report submitted to the government.

The RBI said banks must implement strategies such as improved onboarding processes, competitive benefits and a supportive workplace culture for long-term staff engagement.

On top-up loans, which had grown significantly in

the last one year and believed to be finding its way to the stock markets, the RBI said such additional facilities were often sanctioned with minimal processes and due diligence, with liberal underwriting standards and lax adherence to prudential guidelines on loan-to-value (LTV) ratios, risk weights, and without ensuring the end-use of funds.

Top up loans

Though in November 2023, the RBI had instructed all top-up loans extended by REs against movable assets, which are inherently depreciating in nature, should be treated as unsecured loans for credit appraisal, prudential limits and exposure purposes, the central bank said it would assess the need, if any, for additional regulatory interventions to mitigate identified risks in cases of other top-up loans.

The RBI also said asset quality of banks improved, with the gross non-per-

forming assets (GNPA) ratio falling to its lowest in 13 years at 2.7% at end-March and 2.5% at end-September. Banks' profitability also rose for the sixth consecutive year in 2023-24 and continued to rise in H1:2024-25 with the return on assets (RoA) at 1.4% and return on equity (RoE) at 14.6%.

"The combined balance sheet of urban co-operative banks (UCBs) expanded in 2023-24, with asset quality improving for the third consecutive year while capital buffers and profitability were strengthened," it said.

The non-banking financial companies (NBFC) sector exhibited double-digit credit growth, while its unsecured lending contracted and asset quality improved further – the GNPA ratio dropped to 3.4% at end-September 2024; strong capital buffers kept the CRAR (capital to risk assets ratio) well above the stipulated norm at end-September 2024.

Chawla takes charge as Revenue Secretary

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

Arunish Chawla took charge as the Secretary, Department of Revenue.

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C-Block, 1st Floor, Yojana Bhawan, Tilak Marg, C-Scheme, Jaipur.
RISL invites bids from the eligible bidders for the following:

NIB No./Date/Unique bid no.	Particulars	Estimated Cost/EMD	Start date /Last date
F4.2(647)/RISL/Tech/24-02603-24.12.2024	RFP of Selection of Third-Party Auditor for VAPT of Rajasthan State Data Centers (RSDCs)	Rs. 1.6 Cr. Rs. 3.20 Lacs	24.12.2024

Details can be seen on the websites <http://risl.rajasthan.gov.in>, <http://dtcr.rajasthan.gov.in>. Bids are to be submitted through <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in> RAJ-Samwad/C24/9526

OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER, (PROJECT) PHED CHURU (RAJ.)
S.N. 1294-1343
Notice Inviting Bid
Bids for following works are invited from interested bidders upto 18.00 hrs. 09.01.2025. Other particulars of the bid may be visited on the procurement portal <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>, <http://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in> and departmental website <http://phed.raj.nic.in>

NIT No	Work Description	Estimated Cost
06/2024-25 ACE(P)Churu	Providing installation, testing and commissioning of Gas-Chlorinator plant at 60 MLD WTP Karamsanga District Hanumangarh including 5 years O & M on single responsibility output performance contract basis along with consumable items UBN is : PHE2425WSOB07316	Rs. 423.77 Lacs
07/2024-25 ACE(P)Churu	Providing installation, testing and commissioning of Gas-Chlorinator plant at 25 MLD WTP Sahwa District Churu including 5 years O & M on single responsibility output performance contract basis along with consumable items UBN is : PHE2425WSOB0	

SANA

Israeli strikes hit airport, military, power targets in rebel-held Yemen



Israeli air strikes hit Sanaa's International Airport and military targets in Yemen on Thursday, following Houthi missile attacks on Israel. The strikes targeted military infrastructure and power stations, with Houthi officials condemning them as "Zionist crimes" against Yemenis amid escalating tensions in the region. AFP

KYIV

Russian drone attack injures eight persons in Ukraine's Nikopol town



A Russian drone attack on the central market in Nikopol injured eight people on Thursday morning, according to local authorities. Seven of the injured were hospitalised after the strike damaged multiple market stalls. This follows a recent attack on Ukraine's energy system that killed one person. REUTERS

SEOUL

South Korean Opposition submits motion to impeach Acting President



South Korea's Opposition party submitted an impeachment motion on Thursday against Acting President Han Duck-soo on Thursday, citing his refusal to appoint justices to fill three Constitutional Court vacancies. This comes as the court prepares to review rebellion charges against impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol. AP

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan sentences another 60 civilians to prison for May 9 riots



Pakistan's military courts have convicted 60 civilians to prison terms of two to ten years for their involvement in attacks on military installations during the May 9, 2023 riots linked to Imran Khan's arrest, the Army said on Thursday. This follows a previous conviction of 25 individuals for similar offences. PTI

Azerbaijan mourns crash victims as speculation mounts about cause

U.K.-based Osprey Flight Solutions said flight was likely shot down by a Russian air-defence system; Azerbaijani President Aliyev said it was too soon to speculate on the reasons, but said the weather had forced the plane to change from its course

Associated Press

Azerbaijan on Thursday observed a nationwide day of mourning for the victims of the plane crash that killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured as speculation mounted about a possible cause of the disaster that remained unknown.

Azerbaijan Airlines' Embraer 190 was en route from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus on Wednesday when it was diverted for reasons yet unclear and crashed while making an attempt to



Fatal crash: Emergency specialists work at the crash site of an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger jet near Aktau on Wednesday. AFP

land in Aktau in Kazakhstan after flying east across the Caspian Sea.

Cellphone footage showed part of its fuselage

ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft lying upside in the grass.

Speaking at a news con-

ference on Wednesday, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said that it was too soon to speculate on the reasons behind the crash, but said that the weather had forced the plane to change from its planned course.

As the official crash investigation started, theories abounded about a possible cause, with some commentators alleging that holes seen in the plane's tail section possibly indicate that it could have come under fire from Russian air defence systems fending off a Ukrainian drone attack.

Ukrainian drones had

previously attacked Grozny, the provincial capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, and other regions in the country's North Caucasus.

Osprey Flight Solutions, an aviation security firm based in the U.K., warned its clients that the "Azerbaijan Airlines flight was likely shot down by a Russian air defence system."

Asked about the claims that the plane had been fired upon by air defense assets, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that "it would be wrong to make hypotheses before investigators make their verdict".

Syria authorities launch attack in Assad stronghold

Agence France-Presse
DAMASCUS

Syria's new authorities launched an operation in a stronghold of ousted President Bashar al-Assad on Thursday, with a war monitor saying three gunmen affiliated with the former government were killed.

Mr. Assad fled Syria after an Islamist-led offensive wrested from his control city after city until Damascus fell on December 8, ending his clan's five-decade rule.

After 13 years of civil war sparked by Mr. Assad's crackdown on democracy protests, Syria's new leaders from Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) face the monumental task of safeguarding the multi-sectarian, multi-eth-



Strict watch: Fighters affiliated with Syria's new administration deployed near the road leading to Alawite-majority Mazeh 86. AFP

nic country from further collapse.

Rooted in Syria's branch of al-Qaeda, a Sunni Muslim jihadist group, HTS has moderated its rhetoric and vowed to ensure protection for minorities, including the Alawite community from which Mr. Assad

hails.

With 5,000,000 dead in the war and more than

1,00,000 missing, the new authorities have also pledged justice for the victims of abuses under the deposed ruler.

On Thursday, state news agency SANA said security forces launched an operation against pro-Assad militias in the western province of Tartus, "neutralising a certain number" of armed men.

+ 'Moscow's security should be guaranteed'

Reuters
MOSCOW

Russia sees no point in a weak ceasefire to freeze the war in Ukraine but Moscow wants a legally binding deal for a lasting peace that would ensure the security of both Russia and its neighbours, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Thursday.

"A truce is a path to nowhere," Mr. Lavrov said,

adding that Moscow suspected such a weak truce would be simply used by the West to re-arm Ukraine.

"We need final legal agreements that will fix all the conditions for ensuring the security of the Russian Federation and, of course, the legitimate security interests of our neighbours," Mr. Lavrov said. He added that Moscow wanted the legal documents drafted in

such a way to ensure "the impossibility of violating these agreements".

It was earlier reported that President Vladimir Putin is open to discussing a Ukraine ceasefire deal with Donald Trump but rules out making any major territorial concessions and insists Kyiv abandon ambitions to join NATO.

Mr. Putin said last week that he was ready to compromise over Ukraine in

possible talks with Mr. Trump on ending the war and had no conditions for starting talks with the Ukrainian authorities.

Mr. Putin said the fighting was complex, so it was "difficult and pointless to guess what lies ahead... (but) we are moving, as you said, towards solving our primary tasks, which we outlined at the beginning of the special military operation".

Israeli strike kills 5 Palestinian journalists

Associated Press
DEIR AL-BALAH

An Israeli strike killed five Palestinian journalists outside a hospital in the Gaza Strip overnight, the Health Ministry said early Thursday. The Israeli military said it had targeted a group of militants.

The strike hit a car outside the Al-Awda Hospital in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp in the central

Over 130 Palestinian reporters have been killed since the start of the war, an organisation says

part of the territory. The journalists were working for the local Quds News Network.

The military said it targeted a group of fighters from Islamic Jihad, a mili-

tant group allied with Hamas, whose October 7, 2023 attack into southern Israel ignited the war.

The Committee to Protect Journalists says over 130 Palestinian reporters have been killed since the start of the war. Israel has not allowed foreign reporters to enter Gaza except on military embeds.

Israel has banned the pan-Arab Al Jazeera network and accused six of its

Gaza reporters of being militants. The Qatar-based broadcaster denies the allegations and accuses Israel of trying to silence its war coverage, which has focused heavily on civilian casualties from Israeli military operations.

A 35-year-old reserve soldier was also killed in central Gaza on Thursday, bringing the total number of soldiers killed in the ground operation to 389.

Bangladesh to investigate 2009 mutiny massacre

Agence France-Presse
DHAKA

Bangladesh on Thursday ordered a commission to investigate a failed 2009 Army mutiny and subsequent crackdown, including the role of alleged "foreign" backers, the inquiry chief said.

The violent mutiny sent shock waves through the South Asian nation and ended with the Army crushing the mutineers, with scores arrested and sentenced to death.

A previous official investigation into the mutiny which left scores dead blamed years of pent-up anger among ordinary soldiers, who felt their appeals for pay rises and better treatment were ignored.

But that probe was carried out during the tenure of Sheikh Hasina, who was ousted as Prime Minister by a revolution in August, when she left to India.

Since her fall, families of soldiers killed in the violence have been campaigning to reopen the investigation.



accused Ms. Hasina – then newly elected – of orchestrating a plan to weaken the military to bolster her own power in a country prone to coups.

Protesters have also alleged India's involvement in that plot.

The claims are likely to infuriate New Delhi, which did not immediately respond to the allegations.

Foreign involvement "We aim to determine whether any foreign entity was involved in the carnage, as allegations of national and international conspiracy have been raised," commission chief A.L.M. Fazlur Rahman told presspersons.

The mutineers stole

thousands of weapons in February 2009 from the headquarters of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) paramilitary squad before embarking on a killing spree in the barracks.

The uprising quickly spread, with thousands of soldiers seizing weapons and pledging allegiance to the mutineers before it was quashed by the Army.

Thousands were rounded up and tried in special military courts in the aftermath of the massacre, as the then newly-elected government of Ms. Hasina wrestled to regain control.

Hundreds of soldiers were handed punishments ranging from death to a few years, with the United Nations criticising the process for failing to meet basic standards.

Ms. Hasina's iron-fisted rule was backed by New Delhi, and the 77-year-old remains in India, adding to fraying relations between the nations.

On Monday, Dhaka said it had requested India send Ms. Hasina back, to face charges of "massacres, killings, and crimes against humanity".

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SI.No Online Tender no with qfy / Document Cost Sale Period Pro bid Submission Opening
1 E1277SCOPEDME/TNMSC/ENGG/ 2024, dt: 26.12.2024 - Laparoscopic Set with 3D, 27.12.2024 03.01.2025 21.01.2025 21.01.2025
2 E1278SCOPEDME/TNMSC/ENGG/ 2024, dt: 26.12.2024 - Endoscope set for Urology (1), Rs.5,725/- 27.12.2024 03.01.2025 21.01.2025 21.01.2025
3 E1279PSC/DMET/TNMSC/ENGG/ 2024, dt: 26.12.2024 -Power Saw (1), High Energy Drill or K-Wire Oscillating / Sagittal Saw (1), Rs.5,725/- 30.12.2024 03.01.2025 21.01.2025 21.01.2025
4 E1280NWRC/TNMSC/ENGG/ 2024, dt: 26.12.2024 Neonatal Warmer (10), Rs.5,725/- 30.12.2024 03.01.2025 21.01.2025 21.01.2025
5 E1281LASER/RC-TNMSC/ENGG/ 2024, dt: 26.12.2024 Green Laser (8), ND-YAG 30.12.2024 03.01.2025 21.01.2025 21.01.2025
6 E1282R/RC/TNMSC/ENGG/ 2024, dt: 26.12.2024 -Various types of Digital X-ray (5), 30.12.2024 03.01.2025 31.01.2025 31.01.2025

EMD as specified in the tender document. For details visit www.tntenders.gov.in and TNMSC website www.tnmsc.tn.gov.in

DIPR-5671/TENDER/2024

General Manager (Equipment)

The Kerala Industrial Corridor Development Corporation Limited (KICDC) NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (NCB)

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION CUM REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) FOR SELECTION OF PROGRAMME MANAGER FOR NEW CITIES (PMNC) FOR INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRATED MANUFACTURING CLUSTER AT PALAKKAD IN KERALA UNDER CBIC PROJECT

The Government of India has envisaged the development of Chennal Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC) to achieve accelerated development and regional industry agglomeration in the state of Kerala. The Kerala Industrial Corridor Development Corporation Limited (KICDC), a special purpose company, has been entrusted to select the consultants for the CBIC Project.

Kerala Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (KICDC) which is an SPV Company formed by the State Resource Agency (SRA) for the project, invited bidders programme manager for new cities (PMNC) for Infrastructure Development of Integrated Manufacturing Cluster at Palakkad in Kerala under CBIC project.

The salient features of the project, eligibility criteria and prescribed formats for submission can be accessed on RFP document uploaded on the website: <https://kinfra.org>, <https://www.kicdc.in>, <https://www.gem.gov.in>.

Interested and eligible applicants are requested to submit their online responses to the RFP-cum RFP at <https://www.gem.gov.in> on or before 3:00 PM (IST), 23.01.2025.

SD/Managing Director

GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA

Office of the Principal Secretary to Government of Karnataka, Department of Medical Education and Convenor, Search Committee, Bengaluru

APPOINTMENT OF THE POST OF VICE-CHANCELLOR, RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, BENGALURU

Applications are invited for the post of Vice-Chancellor, RGUHS from person who have distinguished themselves in the field of Health Sciences.

The applicants should not have attained the age of 62 years as on 26.01.2025.

The applicants may submit their Bio-data and a DD (Demand Draft) of the application fee drawn in the name of the Director, Directorate of Medical Education, BMC & RI (Old Building), 1st Floor, Fort, K.R. Road, Bengaluru - 560 002 to the following address in four sets to the Convenor, Search Committee, on or before 15.01.2025 by 5:30 pm in the Room No.611, 4th Gate, 6th Floor, M.S Building, Dr.Ambedkar Veedhi, Bengaluru - 560 001.

Application Fee (Non-Refundable)
1) For General Eligibility and other Candidate - Rs.10,000/-
2) For Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Category-1 Candidates - Rs.5,000/-

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Dated : 21/12/2024
NOTICE INVITING TENDER UNDER NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-PROCUREMENT

1. Name of the Work : Construction of Black Top Bituminous Road for a length of 675 mtr. along with RCC drain and four nos. of double row 900 mm dia. NP3 RCC Hume Pipe Culvert at Kurki IA in Puri District.
2. Estimated Cost : Rs.396.55 Lakh
3. Period of Completion : 05 (Five) Calendar months.
4. Other details

Procurement Officer	Bid ID/Tender reference No.	Availability of Tender On
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STAYING HUMBLE

Played with freedom and got lucky, reveals Konstas



Australia opener Sam Konstas was humble in his response after a brilliant start to his Test career against India at the MCG. "It was quite surreal with the big crowd, the biggest crowd I have ever played in. The boys welcomed me, so I just played with that freedom and backed myself and was lucky to get a few runs."

GETTING IT RIGHT

I was trying to put a bit of pressure on [Bumrah] and it paid off"



Sam Konstas lit up the MCG, with his rapid 60 on the opening day of the fourth Test against India on Thursday. Probed about his assault on Jasprit Bumrah, the Aussie opener explained: "He is a legend of the game so I was trying to put a bit of pressure on him and it paid off. I was trying to take his lines away."

NEW MARK

Record number of fans flock MCG on opening day



A record 87,242 spectators filled the stands at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground on the opening day of the Boxing Day Test between India and Australia, setting a new mark for the highest single-day attendance in a five-day match between the two teams. Tickets for the opening day had been sold out over two weeks ahead of the clash.

MILESTONE

Andy Pycroft completes 100 Tests as match referee



Andy Pycroft on Thursday became only the fourth official in the history of men's Test cricket to complete 100 games as a match referee with the Boxing Day contest between India and Australia. The list is led by former Sri Lanka player Ranjan Madugalle with 225 Tests, followed by New Zealand's Jeff Crowe (125) and England's Chris Broad (123).

Konstas makes a stunning debut as Aussies inch ahead on Day 1

Khawaja, Labuschagne and Smith too fire for the home side after Cummins opts to bat while Head falls for a duck; Bumrah leads the Indian fightback with a two-wicket burst in the final session at the MCG

IND IN AUS**K.C. Vijaya Kumar**

MELBOURNE

The extravagant promise of youth, runs by middle-aged men and a spearhead's late surge, were all on display at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) here on Thursday. Sam Konstas belied his 19 summers and made a stunning debut while his seniors Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith found their collective voice.

Meanwhile, Jasprit Bumrah (three for 75) offered a counter-punch with a two-wicket burst. The fourth Test's opening day had more drama and less dormancy, and at close Australia scored 311 for six in its first innings.

Second wind

In the last session, Rohit Sharma's men found a second wind. Even as Smith (68 batting) drilled fours off the spinners, Labuschagne (72) fell to Washington Sundar. Lofting the off-spinner, the batter found a leaping Virat Kohli at mid-off.

Travis Head walked in and soon retreated as Bumrah held sway. The ball nipped back. Head shouldered arms, and one ball respected Newton's law of gravity. The Indian fans exhorted Bumrah to do one better, and he lured an edge from Mitchell Marsh. Australia 246 for five and wobbling, but Smith and Alex Carey allied well. The new ball end-



Unorthodox tactics: Konstas used the scoop shot to good effect, especially against Bumrah. AFP

ed Carey's tenure but the host remained marginally ahead.

Prior to this, in the afternoon, India kept it tight before Khawaja pulled Akash Deep for a four. Later he steered the seamer to get to his fifty while at the other end, Mohammed Siraj often left Labuschagne in a tangle. The latter finally exhaled with a pulled four and just as Australia was cruising, Khawaja (57) hit Bumrah straight down short mid-wicket's throat.

Smith got in and hustled and at tea, Australia moved to 176 for two. The second session that yielded 64 for one from 28 overs, reflected sedate progress unlike the furious gallop in the morning, orchestrated by

Konstas while an entire city seemed to be marching towards the MCG.

Once Pat Cummins won the toss and elected to bat, Konstas ran in with a sideways hop, skip and jump. Taking first strike against Bumrah, Konstas defended, played and missed. Soon the lad of Greek origin scripted his unique odyssey. And the missed ramp shots off Bumrah, did not deter a young star, erupting in applause.

Between overs, Kohli shouldered-barged Konstas, words were exchanged, and Khawaja tried to be the peacemaker. The incident happened while Kohli and Konstas were crossing over, and whether it was accidental

remains a matter of conjecture. But it showed the former India captain in poor light.

The philosophy of scoop, scoop until you succeed, worked in favour of Konstas. This shot's conventional and reverse variants, were executed to the hilt. A four, six and four were hammered against Bumrah and the venue, recognising a new star, erupted in applause.

Khawaja too flicked and pulled, and Konstas got to his fifty. However, against the run of play, he (60) fell to Ravindra Jadeja. Labuschagne and Khawaja then guided the host to 112 for one at lunch. It was a position that gained ballast as the day wore on.

SCOREBOARD**AUSTRALIA — 1ST INNINGS**

Sam Konstas lbw b Jadeja 60 (65b, 6x4, 2x6), Usman Khawaja c Rahul b Bumrah 57 (121b, 6x4), Marnus Labuschagne c Kohli b Washington 72 (145b, 7x4), Steve Smith (batting) 68 (111b, 5x4, 1x6), Travis Head b Bumrah 0 (7b), Mitchell Marsh c Pant b Bumrah 4 (13b, 1x4), Alex Carey c Pant b Akash 31 (41b, 1x6), Pat Cummins (batting) 8 (17b, 1x4); Extras (lb-7, nc-4); 11; Total (for six wkts., in 86 overs): 311.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-89 (Konstas, 19.2 overs), 2-154 (Khawaja, 44.1), 3-237 (Labuschagne, 65.1), 4-240 (Head, 66.3), 5-246 (Marsh, 68.6), 6-299 (Carey, 82.1).

INDIA BOWLING

Bumrah 21-7-75-3, Siraj 15-2-69-0, Akash 19-5-59-1, Jadeja 14-2-54-1, Nitish 5-0-10-0, Washington 12-2-37-1.

Nayar explains rationale behind Gill's omission

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

MELBOURNE

Minutes before the fourth Test commenced at the Melbourne Cricket Ground here on Thursday, India stirred the news with some radical selection calls. Shubman Gill was dropped, Washington Sundar was preferred and there were hints about Rohit Sharma surfacing in the top-order.

After the first day's play, it was assistant coach Abhishek Nayar's turn to offer his rationale behind India's choices: "Looking at these conditions and the pitch, having Washi in the bowling attack will give us that variation, especially when the ball gets old."

Nayar then acted coy when asked about the epi-

"After the 50 overs, we felt that was an area we wanted to get better at. We felt Washi could give us that solidarity with Jaddu (Ravindra Jadeja), especially with Travis Head and Alex Carey getting runs lower down."

Explaining further, Nayar said: "Rohit will come up in the order and more likely than not, he will open the innings. Unfortunately for Gill, he had to miss out. He understands it's the team's requirement and it's unfortunate, but I wouldn't say that he has been dropped."

It's just unfortunate that he couldn't find his place in this game."

Nayar then acted coy when asked about the epi-

sode involving Virat Kohli and debutant Sam Konstas: "Honestly, I don't know. We were having a conversation outside. I am not aware of what happened and if anything happened. But when you play a game like that, there will be emotions, but I am pretty sure that it's not as big as it seems."

Konstas drew praise too when Nayar added: "We saw him in the Prime Minister's XI game when he got a 100 against us. We knew what we were up against. It's always refreshing to see someone come and play good cricket, whether that's our team or the opposition. So, credit to him."

Kohli let off with fine for shoulder barge on Konstas

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

MELBOURNE

Virat Kohli was fined 20 per cent of his match fee for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct on the first day of the fourth Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground here on Thursday.

The former Indian captain had cut across the pitch and brushed his shoulder against Australian debutant Sam Konstas in the morning. The youngster reacted and Usman Khawaja stepped in as the mediator.

According to an ICC press release, "Kohli was found to have breached Article 2.12 of the ICC Code of Conduct, which relates to



Heat of the moment: Konstas and Kohli exchange words as Khawaja looks on. AFP

inappropriate physical contact with a player." The statement also added: "One demerit point has been added to Kohli's disciplinary record, for whom it was the first offence in a 24-month period."

After on-field umpires Joel Wilson and Michael

Gough, third umpire Sharuddoula Ibne Shahid Saitkat and fourth umpire Shawn Craig levelled the charge," the ICC further elaborated: "Kohli admitted the offence and accepted the sanction proposed by Andy Pycroft, the match referee."

Indian women eye series sweep

Shayan Acharya

VADODARA

Hazy conditions persisted on Thursday morning as India trained at the Kotambadi Stadium ahead of its final One-Day International (ODI) against the West Indies.

With the series already in the pocket, it was an optional session for the Women in Blue and the team management indicated that it could gauge its bench strength for the inconsequential tie.

With the World Cup scheduled at home for next year, the Indian team has already started planning for the marquee event, and as bowling coach Aavishkar Salvi stated, the side's focus is on working towards achieving the big goal.

Coming on the back of an embarrassing ODI series defeat to Australia, India



Clinical show: The Women in Blue have taken an unassailable lead. VIJAY SONEJI

nation on debut.

The fast bowling bowling department too has been impressive, with Renuka Singh Thakur leading the pack and youngsters Titas Sadhu and Saima Thakur backing her.

West Indies, meanwhile, will be hoping to end the series on a high.

Teams (from): India: Harmanpreet Kaur (Capt.), Smriti Mandhana, Pratika Rawal, Jemimah Rodrigues, Harleen Deol, Richa Ghosh (wk), Uma Chetry, Tejal Hasabnis, Deepthi Sharma, Minnu Mani, Priya Mishra, Tanuja Kanwer, Titas Sadhu, Saima Thakur, Renuka Singh Thakur.

West Indies: Hayley Matthews (Capt.), Sheamaine Campbell, Aaliyah Alleyne, Shamilia Connell, Nerissa Crofton, Deandra Dottin, Afy Fletcher, Shabika Gajnabi, Chinelle Henry, Zaida James, Qiana Joseph, Mandy Mangru, Ashmini Munisar, Karishma Ramharack, Rashada Williams.

Match starts at 9:30 a.m.



Hero: Rajput did the star turn for UP Yoddhas. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

UP Yoddhas, Patna Pirates in semifinals

PKL**Press Trust of India**

PUNE

put (12 points) and Hitesh played starring roles with High-5.

UP Yoddhas will face Haryana Steelers in the first semifinal on Friday.

Patna Pirates beat U Mumba 31-23 in the second Eliminator. It will meet Da-Bang Delhi in the second last-four clash.

The semifinals will be played on Friday while the final is scheduled for Sunday.

The Eliminator 1 was a one-sided contest as Raj-

Everton holds City; Fulham stuns Chelsea

EURO LEAGUES**Associated Press**

MANCHESTER

Erling Haaland's penalty miss cost Manchester City as the four-time defending Premier League champion dropped more points in a 1-1 draw with Everton on Thursday.

Haaland had the chance to fire City on course for only its second win in 13 games when stepping up for a 53rd-minute spot kick at the Etihad Stadium. But his tame effort was saved by Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford to extend City's woeful run.

Pep Guardiola's team has lost nine of its last 13 games in all competitions.

The draw means City picked up only its fifth point in the league since

the end of October. City is seventh in the standings.

Second-placed Chelsea also dropped points after a 2-1 loss at home to Fulham, and Nottingham Forest won 1-0 against Tottenham to go up to third.

City went ahead through Bernardo Silva's deflected shot in the 14th, but Ilkay Ndiaye drew level in the 36th.

Haaland's missed penalty means the Norway international has only scored once in his last seven games.

The results: Bournemouth 0 drew with Crystal Palace 0; Chelsea 1 (Palmer 16) lost to Fulham 2 (Wilson 82, Munir 90+5); Manchester City 1 (Silva 14) drew with Everton 1 (Ndiaye 36).

Newcastle 3 (Gordon 2, Isak 59, Joelin 90+1) bt Aston Villa 0; Nottingham Forest 1 (Elanga 28) bt Tottenham 0; Southampton 0 lost to West Ham 1 (Bowen 59).

bounced back with convincing T20I and ODI series wins against the West Indies. "Since ours is a process-driven team, a few losses or a few wins don't get into our heads. We just try to focus on the next challenge that is instilled for us, and prepare accordingly. That's how we operate," said Salvi.

Smriti Mandhana has been on a roll, with sixth consecutive fifties across formats. Youngsters Harleen Deol and Pratika Rawal have also stepped up with significant contributions. While Harleen scored her maiden international century in the previous game, Pratika showed grit and determination on debut.

The fast bowling bowling department too has been impressive, with Renuka Singh Thakur leading the pack and youngsters Titas Sadhu and Saima Thakur backing her.

Press Trust of India

THE HINDU

INBRIEF



Bowlers bring Pakistan back into the first Test against SA

Bowlers hit back after Pakistan was bowled out for 211 on the first day of the first Test against South Africa at Centurion on Thursday. Khurram Shahzad struck twice and Mohammad Abbas claimed a late wicket as South Africa reached 82 for three at close. Dane Paterson, in pic., and debutant Corbin Bosch did most of the damage for South Africa after Pakistan was sent in to bat on a well-grassed pitch. Paterson took five for 61 – his second five-wicket haul in successive Tests – while Bosch took four for 63. Kamran Ghulam made a counter-attacking 54 off 71 balls for Pakistan.

The scores: Pakistan 211 in 57.3 overs (Ghulam 54, Paterson 5/61, Bosch 4/63) vs South Africa 82/3 in 22 overs (Markram 47 batting).

Williams' unbeaten 145 gives Zimbabwe first day honours

Sean Williams was unbeaten on 145 as Zimbabwe posted 363 for four against Afghanistan on the first day of first Test in Bulawayo on Thursday.

The scores: Zimbabwe 363/4 in 85 overs (Williams 145 batting, Curran 68, Ervine 56 batting) vs Afghanistan. **Toss:** Zimbabwe.

LIVE TELECAST

India Women vs West Indies Women: 3rd ODI, Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & JioCinema, 9.30 a.m.
South Africa vs Pakistan: 1st Test, day 2, JioCinema, 1.30 p.m.
Zimbabwe vs Afghanistan: 1st Test, day 2, FanCode, 1.30 p.m.
ISL: Sports 18-3 & JioCinema, 7.30 p.m.
PKL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 8 p.m.
Premier League: SS Select 1, 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 1 & 1.45 a.m. (Saturday)
Australia vs India: 4th Test, day 3, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 5 a.m. (Saturday)

Bihar shocks Delhi on rain-marred day

A crucial ninth-wicket stand between Raghuvendra and Himanshu ensured Bihar posted a defendable total in overcast conditions



All-round show: Raghuvendra Pratap Singh scored an unbeaten 52 and followed it up with two crucial wickets to help Bihar to a win. V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

HAZARE TROPHY

V.V. Subrahmanyam
HYDERABAD

Bihar shocked favourites Delhi by 17 runs via VJD Method after rain disrupted the day as the latter chased a modest target of 211 in the Vijay Hazare Trophy one-day cricket championship Group E match at Rajiv Gandhi Stadium here on Thursday.

After a delayed start, the match was reduced 42 overs.

Delhi's decision to put Bihar in worked in their favour. Debutant pacer Akhil Chaudhary (four for 45) was the most successful bowler despite being erratic,

ic, conceding 17 byes, while Prince Yadav bowled well in patches to pick a three-wicket haul.

However, what clearly changed the course of the game for Bihar was a crucial ninth-wicket stand of 59 runs between Raghuvendra Pratap Singh (52 n.o., 48b, 6x4, 2x6) and Himanshu Singh (14, 27b) which ensured it posted a total which could be defended in overcast conditions. This after a cameo by Bipin Saurabh (37, 16b, 2x4, 4x6) lifted Bihar's spirits on a gloomy day.

Delhi clearly struggled chasing the modest target which, after the first rain interruption (Delhi scoring 23 for one in seven overs), was revised to 192 in 36 overs.

A disciplined bowling ef-

fort by Bihar ensured it stayed in the game as wickets fell at regular intervals. Strangely, Delhi didn't promote the in-form wicket-keeper-batter Anuj Yadav, who came into bat at No. 7, when the team was struggling having lost 98 for five and rain threat looming large.

Anuj showed his class with a cover-drive to the fence and a huge six over long-on off pacer Raghuvendra in one over before heavy downpour forced abandonment of play with Delhi at 109 for five in 24 overs.

For Bihar, pacer Raghuvendra and off-spinner Suraj Kashyap picked two wickets apiece at crucial junctures to put the brakes on Delhi intentions.

VIJAY HAZARE TROPHY: THIRD-ROUND SCORES

Group-A

Jaipur: Goa 298 in 49.5 overs (Krishnamurthy Siddharth 101, Vikas Singh 95, Pheirojaiot Jotin 5/45) bt Manipur 127 in 34.2 overs (Amulya Pandrekar 5/20);

Points: **Goa 4(8), Manipur 0(0).**

Assam 75 in 19.1 overs (Chintan Gaja 57, Priyajit Singh Jadeja 4/23) lost to Gujarat 78/2 in 9.5 overs; **Gujarat 4(12), Assam 0(4).**

Odisha 265/7 in 50 overs (Swastik Samal 53, Kartik Biswal 69) bt Uttarakhand 190 in 41.5 overs (Rajesh Mohanty 5/41); **Odisha 4(4), Uttarakhand 0(4).**

Haryana 295/6 in 50 overs (Ankit Kumar 67, Dinesh Bana 72 n.o., Sumit Kumar 56 n.o.) bt Jharkhand 231 in 46.4 overs (Anshul Kambaj 4/48); **Haryana 4(8), Jharkhand 0(8).**

Group-B

Vizianagaram: Mizoram 169 in 36 overs lost to Chandigarh 173/4 in 31.2 overs (Manan Vohra 101 n.o., Ankit Kaushik 58 n.o.); **Chandigarh 4(6), Mizoram 0(2).**

Chhattisgarh 80 in 30.3 overs (Yash Thakur 4/27) lost to Vidarbha 83/2 in 18 overs; **Vidarbha 4(8), Chhattisgarh 0(6).**

Visakhapatnam: Tamil Nadu 284/5 in 47 overs (M. Shahrukh Khan 132 n.o., Mohamed Ali 76 n.o.) bt Uttar Pradesh 170 in 32.5 overs (Rinku Singh 55); **Toss: UP, TN 4(6), UP 0(6).**

Group-C

Hyderabad: Kerala 160 in 29.2 overs (Sagar Solanki 5/14) vs Madhya Pradesh 99/5 in 18 overs; **Kerala 2(2), MP 2(6).**

Bihar 210/9 in 42 overs (Raghuvendra Pratap Singh 52 n.o., Akhil Chaudhary 4/45) bt Delhi 109/5 in 24 overs; **Bihar 4(4), Delhi 0(4).**

Tripura 201/7 in 25 overs (Jiwanjot Singh 59, Mandeep Singh 94) vs Bengal 42/2 in 6.2 overs; **Tripura 2(6), Bengal 2(6).**

Rodriguez's brace fires Bagan past Punjab

Sports Bureau

Alberto Rodriguez scored a brace as Mohun Bagan Super Giant returned to winning ways with a 3-1 victory over Punjab FC in the ISL in New Delhi on Thursday. It was the third consecutive loss for Punjab.

Mohun Bagan Super Giant ended the year at the top with 29 points.

The result: Punjab 1 (Shabong 12) lost to MBSG 3 (Rodriguez 48, 69, Maclaren 64).

West Bengal puts it across Odisha, makes it to semifinals

Sports Bureau

HYDERABAD

West Bengal scored a 3-1 win over Odisha and made it to the semifinals of the Santosh Trophy National football championship here on Thursday.

Robi Hansda's ninth goal of the campaign, which came in the 77th minute saw him pull further away in the scoring charts.

This will be Bengal's 52nd appearance in the last-four stage.

The results:
Quarterfinals: Bengal 3 (Shreshtha 45+2, Hansda 77, Maji 90+2) bt Odisha 1 (Oram 25); Manipur 5 (Lowly 49, Shoraiham Sagar Singh 50, Shunjanthan Raghu 97, 105+5-pen, Zahir Khan 107) bt Delhi 2 (Jaideep Singh 10, 65-pen) in extra time.

Prachi enters semifinals

CHANDIGARH: Prachi Malik beat third seed Pal Upadhyay 7-5, 6-0 in the under-18 girls' quarterfinals of the AITA National series junior tennis on Thursday.

The results:

Quarterfinals: U-18: Boys:

Neev Kothari bt Sreenivas Kurapati 6-3 (retired); Tavish

Pahwa bt Swaraj Dhamdhare 7-6(1), 6-1; Akshat Dhull bt Omkar Shinde 3-6, 6-4, 6-3; Armaan Walia bt Parth Deonrukhakar 6-1, 6-0.

Girls: Devanshee Prabhudes bt K. Aadurai 6-4, 6-1; Shatakshi Sahayak bt Reet Arora 3-6, 6-0, 6-0; Prachi Malik bt Pal Upadhyay 7-5, 6-0; Jaya Kapoor bt Anandita Upadhyay 6-4, 6-3.



THE HINDU GROUP

Vijayveer wins rapid fire pistol gold



All smiles: Gurpreet Singh, champion Vijayveer Sidhu and Shivam Shukla, the rapid fire pistol medallists. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

to climb up in the six-man final, could not execute a fairy-tale finish.

In fact, Gurpreet was constantly caught with over-time shots, and ended with one in the last series as well. He had four such shots through the final

which cost him four points in the match.

"I was taking a lot of risk with my shots in trying to be aggressive," said Gurpreet, as he announced that it was his last Nationals and that he would focus on coaching henceforth.

Shivam Shukla rose to the bronze medal ahead of Ankur Goel who was not at his best in the final after a good start.

Suraj did well to clinch the junior silver behind Raajwardhan Paatil, a trainee of Gun for Glory in Pune, who struck perfect-5 thrice in a row to outclass the field. Eventually, Raajwardhan won 31-23, while Abhinav Choudhary took the bronze, ahead of Jatin, Bhavya Sharma and Mukesh Nelavalli.

The results: 25m rapid fire pistol: Men: 1. Vijayveer Sidhu 28 (581); 2. Gurpreet Singh 25 (575); 3. Shivam Shukla 23 (576). **Juniors:** 1. Raajwardhan Patil 31 (573); 2. Suraj Sharma 23 (578); 3. Abhinav Choudhary 21 (573).

It is my endeavour to grow this wonderful game of golf: Kapil



Ahlawat. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT
Ahlawat. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

as the Tata Steel PGTI ranking champion, collecting a record ₹1.56 crore for the season. He won two titles and had nine top-10 performances. He was rewarded with the DP World Tour card for 2025.

More than that, the top-10 players collected a minimum of ₹44 lakh, while the top-20 got a minimum of ₹31 lakh. The top-30

were assured of ₹22 lakh, that established the growing financial rewards for the professionals.

The 21 events had 19 different winners, including four first time champions. The average winning score was 17-under and four titles were decided on play-off, including the season-ending championship in Jamshedpur.

Rayhan Thomas, a professional of Indian origin from the UAE, won on debut, and secured the Korn Ferry Tour and Challenge Tour cards for 2025. While international champions Gaganjeet Bhullar and Ajeeetes Sandhu shone bright at home, players from USA, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Chile, Japan and Korea joined the Indian tour, elevating its global presence.

The Harish Sharma memorial basketball championship, celebrating the contribution of late general secretary of Basketball Federation of India (BFI), will be hosted in a 3x3 format, featuring dozens of men and women teams, at the K.D. Jadhav Hall of the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium on Dec. 28 and 29.

The two-day event will also have 3-point shooting, free throw and dunk competitions to make it a lively affair for everyone. The basketball festival will be telecast live by Doordarshan and streamed on social media. FIBA will also telecast the event in collaboration with organisers.

Harish Sharma basketball on December 28 and 29

Sports Bureau
NEW DELHI

The president of the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI), Kapil Dev, assured that he would continue to grow the game, as he presented the achievements of the season.

"Golf has deeply touched my life, especially after I retired from cricket. It is now my endeavour to grow this wonderful game of golf and create more opportunities for its development across the country," said Kapil, in a release here on Thursday.

In 21 tournaments

through the season, the PGTI offered an overall prize pool of ₹33 crore. Kapil had recently stressed that this prize would reach ₹50 crore soon.

Veer Ahlawat emerged



In association with YARA



YARA

Y

Young guns help Patna Pirates plunder PKL heavyweights, dream of title again

In a system that often picks star-studded outfits as the way to go, the Pirates with their unheralded raiding core have gone against the grain with some astounding results



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Saikat Chakraborty

Patna Pirates, the three-time Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) champion, has shaken off its past few seasons of misfortune as it comfortably moved into the playoffs of Season 11.

In the 22 league matches in this edition, the Pirates have accumulated 525 raid points, the best in the tournament, from 404 successful raids at an average of 23.86 points per match. They are also leading in all the team raiding matrixes and have inflicted a whopping 25 all-outs.

The team's success can be primarily attributed to its raiding unit. With largely unknown raiders, Patna has taken PKL 11 by storm. The auction saw the side's former skipper and talisman Sachin Tanwar moving to Tamil Thalaivas. The franchise did not do much to make up for the loss of seasoned names in its ranks as the management had other plans, trusting their fortunes with relative newbies instead.

"We have a very balanced squad. We don't have big names but it is a chance for these boys to make a name for themselves. All the big players were newcomers at one point. You need a platform to showcase your potential and we believe this unit can go a long way," coach Narendar Redhu told *The Hindu*.

Raiding Supremacy

The Pirates setup has been a raiding nursery over the years, producing and cushioning talents like Pardeep Narwal (who recently became the first and only man to score 1800 raid points in PKL history), Monu Goyat and Sachin.

The raiding duo of Devank Dalal – playing his third PKL season – and Ayan Lohchab – featuring in his maiden campaign – prove that the baton has passed on to capable successors.

In the league stage, they have scored 280 and 165 raid points respectively, in 22 matches. Together, this pair has accounted for nearly 85 percent of their team's total raid points.

But the raiding arsenal doesn't stop there. Devank and Ayan have found good support from Sandeep Dhukhan Kumar and Sudhakar Maruthamuthu (who the Pirates retained ahead of the PKL auction before this season).

In a system that often picks star-studded outfits as the way to go, the Pirates with their unheralded unit have gone against the grain with some astounding results.



However, this approach is not without its fault lines.

The pack is still undecided on a dedicated raider for do-or-die raids (the third raid after two unsuccessful raids where the raider must pick up a point or is deemed out), a responsibility earlier handled by Sachin when he was with the side. Both Ayan and Devank have faced the heat of these raids, but haven't been consistent or concretely made that role their own. The management leaving that bit to chance is a fairly surprising situation facing a side that's otherwise quite clinical.

Change of guard

Following Sachin's departure, the Pirates scrambled to find a new leader and appointed Shubham Shinde, their most expensive auction purchase at ₹70 lakh.

However, the team struggled with both defensive stability and game management. After the Hyderabad leg, the proverbial armband was transferred to defensive all-rounder Ankit Jaglan. This mid-season change, which proved successful last season, brought greater organisation to the Pirates, particularly in defence. Freed from the captaincy, Shubham flourished at the right-corner.

The move also unlocked Ankit's full potential, establishing him as one of the league's top defenders with 70 tackle points, including eight Super Tackles (tackles made with three or fewer defenders on the mat). During the league phase, the Pirates' defensive unit amassed 243 raid points in 22 matches, ranking fourth in the league.

Ankit validated the faith shown by coach Redhu, who has been at the helm of the Army Kabaddi team for almost a decade, when he chose to retain the

player despite his underwhelming numbers last season.

"Ankit showcased his talent in the Army tournaments. He is a natural leader and can bring the best out of them. He treats them (the youngsters) as brothers and also respects the experienced players. His and Shubham's bond elevated our defence," added Pirates' coach.

One step forward

Finishing in the top two helps teams directly enter the semifinal. The Pirates, who looked set to follow suit, fell short and were placed alongside U Mumba in the second Eliminator on Thursday. It was an unusually off colour night for Devank with the Pirates' top raider struggling a bit in his eight-point haul from 17 attempts.

But that's where having an equally adept number two saves your life, and in this case, keeps you alive in the tournament.

Ayan had one of his best games in an already charmed season, operating in raiding and defence to help the Pirates secure a spot in the semifinals with a 31-23 win over U Mumba.

Ayan managed 10 points in total, with two of those coming in defence. Patna played with three people on the mat for a considerable part of this game but it was Ayan who kept poking and prodding at the U Mumba strategy sheet.

If one keeps the numbers aside, Ayan has often looked like the more technically gifted raider. He is agile and can move both ways. He has just a tad bit more speed sometimes than Devank which makes him great for do-or-die raids.

However, what sets them apart in many ways is quite simply their attitude. Devank is all about business. He is happy to go in,



Many people thought we were weak after the auction. But we know what we're doing with our squad and the talents coming in. Give us a chance and we'll change the face of this tournament

NARENDR REDHU
Coach

do the job asked of him and run back up. Ayan has learnt to attach a certain swagger to his operations. He has harnessed the power to intimidate oppositions by not hesitating to venture deep into defensive formations, trusting his speed to make his way. The audacity flummoxes teams most times, his skills handle the rest.

Pirates had lost both their league games against U Mumba so there was every reason to feel some pressure. But coach Redhu, as many successful ones do, took the planning pressure off his players.

"Khul ke khelo (play with freedom)- this is all coach sir said," Ayan revealed at the end of the game. "We came in on the back of two underwhelming games. But the coach believed in us and said just play freely. And we did. We gave it our all."

Ayan and the Pirates defence kept their Mumba counterparts quiet for most part and did not allow raiders the space to run away with the game. They controlled momentum throughout which will come in handy against their opponents in the semifinal - Dabang Delhi.

Delhi and Patna are fairly evenly matched as competitors. There's a raiding duo on either side that is equally well tuned and on song. There is defensive brilliance to fall back on. But more importantly, there's that youthful exuberance to show veterans of the game that the young ones can do the job just as well which promises to make this knockout one for the ages.

If the Pirates get past this hurdle and make the final, Redhu's prophetic words from the start of the season could well come true.

"Many people thought we were weak after the auction. But we know what we're doing with our squad and the talents coming in. Give us a chance and we'll change the face of this tournament."

Grab your popcorn. We're in for a blockbuster.

THE GIST

▼ Patna Pirates retained a young core and opted against going for big names in the auction. There were concerns that the team might lack muscle in its raiding department, but the side's run to the semifinal has proved naysayers wrong

▼ The raiding duo of Devank Dalal and Ayan Lohchab have proven that the famed Pirates raiding nursery's baton has been passed on to capable successors

▼ In the league stage, they have scored 280 and 165 raid points respectively, in 22 matches. Together, this pair has accounted for nearly 85 percent of their team's total raid points. They also had support from Sudhakar M and Sandeep Dhukhan Kumar

SCIENCE

A global polio resurgence and the need to reevaluate the basics

Eternal vigilance is the price we pay to inhabit a planet with a range of biodiversity. Any letup, and it's likely that years of achievement might be undone. We are seeing a glimpse of this in a resurgence of polio worldwide, with environmental samples and human cases throwing up both wild polio virus as well as vaccine-derived polio virus.

Ramya Kannan

The gains of science can easily be frittered away, much faster than they were earned. Eternal vigilance is the price we pay to inhabit a planet like earth, with the range of biodiversity it has. Any letup, and it's quite likely that years of achievement might be undone. We are seeing a glimpse of this in a resurgence of polio worldwide, with environmental samples and human cases throwing up both wild polio virus as well as vaccine-derived polio virus.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported that poliovirus had been detected through routine surveillance of wastewater systems in five countries in the WHO European Region (Finland, Germany, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom) since September this year. "While no cases have been detected to date, the presence of the virus underscores the importance of vaccination and surveillance, as well as the ongoing risk that any form of poliovirus poses to all countries everywhere," the WHO says.

In Pakistan, four WPV1 cases and eight WPV1-positive environmental samples were lifted. In Cameroon and Côte D'Ivoire, one case each of cVDPV2 was detected, while in Chad and Nigeria, four and three cases of cVDPV2 were detected recently, according to the WHO. Additionally, positive environmental samples were found in Finland, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

In the past 3 months, circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (VDPV2) was detected in sewage samples in Barcelona, Spain; Warsaw, Poland; Cologne, Bonn, Dresden, Duesseldorf, Mainz, Hamburg, and Munich in Germany; Tampere in Finland; and Leeds, London, and Worthing in the UK, according to the WHO. The detected virus was genetically linked to a strain that emerged in Nigeria. In none of the five countries was there confirmed local circulation of the virus at this time, the health body said.

"WHO continues to support national and local public health authorities in their investigations and monitoring of the situation, including identification of any potential subnational immunity gaps that may need to be addressed," added Robb Butler, Director, Communicable Diseases, Environment and Health at WHO/Europe. "Vaccination of every vulnerable child is essential to ensure that the virus cannot lead to lifelong paralysis or even death."

All five countries where the virus was detected maintained strong disease surveillance and high levels of routine immunisation coverage, estimated at



Children show their ink-marked fingers after being administered with polio drops by healthcare workers as part of the Pulse Polio Program, at New Gardiner Road Hospital in New Delhi. ANI

85-95% nationally with 3 doses of inactivated polio vaccine (IPV), which provides excellent protection from paralysis caused by poliovirus. Earlier, polio was also picked up in Gaza on July 16, 2024. It was confirmed in a 10-month-old child who became paralysed in August 2024.

However, pockets of undervaccination exist in every country. In response to the detections, investigations are ongoing, including through continued disease surveillance. Subnational immunity levels have been examined to identify any potential gaps and immunisation of unvaccinated children, the WHO says.

Vaccine controversy

In the context of the surge, the debate about what vaccine to use has once again come to be of interest. Even back in the early 20th century, initial theories about poliovirus transmission pointed to respiratory transmission based on the epidemiological features of polio before later studies shifted the focus to the faecal-oral route, primarily due to research on virus shedding in the gut. The polio Sabin vaccine, also known as the oral polio vaccine (OPV), is a live-attenuated vaccine that was developed by physician and microbiologist Albert Sabin. It was adopted by the WHO because of the efficacy in administering the vaccine and given the mammoth task in front of the world at that time. The flip side, however, was that oral polio vaccine allowed vaccine-derived polioviruses to infect children.

A recent paper, *The Respiratory Route of Transmission of Virulent Polioviruses*,

widely assumed of faecal-oral transmission led to the exclusive use of OPV. However, researchers suggest that a shift towards the inactivated poliovirus vaccine would be more effective in preventing polio transmission, particularly in regions where respiratory transmission is the main route

by T. Jacob John, Dhanya Dharmapalan, Robert Steinglass, and Norbert Hirschhorn, in the peer-reviewed journal *Infectious Diseases*, presents a thorough analysis of the transmission routes of poliovirus, particularly wild polioviruses (WPVs) and circulating vaccine-derived polioviruses (cVDPVs). They make the case that the transmission of virulent polioviruses (WPV and cVDPV) is via the respiratory route, like other contagious childhood infectious diseases such as measles, rubella, varicella, diphtheria, and pertussis. But the systems of virus amplification and transmission are different in that silently reinfected individuals can transmit virulent polioviruses but not the pathogens of these other childhood diseases.

Poliovirus does not replicate in the environment nor in contaminated food – hence, faeces has to be consumed to become exposed. If faeces were consumed at high dosage and frequency to saturate children or cause outbreaks of polio, certainly one would expect many other diseases to occur pari passu with polio. They don't. Conversely, one would

expect polio to be a regular part of outbreaks of enteric diseases following contamination of drinking water; it isn't," the paper rationalises.

Respiratory transmission?

The paper explores the long-standing debate over whether poliovirus is primarily transmitted via the faecal-oral route or the respiratory route. Historically, the faecal-oral route was widely accepted, particularly after the introduction of the oral polio vaccine. The authors argue that available evidence leans strongly towards respiratory transmission as the primary route. While poliovirus is known to shed in both the throat and stool, the paper challenges the assumption that the faecal-oral route is the dominant means of transmission.

Instead, the authors emphasise that virus shedding in the throat is critical for transmission, and this shedding supports the respiratory transmission theory.

The authors say continuing to distribute OPV is the wrong path to polio eradication. On the other hand, vaccination with Injectable Polio Vaccine will expedite the eradication of WPV and cVDPVs, Dr. Jacob John argues. The earlier OPV is replaced with IPV, the faster the world will reach global polio eradication. Since IPV is non-transmissible, the OPV-to-IPV switch should be planned/implemented country by country until OPV is no longer used anywhere. That is the only way the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) can avoid causing polio in the name of eradication.

The paper discusses how initial studies pointed to respiratory transmission based on the epidemiological features of polio before later studies shifted the focus to the faecal-oral route, primarily due to research on virus shedding in the gut. Dr. John, a retired professor of virology from Christian Medical College, who also served as an expert member on the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation, has always been forceful about his view that OPV could be used only for "polio control" but not for "polio eradication". Without global use of IPV and without global withdrawal of OPV, the polio eradication project cannot even begin.

The authors argue that the widespread assumption of faecal-oral transmission has led to the exclusive use of the oral polio vaccine (OPV) in the GPEI. However, the authors suggest that, based on their findings, a shift towards the inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV) would be more effective in preventing polio transmission, particularly in regions where respiratory transmission is the main route.

THE GIST

Poliovirus had been detected through routine surveillance of wastewater systems in five countries: Finland, Germany, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom since September this year

OPV is a live-attenuated vaccine. It was adopted because of the efficacy in administering. The flip side was that oral polio vaccine allowed vaccine-derived polioviruses to infect children

Researchers say OPV is the wrong path, and vaccination with IPV will expedite eradication efforts. Since IPV is non-transmissible, the OPV-to-IPV switch should be implemented country by country until OPV is no longer used anywhere

BIG SHOT



The Yamuna river obscured by smog. According to the Commission for Air Quality Management, Delhi's air quality has worsened, with levels breaching the 400 mark and falling into the 'severe' category. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Local clinical trial waiver for selected drugs is a double-edged sword: experts

Bindu Shajan Perappadan

A move to give patients in India faster access to medicines is a double-edged sword, experts have warned. This follows the Central Licensing Authority (CLA) recently allowing a local clinical trial waiver during the approval process for five categories of new drugs, sourced from six countries. This was notified under Rule 101 of the New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules (NDCTR), 2019.

A senior Health Ministry official said that the notification "will help faster decisions on waivers of requirements for local clinical trials, with consistency and predictability." The countries and regions specified through the order include the US, United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, Canada, and the European Union.

New drugs from these countries, including orphan drugs for rare diseases, gene and cellular therapy products, those used in pandemics, those used for special defence, and drugs that offer significant therapeutic advantages over current standard care, will be considered for clinical trial waivers, according to the Drugs Controller General (India) (DCGI).

"India's decision to waive local clinical trials for drugs approved in countries like the U.S., U.K., Japan, and the European Union represents a pivotal regulatory shift. While the move aims to expedite access to essential medications and enhance market availability, it raises significant concerns about patient safety, research and development (R&D), and broader healthcare implications," noted Rajmohan Seetharaman in his paper titled *The implications of waiving local clinical trials for drugs in India: a double-edged sword*, published in *The Lancet regional health (Southeast Asia)* recently.



Janatha Bazaar Drug Counter at Victoria Hospital campus, in Bengaluru. FILE PHOTO

Currently, the Central Technical Committee on Rare Diseases at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has yet to decide on including acid sphingomyelinase deficiency (ASMD) as a notified condition under the National Policy for Rare Diseases 2021, despite treatment being approved by the Subject Expert Committee of CDSCO as early as 2023. Voices from the industry, state that the move will expedite the approval process for new drugs and will help industry to respond faster in case of pandemic situations and bring in products for rare diseases at the earliest. It added that this will also ease the regulatory pathway for new drug launches.

Pivotal regulatory shift

"India's population diversity means bypassing trials could result in unanticipated adverse effects or reduced efficacy," he said. He said countries like Japan and China mandate local testing or foreign data analysis for ethnic sensitivity, emphasising the importance of safety through localised validation. Japan's cautious approach to genetic diversity in drug metabolism and China's regulatory framework highlight the need for India to consider its own population's unique traits.

Patient groups have also expressed their concerns with many stating that local trials are also a way of accessing costly medicines for several patients with rare diseases.

Patient advocacy groups (PAG) have highlighted that the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) directive to implement fast-track approvals for rare disease drugs represents a significant advancement in enhancing access to life-saving treatments for patients. "This initiative addresses several critical challenges, including accelerated drug availability and the reduction of long waiting periods for patients diagnosed with life-threatening conditions," stated the mother of a 15-year-old patient with Acid sphingomyelinase deficiency (ASMD).

Reduces waiting periods

Currently, the Central Technical Committee on Rare Diseases at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has yet to decide on including acid sphingomyelinase deficiency (ASMD) as a notified condition under the National Policy for Rare Diseases 2021, despite treatment being approved by the Subject Expert Committee of CDSCO as early as 2023. Voices from the industry, state that the move will expedite the approval process for new drugs and will help industry to respond faster in case of pandemic situations and bring in products for rare diseases at the earliest. It added that this will also ease the regulatory pathway for new drug launches.

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