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Over 90% teens use social media
Only 50% know to block profiles, make account private
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INSIDE



Somali pirates foiled again by Indian Navy

NEW DELHI
In the second successful intervention within 36 hours, the Indian Navy's offshore patrol vessel *INS Sumitra*, deployed in the Gulf of Aden, neutralised a hijack situation and rescued the Iranian-flagged fishing vessel *Al Na'eemi*. » PAGE 4



3 CRPF personnel killed in Maoist attack in Bastar

RAIPUR
Three Central Reserve Police Force personnel were killed and 15 injured in an encounter with Maoists along the boundary of Sukma and Bijapur districts in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh on Tuesday. Six Maoists were killed in the retaliatory fire, the police said. » PAGE 4

Centre starts survey on women in workforce

NEW DELHI
The Union Ministries of Labour & Employment and Women & Child Development have started a joint survey on increasing women participation in the workforce. The survey was announced by Union Minister Smriti Irani here on Tuesday. » PAGE 6

IMF lifts growth outlook, says 'soft landing' in sight

WASHINGTON
The International Monetary Fund on Tuesday lifted its forecast for global economic growth, upgrading the outlook for both the U.S. and China — the two largest economies — and citing faster-than-expected easing of inflation. » PAGE 14

'Missing' CM Soren surfaces in Ranchi after ED visits Delhi home

Jharkhand CM holds talks with alliance partners; MLAs sign letter of support without name; officials tow away a vehicle and impound about ₹36 lakh in cash from his Delhi residence; Soren likely to appear before ED at his Ranchi residence today

Amarnath Tewary
PATNA

Hours after the BJP accused Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren of going "missing" in Delhi since Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials visited his residence there on Monday, he surfaced in Ranchi and held several rounds of meetings with leaders from his ruling coalition on Tuesday.

The MLAs of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-led coalition expressed solidarity with the Soren government. They also signed a letter of support without any name as speculation is rife that the Chief Minister's wife, Kalpana Soren, will be given the reins of the State. Ms. Soren, who is not an MLA, attended a meeting of the lawmakers earlier in the day.

After their visit to his Delhi residence, the ED officials towed away a vehicle purportedly used by Mr.

Soren and also reportedly impounded about ₹36 lakh in cash. It is not yet confirmed whether the agency has seized or attached those assets under any provision of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

Mr. Soren is likely to appear before the ED at his Ranchi residence on Wednesday afternoon to record his statement in an alleged land scam case. He had been questioned by the ED for seven hours on January 20 after evading ten previous summons from the agency.

Homage to Gandhi

After 32 hours out of the public eye, however, Mr. Soren emerged from his residence in Ranchi on Tuesday to offer homage to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary. "We will not let the teachings of Babu be suppressed," the smiling CM told waiting presspersons. Security was beefed up at his Ranchi residence where he held meetings with his alliance



Fighting mode: Hemant Soren after paying tributes to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary, in Ranchi on Tuesday. PTI

partners. Leaders of the Congress, the RJD, and the Nationalist Congress Party, all members of the ruling coalition also held a meeting at the State Circuit House. Later in the evening, legislators from Mr. Soren's Jharkhand Mukti Morcha met at his residence.

"We are ready for what may come... The BJP is abusing Central agencies to destabilise a democratically elected government but we will not allow them to succeed in their mis-

sion," Transport Minister and senior JMM leader Champai Soren said. The Minister said the meeting was convened just to express legislators' solidarity with the Chief Minister in the prevailing circumstances.

On the speculation that Ms. Soren might replace her husband as the Chief Minister, the legislators said no such discussion was held in the meeting. Health Minister Banna Gupta said any decision in

the current scenario will be taken according to the circumstances. "We will again meet tomorrow at the CM House to express solidarity," the Congress Minister said.

Section 144 imposed

With JMM workers protesting against Mr. Soren's summons by the ED, Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, prohibiting public assembly, was imposed near the CM's residence, as well as at the Raj Bhavan and the ED's Ranchi office. Declaring that "no one is above the law", Jharkhand Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan summoned the Director-General of Police to the Raj Bhavan on Tuesday to discuss the law-and-order situation in the State.

JMM national general secretary Supriyo Bhattacharya, however, told presspersons that "a Chief Minister is not an individual but an institution". (With inputs from Devesh K. Pandey and PTI)

Imran sentenced ahead of Pak. polls

Associated Press
ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani court convicted former Prime Minister Imran Khan of revealing official secrets on Tuesday and sentenced him to 10 years in prison — the latest in a slew of legal cases that supporters say are meant to sideline the imprisoned politician just days ahead of parliamentary elections.

Mr. Khan, who was ousted in a no-confidence vote in 2022, is not on the ballot because he is already serving a three-year prison term — and more than 150 other cases are still pending against him.

The former cricket star nonetheless remains a potent political force because of his grassroots following and anti-establishment rhetoric.

Pakistan saw violent demonstrations after Mr. Khan's arrest last year, and authorities have cracked down on the politician's supporters and party since then, making them wary of staging new rallies.

The February 8 elections come at a sensitive time in Pakistan, which is mired in an economic crisis that Mr. Khan's succes-



Imran Khan

sor, Shehbaz Sharif, struggled to manage.

The cipher case

On Tuesday, Mr. Khan was convicted in what is popularly known as the cipher case, in which he was accused of exposing state secrets by waving a confidential document at a rally. The document has not been made public but is believed to be diplomatic correspondence between the Pakistani Ambassador to Washington and the Foreign Ministry in Islamabad.

'MIRROR IMAGE OF THE PAST'
» PAGE 12

Problem of plenty



A dime a dozen: A herd of nilgai, an antelope, at a watering hole at Mohanlalganj in Lucknow, on Tuesday. They are considered a menace by farmers, and governments in many northern states are struggling to manage their population. SANDEEP SAXENA

Fourteen get death penalty for Kerala BJP man's murder

The Hindu Bureau
ALAPPUZHA

A court in Kerala on Tuesday awarded the death penalty to 14 of the 15 convicts in the murder of Ranjith Sreenivas, a BJP functionary. The verdict was delivered by the Mavelikara Additional District Sessions Court-I.

Sreenivas, who was a lawyer and the State secretary of the BJP's front for Other Backward Classes, was hacked to death at his house at Vellakinar in Alappuzha on December 19, 2021, in front of his mother, wife, and daughter. His family welcomed the verdict. The convicts, hailing from Alappuzha, belong to the now-proscribed Popular Front of India and its



The police escort the convicts from a sessions court in Alappuzha on Tuesday. PTI

political arm, the Social Democratic Party of India.

'Rarest of rare case'

Observing that the murder fell under the category of the rarest of rare cases, Judge Sreedevi V.G. directed that the 14 convicts — Naisam, Ajmal, Anoop,

Mohammed Aslam, Abdul Kalam alias Salam, Abdul Kalam, Saffaruddin, Manshad, Jaseeb Raja, Sameer, Nazir, Zakir Hussain, Shaji Poovathungal, and Shernas Ashraf — be hanged by the neck till their death. The court also imposed a ₹1 lakh fine on all of them.

Though the court has found Navas, the tenth accused, guilty of the offences charged against him, it did not pronounce his sentence as he is undergoing medical treatment at a hospital. The court will award him punishment at a later date. All 15 accused in the case were found guilty by the court on January 20, under Section 302 (murder) and various other provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Israeli forces posing as women storm West Bank hospital, kill three

Associated Press
JENIN

Israeli forces disguised as civilian women and medical workers stormed a hospital on Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, killing three Palestinian militants in a dramatic raid that underscored how deadly violence has spilled into the territory from the war in Gaza.

The military said the militants were using the hospital as a hideout, without providing evidence. It alleged that one of those targeted in the raid had transferred weapons and

ammunition to others for a planned attack, purportedly inspired by the Hamas assault on southern Israel on October 7 that triggered the war in Gaza. It did not provide details on how the three were killed.

'Targeted killing'

The Palestinian Health Ministry said Israeli forces opened fire inside the wards of the Ibn Sina Hospital in the town of Jenin. The Ministry condemned the raid and called on the international community to pressure Israel's military to halt such operations in hospitals. A hospital spo-

kesperson said there was no exchange of fire, indicating that it was a targeted killing.

He said the Israelis attacked doctors, nurses, and hospital security during the raid. "What happened is a precedent," he said.

"There was never an assassination inside a hospital. There were arrests and assaults, but not an assassination."

Footage said to be security camera video from the hospital that circulated on social media showed about a dozen undercover forces, most of them armed,



CCTV footage reportedly of the deadly raid by undercover Israeli troops at the Ibn Sina hospital in Jenin, West Bank on Tuesday. AFP

dressed as women with Muslim headscarves or hospital staff in scrubs or white doctor's coats.

One in a surgical mask

carried a rifle in one arm and a folded wheelchair in the other.

Hamas claimed the three men as members,

calling the operation "a cowardly assassination."

Israel has come under heavy criticism for its raids on hospitals in Gaza, which have treated the tens of thousands of Palestinians wounded in the war as well as providing critical shelter for displaced people.

Collapsing healthcare

Gaza's health care system, which was already feeble before the war, is on the verge of collapse, buckling under the scores of patients, the lack of fuel and medical necessities limited by Israeli restrictions and repeated interruptions

from fighting in and near the facilities.

Since October 7, violence in the West Bank has also surged as Israel has cracked down on suspected militants, killing more than 380 Palestinians, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Most were killed in confrontations with Israeli forces during arrest raids or violent protests. The Israeli military says it has arrested nearly 3,000 Palestinians in the West Bank over the past four months.

PUSH FOR TRUCE
» PAGE 12

BJP trumps INDIA bloc in Chandigarh mayoral polls

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

The INDIA bloc on Tuesday faced a setback as the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party joint candidates lost to the Bharatiya Janata Party in the Chandigarh mayoral elections, after eight votes for the bloc were declared as invalid by presiding officer.

FULL REPORT
» PAGE 2

BJP trumps INDIA bloc in Chandigarh mayoral polls

AAP, Congress allege rigging after eight votes were declared invalid; losing candidate moves High Court seeking fresh election; Punjab CM says it'll be remembered as the 'darkest day of Indian politics'

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

The INDIA bloc alliance on Tuesday faced a setback as the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) joint candidates lost to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Chandigarh mayoral elections. The BJP's candidate, Manoj Sonkar, won the post of mayor by securing 16 votes in the 35-member municipal corporation House while Congress-AAP candidate Kuldeep Tita got 12 votes.

Though the INDIA bloc had 20 votes, eight votes were declared as invalid by presiding officer Anil Masih and Mr. Sonkar romped home. In Municipal Corporation Chandigarh, there are 35 councillors while the Member of Parliament from Chandigarh (of the BJP) is an ex-officio member and also has voting rights. The BJP has 14 councillors, AAP 13 and the Congress seven. The Shiromani Akali Dal has one member in the House.

The Chandigarh election was being seen as the first electoral test for the INDIA bloc's effectiveness in taking on the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) ahead of the general election, coming as it does days after one of the bloc arch-



Mixed emotions: Manoj Sonkar (BJP) being offered sweets by party colleagues after he won the post of Mayor in Chandigarh on Tuesday; (right) Kuldeep Kumar of the AAP breaks down after his defeat in the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation poll. PTI

itects, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, switched over to the BJP-led alliance.

Ruckus in House Congress and AAP members created a ruckus in the House alleging poll rigging, following which the presiding officer called marshals to control the situation. They boycotted the next phase of elections to the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor. BJP nominees Kuljit Sandhu and Rajinder Sharma were declared elected to the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor respectively.

Hours after the elections, AAP moved the Punjab and Haryana High

Court seeking setting aside the results and demanding fresh polls under the supervision of a retired High Court judge. The petition, filed by the AAP mayoral candidate against the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation and the Chandigarh UT administration, among others, is likely to be taken up on Wednesday.

As part of the tie-up, the Congress had contested the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor while AAP fought for the mayor's post, reserved this year for the Scheduled Caste category.

Taking a dig at the INDIA bloc, BJP president J.P. Nadda in a post, "Congratulations to BJP Chandigarh

unit for winning the Mayor election. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji, UTs have witnessed record development. That the INDIA Alliance fought their first electoral battle and still lost to BJP shows that neither their arithmetic is working nor their chemistry."

Darkest day: CM Mann Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann said January 30 will be remembered as the "darkest day" in the annals of Indian polity. "This has come when we celebrated the Republic Day a few days ago. Now, in the polls, the Constitution has been trampled. I will say that the mayoral elec-

tions were looted by the BJP," he said.

Mr. Mann alleged there was tampering with the ballot papers in the elections. "Anil Masih, who was made presiding officer, is an office-bearer of BJP's minority wing. I demand that 'deshdroh' (treason) case be registered against the presiding officer. He has murdered democracy," he said.

The Punjab CM said several Opposition parties keep demanding holding of polls through ballot papers, "but if this is the way how ballots are counted as we saw in mayoral polls, imagine what will happen then".

HC-set poll date

The mayoral polls were earlier slated for January 18 but could not be conducted as the election presiding officer fell sick. While the Chandigarh Deputy Commissioner rescheduled the polls for February 6, the Punjab and Haryana High Court later directed the elections to be conducted on January 30 on a petition filed by Kuldeep Kumar, an AAP councillor.

While quashing the order postponing the elections, the court had called it "unreasonable, unjustified and arbitrary". (With inputs from PTI)

Shameless capture of democracy, says Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday accused the BJP of "shameless capture" of democracy after the INDIA bloc nominee lost in the mayoral election.

"First they abruptly postponed the elections, and then devised a way to capture it. This is a warning for all those who are deluded into thinking that the Modi-led BJP will allow democracy to function if they win in 2024," Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said in a post on X.

His party colleague, Jairam Ramesh, said: "This foul play... is yet another example of their arrogance, their absolute disregard for Constitutional propriety, and their disdain for democratic processes". Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, in a post said, "On Gandhiji's #MartyrsDay, Godse worshipper BJP has murdered Democracy and all ethos of Constitution." Now, the entire country is



The aftermath: AAP and Congress councillors stage a sit-in after the declaration of the results in Chandigarh on Tuesday. PTI

Blatant dishonesty, hooliganism: Kejriwal

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday said that through "blatant dishonesty" and "hooliganism", the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the mayoral election in Chandigarh. He said this was "extremely dangerous" for democracy.

"On 30th January, 76 years ago the ambassador of peace and non-violence, Gandhiji was murdered. And today they have murdered democracy in the country. Fortunately, their acts of hooliganism and dishonesty have been captured on the cameras. Now, the entire country is

witnessing openly how forcibly they committed robbery of votes to elect their Mayor in Chandigarh," Mr. Kejriwal said at a press conference in New Delhi.

The AAP chief said that in the history of Chandigarh mayoral elections, votes have never been declared invalid at such a large scale.

He alleged that if the BJP can manipulate even with a mayoral election which involves only 36 votes, one can imagine the extent of manipulation in a Lok Sabha election which involves about 90 crore votes. "Even a 5-6% discrepancy in votes in national elections can significantly impact the results," he said.

IN BRIEF



'Himachal Rajya Sabha seat can go to Sonia or Priyanka'

Himachal Pradesh Congress chief Pratibha Singh on Tuesday said the lone Rajya Sabha seat falling vacant on expiry of six-year term of BJP chief J.P. Nadda on April 2 can go to Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi or Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. "We would discuss the matter with Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and the seat could go to them if they are willing," Ms. Singh said. Following declaration of schedule for the elections to 56 Rajya Sabha seats, search has begun in the Congress which has a clear majority of 40 out of 68 seats in the Himachal Assembly. At present, all three Rajya Sabha seats from the State are held by the BJP. PTI

Khichdi scam: ED questions Sanjay Raut's brother

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday questioned Shiv Sena (UBT) leader and MP Sanjay Raut's younger brother Sandeep Raut in connection with the money laundering case related to the "Khichdi scam" of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). Sandeep Raut, accompanied by Sanjay Raut, appeared before the probe agency at its office in Ballard Estate in south Mumbai around 11.30 a.m. As per the case details, rules were violated when the BMC gave a contract for providing "Khichdi" packets to migrant workers stranded in the city during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ED has arrested Aditya Thackeray's close aide and Yuva Sena functionary Suraj Chavan in the case. PTI

'Took permission to use AI to recreate late singers' voice'

Music composer A.R. Rahman has said that his team took due permission to use an AI software for recreating the voices of late singers Bamba Bakya and Shahul Hameed for a track in veteran actor Rajinikanth's new film "Lal Salaam". The two artists, who had worked with Mr. Rahman on multiple projects before their deaths, are credited as playback singers for the track "Thimiri Yezhuda". "We took permission from their families and sent deserving remuneration for using their voice algorithms...technology is not a threat and a nuisance if we use it right...respect #nostalgia," he wrote. Bakya died in September 2022 at the age of 42. PTI

M.P. Congress removes party spokesperson over scuffle

The Hindu Bureau
BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee president Jitu Patwari removed Shahryar Khan from the post of spokesperson and issued show-cause notices to him and the State unit's Scheduled Caste wing chief Pradeep Ahirwar, a day after a viral video showed the two leaders coming to blows with each other.

A video of the two leaders engaged in a scuffle at the PCC headquarters in Bhopal went viral on Monday showing Mr. Khan and Mr. Ahirwar arguing over the ticket distribution in last year's State Assembly elections. The two can also be seen hurling abuses at each other while Mr. Khan is seen falling on the ground with Mr. Ahirwar charging at him with a chair even as other leaders try to intervene in the matter.

Jarange-Patil steps up pressure on govt. with new agitation threat

Shoumojit Banerjee
PUNE

Unwilling to let the Maharashtra government off the hook, Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange-Patil on Tuesday announced yet another indefinite hunger fast from February 10 onwards if the government did not make good its promise of granting other backward class (OBC) Kunbi caste certificates to blood relatives of Marathas whose records proved them as Kunbis.

Speaking at Raigad, which was the capital of the Maratha warrior-king Chhatrapati Shivaji, Mr. Jarange-Patil further gunned for reservation to be given to Muslims and the Dhangar community.

Last week, after CM Eknath Shinde met with the activist in Navi Mumbai and persuaded him to call off his protest by assenting to all his demands, the



Activist Manoj Jarange-Patil

Maharashtra government issued a draft notification which stated that blood relatives of a Maratha person, who had obtained records to prove that he belonged to the agrarian Kunbi community, would also be recognised as Kunbi.

'Implement in 10 days' Mr. Jarange-Patil stressed he had not stopped the quota stir and warned he would not do so until every Maratha had secured reservation. "The government must implement its promises in the next 10 days," he said.

Amid seat-sharing talks with Congress, SP releases first list of 16 candidates for LS polls

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The Samajwadi Party (SP) on Tuesday announced its first list of 16 candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha election amid seat-sharing talks with the Congress. The Congress had staked claim to at least two of these 16 seats – Farrukhabad and Faizabad.

According to sources, senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid wanted to contest from Farrukhabad, which he has won twice in 1991 and 2009. "How could they lay a claim on the seat, considering that the Congress had polled around 8,000 votes in all five Assembly segments that make the Lok Sabha seat during the 2022 Assembly election," a senior SP leader said.

The Congress wanted the Faizabad seat as well from where its former State

The Congress had staked claim to at least two of these 16 seats – Farrukhabad and Faizabad; Dimple Yadav to contest from Mainpuri

president Nirmal Khatri has won twice in the past. But the SP leaders ruled that the Congress is not in a winnable position here.

The first list includes three members of the 'first family' of the SP – Dimple Yadav from Mainpuri, which she currently represents, Akshay Yadav, son of senior SP leader Ramgopal Yadav, from Firozabad, and Dharmendra Yadav from Budaun parliamentary constituency. Both Mr. Akshay and Mr. Dharmendra have held Firozabad and Badaun seats in the past, but had lost the 2019 election.

In the Kheri Lok Sabha seat, where the SP's two-

time Lok Sabha MP Ravi Verma switched to the Congress, the party has fielded Utkarsh Verma, a first-timer. This seat is currently held by the BJP's controversial leader and Union Minister Ajay Mishra Teri.

The party is also repeating its Sambhal MP, Shafiqur Rahman Barq, from Sambhal. Annu Tandon, former Congress leader who switched to the SP, has been fielded from Unnao. She had won the seat in 2009 on a Congress ticket. The SP has been a distant second on the seat in the last two elections losing to the BJP's Sakshi Maharaj. Ravidas Mehrotra, sitting MLA from Lucknow Central, has been named as the party candidate from Lucknow. Similarly, the sitting MLA from Katehari in Ambedkar Nagar district, Lalji Verma, has been fielded from Ambedkar Nagar parliamentary constituency.

Canal pact touted as major achievement of new BJP govt. in Rajasthan

Mohammed Iqbal
JAIPUR

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Rajasthan has claimed that a tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the Centre and the Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan governments for the ambitious Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP) will herald a "new era" of the State's development. A detailed project report (DPR) for the ERCP will be prepared under the pact.

The previous Congress government had turned the demand for the national project status for the ₹37,200-crore ERCP into a major election issue, while accusing the BJP government at the Centre of not taking care of the interests



Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat with Rajasthan CM Bhajan Lal Sharma and his M.P. counterpart Mohan Yadav at the signing of an MoU on Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project. FILE PHOTO

of the people in 13 districts, which were set to benefit from it. The Congress alleged that the BJP had gone back on its promise.

In its original form, the ERCP was to be implemented along with the interlinking of Parvati, Kali Sindh and Chambal rivers. Since the Centre did not accept the demand for the national project status, the Congress government

started the work with its own resources, with the construction of the Navnera-Bisalpur-Isarda link, Mahalpur barrage and Ramgarh barrage at a cost of ₹9,600 crore.

The MoU signed in New Delhi on Sunday in the presence of Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and Chief Ministers Bhajan Lal Sharma and Mohan Yadav will incorporate the work done so far in the State. This will be the second project under the Centre's national perspective plan of interlinking of rivers programme.

BJP State president C.P. Joshi said here that the collaboration between Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan had become possible after the formation of the "double engine government". The revamped Parvati-Kali Sindh-Chambal link project of the ERCP would be a cornerstone for development of both the States, with the availability of an ample amount of water for both drinking and irrigation, he said.

A total of 26 districts in both the States will benefit from the agreement and 25 lakh families of agriculturists in 13 districts of Rajas-

than will get access to irrigation waters. The water will be available for 2.80-lakh hectares in the State, contributing to an increase in the ground water level.

Rajasthan's districts which will benefit from the project are Jhalawar, Baran, Kota, Bundi, Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer, Tonk, Jaipur, Karauli, Alwar, Bharatpur, Dausa and Dholpur, where a population of 3.5 crore resides. The Congress government had sought the national project status on the ground that the huge project cost could not be borne by the State alone.

'Will receive less water' However, Kisan Mahapanchayat president Rampal Jat said the MoU had undermined the original DPR, as the quantity of wa-

ter to be received by Rajasthan would be reduced by half. "The DPR of 2017 stipulated that the State would receive 3,510 million cubic metres of water. The project's integration with interlinking of three rivers will reduce the quantity of water to 1,775 MCM, which will not be sufficient for the 13 districts," Mr. Jat said.

Uproar in Assembly The signing of the MoU also came up for a debate in the State Assembly on Tuesday with the government making a statement on the floor of the House. The proceedings were adjourned twice because of the uproar by the Opposition Congress MLAs, who pointed out several shortcomings in the agreement and demanded that the government reconsider it.

Won't let anyone take away citizenship of people as long as I am alive: Mamata

BJP raking up NRC, CAA, and UCC ahead of Lok Sabha poll, this is nothing but politics, says West Bengal CM in response to Union Minister Shantanu Thakur's claim that CAA would be rolled out soon

Press Trust of India
RAIGANJ

Lambasting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for "opportunistically raking up" the issue of Citizenship (Amendment) Act ahead of the Lok Sabha election, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday said she would not allow anyone to take away the citizenship of people during her lifetime.

Her latest remarks were prompted by Union Minister Shantanu Thakur's assertion that CAA would be rolled out across the country within a week. Mr. Thakur's statement, made during a public gathering at Kakdwip in South 24 Parganas district on Sunday, had fuelled concern regarding the imminent enforcement of the controversial legislation.

The CAA, enacted by the BJP-led government at the Centre in 2019, fast-tracks citizenship to six undocumented non-Muslim communities — Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Parsi, Christian and Jain — from the neighbouring countries of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Speaking at a programme at Raiganj in West



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during her visit to Balurghat in South Dinajpur district on Tuesday. PTI

Bengal's Uttar Dinajpur district, she said, "They [BJP] are speaking about NRC (National Register of Citizens), CAA, and Uniform Civil Code ahead of the election. This is nothing but politics. We have given citizenship to everyone [and] they [people in border areas] are getting everything. They are citizens, which is why they are allowed to vote," she said.

"But let me make it very clear that as long as I am alive, I will not allow the implementation of NRC in West Bengal. I will not allow them to take away the citizenship of anyone...

everyone here is a citizen," she said.

'NRC trap'
Expressing concern over reports of the Border Security Force (BSF) allegedly issuing separate identity cards to the residents in the border areas, Ms. Banerjee cautioned people against accepting such cards, labelling those as potential tools in "NRC trap".

She also emphasised the need for vigilance among border communities. Ms. Banerjee's statements align with her earlier claims in Cooch Behar district,

where she accused the BSF of similar actions, a charge denied by the paramilitary force.

Reacting to Ms. Banerjee's statement, the West Bengal BJP unit said the CAA is a law of the land and no one can stop it from being implemented. "CAA is a law of the land and no one can stop it from being implemented. Why is she making confusing statements about NRC implementation? The Centre has never said anything about NRC implementation," BJP leader Rahul Sinha said.

The Chief Minister rallied support against what she characterised as an alliance between the Congress, CPI (M), and BJP in West Bengal, urging people to unite under the Trinamool Congress (TMC) banner to counter this perceived threat. "It is the Trinamool Congress that is fighting for the rights of the people of the State. We all have to unite to defeat the Congress-CPI (M)-BJP nexus in Bengal," Ms. Banerjee said, calling for solidarity among citizens.

Her remarks follow her recent announcement of the Trinamool's decision to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha poll in West Bengal alone.

Decide Sharjeel's bail plea by next month, says Delhi HC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday ordered a trial court here to decide by next month a plea by student activist Sharjeel Imam seeking bail in connection with a 2020 communal riots case involving allegations of sedition and unlawful activities.

Mr. Imam has sought bail on the grounds that he has been in custody for the past four years and the maximum sentence for the offence under Section 13

Sharjeel Imam has sought bail on the grounds that he has been in custody for the past four years

(punishment for unlawful activities) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act is seven years.

He said he has undergone more than half of the maximum sentence prescribed for the offence and is entitled to bail under the provision. According to Section 436-A CrPC (Code

of Criminal Procedure), a person can be released from custody if he has spent more than half of the maximum sentence prescribed for the offence.

During the hearing, Mr. Imam's counsel told the court that there are a total of 43 prosecution witnesses in the case, out of which 22 have been examined so far. In 2022, the trial court had framed charges against him under Sections 124A, 153A, 153B (imputations prejudicial to national integration), 505 of IPC and Section 13 of the UAPA.

Teacher kills 2 colleagues over 'affair', shoots self

Press Trust of India
GODDA (JHARKHAND)

A teacher allegedly shot dead two colleagues at a government school in Jharkhand's Godda district over a "love affair", before shooting himself, police said on Tuesday.

Godda SP Nathu Singh Meena said, "The bodies of two teachers, including a woman, were found lying in a pool of blood, while the accused was also found seriously injured."

Dreaded gangster 'Ravan of Sahebganj' on the run for 10 years, nabbed from Bihar

Samridhi Tewari
NEW DELHI

A dreaded gangster wanted in 25 cases of murder, attempted murder, extortion, and narcotics-related cases, known by his moniker 'Ravan of Sahebganj', was arrested from Paru town in Bihar's Muzaffarpur earlier this month by Delhi Police.

Ram Naresh Sahani was given the moniker after he set up his base in Muzaffarpur's Sahebganj village nearly two decades ago and terrorised its residents. He still has an active gang of nearly 50 in the area, police sources said, adding that he exerts tremendous influence over

the illicit liquor business in northern Bihar. The Delhi police booked him in a murder case in 2005 and declared him a proclaimed offender in connection with a narcotics-related case in 2014.

Sahani was accused, along with two other persons, of murdering a man named Kumod in Surat. Police sources said Sahani ran an illicit liquor business in Gujarat for nearly four years, during which he had a dispute with Kumod, who was in the same trade. After gunning down his competitor, Sahani evaded arrest till March 2012, when Delhi Police's Crime Branch nabbed him for running a narcotics net-

work in the national capital. In July 2013, during the trial, Sahani got an interim bail for his daughter's marriage. However, he jumped the bail. A year later, he was declared a proclaimed offender.

Cat-and-mouse game
A senior officer said they received a tip-off about Sahani's whereabouts on January 5. "Upon reaching Bihar, we camped in Muzaffarpur for four days to apprehend him," the officer said. "We looked for him from morning to night. We had to develop a network of informers because nobody wanted to speak up against him. What made catching him more difficult

was that Sahani would change his address, mobile number, and appearance to evade arrest. He would grow a beard and then remove it. His facial features kept changing," the officer added.

Additional Commissioner of Police (Crime) Sanjay Bhatia said, "Due to the terror of his gang, nobody ever shared information regarding his whereabouts with the police. Whenever the police tried mounting pressure on him, he would flee to Nepal and return to Bihar only after sensing that the pressure had eased." Sahani was finally arrested from the outskirts of Paru town in Muzaffarpur on January 8.

Will seek a Chennai LS seat from the DMK: Alagiri

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president K.S. Alagiri on Tuesday said some of the Lok Sabha seat aspirants in the Congress were urging the leadership to ask for seats that Dravidian parties generally do not allot to allies.

Referring to DMK Minister R.S. Rajakannappan's comments that the Congress existed only to "get seats during polls", he said it was a norm in every party to speak about such shortcomings openly. "Even in our party, some have asked me why doesn't the DMK give us any of the Chennai seats. I told them that I will seek a Chennai seat on their behalf..."

Tribal rhythm



Graceful moves: Tribal women performing *dhimsa*, a dance form that is performed primarily by the Porja tribe of Andhra Pradesh, during the closing ceremony of 14th All India Police Commando Competition, 2023 in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday. V. RAJU

AAP MP made special purpose vehicle to launder money: ED

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Arrested AAP MP Sanjay Singh was involved in creating a "special purpose vehicle" to launder the proceeds of crime "that would have been generated from the business arising out of the changes" made in the Delhi excise policy, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) told the High Court.

The agency said Mr. Singh was involved in "acquiring, processing, concealing, dissipating, and using proceeds of crime" generated from the excise policy between 2021 and 2022 and had, in that time frame, received illegal funds to the tune of ₹2 crore as "proceeds of crime".

The ED's contentions



The ED has accused Sanjay Singh of playing a key role in formulating and implementing the now-scrapped excise policy.

came in response to Mr. Singh's bail plea. The Rajya Sabha member, whom the agency arrested in October last year in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped excise policy, had challenged a trial court's December 22 order dismissing his bail plea.

Mr. Singh has been accused of playing a key role in formulating and imple-

menting the now-scrapped excise policy.

The ED in its affidavit also called Mr. Singh a "key conspirator" in the alleged scam, stating that investigation had found that he was "closely associated" with a number of accused or suspects in the case, including businessmen Dinesh Arora and Amit Arora.

Odisha makes two years of service mandatory to meet doctors' shortage

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Faced with a severe shortage of doctors, the Odisha government has declared that admission to government medical colleges would be denied to any student unwilling to commit to serving the State for a mandatory period of two years following the completion of their studies.

The government ordered the submission of a bond declaring that, after the completion of studies related to healthcare, the candidates would serve in any health institution of the State for at least two years.

After the completion of

two years of service in accordance with the bond, direct recruits as well as in-service doctors would be released from the bond's conditions.

"There is a dearth of doctors in the State and there is a reluctance to serve the State after completion of course amongst the doctors studying in different government medical and dental colleges at the cost of State exchequer," a notification issued by the State Health and Family Welfare Department says.

"In order to overcome the dearth, the government has modified the existing policy for execution of an agreement in shape of bond," it says.

Kangaroo lizard species discovered in Western Ghats

Sarath Babu George
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The biodiverse forests of the Western Ghats have thrown up yet another marvel of evolution — a new species of tiny lizards, which researchers have described as "diminutive dragon". *Agasthyagama edge* or northern kangaroo lizard, which belongs to the Agamidae family, is known to have a maximum snout-vent length of 4.3 cm.

A group of scientists from various institutions in India and abroad have discovered the new species from the southern Western Ghats at Kulamavu in Kerala's Idukki.

The species is the second one of the *Agasthyagama* genus after *A. beddomii* or Indian kangaroo lizard that has been pre-



New find: *Agasthyagama edge* or the northern kangaroo lizard. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

viously reported from the Sivagiri hills in Tamil Nadu.

Poor climbers
A reduced fifth toe makes these reptiles poor climbers and hence do not climb trees like other lizards.

The species is the second one of the *Agasthyagama* genus after *Indian kangaroo lizard* that was reported from the Sivagiri hills

ed in *Vertebrate Zoology*, a scientific journal published by the Senckenberg Museum in Germany.

First sighted in 2015
According to the study's lead author Sandeep Das, a Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) national post-doctoral fellow at Calicut University, the species was first sighted during an expedition in search of another evasive species, the Mahabali frog or the purple frog, around 2015.

The frog was spotted by the roadside near a forest stream in Idukki.

While the sighting was initially assumed to be *A. beddomii*, herpetologists found evidence that suggested the possibility of a new species.

Their hunch proved to be right after they chanced upon more members of the same species from the locality years later. Analyses revealed consistent morphological and genetic differences.

Besides, they have been found to be geographically separated with the closest distributional records being approximately 80 km apart.

The new species has a uniform dull olive-brown body with slightly darker head. It also has a white throat with a broad dark

brown stripe on its dewlap with brick yellow scales on the outside.

It has been named after the Evolutionary Distinct and Globally Endangered (EDGE) programme of the Zoological Society of London that has supported several researchers including Dr. Das and co-author K.P. Rajkumar of the Aranyakam Nature Foundation.

The other members of the research team include Saunak Pal of the Bombay Natural History Society; Surya Narayanan of the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment; K. Subin of the Kerala Forest Research Institute; Muhamed Jafer Palot, Zoological Survey of India; and V. Deepak the University of Wolverhampton.

Man killed, one injured in gunfight in Manipur

Press Trust of India
IMPHAL

At least one village volunteer was killed and another injured after their camp came under attack from unidentified gunmen in Kangpokpi district of Manipur on Tuesday, the police said.

The incident took place at the camp situated near Kadangband village in the Lamshang area in adjoining Imphal West district.

"After the unknown gunmen launched the attack, the village volunteers retaliated, resulting in a gunfight in which one village volunteer was killed and another was injured.

"Following the retaliation, the attackers retreated, regrouped and attacked again. The gunfight is under way," a police officer said. After the eruption of the gun battle, several women and children from Kadangband and neighbouring Koutruk village fled to safer areas, he said. Additional security personnel have been sent to the area to bring the situation under control, the officer said. The injured has been taken to the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal.

HC directs T.N. to restrict non-Hindus' entry into temples

The Hindu Bureau
MADURAI

Justice S. Srimathy of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Tuesday directed the State government, the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department and temple authorities to install boards in and around temples, indicating that non-Hindus were not allowed beyond the *Kodimaram* of the temples.

If a non-Hindu seeks to visit a particular deity in a temple, the authorities shall obtain an undertaking from the individual that he/she has faith in the deity, and would follow the customs and practices of Hinduism and of the temple. On obtaining such an undertaking, the non-Hindu may be allowed to visit the temple, the judge said.

Whenever a non-Hindu is allowed entry based on such an undertaking, the same shall be recorded in a register maintained by the temple. The authorities shall strictly follow the *agamas*, customs, and practices of the temple, the judge said.

The authorities submitted that if such a board was installed, it would hurt the

A temple is not a picnic or tourist spot, and ought to be maintained with reverence, says the High Court judge

religious sentiments of those who would like to visit the temple.

To this, the judge said that the authorities were confusing the issue. If a non-Hindu did not have faith in the religion and declined to follow its customs and practices and those of the temple, then he/she cannot be allowed entry, and hence, there was no question of hurting sentiments, she said.

On the other hand, if a non-Hindu who declined to follow such customs and practices was allowed inside the temple, it would affect the sentiments of the large number of Hindus who practise the faith reverently. It would also affect the rights of Hindus guaranteed under the Constitution, the court said.

Further, Justice Srimathy said that a temple was not a picnic or tourist spot, and ought to be maintained with reverence, and as per *agamas*.

3 CRPF personnel killed in Maoist attack in Bastar

Two commandos of elite jungle warfare unit among the deceased; 15 personnel injured but are out of danger; six Maoists killed in retaliatory fire, say police; Chief Minister slams 'cowardly act'

Shubhomoy Sikdar
RAIPUR

Three personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), two of them commandos of the elite jungle warfare unit CoBRA, were killed and 15 injured in an encounter with Maoists along the boundary of Sukma and Bijapur districts in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh on Tuesday. Six Maoists were killed in the retaliatory fire, the police said.

The shoot-out took place on the first day of a newly established security camp at Teklagudem village, a Maoist stronghold about 450 km from the State capital, Raipur. The attackers were over 500 in number, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said in the evening. He spoke to some of the injured jawans hospitalised in Raipur. Some accounts had pegged the number at even 1,000, the Chief Minister added.

Inspector-General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P. said that after the camp was set up, a joint



Deep pain: An injured CRPF jawan being treated at a government hospital after a Maoist attack in Chhattisgarh. PTI

team of the Special Task Force, the District Reserve Guard [both components of the State police], the Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA), and the CRPF was patrolling in nearby villages when Maoists opened fire on them.

"All the jawans gave a befitting reply and we have received information of six Maoists cadre getting killed but unfortunately, in this

encounter, our three jawans – two CoBRA jawans and one CRPF jawan – were martyred. Fifteen were injured too," he said.

The Maoists retreated into the forests following the retaliatory fire. Search operations were on till late in the evening, the police added.

The deceased were identified as constables Devan C. and Pavan Kumar (both from 201 CoBRA) and

constable Lambdhar Sinha (150 CRPF). Among the injured are a Deputy Commandant, an Assistant Commandant, four head constables, and nine constables.

Mr. Sundarraj said the injured personnel were taken to the Jagdalpur Medical College and two private hospitals in Raipur. They were out of danger, he added.

Twenty-three security personnel were killed in an encounter with Maoists in the same area in April 2021.

Mr. Sundarraj said that the camp had been established for the security of the people and that the attack would not deter the police.

Expressing solidarity with the security personnel, the Chief Minister said areas perceived as sympathetic to Maoists were now witnessing increased deployment and effectiveness of security forces. This, the Chief Minister said, led to "a disarray among the Naxals and they were resorting to cowardly acts of terror".

SC questions J&K on plea to publish review orders

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday questioned the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir about the non-publication of review committee orders regarding Internet shutdowns in the region.

"Review committee's orders are meant to be published," a Bench of Justices B.R. Gavai and Sanjay Karol addressed Additional Solicitor General K.M. Nataraj, who appeared for the Union Territory. The court's remarks came in a petition filed by the Foundation for Media Professionals, which claimed that the authorities were not complying with a Supreme Court direction in the January 2020 *Anuradha Bhasin* judgment to publish the orders for suspension of telecom services.

Justice Karol told Mr. Nataraj that the authorities ought to follow the directions in the judgment. Mr. Nataraj said the deliberations of the review committee need not be made public. He assured the court that he would seek instructions on the issue in time for the next hearing, posted after two weeks.

Curbs on liquor sale do not extend to municipal areas: SC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has asserted that its December 2016 ban on the sale of liquor within 500 metres of the outer edge of national and State highways will not extend to municipal areas.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud has recalled a Supreme Court order of March 20, 2023. The March 2023 order had set aside a Madras High Court decision confirming the permission granted by the Puducherry Excise Department to a liquor retailer, represented by senior advocate P.B. Suresh, to shift his shop to ECR Main Road at Ganapathi Chettikulam from Kamaraj Salai in Pillalthottam.

The residents' society, Kanagachettikulam Makkal Podhumala Eyakkam, had moved the High Court against the shifting of the liquor shop, saying the establishment was hardly 150 metres from temples, mosques and educational institutions. The High Court dismissed the petition of the residents, who approached the Supreme



Court. A Division Bench headed by Justice (now retired) M.R. Shah had ruled in favour of the residents in March 2023.

Arguing the review petition on Monday, Mr. Suresh said the top court had clarified, in a subsequent order on July 11, 2017, that the December 2016 prohibition on the sale of liquor within 500 metres along highways, did not extend to municipal areas.

"The purpose of the directions contained in the order dated December 15, 2016 is to deal with the sale of liquor along and in proximity of highways properly understood... The order does not prohibit licensed establishments within municipal areas... We have considered it appropriate to issue this clarification to set at rest any ambiguity," a three-judge Bench had explained in its 2017 order.

Navy foils hijacking bid by Somali pirates, rescues 19 Pak. nationals

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

In the second successful intervention within 36 hours, the Indian Navy's offshore patrol vessel *INS Sumitra*, deployed in the Gulf of Aden, neutralised a hijack situation and rescued the Iranian-flagged fishing vessel *Al Naeemi* and its crew of 19 Pakistani nationals from 11 Somali pirates off the east coast of Somalia.

In another incident, a coordinated multilateral response between the Indian Navy, the Seychelles Defence Forces and the Sri Lankan Navy foiled the hijacking bid on a Sri Lankan fishing trawler.

Swift response

The Indian Navy, in a statement on Tuesday morning, said that *INS Sumitra* was pressed into action to locate and intercept the Iranian-flagged fishing vessel *Al Naeemi*, which had been boarded by pirates with its crew of 19 Pakistani nationals taken hostage.

"Responding swiftly to the developing situation, *Sumitra* intercepted the vessel on Monday and through coercive posturing and effective deployment



Indian commandos with a group of detained pirates after the Indian Navy freed an Iranian Fishing Vessel hijacked by Somali pirates. AFP

of her integral helicopter and boats compelled the safe release of the crew and the vessel. The ship also undertook confirmatory boarding to sanitise and also to check on the well-being of the crew who were held captive by the Somali pirates."

This incident came just after *INS Sumitra* prevented a hijack incident in the area after responding to a distress message from Iranian-flagged fishing vessel *Iman*, with a crew of 17 Iranian nationals, which had been boarded by pirates and the crew taken hostage.

A hijacking incident was reported aboard the Sri Lankan-flagged fishing

trawler *Lorenzo Putha 04* about 955 nautical miles east of Mogadishu, Somalia and three pirates had boarded and hijacked it on January 27.

The Indian Navy deployed *INS Sharada* from Kochi on Sunday afternoon and also tasked its Sea Guardian High Altitude Long Endurance Unmanned Aerial Vehicle with locating and intercepting the hijacked fishing vessel, the Navy said.

"Additionally, efficient operational coordination and information sharing through the Sri Lanka and Seychelles International Liaison Officers at Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC

IOR), New Delhi resulted in the interception of the hijacked fishing vessel by *SCGS Topaz* in Seychelles Exclusive Economic Zone on Monday."

The three pirates surrendered to the Seychelles Coast Guard (SCG), all six crew members are safe and the vessel is being escorted to Mahé, Seychelles, the Navy said.

"*INS Sumitra*, over the course of less than 36 hours, through swift, persistent and relentless efforts has rescued two hijacked fishing vessels along with 36 crew, 17 Iranian and 19 Pakistani, in southern Arabian Sea approximately 850 nm [nautical miles] West of Kochi, and prevented misuse of these vessels as mother ships for further acts of piracy on Merchant Vessels," the Navy said on the two incidents to which *INS Sumitra* responded.

The Gulf of Aden has seen a sudden spurt in piracy from Somalia in the last few months after going down completely from the peak around 2010. The Indian Navy has maintained continuous presence with at least one major warship deployed on anti-piracy duties since 2008.

'India-U.S. ties will make the democratic world order stronger'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The capital and technological know-how from the U.S. can help India achieve its goal of becoming a developed country by 2047, while investments here can give the American companies high returns and an avenue of de-risking, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday. In addition, he said that India-U.S. cooperation will act as force multiplier for a rules-based world order.

"India is the largest democracy in the world, and the U.S. is another big democracy. When two big democracies cooperate with each other, it will definitely make the democratic world order stronger. This will act as a force multiplier for rules-based order across the globe. Our work together will be beneficial not only to us, but for the entire world," Mr. Singh said while addressing a conference on "Strengthening Indo-U.S. Relationship in Amrit Kaal - Aatmanirbhar Bharat" organised by Indo-American Chamber of Commerce.

Stating that American



Rajnath Singh

investments can play a vital role in realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of *Viksit Bharat*, Mr. Singh termed it a win-win situation for both the countries, stating that India's fast-growing economy, its demographic dividend, skilled workforce, and huge domestic market guarantee high returns to the U.S. companies.

Mr. Singh described India and the U.S. as natural partners who must move forward together in both business and strategic sectors amidst the current global geopolitical scenario.

"India and the U.S. support a free, open and rules-based international order. Due to this, there is a lot of alignment in our strategic interests," Mr. Singh said.

Indian graziers confront Chinese soldiers along the LAC in Ladakh

Vijaita Singh
Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

Indian graziers were stopped by Chinese soldiers in the Kakjung area of Ladakh along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) earlier this month, according to a video shot by the local people that was shared on X by Chushul councillor Konchok Stanzin on Tuesday.

In the video, the herders can be seen confronting the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers when the latter ask them to go back claiming it to be Chinese territory. The local people, who can be heard

speaking in a Tibetan language, are seen throwing rocks at the Chinese soldiers.

The incident occurred on January 2 near Patrolling Points 35 and 36 at Kakjung under the Nyoma constituency in Ladakh, Mr. Stanzin said. While Chinese soldiers with their vehicles can be seen in the video, there is no presence of Indian security forces.

Ishey Spalzung, councillor, Nyoma, told *The Hindu* that the area is within India's perception of the LAC.

He said that after the face-off, the sarpanch, the sub-divisional magistrate, and officials of the Indian



Face off: People Liberation Army soldiers and tanks during military disengagement along the Line of Actual Control. FILE PHOTO

Army and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) visited the grazing site on January 12. "It is a valley and is essential for winter grazing of cattle. In 2019, the Chinese had tried to stop the

graziers but we had pitched tents to assert our claim. The nearest Army unit is present around five to seven kilometres from this place. That particular day they were not pre-

sented," Mr. Spalzung said, adding that the herders had started from their village around 20 days ago before they reached the location.

Mr. Stanzin said on X, "See how our local people are showing their bravery in front of the PLA claiming that the area they are stopping is our nomad's grazing land. PLA stopping our nomads from grazing in our territory. Seems it is never a never-ending process due to different lines of perceptions. But I salute our nomads, who always stand to protect our land and stand as the second guardian force of the nation." He later told *The Hin-*

du that the place where the incident happened is within one kilometre of the Indian claim on the line of the border with China.

A defence source said the video is of an incident that happened in the first week of January where "nomad graziers [with livestock] from our side are seen in conversation with PLA soldiers".

Such incidents are commonplace and happen on both sides whenever graziers stray across the LAC on account of the differing perceptions of the LAC, the source said. Such incidents are dealt with appropriately as per established mechanism.

As reported by *The Hindu* earlier, restoration of grazing grounds for graziers on both sides is among the top of the issues on agenda at the Corps Commander-level talks between the two sides as part of efforts for disengagement at two remaining friction points – Demchok and Depsang – and the overall de-escalation along LAC in eastern Ladakh.

Among issues in the ongoing discussions are restoration of patrolling rights and agreeing on new parameters for patrolling in these two areas to avoid friction.

As many as 20 Indian soldiers were killed in vio-

lent clashes with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in eastern Ladakh on June 15, 2020.

There are at least 26 PPs out of 65 in eastern Ladakh that are not being patrolled by Indian troops since April-May 2020 even as the two countries have several rounds of talks to resolve the border issue. In eastern Ladakh, several areas that were being patrolled earlier have been turned into "buffer zones," with the Chinese also not sending troops. PPs are often used to assert territorial claims along the undefined LAC. There is no mutually agreed border in several stretches.

New BJP-JD(U) alliance may cap the evolution of social justice politics

NEWS ANALYSIS

Varghese K. George
NEW DELHI

The pendulum politics of Bihar Chief Minister and Janata Dal(U) chief Nitish Kumar, who swung between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)-Congress axis several times in recent years, signifies the social kinetics unleashed by the rise of Hindutva. The evident opportunism in the renewal of the BJP-JD(U) alliance is only superficial.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has subsumed the social justice rhetoric within the rubric of Hindutva. This Hindutva 2.0 has thrown old tropes of social justice politics into a tailspin. Mr. Kumar's latest

somersault is his last attempt to hold on to his base – he concluded that his political longevity would be higher as an ally of the BJP than as an opponent. The BJP, on the other hand, has split the Opposition and derailed an attempted revival of Mandal politics, through its newest alliance.

Various strands of subaltern politics shared a common scepticism about Hinduism, even as nationalist politics sought to advance a composite Hindu identity through appeasement and coercion. Socialists, the forebears of the current social justice stock, hoped to use the Jan Sangh, the predecessor of the BJP, to undermine the dominance of the Congress. Socialists saw the Congress as the vehicle of upper caste do-

minance and hoped they could opportunistically ally with Hindutva.

Anti-Congress politics

Hindutva remained a marginal player within the spectrum of anti-Congress politics until the birth of Ayodhya politics in the 1980s. Terrorism in Punjab and Kashmir, supported by sections of Sikhs and Muslims, provided a helpful backdrop to the rise of Hindutva, but the simultaneous rise of Mandal politics raised a barrier. But all social justice groups were not opposing the BJP. Mr. Kumar, under his mentor George Fernandes, split from the Janata family and joined hands with the BJP in 1994.

The relations between Hindutva and caste-based social justice politics re-



More to it: The evident opportunism in the renewal of the BJP-JD(U) alliance is only superficial. FILE PHOTO

mained fluid, with both sides looking to take advantage of the other, even as tensions bubbled underneath.

Mr. Modi's proclamations about his own Other Backward Class (OBC) origins began making a dent in the flanks of social jus-

ice politics by 2014.

In 2015, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat's call for a rethink of caste reservations brought forth a resurgence of social justice politics and propelled the JD(U)-RJD alliance to victory in the Bihar Assembly

election. But the alliance lasted only for two years. Since then, Mr. Bhagwat has made compendious arguments in favour of continuing with reservations for an indefinite period, resolving a fundamental friction between Mandal and Kamandal. The move in the past one year to infuse a new life into Mandal politics through the call for a caste census did not gain momentum.

Mr. Kumar's government conducted a caste survey in Bihar and its results were published, but it did not turn out to be a climactic political event. Meanwhile, Mr. Modi's speech at the inauguration of the temple in Ayodhya recently amplified the subaltern legends that embellish the epic of Ram. Subaltern Hindutva

thrives by expanding representation in politics and cultural spaces that are under construction in the new nationalist project. Subaltern classes that allied with Muslims since the 1990s in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to gain political power find three attractions in the Hindutva model of social justice.

What it offers

First, it allows numerically weaker OBC groups to break away from the Yadav-, Jatav-, and Jat-led politics in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Second, the BJP encouraged OBCs to decouple from Muslims and increase participation in repurposed great traditions. This is presented as upward mobility.

Third, the BJP offers subaltern classes better

political representation. Mr. Modi presents himself as a member of the OBC community; the BJP elected a Dalit followed by a tribal woman to the highest office in the country. The combination of these factors have made conventional social justice politics redundant at the moment.

The BJP model has its own contradictions that might sharpen at some point in future. For the moment, the Sangh Parivar has moved to the centre on the question of social justice, and Mr. Bhagwat's changed view on reservations is only one indicator of that. The pendulum of social justice politics might stop swinging for now. Mr. Kumar's opportunism might end with the complete assimilation of his politics by the BJP.

Suspended MPs back as last session of the 17th Lok Sabha commences today

The 14 MPs, whose cases of suspension were referred to the Privileges Committees of the two Houses of Parliament, are set to return; Interim Budget to be presented tomorrow; at an all-party meeting, government urges the Opposition parties to cooperate and ensure that no placards are on display

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Budget Session of Parliament, the last one of the 17th Lok Sabha, will commence on Wednesday. The 14 Opposition MPs who were suspended during the previous session for protesting against the lack of a response from the government after an unprecedented security breach, will return to Parliament, after the Privileges Committee of the two Houses recommended the revocation of their suspension.

A total of 146 Opposition MPs – 100 in the Lok Sabha and the rest in the Rajya



An all-party meeting chaired by Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHKAPAKAR

Sabha – were suspended for bringing placards into the chambers, and frequently disrupting parliamentary proceedings. While the suspension of

132 members was only till the remainder of the session that ended on December 21, the cases of 14 members (11 in the Rajya Sabha and three in the Lok Sab-

ha) were referred to their respective Privileges Committees.

The session will begin with President Droupadi Murmu addressing a joint sitting of the Lower and Upper Houses. At an all-party meeting, the government urged the Opposition parties to cooperate and ensure that no placards were on display.

Interim Budget

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Interim Budget on Thursday, ahead of the Lok Sabha election likely to be held in April-May. The Budget for Jammu and Kashmir, which is under

President's Rule since December 2018, will also be presented during the session.

With the return of the Janata Dal(U) to the National Democratic Alliance, and the differences evident between the Trinamool Congress and the Congress, the Opposition will be on the back foot. Several senior Congress leaders, including former party chief Rahul Gandhi and general secretaries K.C. Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh, who are participating in the party's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, are unlikely to be present.

This will be the first Lok Sabha without a Deputy

Speaker, a post mandated under Article 93 of the Constitution.

At the all-party meeting chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Opposition members raised a host of issues, and demanded a debate on unemployment, high inflation, agrarian crisis, and violence-hit Manipur. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi addressed presspersons at the conclusion of the meeting. "They [the Opposition] have given suggestions, but since this is the last session of the present Lok Sabha, we have said we will give them an opportunity in the next session," he said.

CPI(M) reiterates its support to INDIA, but slams Cong. in Kerala

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The CPI(M) Central Committee, while reiterating its commitment towards the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc on Tuesday, slammed the Congress for "adopting a negative and anti-democratic approach" to the Kerala government.

"Despite the JD(U) deserting the INDIA bloc and collaborating with the BJP, the CPI(M) will make all efforts to further strengthen this formation and continue the activities to defeat the BJP to safeguard the secular democratic character of our Constitutional Republic," the party said.

The party, however, accused the Congress of keeping silent on the

Centre's "assault on the rights of Kerala" which, it said, helps the BJP in its manoeuvres against the State government.

The party also asked the Election Commission of India to "restore people's confidence" in Electoral Voting Machines (EVMs) by changing the current sequence of recording ballots. "Voters have no control over or knowledge of what transpires electronically between the VVPAT [voter-verified paper audit trail] device and the control unit. Hence, the CPI (M) has requested the ECI to connect the ballot unit directly to the control unit and from that point to the VVPAT to ensure accurate accounting," party general secretary Sitaram Yechury said.

Fresh powder



Snowed under: The Pir Panjal range is covered in snow in Poonch on Tuesday. With fresh snowfall in the upper reaches of Jammu & Kashmir, Mughal Road connecting Poonch and Shopian districts has been closed. ANI

We don't need someone who made U-turn under pressure: Rahul on Nitish

The Hindu Bureau
PATNA

As his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra traversed Bihar for the second day on Tuesday, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said his party did not need the support of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. "A little pressure and he took a U-turn."

"I understand Nitish ji's quandary. I told him straight that you will have to conduct caste census in Bihar... And we (Congress), along with RJD, insisted Nitish ji should conduct the survey. But BJP was in a panic as they oppose the survey. Nitish ji was in a jam and the BJP provided him a back door to escape," Mr. Gandhi said while addressing an impressive public meeting at Rangbhumai Maidan in Purnea, north Bihar.

"The mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) will continue to fight for social justice in Bihar and we don't need Chief Minister Nitish Kumar," Mr. Gandhi said. The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra entered Kishanganj in Bihar on January 29 from West Bengal.

Farmers share concerns

"In Purnea, Mr. Gandhi had an extended interaction with local farmers. The farmers highlighted how they were squeezed between rising input costs, unfair land acquisition practices, and inadequate



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi interacts with farmers during the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Purnea of Bihar on Tuesday. PTI

compensation for harvests," Jairam Ramesh posted on X.

"Rahul empathised with the struggle that farmers face in the Modi government's anyay-kaal, juxtaposing the UPA government's progressive Land Acquisition Law to the Modi government's attempts to revoke it within months of coming to power. He assured them that as soon as the Congress government is formed, it would enforce robust and fair laws for farmers across the nation, delivering on the promise of Kisan NYAY," Mr. Ramesh said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge was scheduled to address the public in Purnea but could not reach the venue due to bad weather and his flight failed to land. He addressed the meeting virtually and took a dig at Mr. Kumar's sudden political U-turns.

"Bihar, which showed the light to the world, is known today as political lab of *aaya-rams and gaya-rams*", Mr. Kharge said. "Bihar was the birthplace of democracy", he said speaking of saints and eminent politicians "but sadly the politics of greed and opportunism dominate this land today".

"The Congress party has not ditched anyone and been respectful to our allies. The mahagathbandhan government tried to intensify development works in Bihar which have been halted for years but that hurt Modi and Shah and they made a mockery of Bihar's prestige and self-respect," added Mr. Kharge in his virtual speech.

Former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya too addressed the meeting.

BJP hits out at Kharge over his remark on 'dictatorship'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday criticised Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge for his remark that the 2024 Lok Sabha election will be the "last" in India if Prime Minister Narendra Modi is re-elected, stating that it was in fact "dynastic politics in the name of democracy" that was at an end and that "true democracy" was in the offing.

Mr. Kharge had, while addressing a rally in Bhubaneswar on Monday, expressed apprehensions that the 2024 Lok Sabha election would be the last opportunity for the people to save democracy, and that "if Narendra Modi wins another election", there will be dictatorship in the country. "The BJP will rule India like Putin in Russia," he had said.

Responding to Mr. Kharge's remarks, BJP Rajya Sabha MP Sudhanshu Trivedi said, "Dynastic politics under the garb of democracy is coming to an end, and they are wondering what will be their future." "Whether it is Abdullah and Mufti families in Jammu and Kashmir, or the Badals in Punjab, the Hooda family in Haryana, all of them lost elections," Mr. Trivedi said. He asserted that "only two Prime Ministers were elected democratically in India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi".

High command will decide LS candidates, says Revanth

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy said that the Congress high command will decide the Lok Sabha candidates in the State.

"The high command has already constituted a committee, headed by Harish Choudary, to finalise the candidates, which will be approved by the Central leadership," he said at a meeting of the Pradesh Election Committee (PEC) held at Gandhi Bhavan on Tuesday evening.

The PEC passed an unanimous resolution autho-



A. Revanth Reddy

rising the AICC chief to finalise the LS candidates. The Congress will invite applications from aspirants for the LS polls, Mr. Revanth Reddy said, adding that party leaders can apply till March 3.

He said that the cadre have to work hard to en-

sure the victory of party candidates and pointed out that AICC has already appointed in-charges for all the 17 Lok Sabha constituencies.

"LS polls are just 60 days away and already the notification for Rajya Sabha elections are announced. Let us strive to get good results," he said. The government is committed to fulfilling all the promises it had made to the electorate.

Mr. Reddy said the party was now preparing to reach out to people from February 2 with the first meeting at Indervalli in Adilabad district.

P.C. George likely to merge his party with BJP

The Hindu Bureau
KOTTAYAM

Ending his protracted break from the political mainstream, Kerala Janapaksham (Secular) [K(S)] leader P.C. George has opened talks to merge his party with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Mr. George, a seven-time member of the Kerala Assembly and United Democratic Front (UDF) Chief Whip in the Oommen Chandy government, confirmed that his party was in discussions with the BJP's national leadership.

IN BRIEF



2 pilots de-rostered for taking off without ATC clearance

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) de-rostered two IndiGo pilots after the airline's Delhi to Baku flight allegedly took off on Monday night without clearance from the air traffic controller. Sources at the Indira Gandhi International Airport said IndiGo's 6E 1803 from Delhi to Azerbaijan's Baku at 7:38 p.m. on Monday took off without a departure clearance from the air traffic controller. "The matter is under investigation. The two pilots have been de-rostered from duties pending investigation," said a DGCA official. The airline said in a separate statement, "The incident is currently under investigation and, appropriate action will be taken as necessary."

ED questions Tejashwi Yadav in land-for-jobs case in Patna

Rashtriya Janata Dal leader and former Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav was questioned by the ED at its Patna office for several hours in a land-for-jobs case on Tuesday. This comes a day after his father and RJD chief Lalu Prasad was questioned for 10 hours. A crowd of RJD supporters and leaders camped outside the ED's office waiting for Mr. Tejashwi to come out. "This is not the office of the BJP. When elections come, Opposition party leaders get summons from them," said Rajya Sabha member Manoj Jha. The ED has alleged that land was taken in the name of Mr. Prasad's family members in return for railway jobs while he was Railway Minister.

Manvendra Singh's wife killed in road accident

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

Congress leader and former MP Manvendra Singh's wife Chitra Singh, 55, was killed in an accident on Tuesday in which he was injured. His son Hamir and driver also sustained injuries.

Their car hit the side-wall of a flyover on the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway. The accident occurred near Khushpuri village in Alwar district.

The cause of the accident is unclear, but the police said the driver appears to have lost control of the vehicle at a high speed and hit the sidewall. The family was travelling from New Delhi to Jaipur. The injured were rushed to a private hospital in Alwar. Mr. Singh, who was injured in the ribs, was stable.

Modi pays tributes to Mahatma Gandhi

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi on his 76th death anniversary. Mr. Modi paid floral tributes to the father of the nation at Rajghat in the morning and attended a prayer meeting at Gandhi Smriti in the evening.

"I pay homage to Pujya Babu on his Punya Tithi. I also pay homage to all those who have been martyred for our nation. Their sacrifices inspire us to serve the people and fulfil their vision for our nation," he said in a post on X.

Educationist nominated to Rajya Sabha

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu has nominated founder Chancellor of Chandigarh University and educationist Satnam Singh Sandhu to the Rajya Sabha.

The Union Home Ministry announced the decision in a notification here on Tuesday.

Centre starts survey on participation of women in workforce

Study undertaken to assess the spread of women employee-friendly practices such as running creche and equal pay for equal work

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Ministries of Labour & Employment and Women & Child Development have started a joint survey on increasing women participation in the workforce. The survey was announced by Union Minister Smriti Irani here on Tuesday at a function, "Women in the workforce for Viksit Bharat".

The survey is being undertaken to assess the spread of women employee-friendly practices in the country. Various international agencies and trade unions, including the International Labour Organization, had expressed concern over the decrease in participation of women workforce in the country.

Latest PLFS data

The latest results of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), released by the Labour Bureau last October, showed a considerable increase in women participation. In 2017-18, the participation rate was 23.3% and



The latest results of the PLFS show the women participation rate increased from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 37% in 2022-23. FILE PHOTO

in 2022-23, 37%. The survey, conducted by the Union Labour Ministry through the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation and other government agencies, has asked questions to the subscribers of government schemes about policies or initiatives for women by the companies they are employed with.

The government is seeking details such as formation of the internal complaints committee for prevention of sexual ha-

arrassment at the workplace, creche for children, equal pay for equal work, flexible or remote working hours for women and transportation facilities during late hours.

A senior officer said the survey is carried out in a confidential manner. "We are not asking the names of [the women] or any other identification detail, except their gender," the officer said. The name of the company, its location and address are also sought in the survey.

'Give maternity leave to construction staff'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Tuesday asked employers to ensure digital payment of wages and paid maternity leave of 26 weeks to women construction workers. These two were a few measures that were part of advisories issued by the Ministries of Road Transport and Highways, and Housing and Urban Affairs to agencies under them to encourage their participation in the workforce.

For more than two children and for adoption or

commissioning mothers, 12 weeks of paid maternity leave shall be provided by the employer. In addition to childbirth, the advisories addressed miscarriages, stipulating that if a woman in the construction sector experiences a miscarriage, she is entitled to leave with wages equivalent to maternity benefits for six weeks following the day of the miscarriage.

The advisory also emphasised the proactive role of employers in implementing policies and programmes to encourage women to join the workforce.

7 additional judges made permanent

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Seven additional judges posted in four High Courts were elevated as permanent judges on Tuesday.

Justices Ananya Bandyopadhyay, Rai Chattopadhyay, Shampa Dutt (Paul) and Raja Basu Chowdhury of the Calcutta High Court were made permanent judges. Justice Lapita Banerji of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, Justice Shobha Annamma Eapen

of the Kerala High Court and Justice Pradeep Kumar Srivastava of the Jharkhand High Court were also elevated. Justice Subhendu Samanta, an additional judge of the Calcutta High Court, was given a "fresh term" of one year effective from May 18.

Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal announced the appointments in a post on X. Additional judges are usually appointed for a period of two years before being made judges.

After four years of survey, India's snow leopard count put at 718

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

India has an estimated 718 snow leopards in the wild, according to a first-of-its-kind, four-year-long estimation exercise, the results of which were made public on Tuesday.

The snow leopard is known to be an elusive cat and located in mountainous terrain that is hard to access, and the exercise for the first time marks a base threshold for the animal's numbers in India.

The highest number of cats was estimated to be in Ladakh (477), followed by Uttarakhand (124), Himachal Pradesh (51), Arunachal Pradesh (36), Sikkim (21), and Jammu and Kashmir (nine). The current estimate puts the number of Indian snow leopards between 10% and 15% of the global population.



The exercise involved setting up cameras, or camera traps, in 1,971 locations and surveying 13,450 km of trails. GETTY IMAGES

The exercise involved setting up cameras, or camera traps, in 1,971 locations and surveying 13,450 km of trails which teams surveyed for recording signs of snow leopards such as scat, hair and other body markers. Much like the approach used in surveys to estimate tiger numbers, the States conducted the surveys and the Dehradun-based Wildlife Insti-

tute of India, an autonomous body of the Union Environment Ministry, used software and statistical methods to estimate the number of individual cats that are present but not caught on camera and combined them with those caught on camera.

"Essentially we use a similar statistical approach to that being used in the tiger surveys for the past

20 years. It's a rigorously tested equation and not dependent on guesswork," V.B. Mathur, former head of the WII, involved in the study, told *The Hindu*.

"Over the years, technology and statistics has improved leading to better estimates. What we now have is a good, scientifically established baseline that will be a reference for future surveys," he added.

The Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) began in 2019 and involves the World Wide Fund for Nature-India and the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru, along with the WII.

The snow leopard is classified as 'vulnerable' by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and faces threats from free-ranging dogs, human-wildlife conflicts, and poaching.

India nominates 12 forts of Marathas for UNESCO World Heritage List

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India has nominated the "Maratha Military Landscapes", a network of forts that showcase the strategic military powers of Maratha rule, for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List for 2024-25.

The 12 forts included in this nomination are the forts of Salher, Shivneri, Lohagad, Khanderi, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala, Vijaydurg and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra and Gingee in Tamil Nadu.

The "Maratha Military Landscapes", which developed between 17th and 19th centuries, represent an extraordinary fortification and military system envisioned by the Maratha



Pratapgad Fort, situated in Mahabaleshwar, is one of the forts nominated for UNESCO World Heritage List. FILE PHOTO

rulers. This extraordinary network of forts, varying in hierarchies, scales and typological features, is a result of integrating the landscape, terrain and physiographic characteristics distinctive to the Sahyadri mountain ranges, Konkan Coast, Deccan Plateau and Eastern Ghats in the Indian Peninsula.

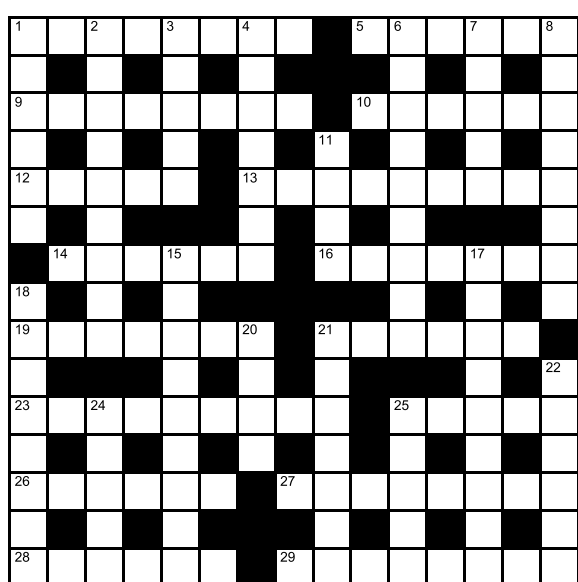
They are distributed across diverse geographi-

cal and physiographic regions and showcase the strategic military powers of the Maratha rule, the Union Culture Ministry said on Monday.

The inception of the Maratha military ideology dates back to 17th century during the reign of the Shivaji Maharaj from 1670 and continued through subsequent rules until the Peshwa rule till 1818 CE.

THE CROSSWORD+ 14085

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



Across

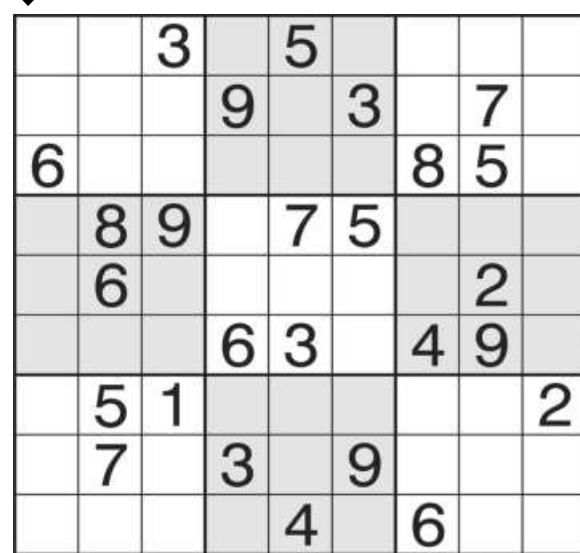
- Glow in arcade, perhaps (8)
- Number nine in standings at first in game (6)
- Over concerned with correctness, engineer cited a new paper at first (8)
- Astuteness of copper aboard - so be it (6)
- Mimicry by primate on railway line (5)

- Awareness of king currently on narrow platform (9)
- Story not essentially missing skill (6)
- Tiredness of stout one regularly missing gluten (7)
- Invalidate fully in new order (7)
- Clergyman to heal without a hint of therapy (6)
- Not good working to conceal fortune - racket may be involved in this (9)
- Doctor cutting tea for coffee (5)
- Encroachment at home beside street (6)
- First to last shoe splitting tumble in kicking game (8)
- It may be played by pawn easily losing heart (6)
- Source of light on carrier - one that may fly through space (8)

Down

- Repeat broadcast of race outside Portugal (6)
- Grand old blade used in sport where one may have to evade (9)
- Can no Yankee conceal anger? (5)
- What an insect may play? (7)
- Crate also transported in device that moves up (9)
- Part of piano made for one that keeps moving (5)
- Star in retrospect embarrassed with editor, split away (8)
- Whip returned for sport (4)
- Expel one minister in delight (9)
- Charges a tenor in a bad way to enter a party uninvited (9)
- Condescending aristocrat follows saint initially, braking is hard (8)
- Mythical creature at this time on island (4)
- Make up of criminal, firm on court (7)
- Everyone amidst German operation to quickly make progress (6)
- Physicist split direct and alternating current (5)
- Doctor on small hill to move fast (5)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

T	R	U	T	H	I	N	T	E	G	R	I	T	Y
H	S	I	B	E	Y	M	L	I					
E	P	I	S	T	L	E	A	I	R	S	I	C	K
O	N	A		A	T	E							
R	I	G	H	T	M	O	R	A	L	A	S	S	
S	I	P	U	A	U	T	O						
T													
S	A	B	R	E	L	I	S	L	E	S	I	R	
P	U	S	A	L	O	S	S	I	C	O	N	E	
O	M	T	A	S	I	C	O	N	E				
P	L	A	S	T	I	C	B	A	R	I	S	T	
U	T	I	A	L	E	A	C						
P	R	I	N	C	I	P	L	E	V	A	L	U	E

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Splendour of the Goddess

Sri Papanasam Sivan, in his composition, asks whether a child can live without the merciful care of its mother ("*Thai irangavidil seiyyir vazhumo?*").

A child bereft of the mother's help will display anguish and sadness.

The mother of the Universe, Goddess Mahalakshmi, emerged when celestials and asuras churned the ocean of milk using the Mandhara mountain as the churning staff; Vasuki, the king of serpents, as the cord; and Lord Narayana turning as a tortoise to support the churning.

The Goddess made the auspicious bosom of Lord Vishnu her abode.

Affluence personified, the Goddess illuminated with Her splendour.

She is the Goddess of prosperity, wealth, tolerance, and patience.

Smt. Visaka Hari said in discourse that our backbone is the Mandara mountain, our veins and arteries (*nadis*) are the Vasuki-like cord, our heart is the ocean of milk, and our sitting posture for penance, the korma (tortoise) asana, is to derive the nectar-like blessings of the Lord with His divine consort.

When Lord Vishnu descended on Earth as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, the Goddess also descended as Sri Sita and Sri Rukmini. She is the divine energy of the Lord.

He is called in the Sri Vishnushastranama '*Sridha: Srisa: Srinivasa: Srinidhi, and Srivibhavana*' - prefixing the established name of Mahalakshmi as Sri. She is called *Jagamatha* (the mother of the Universe). She will reside where righteousness is upheld.

Astronomers spot unusual object that falls within the black hole 'mass gap'

The mass of a 'dark' companion in the NGC 1851E system is between the heaviest possible neutron stars and the possible lightest black holes. The nature and formation of objects in this gap is an outstanding question in astrophysics; the heaviest neutron stars, are thought to be around 2.2 solar masses, and the lightest black holes around 5

Ewan D. Barr
Arunima Dutta
Benjamin Stappers

Sometimes astronomers come across objects in the sky that we can't easily explain. In our new research, published in *Science*, we report such a discovery, which is likely to spark discussion and speculation.

Neutron stars are some of the densest objects in the universe. As compact as an atomic nucleus, yet as large as a city, they push the limits of our understanding of extreme matter. The heavier a neutron star is, the more likely it is to eventually collapse to become something even denser: a black hole.

These astrophysical objects are so dense, and their gravitational pulls so strong, that their cores – whatever they may be – are permanently shrouded from the universe by event horizons: surfaces of perfect darkness from which light cannot escape.

If we are to ever understand the physics at the tipping point between neutron stars and black holes, we must find objects at this boundary. In particular, we must find objects for which we can make precise measurements over long periods of time. And that's precisely what we've found – an object that is neither obviously a neutron star nor a black hole.

It was when looking deep in the star cluster NGC 1851 that we spotted what appears to be a pair of stars offering a new view into the extremes of matter in the universe. The system is composed of a millisecond pulsar, a type of rapidly spinning neutron star that sweeps beams of radio light across the cosmos as it spins, and a massive, hidden object of unknown nature.

The massive object is dark, meaning it is invisible at all frequencies of light – from the radio to the optical, X-ray and gamma-ray bands. In other circumstances this would make it impossible to study, but it is here that the millisecond pulsar comes to our aid.

Millisecond pulsars are akin to cosmic atomic clocks. Their spins are incredibly stable and can be precisely measured by detecting the regular radio pulse they create. Although intrinsically stable, the observed spin changes when the pulsar is in motion or when its signal is affected by a strong gravitational field. By observing these changes we can measure the properties of bodies in orbits with pulsars.

Our international team of astronomers has been using the MeerKAT radio



An artist's impression of the the NGC 1851E binary system, looking over the shoulder of the dark mystery companion star. MPIFR, DANIELLE FUTSelaar (ARTSOURCE.NL)

telescope in South Africa to conduct such observations of the system, referred to as NGC 1851E.

These allowed us to precisely detail the orbits of the two objects, showing that their point of closest approach changes with time. Such changes are described by Einstein's theory of relativity and the speed of a change tells us about the combined mass of the bodies in the system.

Our observations revealed that the NGC 1851E system weighs almost four times as much as our Sun, and that the dark companion was, like the pulsar, a compact object – much denser than a normal star. The most massive neutron stars weigh in at around two solar masses, so if this were a double neutron star system (systems that are well known and studied) then it would have to contain two of the heaviest neutron stars ever found.

To uncover the nature of the companion, we would need to understand how the mass in the system was distributed between the stars. Again using Einstein's general relativity, we could model the system in detail, finding the mass of the companion to lie between 2.09 and 2.71 times the mass of the Sun.

The companion's mass falls within the "black hole mass gap" that lies between heaviest possible neutron stars, thought to be around 2.2 solar masses,



Neutron stars are some of the densest objects in the universe. As compact as an atomic nucleus, yet as large as a city, they push the limits of our understanding of extreme matter

and the lightest black holes that can be formed from stellar collapse, around 5 solar masses. The nature and formation of objects in this gap is an outstanding question in astrophysics.

Possible candidates

So what exactly have we found then?

An enticing possibility is that we have uncovered a pulsar in orbit around the remains of a merger (collision) of two neutron stars. Such an unusual configuration is made possible by the dense packing of stars in NGC 1851.

In this crowded stellar dance floor, stars will twirl around one another, swapping partners in an endless waltz. If two neutron stars happen to be thrown too close together, their dance will come to a cataclysmic end.

The black hole created by their collision, which can be much lighter than those created from collapsing stars, is

then free to wander the cluster until it finds another pair of dancers in the waltz and, rather rudely, insert itself – kicking out the lighter partner in the process. It is this mechanism of collisions and exchanges that could give rise to the system we observe today.

We are not done with this system yet. Work is already ongoing to conclusively identify the true nature of the companion and reveal whether we have discovered the lightest black hole or the most massive neutron star – or perhaps neither. At the boundary between neutron stars and black holes there is always the possibility that some new, as yet unknown, astrophysical object might exist.

Much speculation will be sure to follow this discovery, but what is already clear is that this system holds immense promise when it comes to understanding what really happens to matter in the most extreme environments in the universe.

(Ewan D. Barr is project scientist for the Transients and Pulsars with MeerKAT (TRAPUM) collaboration and Arunima Dutta is a PhD candidate at the Research Department Fundamental Physics in Radio Astronomy, both at the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy; Benjamin Stappers is professor of astrophysics, University of Manchester. This article is republished from The Conversation.)

THE GIST

Neutron stars are permanently shrouded from the universe by event horizons: surfaces of perfect darkness from which light cannot escape

If we are to ever understand the physics at the tipping point between neutron stars and black holes, we must find objects at this boundary

At the boundary between neutron stars and black holes there is always the possibility that some new, as yet unknown, astrophysical object might exist

BIG SHOT



The spiral galaxy NGC 1512, located 30 million light-years away from the earth, is seen in this image captured by the James Webb Space Telescope. The images were made public on Monday by scientists in a project called Physics at High Angular resolution in Nearby Galaxies (PHANGS). The new images came from Webb's Near-Infrared Camera and Mid-Infrared Instrument. They show roughly 100,000 star-clusters and millions of individual stars. NASA, ESA, CSA, STSCI, PHANGS

QUESTION CORNER

Rain: how vapour becomes water



Q: Why does rain fall as drops and sheets?

A: Many windblown drops can be forced together to form what weather reporters call 'sheeting rain', but

rain is always born as minuscule drops of condensed water vapour, according to the book *Clouds and Weather* by John A. Day and Vincent J. Schaefer.

The formation of these droplets depends on the right amount of water vapour at the right pressure and temperature, but it also requires the presence of tiny solid particles of matter in the air on which the water vapour can gather and condense. These bits of dust and salt are called cloud condensation nuclei. Salt starts collecting vapour at about 80% relative humidity, while bits of clay begin to take on water molecules at 100% relative humidity.

As the water molecules slowly collect and condense on the particles, cloud droplets form. They are a million times the volume of the original particle but are still very tiny. It takes perhaps 3,000 droplets to form a small raindrop. The drops in a heavy shower are the size of around 6,000 droplets, according to *The New York Times*.

The droplets can grow into drops by several processes. First, they can slowly continue to attract vapour. Second, larger droplets fall faster than small ones and collide with



Rain is carried to the ground by solid particles in the air. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

them, sometimes joining into larger drops.

Finally, evaporating droplets may collect on ice crystals in clouds. The crystals may warm and melt into rain drops or they may grow 'branches' and fall as snowflakes.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'



Economic encomium

A glowing 10-year report card must not stoke complacency

A head of the Interim Budget for 2024-25 on Thursday, the Finance Ministry's 10-year review of the economy with some forward outlook, serves as a proxy to the annual Economic Survey. The review signals GDP will grow close to 7% in 2024-25, with scope to go 'well above' 7% by 2030. From about \$3.7 trillion this year, India's economy will expand to \$5 trillion in three years, making it the world's third largest, and could hit the \$7 trillion dollar mark by 2030, it reckons. Splicing India's growth story into two phases – 1950-2014, and a 'decade of transformative growth' since 2014 – the review stresses that the state of the economy was 'far from encouraging' when Prime Minister Narendra Modi 'assumed power'. Growth was hobbled by structural constraints such as tardy decision-making, ill-targeted subsidies and a large informal sector, while inflation was unpalatably high. Post-2014 reforms have restored the economy's ability to grow healthily with "longer and stronger" economic and financial cycles, and made India the fastest growing G-20 nation, it argues. The review asserts that India's 7% growth when the world is growing 2%, is 'qualitatively superior' to 8%-9% achieved when the global economy grows 4%, perhaps, hinting at a few years of the UPA era. This is debatable as India's economy is generally delinked from the world with domestic activity driving growth more than exports.

Now that the twin-balance sheet problem inherited from the UPA days has turned into an 'advantage', as the review stresses, it must translate into a wider private investment revival. That would hinge on a broad-based consumption rebound rather than the K-shaped recovery the government vehemently dismisses. Four years of 7%-plus growth, post-pandemic, would be commendable indeed. However, India needs to grow faster to create jobs at the scale its youth need and ensure that a rising growth tide lifts most boats, if not all. The review expects an 'all-inclusive welfare approach' to help enlarge the consumption base by expanding the middle class. But those dependent on handouts, such as the 800 million that need free food by the Centre's reckoning, must progressively shrink for growth to be meaningful and equitable. The report rightly mentions reforms in learning outcomes, health, easier compliances for smaller firms, as priorities, with some critical changes at the 'sub-national government' level to accelerate growth. It is also essential that flaws in reforms such as GST are fixed and some of the blunt policy tools deployed, for instance, import licences and price controls on deregulated products, that send convoluted signals about India's 'open market with predictable policies' pitch, are reconsidered.

Vetting for vendetta

Mechanism to scan cases for political motive cannot address issue of cover-up

The Supreme Court's suggestion for a mechanism to eliminate the perception of vendetta behind the use of investigative agencies against political opponents is sound in principle, but may not address all aspects of the problem. A case under formal investigation may be scrutinised for its legal tenability or political motive, but such a mechanism can do nothing about offences and allegations that are covered up for political reasons. During a recent hearing on a bribery case against an Enforcement Directorate (ED) officer in Tamil Nadu, the ED sought the transfer of the probe to the CBI. It also charged that the State police was not sharing details of FIRs it had registered on complaints against Ministers, officials and others in instances of corruption and illegal mining. The ED, presumably, wants to probe the money-laundering aspects of these offences, whereas the State government believes these details will be used to target its ministers and officials as the State is run by a party opposed to the ruling BJP at the Centre. The Bench's idea that an independent, pan-India mechanism to vet such cases appears reasonable. However, much of the criticism of the use of central agencies against political adversaries of the BJP stems from the view that similar allegations against its party members and allies across the country are seldom investigated.

Corruption allegations abound in several States against key political figures seen as friendly to the Centre, but the Opposition parties believe the CBI, ED and Income-Tax Department are hardly active there. The Bench is right in observing that offenders should not be spared only because they claimed to be victims of vendetta. Its remarks disapproving of retaliatory arrests are also salutary. However, despite the Solicitor-General's argument that the courts could intervene in the case of vindictive action, it has to be noted that the ED's power to summon and arrest anyone, and the difficulty in obtaining bail in money-laundering cases, renders the Union government quite invincible if it chose persecution in the name of prosecution. An unsavoury instance of how far politics over the use of central agencies can sully institutions is the recent episode of a Calcutta High Court judge ordering a CBI probe into charges against the ruling party in West Bengal, and a Division Bench staying the order. The single judge chose to ignore the Bench's order, accusing its presiding judge of political motive. In a welcome move, the Supreme Court formed a Bench of its senior-most judges and transferred the whole case file to itself for disposal. The perception of vendetta can only be removed if all agencies chose independence over subservience.

A dark message to Delhi from Kangla Fort

In what could have been an anti-climax to a melodramatic Shumang Leela act (a traditional form of theatre in Manipur), 38 Meitei legislators took a six-point public oath-taking at the Kangla Fort, Imphal, on January 24. Unlike the four-generic resolutions passed by the State Assembly, and reportedly endorsed by 34-odd State legislators (this included a Meitei Pangal and five Nagas) three days earlier, the six-points oath (later endorsed by the Chief Minister of Manipur, N. Biren Singh) made explicit its communal overtones by castigating the 'Kuki' for unilaterally fomenting violence since May 3.

Everything other than disarmament

The six-points oath called upon the Centre to do the following: abrogate the tripartite Suspension of Agreement (SoA) that it signed with the State and Kuki-Zomi-Hmar militants since 2008; implement the National Register of Citizens but using 1951 as the base year; construct a border-fence across the India-Myanmar border; replace the Assam Rifles with other central paramilitary forces; delete 'Kuki' from the Scheduled Tribe list, and relocate 'Kuki refugees' in Manipur to Mizoram.

If these were implemented, they would not only further expose the vulnerability of the Kuki-Zomi-Hmar groups but would also effectively erase their long-standing protective discrimination benefits.

In hindsight, had the above points been played as themes of a Shumang Leela act to showcase what could have transpired in the real world, patrons of Shumang Leela would have been sorely disappointed by the inversion of its conventional themes, wherein brotherhood, tolerance and justice, among others, are sacrificed at the altar of collective self-love and perceived sense of insecurity.

Clearly, the legislators lost Tagore's dream of 'clear stream of reason' and a fearless mind which should have animated their public action even as they allowed themselves to be consumed by the burning passion to protect the interests of the 'Sanamahi' and Meitei 'community'. That this reflection and reasoned public action were missing from the legislators' public action became apparent as the six-points oath failed to mention 'disarmament', which was one of the four resolutions passed earlier by the Assembly. This is glaring given that almost half of the 6,000 automatic rifles and over five lakh rounds of live ammunitions from various police armouries that were handed over to ragtag mobs are reportedly still with the Arambai Tenggol, the armed militia under whose diktat and supervision this oath-taking event was held.

This, and the fact that much of the arms and ammunition continue to be in the hands of armed



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The Indian state needs to be aware of the implications of the recent oath-taking event by 38 Meitei legislators in Imphal, under the gaze of a militia group

militants across the divide, continue to be a key structural cause of this violence.

An abandonment of constitutional duty

Given the extensive reports of Arambais being involved in violent attacks against several Kuki-Zomi-Hmar villages, the legislators' decision to publicly partake in the Arambais agenda only reinforces the partisan image and the role of the Meitei legislators in Manipur's violence. There may have been applause following the Arambai Tenggol's triumphant shout of 'Manipur *na yai phare* (Manipur has done well)' in Kangla as they retreated to their camps in motor cavalcades after this event, but far from securing the interests of the Meiteis and protecting Manipur's territorial integrity, there are signs of a sense of insecurity. If one is to go by the hostile responses on social media, this event has also sharpened the emotional, demographic and territorial divide between the Kuki-Zomi-Hmar and Meitei.

The immediate fallout of this was evident during the event as three legislators, who included Meghachandra, the President of Congress Pradesh Committee, were physically assaulted by the Arambais for attributing the violence to misrule by the Bharatiya Janata Party in the State. The muzzling of dissent and violent intolerance stems from this. That the Arambai Tenggol brooks no dissent and might unleash terror was also evident when its cadres vandalised the residences of human rights activist Babloo Loitangbam and a retired police official, Thounaojam Brinda, when they implicated the Arambai Tenggol for its role in this cycle of violence.

By giving in to the diktat of the Arambai Tenggol and Koroungamba Khuman, its commander-in-chief (out of fear of being labelled 'enemy' and 'traitor' of the Meitei 'community'), the Meitei legislators have abandoned their primary constitutional duty and oath to protect India's Constitution.

This dramatic event is also remarkable for its symbolic and iterative significance. That an armed militia chose Kangla Fort as the site for public oath-taking demonstrates its determination to not only revive the glorious past of *Kangleipak* (the local name for Meitei Kingdom) from its symbolic and traditional seat of power, but also project this as a fulcrum to revive Meitei indigenous tradition, culture, and religion (*Sanamahi*). The event is also significant for another reason – that elected representatives of a democratic state, whose primary oath of allegiance is to the Indian Constitution, are very pliable and can be blackmailed under duress to capitulate to the partisan communal agenda of an unelected, and armed militant group. That elected legislators could be overshadowed in a democratic and constitutional state is disturbing

as it strikes at the very root of the legitimacy of the Indian state.

Dangers of a radical agenda

The fact that this event was organised to convey a strong political message to New Delhi is clear as it happened within days of backroom attempts by a three-member team of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (headed by A.K. Mishra, a retired police officer and an interlocutor with Kuki-Zomi-Hmar SoO groups in Manipur), to persuade the Arambai Tenggol to either cancel or postpone the event. In its ambition to upstage the 38-odd Meitei legislators (plus the Chief Minister who later signed the pledge) as the bearers of democratic legitimacy, the Arambai Tenggol and this oath reinforced the communal and partisan agenda/interest of large segments of Meitei non-state actors and their legislators in targeting the 'Kuki' as the problematic 'other'.

Although the Arambai Tenggol is largely seen as a private militia (started and sustained under the patronage of Leisemba Sanajaoba, the titular king of Manipur, and the powers-that-be), it also represents a calibrated organisational attempt to revive Meitei indigenous culture, tradition and religion (*Sanamahi*). Much like the radicalisation of youths in Punjab in the 1980s under Bhindranwale's Damdami Taksal, the Arambai Tenggol has succeeded in reorienting many unemployed Meitei youth to the cause of a sovereign Kangleipak under the veneer of reviving Meitei's fast-vanishing indigenous religion, traditions and cultures such as traditional martial arts that focus on the use of sword, and a horse-mount dart as a weapon. In doing so, the Arambai Tenggol has galvanised popular interest and support in quick time. However, given that it operates in an insurgent space where the 'radical' agenda and interest of a motley of non-state actors including armed groups which espouse a sovereign Kangleipak intersect and often either coalesce or reinforce one another, the Arambai Tenggol is susceptible to manipulation and control by powerful social forces and political actors.

It is precisely here that one should be wary of the Janus-faced Arambai Tenggol. Allowing the mighty Indian state to capitulate to this armed militia, or other powerful social forces, just because it is amenable to cultural and nationalist appropriation by some vested parties in their electoral pursuit cannot be used as a ruse to denude what the eminent sociologist Michael Mann in a different context calls the 'infrastructural power' of the state – that is, the autonomous power to regulate state-society relations. Otherwise, this public event could turn out to be India's Bhindranwale moment again.

The views expressed are personal

A blurred mapping of internal female migration

Internal migration is a crucial form of physical and social transaction in India. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), which collects data on employment and unemployment indicators in the country, has estimated it to be 27% from June 2020 to 2021. Normative literature (Rajan *et al.*, 2020; Jesline *et al.*, 2021) usually documents it as a male-dominated narrative. However, women, especially of working age, comprise a greater share of the migrant pool but there is little dialogue surrounding them. This is a concern given India's falling Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR). It also raises the question of whether women face employment barriers due to post-migration conditions.

National surveys, inaccurate picture

National surveys such as the PLFS capture information about female migrants but often convey an inaccurate picture. For instance, surveys only ask the respondents regarding their primary reason for migration. PLFS data suggest that the leading reason for migration among women is marriage (81%), followed by migration of family members (10%), employment (2.42%), and migration for education opportunities (0.48%). There is no provision to know the secondary reasons/motivations such as climate shocks and food insecurity, which can be a crucial driver of migration for women.

In the same vein, data from these surveys regarding migrant women's labour force participation can be misinforming. According to the PLFS, approximately three quarters of migrant women are unemployed, approximately 14% of migrant women are in self and wage-employed jobs and approximately 12% are in casual labour. This round of data collection was during the COVID-19 pandemic, which might explain the low numbers, but does not adequately underscore the problem of underreporting of their employment status. Anecdotal evidence and findings from the respective works of researchers Sonalde Desai and Ashwini Deshpande suggest that it is not uncommon for migrant women to engage in



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Women, especially of working age, comprise a greater share of India's migrant pool but there is little dialogue and flawed data on this important issue

casual employment, indicating the underestimation of the number of migrant women involved in the various sectors that might be categorised as casual (or even informal) such as agriculture, construction, and domestic help.

Second, definitional issues and women's own beliefs also lead to an underreporting of employment of migrant women. According to the definition of employment used by national surveys, only those with some form of verbal or written contract with their employer are considered part of the labour force. Consequently, women are largely classified as unemployed.

However, what is often overlooked is that women choose forms of employment that allow them to handle their domestic duties while contributing to the household's production or finances. Thus, working as unpaid family workers, in household enterprises, or being self-employed is common amongst them (S. Rukmini, 2023). But they may view that as an extension of their domestic commitment instead of a form of employment which leads to them misreporting their employment status.

Human and social capital

Notwithstanding these arguments, if indeed entry to the formal labour force is challenging, one important factor restricting their entry into the labour force could be the need for more human and social capital. In the PLFS data, 85% of the women have less than 10 years of education, which can create problems. While there is no significant difference in the educational levels of migrant and non-migrant women, migrant women are proportionally less employed than the non-migrant women. Coupled with the lack of social networks, especially after they migrate, these factors can significantly hinder their employment chances.

Such barriers might also explain the dismal recovery of women's labour activity after the pandemic. A study by Yale University on this issue observed that after the COVID-19-induced lockdown, 55% of women never returned to their

places of employment, and those who did so, earned only 56% of their pre-pandemic income levels.

Regardless of the sparse number of migrant women formally counted in the labour force, female migration for labour/employment increased by 101% between 2001 and 2011. However, they remain largely invisible, facing significant hurdles and marginalisation. Consequently, this results in unaddressed struggles and a lack of targeted policies. From a political standpoint, women migrants are not a considerable vote bank, and, therefore, their needs are not addressed. Although recent polls would disagree, political parties do not campaign to gain migrant women's votes. This has several detrimental outcomes, such as a lack of good data on female migrants and treating migrant men and women as the same. This engenders policy-making, which is poorly informed about the needs, motivations, and conditions of female migrants. Policies such as One Nation One ration card, e-Shram, and affordable rental housing complexes are examples of this as they are mainly targeted towards the male migrant population.

Steps to take

To remedy this, several steps should be taken. National surveys should compile more information regarding their socio-economic conditions post-migration as very little is known about it. For instance, the PLFS indicates that a minute percentage (approximately 7%) have access to social security benefits; there is no data for the rest of the populace. There is also a lack of time-use data (Nadal *et al.*, 2020; Charmes, 2019) for migrants, as India has not made that the norm yet. Time-use data would significantly help advance existing knowledge regarding unemployed female migrants. On a broader scale, a change in narrative is required, starting with an increased collection of female-specific data. It will illustrate the largely anecdotal problem and bring awareness about the plight of these women to encourage progressive policymaking.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Party hopping

It does not augur well for the health of democracy in India if we have maverick politicians like Nitish Kumar who change loyalties at the drop of a hat. The anti-defection law may have checked retail horse trading perhaps, but wholesale horse trading

continues unabated. With the biggest show of all, viz., the general election due in a few months, one has to wait and watch how many more such turnarounds are in store for the general public (Inside pages, January 30).
Sharada Sivaram,
Ernakulam, Kerala

The world of Test cricket

The aggressive brand of cricket, which the English coach Brendon McCullum has espoused, seems to be working well for England ('Sport' page, January 30). Test cricket purists must be shaking their heads in disbelief when they see reverse sweeps and

pre-determined scoops. Bazball has definitely created a buzz and shown that an unconventional approach can succeed in Test matches in India. India needs to come up with a strategy to counter this unconventional approach.
Thomas Palocaren,
Vellore, Tamil Nadu

The world of cricket witnessed two of the best Tests, won by visiting countries. In this batsmen's era, the wins on account of bowling performances are a boost to Test cricket.
P. Ramu Selvam,
Palani, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu

The sensational win by the West Indies has taken the cricketing world by storm. Beyond the records, the West Indies victory was a celebration of the spirit of the game. It showcased the power of belief, teamwork and overcoming invincible odds.
R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

Pulling Sri Lanka out of the abyss

On January 9, 2024, the United National Party (UNP) proposed incumbent Ranil Wickremesinghe as the national presidential candidate for the elections. This move may garner support from some political parties. In July 2022, six-time Prime Minister Wickremesinghe was chosen for his economic credentials by a parliamentary majority to replace Gotabaya Rajapaksa who resigned following mass protests over economic mismanagement and rent-seeking. In April 2022, Sri Lanka became the first Asian country in the 21st century to pre-emptively default on debt, which amounted to over \$50 billion. A devastating economic crisis followed. The GDP contracted by 7.8%, year on year inflation escalated to 69.8% in September 2022, the Sri Lankan rupee depreciated by 44.8% against the U.S. dollar, and usable foreign reserves fell to two weeks of imports creating shortages of medicine, food, and fuel.

Stabilisation policies
Mr. Wickremesinghe's government, with members of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) led by Mahinda Rajapaksa, implemented an orthodox set of stabilisation policies. These included raising interest rates to control inflation, removing fuel subsidies, increasing taxes, passing a law to improve the independence of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka and initiating privatisation of state-owned enterprises. The government also sought Indian aid, intensified negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on an Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and also foreign debt restructuring talks with private bondholders and bilateral creditors.

In March 2023, the IMF Board approved a EFF worth \$2.9 billion over 48 months, emphasising fiscal and governance reforms. The first review by the IMF Board in December 2023 rated Sri Lanka's performance as



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Under Ranil Wickremesinghe, economic progress is visible after 18 months of stabilisation policies

“satisfactory” meaning total IMF disbursement will be \$670 million. The EFF unlocked additional funding from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank for budget support, social protection, financial sector development, and infrastructure development.

Progress is visible after 18 months of stabilisation policies. Inflation fell to 4% in December 2023 but could rise with the increase in Value Added Tax from 15% to 18% in January 2024. The Sri Lankan rupee appreciated by 12.1% against the U.S. dollar in 2023. Foreign exchange liquidity pressures eased. More import capacity means shortages of essentials and waiting lines have disappeared. The IMF projects a return to growth of 1.8% in 2024 compared with -3.6% in 2023.

Furthermore, foreign direct investment in infrastructure, due to Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean, may also be picking up. A joint venture project between India's Adani Group and Sri Lanka's John Keells Holdings seeks to develop the \$700 million West Container Terminal at Colombo Port. The U.S. Development Finance Corporation has committed \$553 million. This will expand the capacity of the port and improve transshipment trade with a growing Indian economy.

In a geopolitical twist, China's Sinopec Group, which will also manage 200 fuel filling stations in Sri Lanka, has committed \$4.5 billion to an oil refinery in the controversial, low-profit Hambantota Port. Foreign exchange constraints and an inefficient state-owned Ceylon Petroleum Corporation led to fuel shortages and hardships for the Sri Lankans during the crisis. FDI by China's Sinopec in petroleum refining and distribution may help improve Sri Lanka's energy security provided the energy market is open to all investors and a strong competition policy is adopted. If not, Sri Lanka could be vulnerable to problems of a private monopoly under Sinopec

with higher fuel prices and variable fuel supply.

Risks to Sri Lanka's outlook
Sri Lanka needs sustained economic growth of 5-6% in the medium term to escape from indebtedness. But its outlook is vulnerable to external and internal risks. The first is geopolitical competition between the U.S. and China. For instance, an intensified U.S.-China trade war following the possible victory of Donald Trump in the U.S. presidential elections could be devastating for inward FDI and trade in Sri Lanka.

The second is debt restructuring. In November 2023, Sri Lanka concluded an initial agreement with key bilateral creditors, including India and the Paris Club, to restructure \$5.9 billion in external debt. This was important for reducing interest payments and unlocking IMF financing in 2024. This deal followed China's separate debt restructuring agreement with Sri Lanka. These agreements are on similar terms, extending deadlines and lowering interest rates. But ominously, private bondholders, who held about 40% of external debt (end 2022), are concerned about the extent of the 'haircut' on debt they could face. They say there has been little engagement with them due to the focus on talks with official creditors.

Third, political risks could derail the EFF and growth beyond 2024 – presidential elections are due in September and general elections in 2025. A doubling of poverty to 25% of the population since the default, and growing dissatisfaction with the UNP and SLPP, appears to be leading to support for the left-wing populist National People's Power. And Sajith Premadasa, the leader of the opposition, who is the head of the centre-right Samagi Jana Balwegaya, says he wants to renegotiate the IMF agreement.

Mr. Wickremesinghe deserves credit for pulling Sri Lanka back from the abyss. Only time will tell whether he can win the election.

Gruha Lakshmi is not a freebie

It signifies a redistribution of resources by the government to a marginalised section

STATE OF PLAY

Gourishankar S. Hiremath & K.S. Harikrishnan



The introduction of the Gruha Lakshmi scheme by the Karnataka government has reignited the policy debate about welfare programmes for the economically disadvantaged and fiscal prudence. The scheme guarantees a direct monthly cash transfer of ₹2,000 to women who are the heads of below poverty line households in Karnataka. About 1.36 crore beneficiaries are registered. This means that the annual outlay of the scheme is more than ₹32,000 crore.

Mainstream economics does not recognise activities primarily carried out by women at home as economic activities. Unpaid work encompasses domestic chores such as cooking and washing, while care work involves caring for the elderly and children. The participation of women in remunerative economic activity is abysmally low, while their burden of unpaid work is substantially higher than men. According to the Time Use survey conducted by the National Statistical Office, 57.3% of male respondents were involved in employment and related activities compared to 18.4% of women. In contrast, 81.2% of women bore the burden of unpaid domestic services for household members compared to 26.1% of men.

Further, the burden of unpaid and care work is disproportionately higher for economically poor women who are also engaged in wage work, as they lack the resources to outsource care activities. Thus, they are trapped in a cycle of poverty. The Gruha Lakshmi scheme represents a

crucial step in recognising the value of unpaid work. As urbanisation grows and the population ages, the burden of elderly care is expected to increase, especially for impoverished families. Income support from the state can alleviate the strain on such families. In this context, monetary support to women cannot be seen as a 'freebie'; it is an entitlement for the care work that women do, especially women who face multidimensional and time poverty.

In a patriarchal economic system, women are often paid low wages, which they reluctantly accept due to their limited bargaining power. Unconditional cash support not only helps women deconstruct their labour power from the system to an extent, but possibly provides some cushion to resist accepting reservation wages by enhancing their bargaining power.

Empirical evidence supports cash transfers to households in stimulating aggregate demand and putting the economy back on a growth trajectory rather than providing sops and bailout packages to the corporate sector to revive it. For instance, according to a study by IFPRI-Indian Council for Agricultural Research, PM-KISAN, a direct benefit transfer scheme of the Union government, enabled farmers to meet expenses other than agriculture and had a multi-

plier effect. Direct support measures, including cash transfers to households by the Union government during the COVID-19 pandemic, led to a swift V-shaped recovery of the economy. The Gruha Lakshmi scheme is also poised to bolster aggregate demand given its target group's relatively high marginal propensity to consume. Consumption improves quality of life and also boosts economic activities.

The scheme signifies a redistribution of resources by the government to a marginalised section of society, recognising unpaid work. Nonetheless, ensuring that resources to finance the scheme are augmented from direct taxes, such as levies on high-value property and capital transactions and excise taxes on premium liquor, is crucial. Prudent administrative measures to trim unnecessary expenditures can provide additional resources to ensure timely and uninterrupted cash transfers. Therefore, a transparent and well-thought-out road map for resource augmentation is indispensable. While fiscal prudence is necessary, it must not come at the expense of the welfare of the marginalised.

It is naïve to consider Gruha Lakshmi as a panacea for gender inequality. There is a need to universalise such support to women in recognition of their unpaid and care work. A comprehensive institutional framework at the national and sub-national levels and cooperative federalism are indispensable to address gender inequality in the economy and ensure redistribution.

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Most teens use social media, but lack skills to protect themselves

While more than 90% use social media, only about 50% know how to block their profile or make their account private

DATA POINT

Rebecca Rose Varghese & Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Among Indian teenagers in rural areas who can't even read a paragraph of text, over 30% can still browse the Internet and close to 50% can find a video on YouTube, says the latest Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Rural. The report provides several such insights into the digital prowess of high school and college students in India.

In the ASER survey, students in the 14-18 age group were asked to read a paragraph. Those who could read the words but not the sentences were said to belong to the 'word level'. Those who could read the paragraph but not a bunch of paragraphs were categorised as belonging to 'Grade 1 level'. Those who could read many paragraphs were said to belong to 'Grade 2 level'. The survey was conducted in 28 districts from September to November, 2023.

Chart 1 shows the share of students aged 14-18 with different leading levels who could do digital tasks on a smartphone. Among those at the 'word level', more than 30% managed to find a YouTube video, browse information on the web, and set an alarm on their smartphone. Among those belonging to 'Grade 1 level', more than 55% could do all these tasks. Interestingly, most students, across reading levels, found it challenging to find travel time on Google Maps.

These conclusions were made for all the 28 districts put together. If the data are analysed at the district level, there are wide variations. For instance, more than 95% of teenagers in the rural parts of Ernakulam in Kerala were able to set an alarm on their smartphone, while less than 50% in Cooch Behar in West Bengal and Gariaband in Chhattisgarh knew how to do this. The India average was 66.4%

(Chart 2A).

There were wide variations among those who could browse information too: while 93% in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag could do this, less than 50% could do so in Odisha's Sambalpur and Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills (Chart 2B).

In Nagaland's Kohima district, only 12.5% teenagers knew how to use Google Maps while more than 55% in Punjab's S.A.S. Nagar could do this (Chart 2C).

Notably, variations among districts were the narrowest when it came to accessing YouTube: with close to 70% or more teenagers in every district managing to do this (Chart 2D).

The data show that digital literacy has penetrated deep into many rural areas but a few areas are still catching up. However, worryingly, many teenagers have still not learned to protect themselves from the dangers of the online world. While more than 90% of them from across districts used social media during the survey week, only 52.3% knew how to block a profile and only 47.8% knew how to make their account private.

There were wide variations in these skills too. Just 33% in Tripura knew how to block a profile (Chart 2E) and less than 30% in Jharkhand's East Singhbhum knew how to make their profile private (Chart 2F). A bigger concern is that the share of girls who knew these skills was much lower compared to the share of boys in many districts despite the fact that girls form a majority of the victims of online abuse.

Table 3 shows the share of teenagers who could block/report a profile and make their profile private, across genders, in select districts where the variation was noticeable.

Online and unprotected

The charts are based on data collated from the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Rural 2023. The survey was conducted in 28 districts last September-November



Chart 1: The chart shows the share of students aged 14-18 who could do digital tasks on a smartphone, across reading levels (in %)

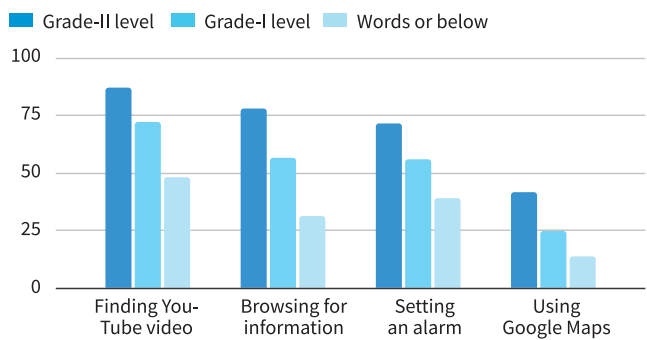
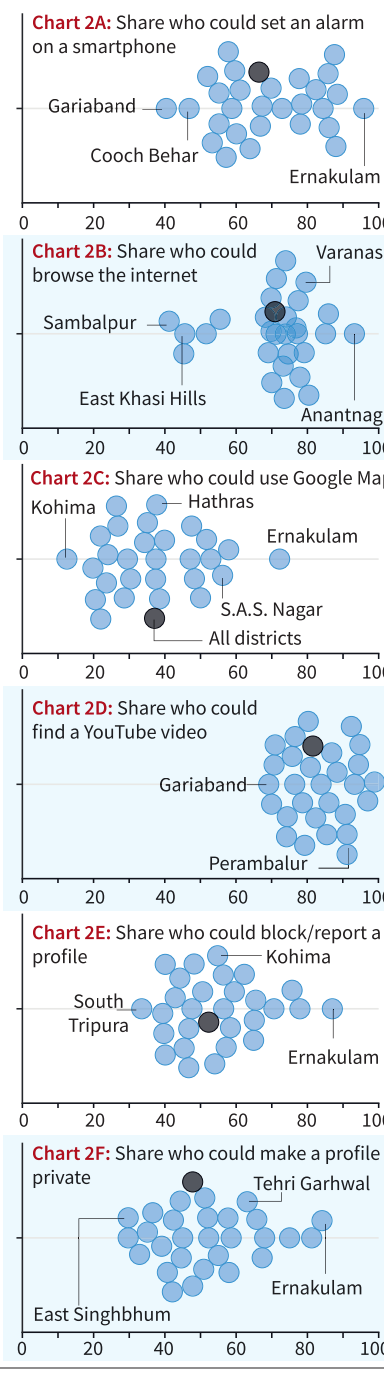


Table 3: The table shows the share of teenagers who could block/report a profile and make their profile private, across genders, in select districts where the variation was noticeable

State: District	Gender of students under the age group 17-18	Share who could block/report a social media profile	Share who could make a social media profile private
Bihar: Muzaffarpur	Male	73.6	70.1
	Female	46.4	39
Chhattisgarh: Gariaband	Male	60.3	48
	Female	49.6	31.3
Jharkhand: East Singhbhum	Male	59.4	52
	Female	42.8	28.7
Rajasthan: Bhilwara	Male	80.6	80.1
	Female	63.1	57.3
Tamil Nadu: Perambalur	Male	73.8	69.9
	Female	49.5	47.1
Uttar Pradesh: Hathras	Male	75.7	60
	Female	54.8	41.9

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Chart 2: The charts show district-wise digital access and usage among youth in the 14-18 age group



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 31, 1974

Rupee Accord: Moynihan sure of U.S. Congress approval

Washington, Jan 30: The U.S. Ambassador to India, Dr. D.P. Moynihan, is confident that the Indo-U.S. rupee agreement initiated in Delhi last December, would win the approval of the Congressional Committees now considering it, even though two Congressmen, who are traditional foes of all forms of aid, told the House Sub Committee on South Asia before which the U.S. envoy testified yesterday that they would oppose the "give away" programme, which would in effect write off the bulk of the U.S. rupee balances in India.

One of the critics of the Indo-U.S. deal asked, "What has India ever done for us, except show enmity? Didn't Mrs. Gandhi tell us to get the hell out of there?" Another gave notice of a "sense of Congress" resolution which would voice disapproval of the rupee accord.

Congressional sources, however, doubted whether such a resolution would gain the approval of the House even though only last week the lower House had killed a Bill which would have allocated \$1.5 billions to the International Developmental Association. These sources also said that if such a resolution is adopted, it would have no binding effect on the agreement already entered into by the Governments of the two countries, though the ensuing confrontation between Congress and the Executive could create an embarrassing situation.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 31, 1924

France and Rumania

Paris, Jan. 30: A long and authoritative statement issued here now makes it clear that Rumania has finally renounced her intention of asking the French Government for a loan of hundred million francs. It is explained that inevitable delay in the French Parliament's voting loans compels Rumania to seek other means of tiding over her difficulties and most of her orders for war material have been given to Rumanian industries. This will be advantageous to both Rumania and France, to the former on account of her depreciated exchange and to the latter because it gives her an opportunity to practice another economy at the moment she is endeavouring to find means of balancing her budget. It is emphasised that France-Rumanian elections are in no way affected.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

India's rank in tourist arrivals to Maldives after row

5 From being the top tourist group visiting Maldives, Indians have slipped to the fifth position in the last three weeks, according to official data. Maldives received over 1.74 lakh tourists till January 28 this year, of which 13,989 were Indians. PTI

Tankers taking longer routes after Red Sea attacks

100 Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis have been targeting vessels in the Red Sea since November to show their support for Hamas in its war against Israel. This has prompted major shipping companies to take the longer route.

Amount seized by ED from Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren

36 lakh in cash. This seizure was related to a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam. The ED also seized a BMW SUV and some "incriminating" documents after it searched the CM's house. It has so far arrested 14 people. PTI

Rate of global GDP growth forecast by the IMF

3.1 in percentage. The global growth forecast was raised by 0.2 percentage points from an earlier estimate on account of greater-than expected resilience in the U.S. and large emerging markets and developing economies, and fiscal support in China. AFP

India's rank in corruption perceptions index

93 out of 100 nations. The report was published by Transparency International, which ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. PTI
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Pakistan and Iran: calm after the storm

What prompted Iran to target Balochistan, and how did Pakistan respond to the missile strikes? What key factors contributed to the decision for both nations to de-escalate tensions? How did the arrival of Iran's Foreign Minister in Islamabad impact economic and security discussions between the two countries?

WORLD INSIGHT

D. Suba Chandran

The story so far:

In a series of events, Iran launched missile strikes in Pakistan's Balochistan province, targeting alleged strongholds of the Jaish al-Adl. In response, Pakistan condemned the attacks, recalling its Ambassador and expelling the Iranian Ambassador, while also suspending high profile bilateral visits. A day later, Pakistan retaliated by targeting individuals and terrorist groups in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province. However, with a diplomatic approach, Pakistan emphasised its respect for Iran, preventing further escalation. On January 19, at a National Security Council meeting aimed at addressing security concerns for regional peace, both nations decided to de-escalate, reinstating ambassadors, and by January 28, Iran's Foreign Minister arrived in Islamabad to discuss economic and security matters, signaling a shift towards dialogue and cooperation.

What is special about the two Baloch provinces in Iran and Pakistan?

First, the demography and geography of the provinces. The Sistan-Baluchestan province, one of the largest provinces in Iran, shares the border with Pakistan's Balochistan and Afghanistan's southern provinces. The Baloch are the majority in the Sistan-Baluchestan province, with Sistanis as a minority. The former is Sunni, while the latter is Shia.

Geographically, Balochistan is the largest of four provinces in Pakistan, with a Baloch majority (which is now being threatened by the Pashtun ingress from Afghanistan and Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). However, Baloch are a minority within Pakistan.

Second, the borders. Pakistan's Balochistan province shares a long border with Iran, around 900 km. Unlike the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, which is disputed by Kabul, the Pakistan-Iran border is settled. Both countries have been building a concrete wall along the border to prevent illegal crossings between Balochistan (in Pakistan) and Sistan-Baluchestan (in Iran) provinces. However, the border remains ineffective in preventing the illicit movement of people and goods, especially along the land and maritime borders. Smuggling is common, especially in the south, closer to the Pakistan-Iran maritime border.

Third, two ports of strategic importance – Gwadar in Pakistan and Chabahar in Iran, are situated on the mouths of the Arabian Sea less than 200 km apart. China and India have invested in these two ports and see them as exit and entry points from/into maritime/mainland Asia. Baloch provinces are strategically important for Iran and Pakistan; however, they remain in the political periphery and are alienated from the national capitals. For the national capitals, the control of the provinces and the two ports is paramount.

Who are the militants that Iran and Pakistan targeted in each other's territory?

In Pakistan, Iran targeted a relatively little-known Sunni militant group – "Jaish al-Adl," based in Balochistan. According to Iran's Foreign Minister, "none of the nationals of the friendly and brotherly country of Pakistan were targeted by Iranian missiles and drones." Considered as a remnant of Jundullah, Iran has been fighting it since the late 2000s. The Jundullah, believed to be founded



Tension relief: Convener, World Minorities Alliance and Former Federal Minister for Population Welfare of Pakistan, Julius Salik showers rose petals to celebrate after Pakistan and Iran 'agreed to de-escalate' tensions, in Islamabad on January 20. AFP

by Abdolmalek Rigi, was present then in the Sistan-Baluchestan province and has repeatedly been targeting Iran's security forces and civilian targets through terrorist activities, including suicide bombings. Iran has been targeting the Jundullah leader; Rigi, a Baloch, was captured and executed in 2010.

Jundullah was a Sunni group with links to al Qaeda and fighting for "Sunni" rights, rather than an ethnic Baloch militant group. However, Tehran considers that the Jundullah had the support of the Baloch people across the Sistan-Baluchestan and Balochistan provinces in Iran and Pakistan, respectively. After Rigi's death, a few Jundullah members formed the Jaish al-Adl and continued attacking Iran during the 2010s.

Between 2013-2023, the Jaish al-Adl is accused of having carried out numerous attacks, mainly targeting Iran's security officials; the latest one was in December 2023, where they targeted a police station in Rask in Sistan-Baluchestan, killing 11 security personnel.

In Iran, Pakistan targeted the hideouts belonging to the "Balochistan Liberation Army" and "Balochistan Liberation Front." Pakistan has been fighting multiple waves of Baloch insurgency since 1947. The latest wave of insurgency intensified after the killing of Akbar Bugti, one of the tallest Baloch leaders. Unlike the Jundullah, the Baloch militant

organisations do not have a sectarian agenda or have links with international organisations such as al Qaeda. They have an ethnic agenda and fight for greater rights for the Baloch; some of them have a separatist agenda and want to establish an independent Balochistan.

Why did Pakistan and Iran de-escalate immediately after the missile attacks?

If the escalation was fast, de-escalation was faster. Immediately after Iran's initial attack, Pakistan recalled its Ambassador and asked the Iranian Ambassador to leave. Two days later, Pakistan targeted a few militant targets in the Sistan-Baluchestan province in Iran. After the swift diplomatic and military escalation, there was a de-escalation. China is believed to have pressured Islamabad and Tehran. But more than any external pressure, the bilateral dynamics might have led to the de-escalation.

Given the regional security situation and the immediate neighbourhood, both countries cannot afford an escalation now, which was reflected in their statements. Pakistan's official statement talked about "dialogue and cooperation as key tools for addressing common challenges, including terrorism," while Iran's underlined adhering to "the policy of good neighbourliness and brotherhood between the two nations" and not allowing "enemies to strain the amicable

and brotherly relations of Tehran and Islamabad."

It appears that Iran's missile strikes in Pakistan had a limited objective as a part of its targets in Syria and Iraq in response to an earlier attack in January 2024 in Kerman. Similarly, Pakistan's response seems limited in making a domestic and a bilateral statement. Both have been careful with their statements to ensure it does not escalate. Besides there have been efforts in recent years aimed at a rapprochement, which they did not want to jeopardise.

What challenges lie ahead for Pakistan and Iran?

Though Tehran was one of the first to recognise Pakistan, since the 1979 Iranian revolution, the two countries had a troubled relationship. Iran's revolution in 1979 and Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's regime in Pakistan during the 1980s brought the Sunni-Shia sectarian divide to the fore between the two. Though both refer to the "brotherly Muslim countries" rhetoric, the sectarian factor was too strong to patch the divide.

Globally, Iran saw Pakistan under the American sphere of influence during the Cold War and post 9/11, especially in Afghanistan. Pakistan and Iran remained in opposite groups; only in recent years has China tried to bring Islamabad and Tehran together.

And regionally, the struggle for supremacy, within the West Asia, pitches Iran and Saudi Arabia on opposite camps, with Pakistan aligned with the latter. On Afghanistan and the Taliban, both countries have differed on objectives and strategies. Until recently, Pakistan viewed Tehran as closer to New Delhi than Islamabad. Pakistan's nuclear bomb is seen as a Sunni one, pushing Tehran to have its own for the Shia world.

Finally, economically, the bilateral relationship is not strong enough to create a political stake; the fact that Iran is planning to approach international arbitration for Pakistan's reluctance to move ahead with the Iran-Pakistan pipeline should underline the harsh realities for Islamabad and Tehran.

(Prof. D. Suba Chandran heads the NIAS Pakistan Reader, an area studies initiative at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru)



Pakistan's Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani greets his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Islamabad. AFP/PAKISTAN FOREIGN OFFICE

THE GIST

On 16 January, a day after its strikes in Iraq and Syria, Iran targeted Pakistan's Balochistan province, with missiles, killing two.

On 17 January, condemning the attacks as "unprovoked" and a breach of sovereignty, Pakistan recalled its Ambassador from Tehran and expelled the Iranian Ambassador. Pakistan also suspended all high profile bilateral visits – ongoing and planned.

On 18 January, Pakistan retaliated by targeting "individuals" and "terrorist groups" in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province, killing nine. Pakistan's Foreign Ministry claimed Iran as a close friend, with great respect and affection for the Iranian people.

On 19 January, the National Security Council meeting decided to "address each other's security concerns in the larger interest of regional peace and stability" as Iran is a "neighbourly and brotherly Muslim country."

On 22 January, a joint statement issued by the two Foreign Ministries agreed on the return of ambassadors. Subsequently, on 26 January, the Ambassadors returned to their offices in Tehran and Islamabad.

On 28 January, Iran's Foreign Minister arrived in Islamabad to discuss economic and security issues between the two countries.

FROM THE ARCHIVES



Legacy remembers: View of the Mahatma Gandhi memorial on a foggy winter morning at Rajghat on Gandhi's death anniversary in New Delhi on January 30. AFP

A betrayal of the very idea of Mahatma

The principles Mahatma Gandhi stood for represent an ideal that is being weakened every day by those in power who are pushing their agenda of bigotry; he viewed Hinduism as a faith that respected and embraced all other faiths, challenging the exclusivity promoted by Hindutva ideologues

Shashi Tharoor

This article dated January 27, 2023, explores the challenges to Mahatma Gandhi's legacy in contemporary India. The article contrasts Gandhi's inclusive vision rooted in Advaita Vedanta with the majoritarian creed of Hindutva ideologies, emphasising the ongoing clash between idealism and exclusionary practices within India's ideological landscape.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination (January 30, 1948) by a Hindu fanatic who thought the Mahatma was too soft on Muslims. The momentous anniversary comes at a time when his legacy, the very idea of Gandhi, stands challenged by the prevailing ideological currents. At a time when the standing of his historic detractors, whose descendants now form the ruling dispensation in the country, is at an all-time high, Gandhi has been criticised for weakness, for having bent over too far to accommodate Muslim interests, and for his pacifism, which is seen by the jingoistic Hindutva movement as unmanly.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination (January 30, 1948) by a Hindu fanatic who thought the Mahatma was too soft on Muslims. The momentous anniversary comes at a time when his legacy, the very idea of Gandhi, stands challenged by the prevailing ideological currents. At a time when the standing of his historic detractors, whose descendants now form the ruling dispensation in the country, is at an all-time high, Gandhi has been criticised for weakness, for having bent over too far to accommodate Muslim interests, and for his pacifism, which is seen by the jingoistic Hindutva movement as unmanly.

The Mahatma was killed, with the name of Rama on his lips, for being too pro-Muslim; indeed, he had just come out of a fast he had conducted to coerce his own followers, the Ministers of the new

Indian government, to transfer a larger share than they had intended of the assets of undivided India to the new state of Pakistan. Gandhiji had also announced his intention to spurn the country he had failed to keep united and to spend the rest of his years in Pakistan, a prospect that had made the government of Pakistan collectively choke.

But that was the enigma of Gandhiji in a nutshell: idealistic, quirky, quixotic, and determined, a man who answered to the beat of no other drummer, but got everyone else to march to his tune. Someone once called him a cross between a saint and a Tammany Hall politician; like the best crossbreeds, he managed to distil all the qualities of both and yet transcend their contradictions.

Explaining a contradiction nowThe contradiction is mirrored in the attitude of the Hindutva-inspired Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mr. Modi was schooled, like other Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) pracharaks, in an intense dislike of Mahatma Gandhi, whose message of tolerance and pluralism was emphatically rejected as minority appeasement by the Sangh Parivar, and whose credo of non-violence, or ahimsa, was seen as an admission of weakness unworthy of manly Hindus. Hindutva ideologue V.D. Savarkar, whom Mr. Modi has described as one of his heroes, had expressed contempt for Gandhiji's 'perverse doctrine of non-violence and truth' and claimed it 'was bound to destroy the power of the country'.

But Prime Minister Modi, for all his Hindutva mindset, his admiration of Savarkar and his lifetime affiliation to the Sangh Parivar, has embraced Gandhiji, hailing the Mahatma and even using his glasses as a symbol of the Swachh Bharat campaign, linking it to a call to revive Gandhiji's idea of seva through the recent 'Swachhata Hi Seva' campaign.

This may, or may not, represent a sincere conversion to Gandhism. The

Prime Minister is hardly unaware of the tremendous worldwide reputation that Mahatma Gandhi enjoys, and is too savvy a marketing genius not to recognise the soft-power opportunity evoking Gandhiji provides, not to mention the global public relations disaster that would ensue if he were to denounce an Indian so universally admired. There may, therefore, be an element of insincerity to his newfound love for the Mahatma, as well as a shrewd domestic political calculation.

But the ambivalence speaks volumes: when many members of Mr. Modi's BJP call for replacing Gandhiji's statues across the country with those of his assassin, Nathuram Godse, the Prime Minister seeks to lay claim to the mantle of his fellow Gujarati for his own political benefit. At the same time, there is also a tangible dissonance between the official governmental embrace of Gandhiji and the unofficial ideological distaste for this icon, that is privately promoted by members and supporters of the present ruling dispensation, some of whose members have not hidden their view that his assassination was, in their eyes, a patriotic act.

The vision of the Mahatma is a well understood reality that the vision of Gandhiji, an openly practising Hindu, differed greatly from that of Veer Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar, the principal ideologues of the Hindu Mahasabha and its more militarised alter ego in the post-Independence era, the RSS and eventually, the BJP (formerly the Jana Sangh).

Gandhiji embodied the central approach of Advaita Vedanta, which preached an inclusive universal religion.

Gandhiji saw Hinduism as a faith that respected and embraced all other faiths. He was profoundly influenced by the principles of ahimsa and satya and gave both a profound meaning when he applied them to the nationalist cause.

He was a synthesiser of cultural belief systems: his signature bhajan of

'Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram' had another line, 'Ishwara Allah Tero naam'. This practice emerged from his Vedantic belief in the oneness of all human beings, who share the same atman and, therefore, should be treated equally.

Such behaviour did not endear him to every Hindu. In his treatise on 'Gandhi's Hinduism and Savarkar's Hindutva', the social scientist Rudolf C. Heredia places his two protagonists within an ongoing debate between heterogeneity versus homogeneity in the Hindu faith, pointing out that while Gandhi's response is inclusive and ethical, Savarkar politicises Hinduism as a majoritarian creed.

But Gandhiji's own understanding of religion, in Heredia's words, "transcended religiosity, Hindu as well as that of any other tradition.

It is essentially a spiritual quest for moksha but one rooted in the reality of service to the last and least in the world". Unlike Savarkar, who believed in conformity, Gandhiji was a synthesiser like no other who took care to include Indians of other faiths in his capacious and agglomerative understanding of religion.

He took inspiration from not just Advaita Vedanta but also the Jain concept of 'Anekantavada' – the notion that truth and reality are perceived differently by different people from their own different points of view, and that, therefore, no single perception can constitute the complete truth. This led him to once declare that 'I am a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, a Parsi, a Jew'.

Hinduism and Hindutva, as I have argued in my book *Why I Am a Hindu*, represent two very distinct and contrasting ideas, with vitally different implications for nationalism and the role of the Hindu faith. The principles Gandhiji stood for and the way in which he asserted them are easier to admire than to follow. But they represented an ideal that is betrayed every day by those who distort Hinduism to promote a narrow, exclusionary bigotry.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

M R. B. M. Mehra, Tolstoy Marg, New Delhi, wants to know the meaning of 'For want of a nail, the kingdom was lost.'

Everything is important. Nothing is small. The absence of what is considered small may lead to some disaster. The line is taken from the following verse:

For want of a nail the shoe was lost; For want of a shoe the horse was lost; For want of a horse the rider was lost; For want of the battle was lost; For want of a battle the kingdom was lost. And all for the want of a horse-shoe nail.

Mr. S. Rajagopalan, Valasaravakkam, Madras, wants to know the meaning of 'dyed-in-the-wool'.

This is an idiom which means 'totally fixed in one's ideas, beliefs, etc.' It is used in a derogatory sense.

She is a dyed-in-the-wool conservative. She is a dyed-in-the-wool socialist.

When wool is dyed or coloured before it is spun into yarn, the colour is even and more lasting. 'Of the blackest dye' or 'of the deepest dye' means 'of the worst kind'.

He is a rogue of the deepest dye. He is a tyrant of the blackest dye.

Mr. B. Krishnamoorthy, Dayal Street, Coimbatore, wants to know whether the use of "offload" in the following sentence is correct: "The driver and conductor are empowered to offload the passengers found smoking". He feels that 'offload' should be used with inanimate things.

"To offload" means 'to unload something that is unwanted'.

He offloaded excess baggage.

Strictly speaking, 'offload' must go with inanimate things. It is used occasionally with animate beings also. Airlines seem to be fond of this word. They use it with baggage and also passengers.

Five passengers were offloaded.

The word 'collect' was originally used with inanimate things but now you can say, 'I will collect you from your office in the evening'. 'Pick up' is another expression that is used these days with human beings. 'I'll pick you up on my way back and drop you at home'. 'Collect' and 'pick up' were used originally with inanimate things but now even human beings are 'picked up' or 'collected' and 'dropped'. So don't feel offended when people want to 'collect you', 'pick you up', 'drop you' or 'offload' you. No disrespect is involved.

Mr. N. Uday Bhaskar, Governorpet, Vijayawada, wants to know the meaning of 'Aunt Sally'.

'Aunt Sally' is a game in which you throw sticks at the wooden image of a woman. You must hit the nose of the figure or break the pipe in its mouth. Figuratively, it means 'a woman or a thing that is subjected to general abuse and criticism, often undeserved'.

She is the Aunt Sally of the neighbourhood. Published in *The Hindu* on December 18, 1990

THE DAILY QUIZ

On the occasion of the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, here are a few questions

Ramya Kannan

QUESTION 1
January 27 has been chosen as the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the holocaust, for a reason. Do you know why?

QUESTION 2
Did you know that the word Nazi is an abbreviation for Hitler's political party? Maybe we've given out too much already, but what does Nazi expand to (in German)?

QUESTION 3
Yet another question on etymology. The Nazi killing pogrom was called the Holocaust. Why was this word chosen?

QUESTION 4
While the Nazis targeted Jews, they also slaughtered other groups of people, in their effort to engineer the pure Aryan race, through a mixture of eugenics and murder. Name at least two other groups thus prosecuted.

QUESTION 5
When was the first concentration camp opened in Nazi Germany, and where?



Visual Question: Find the connection between these two images.

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. This film written, directed and starring Charlie Chaplin premiered on this day in 1931. **Ans: City Lights**

2. Across the world every year the last Sunday of January is observed as _____ Day to raise awareness about this disease. **Ans: Leprosy**

3. An Indian politician and Independence activist who was jailed during the Quit India Movement was born on this day in 1910. **Ans: Chidambaram Subrahmaniam**

4. The legendary band performed their last live gig, known as the 'rooftop' concert, on this day in 1969 for a limited audience. **Ans: The Beatles**

5. One of the first memorial museums established in India on Mahatma Gandhi. Where is the museum located? **Ans: Madurai**

Visual: Identify the man who invented a 3-D combination puzzle. **Ans: Erno Rubik**

Early Birds: C Saravanan | K.N. Viswanathan | Jagrati Shukla | Medhini Prabhakar | Akshat Tiwari

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Word of the day

Astute:
very clever, an ability to understand things clearly

Synonyms: shrewd, quick, sharp, intelligent

Usage: Astute readers will have noticed the reference.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/astutepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ə'stju:t/

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

BELFAST

Unionists to end boycott of Northern Ireland government



Northern Ireland's main pro-U.K. party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), said on Tuesday it endorses a deal with the U.K. government allowing it to end a long-running boycott of the province's devolved administration. The DUP walked out of the regional government in February 2022. AFP

HONG KONG

New Hong Kong law to crack down on pro-independence threats



Hong Kong's leader announced on Tuesday the city would urgently create a new security law to crush pro-independence threats, nearly four years after authorities extinguished a huge democracy movement. The law will expand on legislation imposed by China in June 2020 to silence dissent. AFP

BEIJING

U.S., China launch talks on fentanyl trafficking in a sign of cooperation



American and Chinese officials met on Tuesday to discuss joint efforts to stem the flow of fentanyl into the U.S., a sign of cooperation as the two global powers try to manage their contentious ties. The U.S. wants China to do more to curb the export of chemicals that it says are processed into fentanyl. AP

BOGOTA

Colombia, National Liberation Army rebels extend ceasefire



Colombia's government and the nation's largest remaining rebel group announced on Monday they will extend their current ceasefire by one week to "improve the humanitarian situation", while delegates from both sides who are meeting in Cuba continue to discuss policies that could secure a longer lasting truce. AP

Khan's conviction a week before election is a mirror image of the past: diplomats

While diplomats point to similar cases against other leaders before previous Pakistani elections, control by the Generals appears tighter than in the past; they indicate that this year's election winners will also be 'selected, rather than elected' by the military establishment which pulls the strings

NEWS ANALYSIS

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's latest conviction in the 'Cipher Case' on Tuesday, which comes just 10 days before the general elections, is a dramatic development, but one in step with past elections that have been "managed", said diplomats who have served there. They indicated that this year's election winners would also be "selected, rather than elected" by the military establishment.

While Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders called the 10-year prison sentence against Mr. Khan and former Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi a "sham" and vowed to appeal to higher courts, it seems clear that the verdict is a blow for the party

that won elections in 2018 and still claims to be the most popular party in the fray.

"Imran Khan wasn't given a fair trial, not given access to his counsel or media and public despite the higher courts orders, and the decision was reached in haste with no right given to defence counsel to cross-question the witnesses," Syed Zulfiqar Bukhari, PTI's Adviser on International Affairs and Media, said in comments to *The Hindu*. "These cases are politically motivated and stand no chance in higher courts so we are hopeful decision will be overturned."

Role reversal

Former Indian diplomats to Pakistan pointed out that Mr. Khan is undoubtedly a victim, but of a system that he was the beneficiary of in previous elections, when roles were reversed with PML-N chief



Recurring pattern: Imran Khan and Shah Mehmood Qureshi were sentenced to 10 years in prison in the Cipher case. AFP

and three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. In July 2018, with about two weeks to go to the elections, Mr. Sharif was convicted and handed a 10-year sentence on charges of corruption, after being disqualified from public office in the 'Panama Papers' corruption cases, involving his property in London.

"What Imran Khan and the PTI face today is almost identical to what Nawaz Sharif and the PML-N faced then. So India should see

this as one more Pakistani election and not very different from others," said former High Commissioner to Pakistan T.C.A. Raghavan, who was posted in Islamabad during 2013-15. "We should wait for the dust to settle and see what comes up."

Another former diplomat also said the conviction of Mr. Khan was not "surprising", and as in the past, all strings were being pulled by the Pakistani military. "This election is fast

turning into the mirror image of the 'managed' 2018 election, with Imran Khan at the receiving end of the wrath of the Army this time. The process of his conviction is as questionable as Nawaz Sharif's conviction in 2017-18," said Sharat Sabharwal, who served as High Commissioner to Pakistan during 2009-2013. "A managed election will neither solve the ongoing political crisis, nor result in a government capable of dealing effectively with Pakistan's intractable problems."

Ties with India

Asked about the impact of the expected results of the elections next week on ties with India, Mr. Sabharwal said there could be a "degree of thaw", including some movement on trade. "But the government's ability to deliver on the bilateral relationship will remain contingent upon the will of the Army," referring

to Pakistan Army chief Gen. Asim Munir.

While many of the characteristics of previous Pakistani elections are being repeated in 2024, some developments suggest the control exercised by the establishment over elections is more extreme than in the past. In the 2008 elections, held after former PM Benazir Bhutto was assassinated, Mr. Khan's and his party boycotted elections, claiming they would be "manipulated" by the U.S. and then-President Gen. Musharraf to favour Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), but his party was allowed to contest. In 2013 and 2018, all three major national parties, the PML-N, the PPP and the PTI were in contest, but this time, the PTI has had its election symbol of the "cricket bat" blocked or delisted by the courts, and as a result, PTI candidates are at a further disadvantage.

Israel-Hamas conflict rages as mediators push for new truce

Agence France-Presse
GAZA STRIP

Deadly fighting and bombardment rocked Gaza on Tuesday as international mediators pushed for a new ceasefire and hostage release deal in the Israel-Hamas war.

Heavy Israeli strikes and urban combat across the besieged Gaza Strip killed 128 more people overnight, the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run Palestinian territory said.

The epicentre of fighting has been the southern city of Khan Yunis – the hometown of Hamas's Gaza leader Yahya Sinwar, the alleged architect of the October 7 attack – where vast areas have been reduced to a muddy wasteland of bombed-out buildings.

Troops fighting in city blocks and tunnels have raided several military sites, Sinwar's office and "a significant rocket manufacturing facility", the Israeli military said.

Army spokesperson Daniel Hagari claimed troops



People bury Palestinians, including those who were killed in Israeli strikes, after their bodies were released. REUTERS

in the city had "eliminated over 2,000 terrorists above and below ground".

The Gaza war, now in its fourth month, has left much of besieged Gaza in ruins and sparked a spiralling humanitarian crisis for its 2.4 million people, many of whom face the threats of hunger and disease.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who has pleaded for continued support to meet the "dire needs", will have talks with donors in New York on Tuesday, his office said, as investigations into Israel's claims continue.

Doesn't want wider war in West Asia: U.S.

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Joe Biden said on Tuesday he had decided on a response to a drone strike that killed three American troops in Jordan but said he did not want a wider war in the West Asia.

Facing growing pressure in an election year, Mr. Biden said he held Iran responsible for supplying the weapons to the people who carried out the deadly attack on a military base. The White House warned that "multiple actions" were likely in retaliation for the fatal attack.

Trial by fire



Life savers: Firemen extinguish a huge fire that broke on Tuesday evening in the area of Makadara, in Kenya's capital Nairobi. At least two persons have been severely injured, according to Kenya Red Cross. AFP

Trump stays on Illinois ballot as board declines to ban him

Associated Press
CHICAGO

Illinois' election board on Tuesday kept former U.S. President Donald Trump on the state's primary ballot, a week before the U.S. Supreme Court hears arguments on whether the Republican's role in the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol disqualifies him from the presidency.

The board's unanimous ruling comes after its hearing officer, a retired judge and Republican, found that a "preponderance of the evidence" shows Mr. Trump is ineligible to run for President because he



Donald Trump

violated a constitutional ban on those who "engaged in insurrection" from holding office. But the hearing officer recommended the board let the courts make the ultimate decision.

The eight-member

board, composed of four Democrats and four Republicans, agreed with a recommendation from its lawyer to let Mr. Trump remain on the ballot by determining it didn't have the authority to determine whether he violated the U.S. Constitution.

An attorney for the voters who objected to Trump's presence on the ballot said they'd appeal to Cook County circuit court.

The issue will likely be decided at a higher court, with the U.S. Supreme Court scheduled next week to hear arguments in Mr. Trump's appeal of a Colorado ruling.

Philippines, Vietnam sign agreement on cooperation in South China Sea

Associated Press
HANOI

The Philippines and Vietnam signed agreements on Tuesday to prevent incidents in the South China Sea and broaden cooperation between their coast guards in a growing alliance that will likely be frowned upon by China, which claims virtually the entire waters.

The agreements, along with discussions on enhancing information-sharing and training exchanges between the Vietnamese

Both countries have had confrontations with China in the strategic waterway for global trade

and Philippine militaries, were forged during a visit to Hanoi by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Both sides agreed to boost trade and investment and signed a key deal on rice.

The Philippines and Vietnam have had especially tense confrontations

with China in the strategic waterway and key route for global trade in recent years. Territorial face-offs in the high seas between Chinese and Philippine ships intensified last year, fuelling fears of a wider conflict that could involve Washington, Manila's long-time treaty ally.

Although Chinese and Philippine officials agreed earlier this month at a meeting in Shanghai to take steps to de-escalate tensions, Mr. Marcos while in Hanoi raised his concerns over the long-seeth-

ing disputes and cited increasingly aggressive actions by the Chinese coast guard.

"We are firm in defending our sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction against any provocations," Mr. Marcos said. "But at the same time, we are also seeking to address these issues with China through peaceful dialogue."

Vietnamese and Philippine officials did not release specific details of their agreements on managing incidents.

In blow to Sanchez, Parliament rejects amnesty Bill for Catalan separatists

Reuters
MADRID

Spain's Lower House on Tuesday rejected an amnesty Bill due to differences on its scope between the ruling Socialists and a Catalan separatist party, in a blow for Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez that illustrates his parliamentary fragility.

The Bill, rejected by 179 votes to 171, will now return for debate in a parliamentary committee and could eventually be sent back for another vote in the Lower House. The am-

nesty Bill is set to define Mr. Sanchez's second term and has prompted large protests against it.

Catalan separatists Junts voted against the law after they failed to reach a last-minute deal with Mr. Sanchez's Spanish Socialist Workers' Party.

Junts wanted all exceptions related to terrorism to be removed from the Bill since some of its politicians are currently under investigation by courts over alleged terrorism-related crimes.

The Bill was put forward

Sanchez's party said some crimes, including terrorism-related charges could not be pardoned

by the Socialists in exchange for support for Mr. Sanchez's new term in office from Catalan separatist parties Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya and Junts.

"Junts cannot participate in leaving all Catalan separatism exposed to the arbitrariness of the politi-

cised Spanish judiciary," said lawmaker Miriam Nogueras. She said the current amnesty proposal was too selective and has loopholes.

But Mr. Sanchez's party had said that some crimes involving terrorism-related charges could not be pardoned.

The amnesty would cover all events related to the Catalan independence drive from 2012, including a symbolic vote held in 2014 and an independence referendum in 2017, which courts declared as illegal.



French farmers block a highway with their tractors during a protest, in Longvilliers, near Paris on Tuesday. REUTERS

Protesting French farmers turn up the pressure on govt.

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

French farmers were on Tuesday maintaining roadblocks on key highways into Paris for a second day, increasing pressure on the government for more concessions in an intensifying standoff.

Prime Minister Gabriel Attal is expected to address Parliament and announce new measures aimed at assuaging the anger of farmers, as he faces his biggest crisis since being named Prime Minister by President Emmanuel Macron this month. There were also expectations that Mr. Macron himself would address the issue at a news conference during a state visit to Sweden on Tuesday.

The farmers have now staged over a week of protests, which have spread to the capital where tractors, hay bales and other objects have since Monday prevented motorists from entering Paris along several key routes. The government has so far promoted a soft approach with the protesters, while making clear that any attempts to block Paris's main airports or the vast Rungis wholesale food market would be a red line. A police source said that around 1,000 farmers and 500 vehicles had been involved in Monday's actions and they appeared intent on keeping up the protest until Friday. A convoy of producers who left on Tuesday morning from the southwestern town of Limoges heading for Rungis briefly changed route after being blocked by gendarmes, organisers said. Arnaud Rousseau, the leader of the biggest farmers' union FNSEA, said he was against any disruption of food distribution. "Our objective is not to starve French people, but to feed them," he told the Europe 1 broadcaster.

Ukraine's air strikes inside Russia hurt Putin's efforts for normalcy at home

Increasing long-range attacks from Ukraine in spite of a frozen front line, including the deadly missile strike on border region of Belgorod, are dealing a heavy blow to President Vladimir Putin's attempts to reassure Russians that life in the country is largely untouched by the nearly two-year-old war

Associated Press
MOSCOW

The wail of air raid sirens is commonplace in Belgorod, a Russian border city whose residents are on edge following a Ukrainian missile attack on a New Year's holiday weekend that left dozens of people dead and injured.

A spectacular explosion rocked a huge fuel export terminal on the Baltic Sea southwest of St. Petersburg this month from a Ukrainian drone, forcing the energy company Novatek to suspend operations for several days.

Last week, an apparent drone attack in the Black Sea port of Tuapse in the southern Krasnodar region hit one of Russia's largest refineries and ignited a fire, while another big refinery in the Volga River city of Yaroslavl, north of Moscow came under attack early Monday, but officials said there was no damage.

There also have been strikes on a gunpowder factory in the Tambov region and arms producers and military facilities in the Bryansk, Smolensk and Tula regions.

Attacks like these are dealing a heavy blow to President Vladimir Putin's attempts to reassure Russians that life in the country is largely untouched by the nearly 2-year-old war.

"Ukraine has increased



Hit hard: Firefighters extinguish burning cars after Ukraine strikes in Belgorod, Russia on Dec. 30. AP

its capacity to strike back against Russia," Michael Kofman, a military expert with the Carnegie Endowment think tank, said in a recent podcast.

"You see increased Ukrainian attacks against Russian critical infrastructure, retaliatory attacks against cities like Belgorod and greater strikes against Russian military base in Crimea," he said.

Challenging Kremlin

As Mr. Putin ramps up his campaign ahead of the presidential election in March, he wants to maintain an air of normalcy. But the increasingly frequent Ukrainian attacks have raised the visibility of the war on Russian soil, and there are other signs the conflict is increasingly challenging the Kremlin's tight control of the political scene.

Thousands across Russia have signed petitions supporting the longshot presidential bid of liberal politician Boris Nadezhdin, who has made ending the war his main campaign issue.

Wives of some soldiers rounded up in a partial mobilisation in 2022 have pushed for their discharge. And despite a tight ban on protests, hundreds rallied in Bashkortostan province, clashing with police to protest the jailing of a local activist.

Certainly the December 30 strike on Belgorod marked a bloody escalation in the minds of many Russians. A barrage of missiles struck the city of 3,40,000, which is about 40 kilometre east of the Ukrainian border, on a holiday weekend when people were out shopping, ice skating and watching New

Year's festivities. Officials said 25 people were killed, including five children, and over 100 were injured.

It's not the first time Belgorod has been touched by the war, with drone strikes and other attacks early in the conflict. In April 2023, a bomb accidentally released by a Russian warplane exploded in a street, gouging a huge crater and injuring two people.

On January 24, the Defence Ministry said a military transport plane was shot down in the Belgorod region while carrying Ukrainian prisoners of war, killing all 74 people aboard. Although Russia has released what it called evidence that it said proved Ukrainian POWs were aboard, officials in Kyiv disputed it and instead blamed Moscow for trying to use the incident

to hurt Ukrainian morale.

Mr. Putin said the December 30 shelling of Belgorod left him "boiling with anger", describing it as an act of desperation by Kyiv following the failure of Ukraine's counteroffensive.

"They want to show their people and their sponsors who give them money, weapons and ammunition that they can retaliate against Russia's action," he said. "They want to show that they can also do something, but instead of fulfilling military tasks, they use barbaric methods and strike peaceful settlements with indiscriminate weapons." Throughout the war, the Kremlin claims Russia has hit only military targets in Ukraine — despite widespread evidence to the contrary and heavy civilian casualties in places like Kyiv, Mariupol and Kharkiv.

Ukrainian officials rarely comment on strikes inside Russia but they emphasise their right to use all means to counter Moscow's aggression. At a news conference in August, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia had launched over 6,500 missiles and 3,500 drones since the war began, most of them at civilian targets. In a New Year's address to the nation, he vowed: "The one who brings hell to our land will one day see it from their own window." Russian hawks have pointed

to Belgorod as a turning point for the Kremlin to raise the stakes in the war.

'Take the gloves off'

Alexander Dugin, a nationalist ideologue whose daughter was killed in a car bombing blamed on Ukraine in August 2022, argues that Russia should respond by escalating the fighting and declaring a broad mobilisation. "I would like to believe that Russia now will take off the white gloves and start fighting for real," he wrote. "Should we abide by the rules at a time when a gateway to hell opens?"

With fighting largely frozen along the 1,500-kilometre front line during winter, the missile and drone attacks inside Russia have demonstrated Ukraine's long-range strike capability that is stretching Moscow's security assets.

"Continued Ukrainian strikes in deep rear areas in Russia may thus increase pressure on Russia's air defenses overall," the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said in a recent analysis.

If this is Kyiv's plan, it's similar to what Russia did a year ago by targeting Ukraine's power grid in the hope that repairs would take time. In the end, Ukraine managed to get enough spare parts and make quick fixes so that Moscow's campaign failed. Now, it's Russia that needs to find a coping strategy.

Taiwan People's Party loses out in Presidential polls but emerges as viable third force

Agence France-Presse
TAIPEI

Taiwan's freshly elected lawmakers will meet from Thursday, with a new party enjoying an outsized influence over legislation after breaking through the self-ruled island's long-entrenched two-party system.

Taiwan's political landscape has been dominated for decades by two parties, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the opposition Kuomintang (KMT), both defined by how they would approach the democratic island's relationship with China — which claims Taiwan as its territory.

The DPP's Lai Ching-te won this month's election to be president, but neither of the major parties won enough seats to secure a majority in the 113-seat legislature.



Ko Wen-je

gislature. Taiwan People's Party's (TPP) Ko Wen-je came last in the race to be President, but his party secured eight seats and a quarter of the votes to emerge as kingmaker in the new legislature.

When newly elected legislators take their seats on February 1, the first order of business will be to elect the speaker — an important role that will define Taiwan's legislative agenda.

After that, whichever

party has the TPP's support will have enough votes to pass legislation.

"For the first time ever, you have a viable third party option that... gets to play that decisive kingmaking minority party status in the parliament," said political analyst Wen-ti Sung.

TPP's arrival could mean a more diverse and vibrant democratic scene for Taiwan's future — or it could also translate to a logjam in Parliament.

But "a greater share of voters who previously felt underrepresented by existing political parties may now feel... a greater sense of empowerment", Mr. Sung said.

Mr. Ko has differentiated himself by saying it is pointless to argue over the two scenarios of "unification" or "independence", when there are "real problems" in Taiwan.

Graffiti tale



Tense days: A woman walks past anti-U.S. graffiti outside a building formerly hosting the U.S. embassy — today known as the 'Den of Spies' museum — in Tehran, Iran on Tuesday, amid tensions between Iran and the U.S. over the regional repercussions of Israel-Hamas war. AFP

'Food aid for Tigray region not reaching the needy'

Associated Press
KAMPALA

Only a small fraction of millions of needy people in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region are receiving food aid, according to an aid memo, more than one month after aid agencies resumed deliveries of grain following a lengthy pause over massive theft.

Just 14% of 3.2 million people targeted for food aid by humanitarian agencies in the region this month had received it by Jan. 21, according to the memo by the Tigray Food Cluster, a group of aid agencies co-chaired by the UN's World Food Programme. The memo urges humanitarian groups to "immediately scale up" their operations, warning that "failure to take swift action now will result in severe food insecurity and malnutrition."

UAE reaches out for new horizons as it moves to harness the power of social media

Roshin Mary George
DUBAI

From Indian housewives turning master chefs and travel enthusiasts to Emirati vloggers finding their niche in tech, travel, gaming or mundane domestic affairs, social media has opened a world of enormous possibilities and revenue in the UAE as elsewhere.

Content or content creator is the king/queen and it has led to the evolution of a generation that has found unimaginable success and money in non-traditional careers.

Discerning the enormous power that content creators wield and the dedicated army of followers they breed, Dubai hosted the second edition of the 1 Billion Followers Summit on January 10-11 at the twin Emirates Towers and the Museum of the Future.

Huge crowd

Touted the world's biggest expo for content creators, the summit gathered over 100 speakers, 300-plus companies, 200 CEOs from the creative field, and more than 3000 content creators followed by 1.6 billion people.

The two-day paid summit organised by Dubai's New Media Academy was an opportunity to learn from inspirational talks, hands-on workshops, and enlightening panel discussions by well-known content creators.

If Hala Ajil, YouTube Manager for WANA region expatriated on how to find one's groove on the platform and Mindvalley founder Vishen Lakhiani pointed out it is perfectly okay to venture into the digital realm late in life and turn 3 million views into \$10 million, Indian YouTuber Dhruv Rathee engaged au-



A panel discussion under way during the 1 Billion Followers Summit in Dubai on January 11. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

dience in a dynamic workshop to master ChatGPT for boosting productivity in daily life.

The Senegalese-Italian Tiktoker Khaby Lame, Brit-

ish-Nigerian podcaster Steven Bartlett, Egyptian-American satirist and TV host Bassem Youssef were some of the most recognizable faces who weighed

the consequences of their choice to be in the digital media.

For Arjun Sehgal, digital creator of the insta handle Food Talk Dubai (64.3k followers), "the summit helped us enhance our work ethics with new ideas and skills. It was a great opportunity to meet as well as attend seminars of distinguished speakers and content creators from all over the world."

Clear guidelines

Being part of the UAE's rapidly growing digital content industry and influencer marketing can be

exciting and lucrative provided one plays by the rules. The UAE through its National Media Council regulates media content and its strict laws and decrees ensure that media outlets and individuals abide by the country's values and cultural standards. There are clearcut guidelines on anti-discrimination, data protection, intellectual property and so on. Influencers who promote paid advertisements must obtain a licence for an annual fee, which varies from emirate to emirate.

Sindhu Biju, popular

vlogger and Programme Director of Radio Asia 94.7 FM, stumbled into content creation when she lost her fulltime job as a Radio Jockey in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. "I realised I could utilise my strength as a news gatherer and presenter and began reaching out to my followers with news updates about rules and regulations in the UAE regarding the pandemic, quarantine, vaccination, as well as provide interviews with officials," says Ms. Biju who has around 210k followers across social media platforms.

IN BRIEF



TCS extends contract with U.K. firm Aviva for 15 years

Tata Consultancy Services Ltd. (TCS) has announced a 15-year extension of its contract with Aviva, the U.K.'s Insurance, Wealth and Retirement provider, to transform its U.K. Life business and enhance customer experience. As part of this, the end-to-end policy administration and servicing will be expanded to cover more than 5.5 million policies to be managed by Diligenta, TCS's FCA regulated subsidiary in the U.K., on behalf of Aviva, TCS said in a statement.

IKEA expands e-com footprint to 62 districts in four States

IKEA, the Swedish omnichannel home furnishings retailer, has announced the introduction of its e-commerce deliveries across 62 districts in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh on increasing customer demand. "We will leverage the distribution capabilities of our existing physical stores in these States to fulfill the demand from online channels," said Susanne Pulverer, CEO & CSO (Chief Sustainability Officer), IKEA India.

Coromandel International Q3 net profit plunges to ₹228 cr.

Murugappa group company Coromandel International reported consolidated net profit for the quarter ended December declined sharply to ₹228.11 crore from ₹526.85 crore in the year earlier. Revenue from operations of the company stood at ₹5,464.15 crore (₹8,309.59 crore). Contribution of nutrient and allied business to the revenue was ₹4,902.66 crore (₹7,709.83 crore), while crop protection solutions accounted for ₹615.44 crore (₹652.58 crore).

Rane Brake Lining Q3 net climbs 10% to ₹10 crore

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Rane Brake Lining Ltd. (RBL) reported standalone net profit for the December quarter rose 10% from the year-earlier period to ₹10 crore.

Revenue from operations increased to ₹164 crore from ₹153 crore, while cost of materials remained almost unchanged at ₹87 crore, the leading manufacturer of brake linings and disc pads said.

"Demand continues to remain robust in India except aftermarket though there are increased risk factors globally," Rane Group Chairman L. Ganesh said in a statement.

Wheels India Q3 net declines 18% on low demand and floods

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Wheels India Ltd. standalone net profit for the December quarter contracted by 18% to ₹13 crore from the year-earlier period due to low demand in the tractor and mining wheel segments and floods.

Revenue from operations rose 13% to ₹1,131 crore driven by a strong recovery in exports. Exports grew to ₹307 crore from ₹205 crore, the leading manufacturer of wheels for trucks and agricultural tractors among others said in a statement.

"The profits in Q3 were impacted by low demand in the tractor and mining

IMF says global 'soft landing' in sight, lifts 2024 growth outlook

Lender upgrades outlook for U.S., China, the two largest economies; cites quicker-than-expected easing of inflation; raises India's growth forecast

Reuters
WASHINGTON

The International Monetary Fund on Tuesday lifted its forecast for global economic growth, upgrading the outlook for both the United States and China — the two largest economies — and citing faster-than-expected easing of inflation.

The IMF's chief economist, Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, said the updated World Economic Outlook showed that a "soft landing" was in sight, but overall growth and global trade still remained lower than the historical average.

'Remarkable resilience'
"The global economy continues to display remarkable resilience, with inflation declining steadily and growth holding up. The chance of a 'soft landing' has increased," Mr. Gourinchas told reporters in Johannesburg, adding, "We are very far from a global recession scenario."

But he cautioned that the base of expansion was slow and risks remained, including geopolitical tensions in West Asia and attacks in the Red Sea that could disrupt commodity prices and supply chains.

Delays in announced fiscal consolidation in what Mr. Gourinchas called "the biggest global election year



in history" could boost economic activity but might also spur inflation, he added.

The IMF said the improved outlook was supported by stronger private and public spending despite tight monetary conditions, as well as increased labour force participation, mended supply chains and cheaper energy and commodity prices.

The IMF forecast global growth of 3.1% in 2024, 0.2 percentage point higher than its October projection. The historical average for the 2000-2019 period was 3.8%. Global trade was expected to expand by 3.3% in 2024 and 3.6% in 2025, well below the historical average of 4.9%.

The IMF stuck with its October forecast for headline inflation of 5.8% for 2024, but lowered the 2025 forecast to 4.4% from 4.6% in October.

The IMF said average oil

prices would drop 2.3% in 2024, versus the 0.7% decline it had predicted in October, and said prices were expected to drop 4.8% in 2025.

Raises India outlook
Growth in India is projected to remain strong at 6.5% in both calendar 2024 and 2025, with an upgrade from October by 0.2 percentage point for both years, on resilient domestic demand, the IMF said.

"Staying on the path to a soft landing will not be easy," Mr. Gourinchas said, noting that new commodity price spikes from geopolitical shocks, including continued attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, could prolong tight monetary conditions.

He added the IMF was watching developments in West Asia closely, but the broader economic impact appeared "relatively limited" as of now.

Larsen Q3 net profit rises 15% to ₹2,947 cr.

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Larsen & Toubro Ltd. reported third-quarter consolidated net profit grew 15% to ₹2,947 crore, from ₹2,653 crore in the year-earlier period due to better performance of its energy projects and IT services segments, and aided by better execution at its infrastructure division.

For the period ended December 31, 2023, L&T reported consolidated revenue of ₹55,128 crore recording a year-on-year growth of 19%, aided by a ramp up in execution of a strong order book in the Projects and Manufactur-



S.N. Subrahmanyam

ing portfolio. S.N. Subrahmanyam, Chairman and Managing Director, L&T, said: "We have registered yet another quarter of strong performance, despite the headwinds from a volatile global environment and consequent supply chain constraints."

NCLT issues notice to Sony and ZEEL on suit seeking merger

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Tuesday accepted a petition by a Zee Entertainment shareholder seeking the merger of its Indian entity with Sony, which was called off last week despite regulatory approvals.

The Mumbai-bench of NCLT issued notices on a petition moved by Mad Men Film Ventures, a shareholder of Zee Entertainment Enterprises (ZEEL), directing Sony Pictures Network India, now

known as Culver Max, to file a reply in three weeks.

Mad Men Film Ventures on Tuesday filed the petition requesting both ZEEL and Sony to implement the merger as it was approved by NCLT in August 2023.

NCLT has set March 12 for the next hearing.

Last week, Sony called off the merger with ZEEL following a stalemate over who will lead the merged entity. This merger could have created a \$10 billion media enterprise in India.

The merger was stipulated to be completed before Dec. 21, 2023.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	TUESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	71,140	-1.11
US Dollar	83.10	0.07
Gold	63,300	0.31
Brent oil	82.19	0.51

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	3091.10	-26.45
Adani Ports	1187.35	-9.30
Apollo Hosp.	6309.80	-19.95
Asian Paints	2954.10	-21.95
Axis Bank	1054.10	-7.15
Bajaj Auto	7566.40	-17.60
Bajaj Finserv	1590.55	-46.40
Bajaj Finance	6817.20	-374.45
Bharti Airtel	1158.65	-3.50
BPCL	504.20	-11.55
Britannia Ind.	5091.75	-45.15
Cipla	1311.10	-19.75
Coal India	402.55	-10.25
Divis Lab	3551.70	-18.90
Dr Reddys Lab	5840.95	-2.75
Eicher Motors	3704.75	-35.70
Grasim Ind.	2126.15	21.65
HCL Tech	3559.30	-15.25
HDFC Bank	1444.30	-10.35
HDFC Life	575.00	-3.55
Hero MotoCorp	4588.35	-5.15
Hindalco	569.25	-1.35
Hind Unilever	2458.65	-14.25
ICI Bank	1016.90	-0.50
IndusInd Bank	1519.90	-6.90
Infosys	1651.45	-5.15
ITC	438.05	-11.75
JSW Steel	812.00	0.30
Kotak Bank	1823.60	-0.70
L&T	3633.30	-74.70
LTMindtree Ltd.	5352.80	-95.55
M&M	1620.25	-19.65
Maruti Suzuki	5951.65	-39.75
NestleIndia	2492.05	-6.50
NTPC	315.45	-9.10
ONGC	249.20	-3.30
PowerGrid Corp	254.10	-0.15
Reliance Ind.	2815.25	-80.85
SBI Life	1399.00	-19.40
State Bank	626.75	-3.80
Sun Pharma	1371.75	-29.10
TataConsumerPro-	1122.90	-18.15
duct		
Tata Motors	858.85	17.85
Tata Steel	134.70	-0.30
TCS	3800.55	-4.45
Tech Mahindra	1317.85	-3.50
Titan	3735.75	-130.90
UltraTech Cement	9963.60	-310.45
UPL	535.25	-4.40
Wipro	472.50	-0.50

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on January 30

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	82.91	83.23
Euro	89.74	90.09
British Pound	105.08	105.49
Japanese Yen (100)	56.26	56.48
Chinese Yuan	11.55	11.59
Swiss Franc	96.05	96.42
Singapore Dollar	61.87	62.12
Canadian Dollar	61.84	62.08
Malaysian Ringgit	17.53	17.61
Australian Dollar	54.72	54.93

Source: Indian Bank

Roca India to invest ₹400 cr. for capacity expansion in TN

N. Anand
CHENNAI

Spain-based sanitaryware major Roca Group announced it would invest ₹400 crore in Tamil Nadu towards process automation of plastics and sanitaryware, capacity expansion of pipes and fittings and upgradation of the Global Technical Centre in Sriperumbudur, said a top official.

"All these investments are expected to be completed by the year end," said Roca India MD K. Nirmal Kumar while interacting with the State Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and the visiting delegates in Ma-



T.N. CM M.K. Stalin addressing the investment conclave in Madrid. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

drid on Tuesday. "Roca India has committed to invest further in process automation to export products to Europe and Australia. Besides, we will be modernising the factories to produce products to meet the consumer demand," he told *The Hindu*.

Shanthy Gears Q3 net slips marginally to ₹17.43 crore

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Shanthy Gears Ltd. (SGL) standalone net profit for the December quarter contracted marginally to ₹17.43 crore, from ₹17.54 crore in the year-earlier period.

Revenue from operations rose 9% to ₹125.54 crore, while costs of materials increased to ₹67 crore from ₹50 crore, the Tube Investments' subsidiary said in a statement.

SGL generated free cash flow of ₹8 crore (₹6.5 crore) and its order book grew 19% to ₹142 crore.

The board declared an interim dividend of ₹3 per share and it is payable by February 23.

Adani puts Wilmar stake sale on the backburner

Janaki Krishnan
MUMBAI

The Adani Group has decided to put its plans to divest stake in Adani Wilmar on the backburner for now as it is not satisfied with the offers so far, sources said.

The Group has been in talks with leading multinational fast moving consumer goods companies to sell its near 44% stake, but negotiations have stalled, chiefly on the valuation. Sources say the promoters are aiming for a transaction value of close to \$4 billion, but the buyers are offering considerably less than this.

The Group is also exploring the option of bringing in a 'friendly' financial investor which can pick up a significant chunk of the promoter's stake in Adani Wilmar. The company did not respond to an e-mail seeking comments.

In early December, Adani Group finance head Jugeshinder Singh had said that a decision on divesting the stake or exiting Adani Wilmar would be taken in three months. He said the Group had to decide to either scale up the company or deploy the capital elsewhere. The Group is focused on the infrastructure sector and is divesting businesses that are not part of that core area. Last year, it sold its non-banking finance company Adani Capital.

At the current market price of about ₹357 a share, Adani Wilmar has a market capitalisation of \$5.6 billion while the equity valuation has been pegged at about \$5 billion, according to a couple of brokers.

(The writer is with *The Hindu businessline*)

Dr. Reddy's Q3 net rises 11% to ₹1,380 cr.

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Dr. Reddy's Laboratories reported consolidated net profit for the quarter ended December increased 11% year on year to ₹1,380.9 crore on the back of growth in mainstay global generics business in the U.S. and Europe markets.

Total revenue from operations increased more than 6% to ₹7,236.8 crore (₹6,789.8 crore), according to the results prepared in accordance with Indian Accounting Standards.

"We delivered another quarter of highest ever sales and robust financial performance aided by new products performance and base business market

share gain in the U.S., new products launch momentum and strong performance in Europe," co-chairman and MD G.V. Prasad said in a statement.

Price erosion in certain markets partially offset the gains of increase in volumes of the base business and new product launches. Global generics revenue stood at ₹6,312.4 crore (₹5,927.6 crore), CFO Parag Agarwal said.

On the impact on the situation in Red Sea, he said, "We have been able to divert to different routes... [translating into] some cost escalation and some increase in inventory levels, which we have done to ensure that our sales do not suffer."

India-U.S. annual trade can more than double to \$500 billion: Eric Garcetti

Amiti Sen
NEW DELHI

India-U.S. bilateral trade has the potential to rise to \$500 billion annually, from the current \$200 billion, riding on direct investments, joint ventures, partnerships, educational exchanges and tourism, Eric Garcetti, U.S. Ambassador to India, has said.

The two countries need to give more geographical preference to each other on trade, as India did in the case of iPhones and may do with Tesla, Mr. Garcetti said at a seminar organised on Tuesday by the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce on strengthening Indo-U.S. relationship.

Mr. Garcetti's reference to Tesla indicates the U.S. EV giant may be close to reaching a deal on India entry. "Thanks to U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai's leadership, we have now resolved all seven of our WTO disputes (with India). Our relationship has gone from cynical to sceptical to neutral to positive and ambitious about what we can accomplish together..." he said.

"Let us just try that. Just as India did so marvelously with the iPhone and soon may do with Tesla. Let us see if we can do with the entire country and vice versa. Ask it of us, so that India gets that preferential treatment when it comes to strategic and critical minerals that we need in our supply chain..." the U.S. Ambassador said.

FDI flows shift

India needs to change its export policy and controls if it wants to achieve its



Changing tack: India has to change export policy and controls if it wants more investments to flow in, says Garcetti. THE HINDU

We want to see supply chains that are critical to America coming here. The rhetoric that everything has to be made in India will slow down the pace

goals and attract more investments, Mr. Garcetti said.

"We want FDI from China to shift here. FDI is not flowing into India at the pace it should be. Instead, it is going to South Asia, to Vietnam. I would selfishly want to see more of that happening to India. But for that I need your help."

Self-reliant India
The U.S. wants a self-reliant India, but no country can be totally self-reliant any more.

"We want to see supply chains that are critical to America coming here. The rhetoric that everything has to be made in India will slow down the pace."

"If you tax inputs, you are taxing your outputs. You are not taxing us. You are not protecting the mar-

ket. What you are doing is limiting a market," he added.

Highlighting the CEOs of most top U.S. companies were looking at India for investments but "opaque tax structures" were still a barrier, he said: "When we break down the walls in both countries, whether they are bureaucratic, whether taxation, (related), whether regulatory, or whether part of our federal system, it can only release more jobs, prosperity and strength," he said.

Stating that year 2023 was the best year in Indo-U.S. history, given the high numbers of visas issued, both for students and visitors, and important partnerships announced in diverse areas related to trade and investments, Mr. Garcetti said even with elections in both countries, things should not pause.

"We should accelerate. We should collaborate. We should innovate. We should communicate... and elevate our ambition to higher levels than ever before," the U.S. Ambassador said.

(The writer is with *The Hindu businessline*)

'G-Sec demand may outstrip supply'



Bond effect: Ten-year yield may stabilise at 6.50-6.75% level in FY25, says Manglunia. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

K. Ram Kumar
MUMBAI

Demand for Government Securities (G-Secs) could outstrip supply once these are included in key global bond indices, leading to a significant thaw in G-Sec yields in FY25, say experts.

Also, what could accentuate demand for G-Secs is that long-term investors - such as pension and provident funds and insurers - are building up substantial corpus due to inflows, which must be invested.

"Yield of the 10-year benchmark paper right now is at 7.16% level. I don't see it moving up to 7.25-7.30% levels in FY24 as there are no headwinds and we are in a rate softening environment," said Ajay Manglunia, MD & Head, Investment Grade Group, JM Financial.

He expects yield of the 10-year paper to trade in the 7.10-7.25% range till March-end 2024.

"If large foreign portfolio investor inflows come [due to inclusion of G-Secs/Gilts in global bond indices], the yields may go down.... I see the 10-year yield stabilising at 6.50-6.75% level in FY25," per Mr. Manglunia's assessment.

Inclusion of Indian gilts in JP Morgan's Government Bond Index-Emerging Markets (GBI-EM) could attract investments aggregating about \$23-25 billion in a phased manner beginning June 2024. Further, inclusion of Indian Gilts in Bloomberg's emerging market local currency index from September 2024, could draw inflows of about \$3 billion.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

California and Big Oil are parting ways after their century-long affair

State policies favouring clean energy have oil companies fuming; the two largest U.S. oil producers, Exxon Mobil and Chevron, will formally disclose a combined \$5 billion writedown of California assets when they report fourth-quarter results; oil output has been on a steady decline for 4 decades

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters

It is the end of an era for Big Oil in California, as the most populous U.S. state divorces itself from fossil fuels in its fight against climate change.

California's oil output a century ago amounted to it being the fourth-largest crude producer in the U.S., and spawned hundreds of oil drillers, including some of the largest still in existence. Oil led to its car culture of iconic highways, drive-in theatres, banks and restaurants that endures today.

On Friday, however, the marriage will officially end. The two largest U.S. oil producers, Exxon Mobil and Chevron, will formally disclose a combined \$5 billion writedown of California assets when they report fourth-quarter results.

"They are definitely getting a divorce," said Jamie Court, president of advocacy group Consumer Watchdog, which said the companies long ago stopped investing in California production, and now want to live off their old wells there. "They've been separated for more than a decade, now they are just signing the papers."

Exxon Mobil last year exited onshore production in the State, ending a 25-



Sunset industry: Oil rig pumpjacks, also known as thirsty birds, extract crude from the Wilmington Field oil deposits area near Long Beach, California. REUTERS

year-long partnership with Shell PLC, when they sold their joint-venture properties.

The State's regulatory environment has impeded efforts to restart offshore production, Exxon said this month, leading to an exit that includes financing a Texas company's purchase of its offshore properties.

Costly writedown

The No.1 U.S. oil producer's asset writedown will cost about \$2.5 billion and officially end five decades of oil production off the coast of Southern California.

Chevron will also take



California's oil output a century ago amounted to it being the fourth-largest crude producer in the United States and spawned hundreds of oil drillers

charges of about \$2.5 billion tied to its California assets. It is staying but bitterly contesting State regulations on its oil producing and refining operations in the State, where it was born 145 years ago as Pacific Coast Oil Co.

California's energy poli-

cies are "making it a difficult place to invest," even for renewable fuels, a Chevron executive said this month. The company pumps oil from fields developed 100 years ago but has cut spending in the state by "hundreds of millions of dollars since 2022," the executive said.

Green awareness

If oil companies fed California's car culture, their oil spills spurred the U.S. environmental movement. A devastating oil well blowout in Santa Barbara in 1969 led to the National Environmental Policy Act that for the first time required federal agencies consider

environmental effects of permitting decisions.

In the 70s and 80s, the State set curbs on drilling near homes and businesses and regulations on air pollution - rules that have been copied widely across the U.S. In 1996, California introduced reformulated gasoline to fight smog, developing the country's most stringent and costly environmental standards.

That mixed legacy overshadowed oil's economic contributions. California's high-tech industry long ago replaced oil as a major employer and its Governor, Gavin Newsom, has called for the State to ban sales of new gasoline-powered vehicles by 2035.

His administration last September filed a lawsuit targeting the oil industry for "lying to consumers for more than 50 years" about climate change. He signed into law a bill seeking to hold Chevron and other refiners liable for allegedly price-gouged consumers.

The American Petroleum Institute, the industry's trade association, said climate lawsuits hurt "a foundational American industry and its workers" and represent "an enormous waste of California taxpayers resources."

Industry in decline

For now, the acrimony makes the story of California and oil sound a lot like a tragedy.

"This is a green transition," said Daniel Kammen, a professor of Energy at the University of California, who argues oil firms need to move to clean energy and away from fossil fuels.

"There is a pathway for these companies. But if they chose otherwise, they are dinosaurs."

Oil production in the State has been on a steady decline for almost four decades. Crude output, including at its historic Kern County fields in southern California, is off by a third since its 1.1 million-barrel-per-day peak in 1985.

The State has lacked new oil development projects and the legacy fields that produce heavy oil have not been suitable for state mandates for high quality gasoline.

As of September, more than 50% of oil drilling permits issued to companies have gone unused, according to the California Department of Conservation. Unemployment in oil producer Kern County is at 7.8%, compared with the overall 4.9% average for the state.

And California today has six times more clean-energy as oil-related jobs.

"California can't have both," said UC Berkeley's Mr. Kammen, who formerly was a Science Envoy in the Obama administration. "That means there is no room for oil and gas after that."

On the wrong track?



Code red: Trains are parked outside the central station in Frankfurt, Germany. The International Monetary Fund downgraded the outlook for some countries as Europe continues to struggle with dispirited consumers and the lingering effects of the energy price shock caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. AP

Toyota plant raided for test cheating; firm says sold 11.2 mn vehicles in '23

Associated Press
TOKYO

Japanese transport officials raided the plant of a Toyota group company on Tuesday to investigate cheating on engine testing, as the company reported it kept its status as the world's top automaker in 2023, selling 11.2 million vehicles.

Hours after the probe began at Toyota Industries Corp.'s plant in Hekinan, Aichi Prefecture, central Japan, Toyota Chairman Akio Toyoda vowed to steer the company out of scandal and ensure the Japanese automaker sticks to "making good cars."

"My job is to steer the way for where the overall



Time to reflect: Toyota Chairman Akio Toyoda bows during a news conference in Nagoya, central Japan, Tuesday. AP

group should go," he said.

He apologised, bowing deeply, and stressed the group vision was rooted in the Toyoda founding family's ideas of empowering the "genba," or the workers on the plant floor, "to

make good cars that lead to people's happiness."

The testing scandal comes at a time of otherwise stellar performance for Toyota, which makes the Camry sedan, Prius hybrid and Lexus luxury mo-

dels. Its group global vehicle sales for 2023 were a record 11.22 million units, up 7% from the previous year, topping Volkswagen AG's global sales of 9.2 million vehicles.

Mr. Toyoda spoke at a news conference that was live streamed from a memorial hall in Nagoya that serves as a museum for the founding family. Sakichi Toyoda invented the automated weaving loom. His son Kiichiro Toyoda, Mr. Akio's grandfather, founded Toyota Motor Corp.

Reporters were called to Toyota's Tokyo office, where its CEO Koji Sato apologised for the latest mess: flawed testing at Toyota Industries Corp., that makes diesel engines.

German woes darken central Europe's recovery prospects

NEWS ANALYSIS

REUTERS
BUDAPEST/PRAGUE

The sickly state of the German economy is the next big challenge for the export-reliant countries of central Europe, which are still recovering from some of the world's worst inflation spikes in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Close trade ties with Germany and its once-mighty auto sector were for years a boon for the region since the collapse of communism. But now those ties risk becoming a drag on the economies of Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Already, some local companies reliant on ties

with Germany are trying to tap deeper into other overseas markets and branch into industries like defence to mitigate the weakness of their large western neighbour, where another year of near-recession looms.

Geopolitical issues

However such efforts come at a time of major geopolitical uncertainties, with the Ukraine war, Middle East conflict and rising protectionism. Despite the push into the defence sector, all of these factors could hamper the efforts of the region's companies.

"Economic disruption in the region's most important trade partner, and persistent weakness in the auto sector, pose additional risks of economic setback to the CEE region,"



Yawning gap: S&P Global says budget deficits will remain 'exceptionally wide' for the region. REUTERS

said Dawn Holland, Director, Economic Research at Moody's Analytics.

Central Europe's inflation surge, led by eye-watering levels at 25% in Hungary last year, has

prompted central banks to lift borrowing costs to their highest in two decades, with Czechs enduring the most sustained fall in real wages, now spanning eight successive quarters.

German companies had annual turnover of some €250 billion (\$270 billion) in central Europe in 2021, employing about 1 million people directly and many more through suppliers,

according to Germany's Bundesbank.

The Czech Republic and Hungary rely on Germany for a third and a quarter of exports respectively, with Slovakia sending a fifth of its exports there based on a tally by S&P Global. Poland is seen less exposed because of the strength of its more diversified local economy, with exports less dependent on car making.

Stagnation in turnover

The best scenario for most firms interviewed by Reuters would be stagnation in turnover this year, though some did not rule out an outright decline in revenue and possible job cuts.

Building on feedback from clients, Hungary's DGA Gepgyarto es Automatizalasi Kft, which makes

steel structures, welded components and custom manufactured machinery, had been planning a 50% capacity expansion to meet the expected growth in demand over three years from 2023 to 2025.

"This (higher) demand had evaporated," Tamas Tornai, Executive Director of the holding company that controls DGA told Reuters. Even so, DGA is going ahead with its 2.5 billion forint (\$6.95 million) expansion to serve the booming defence industry.

Wiped out

Germany's car sector is not only struggling with weak sales in U.S. and European markets but obstacles from high energy prices to the global shift to e-mobility that is forcing a rethink of

the future of internal combustion engines.

Within central Europe, Hungary has led a charge in attracting investments in battery and electric car manufacturing from China, positioning itself as a meeting point for Eastern and Western investors.

"There is a very strong decline in car sector demand, caused by inflation, interest rates and economic uncertainty, which nearly wiped out private buyers from the market," said Tamas Mogyorosi, Business Development Manager at Alap Group. Rating agencies say the weakness could complicate efforts to rein in budget deficits, which S&P Global says will remain 'exceptionally wide' in historical terms for the region this year.

REHAB

Pant slowly getting fit, expected to return to the pitch this year



FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

Rishabh Pant on Tuesday provided an injury update as he looks to regain fitness ahead of the upcoming IPL. He posted a story on Instagram, sweating it out in the gym, as he looks to make his first appearance on the field since December 2022. He is expected to return to the pitch this year.

TALISMAN

India badly missed Kohli in Hyderabad Test: Boycott



K. MURALI KUMAR

Former England opener Geoffrey Boycott feels India missed Virat Kohli in the series opener. "Kohli is their talisman. He is a magnificent batter who averages 60 on Indian pitches but he also gives them great energy in the field... England must make the most of it before he comes back for the third Test," Boycott said.

NOT QUITTING

Venus Williams plans to make a return in Indian Wells



REUTERS

Venus Williams is preparing for a return to tennis during the North American hard-court season, and she is drawing inspiration from her sister Serena Williams. "One of my big goals is to play United States, to play in the Miami Open and at Indian Wells. I have not played there since 2019 due to injuries," Venus said.

IMPRESSIVE SHOW

Paltan rout Titans to return to the top of PKL standings



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Puneri Paltan scored a crushing 60-29 win over Telugu Titans to go to the top of the standings in the Pro Kabaddi League in Patna on Tuesday. Akash Shinde (11 raid points), Mohd. Chiyaneh Shadloui (7 points) and Abinash Nadarajan (5 tackle points) did the star turn for Paltan in their comprehensive victory.

Musheer and Saumy star as India romps past NZ

The opener flays the Kiwi attack to score 131, crosses 300 runs in this edition; Adarsh chips in with a fifty; the spinner then takes over as the opponent is skittled out for 81



Dazzling duo: Saumy got into the act after Musheer took India close to the 300-run mark. TWITTER@ICC/BCCI



UNDER-19 WC

Press Trust of India
BLOEMFONTEIN

Musheer Khan's superlative showing in the ongoing ICC U-19 World Cup continued as his second hundred trampled New Zealand by 214 runs in a Super Six encounter here on Tuesday.

After India's top performer Musheer's 131, backed by opener Adarsh Singh's 52, powered India to a huge total of 295 for eight, left-arm spinner Saumy Kumar Pandey (four for 19) and pacer Raj Limbani (two for 17) ripped apart New Zealand's top-order to bowl it out for 81 in 28.1 overs.

Limbani struck off the first and fifth deliveries of

the New Zealand innings to ensure that the momentum remained with India.

Vice-captain Saumy finished with splendid figures of 10-2-19-4 as he knocked the stuffing out of the Black Caps' chase.

Left reeling at 27 for four in the PowerPlay, New Zealand could never stage a comeback as the Indian colts, like in every edition, look like going all the way.

Third heaviest loss

For New Zealand, it was its third heaviest defeat in terms of runs and also its third lowest total in the Under-19 World Cup.

Earlier, Musheer flayed the Kiwi attack to score his second century of the 2024 edition while opener Adarsh Singh struck 52 as India set its opponent a stiff 296-run target.

On a perfect batting

wicket at the Mangaung Oval, Musheer tore apart the Kiwi bowlers to become the first batter in the current edition to go past the 300-run mark, going past Pakistan's Shahzaib Khan with his superb knock.

Musheer, en route his 131, blasted 13 fours and three sixes off just 125 balls and once again showed the right temperament to up the ante when it mattered.

His innings, which was marked by fine running between the wickets, ended when he was looking to accelerate in the slog overs.

Musheer and Adarsh carried out a fine recovery job with a 77-run stand for the second wicket after an early blow for India.

Adarsh took charge of attacking the bowlers as he looked good while driving

on the rise and also played the pull-shot with elan.

Unfortunately he failed to keep a drive in check when Zac Cumming teased him with one outside the off-stump.

A thick edge off Adarsh's bat flew to Oliver Tewatiya at point in the 18th over. The left-handed opener made a fine 52 off 58 balls with six fours.

Skipper Uday Saharan was dismissed for 35 (57b, 2x4).

Saharan put on 87 with Musheer - India's best for the day - before Saumy and Limbani ran through New Zealand.

The scorers:

India 295/8 in 50 overs (Adarsh Singh 52, Musheer Khan 131, Uday Saharan 34, Mason Clarke 4/62) bt New Zealand 81 in 28.1 overs (Saumy Pandey 4/19).

India's next match: Feb. 2 vs. Nepal.

India's conundrum ahead of crucial second Test

ENGLAND IN INDIA

P.K. Ajith Kumar
VISAKHAPATNAM

Bad things come in threes. Maybe in fours, in the case of the Indian cricket team.

A defeat at home after taking a lead of 190 is bad enough, but being forced to rejig the eleven for the next game can be quite a challenge. India indeed has to sort a few things out before the second Test against England begins here on Friday.

Mohammed Shami has been out of action, because of an ankle injury, since his spectacular show at the World Cup. Then, Virat Kohli pulled out of the squad for the first two Tests because of personal reasons.

K.L. Rahul was the obvious choice to occupy Kohli's No. 4 position and the Karnataka batter justified the team management's faith in him by making a fine 86 in the first innings, but has quadriceps pain and will not feature in the second Test.

The only Indian who scored more than Rahul at Hyderabad also sustained an injury and is not available, either. Ravindra Jadeja will be badly missed. He is not merely a world class spinner but a reassuring presence in the middle-order, not to mention his left-handedness.

Remember, there is no Rishabh Pant, either; the dashing left-hander is still recovering from the injuries he sustained from a car accident over a year ago. It perhaps is not the best of times to be the Indian coach, captain or se-



Crunch time: Skipper Rohit needs to take a few brave calls as India looks to draw level. K. R. DEEPAK

lector. They will have to make some choices within the next couple of days before the team takes on a history-making, raring-to-go England side at the Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy Stadium.

Obvious chances

An Indian batter is bound to make his Test debut on that ground. Rajat Patidar, Kohli's replacement, had joined the team on the eve of the Hyderabad Test, while Sarfaraz Khan was named in the squad on Monday.

They both have played for India-A against the touring England Lions and have had considerable success. Patidar, the top-order batter from Madhya Pradesh who made his ODI debut in South Africa last month, had scores like 111 and 151 against the Lions at Ahmedabad. Sarfaraz, Mumbai's run-machine extraordinaire in the middle-order, had scores such as 96, 55 and 161.

The team management may not find it easy to fill the Jadeja-shaped hole. Kuldeep Yadav's left-arm wrist spin is a fascinating option - he has been in excellent form with the white ball and from his eight Tests, he has three five-wicket hauls - but, of course, he is no all-rounder.

Washington Sundar is. He made 62 in his first Test innings and in the second, he hooked Pat Cummins for a stunning six that changed the course of India's historic chase at the Gabba against Australia three years ago. The off-spinning all-rounder scored 96 not out in his last Test innings.

India's other spinning option, Saurabh Kumar, can also bat, and has two First Class hundreds. It would be interesting to see if the host would consider playing just the one seamer in Jasprit Bumrah and play a spinning all-rounder.

Mayank Agarwal.
FILE PHOTO: S.S. KUMAR

Mayank survives serious health scare

N. Sudarshan
BENGALURU

Test cricketer and Karnataka captain Mayank Agarwal survived a serious health scare on Tuesday, just as he and his teammates were about to fly out of Agartala for Delhi en route Surat for their next Ranji Trophy match against Railways starting this Friday.

According to team sources, Mayank allegedly consumed spirit (disinfectant and cleaning agent) in the Indigo flight after mistaking it for bottle of drinking water.

He is said to have spat out most of it after experiencing an immediate burning sensation, and was quickly deplaned and rushed to a local hospital, where he continues to be in the ICU.

There is, however, no threat to the 32-year-old's life and he is currently stable, *The Hindu* understands. Mayank will be assessed further and then flown to Bengaluru for the next stage of treatment.

Because of the incident, the Delhi-bound flight left Agartala only at 4.20 p.m. and the Karnataka team missed its connecting plane to Surat. The team will thus fly out of Delhi Wednesday morning.

Tamil Nadu's Keerthana causes a flutter, rewrites National youth record in girls' 81kg

KHELO GAMES

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu weightlifter R.P. Keerthana broke the National youth record in snatch, clean and jerk and overall to clinch the gold in the girls' 81kg category at the Khelo India Youth Games here on Tuesday.

Keerthana lifted a total of 188 kgs, including 85kg in snatch and 106kg in clean & jerk to finish ahead of State mate K. Oviya (184kg). The previous record in snatch (81kg), clean & jerk (104kg) and overall (185kg) was held by Ch. Sri Lakshmi of Andhra Pradesh set at the National youth championships last year in Nagercoil.

Manipur won the girls' football gold for the second successive time, defeating West Bengal on penalties

8-7 in the final, after the teams played out a goalless draw in the regulation time.

Maharashtra is at the top of the medals tally with 53 gold, 46 silver and 50 bronze medals. Haryana is in second position (35, 22, 46) while Tamil Nadu is in third place (35, 20, 36).

The results:

Archery: Recurve: Boys: Recurve: 1. Shubham Kumar (Bih); 2. Laishram Nelson (Man); 3. Atharva Sharma (Raj). **Girls:** 1. Avani (Har); 2. Sharvari Shende (Mah); 3. Jannat (Har).

Compound: Boys: 1. Sukhmandeep Singh (Pun); 2. Pruthviraj Ghadge & Sharvari Shende (Mah); 3. Mihir Apar (Mah); **Girls:** 1. Aditi Gopichand Swami (Mah); 2. Tejal Salve (Mah); 3. Kumud Saini (Del).

Mixed team: Recurve: 1. Pruthviraj Ghadge & Sharvari Shende (Mah); 2. Agastay Singh & Avani (Har); 3. Atharva Sharma & Pranjal Tholiya (Raj).

Compound: 1. Manav Jadhao & Aditi Swami (Mah); 2. Pandyala Trinath Chowdary & Kengam



Raising the bar: Keerthana lifted a total of 188kg to clinch the 81kg gold with a new record. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Saranya (AP); 3. Aryan Yadav & Kumud Saini (Del).

Badminton (finals): Boys: M.A. Laksh Chengappa (Kar) bt Ansh Negi (Utk) 21-17, 21-13. **Doubles:** G.P. Vinayakram & M. Swastik (TN) bt Bhavya Chabra & Param Choudhary (Del) 21-18, 21-18.

Girls: 1. T. Surya Charishma (AP) bt Aisha Gandhi (Guj) 21-14, 21-14. **Doubles:** Taarini Suri & Shrivani Walekar (Mah) bt Pragati Parida & Vishakha Toppo (Odi) 21-13, 20-22, 21-16.

Shooting: Mixed team: 1. Yuvekk Battula & Venkat Lakku (TS); 2. Vanshika Tiwari & Udyaman Rathore (MP); 3. Zorawar Bedi &

Risham Guron (Pun).

Tennis: Doubles final: Girls:

Maaya Rajeshwari & Lakshmi Prabha (TN) bt Suhitha Maruri & Sreenidhi Balaji (Kar) 6-2, 6-1.

Weightlifting: Boys: +102kg: 1.

Suvansh Thakur (HP) 280kg; 2.

David Zohmingmawla (Miz); 3.

Sarth Jadhav (Mah). **Girls: 81kg:**

1. R.P. Keerthana (TN) 188kg; 2. K.

Oviya (TN); 3. Santushti Choudhary (UP). **+81kg:** 1.

Amritha P. Suni (Ker) 181kg; 2.

Aditi (UP); 3. Y. Chaitna Kumari (AP).

Swimming: Boys: 200m

medley: 1. Yug Chelani (Raj)

2:10.73; 2. Siddhant Singh Jadon (MP); 3. Saswata Roy (WB); **200m**

backstroke: 1. Nithik Nadella (TN) 2:04.60; 2. Rishabh Anupam Das (Mah); 3. Akash Mani (Kar);

800m freestyle: 1. Mongam Theerdu Samadev (AP) 8:29.77; 2.

Gotteti Sampath Kumar Yadav (AP); 3. S. Dharshan (Kar).

Girls: 200m medley: 1.

Shreenithi Natesan (TN) 2:26.78; 2.

Saanvi Deshwal (Mah); 3.

Subhransini Priyadarshini (Asm); **200m backstroke:** 1.

Palak Ashutosh Joshi (Mah) 2:18.59; 2. Sri Nithya Sagi (TS); 3.

Naisha (Kar).

Sharath confident of Indian men booking Paris ticket

K. Keerthivasan
CHENNAI

India's star paddler Sharath Kamal is quite confident of the Indian men's team qualifying for the Paris Olympics through the World team table tennis championships in Busan from February 16 to 25.

"This is our last chance [World team championships] to make it to the quadrennial event. I am pretty confident we can make it to the knockouts (top three make the grade from eight groups). If we make it to the quarterfinals, we can make it to Paris.

"Our men's team is ranked 16 now. We will go up to 15 once the world team rankings are released next week. Of course, the deadline is July 2024," said the 41-year-old here on Tuesday. The Indian men's team is in Group 3 with Korea, Poland, New Zealand



Sharath. M. VEDHAN

and Chile. There are eight groups and the top three from each group will make it to the knockouts.

Assessing the teams, Sharath said: "Korea is a top team while Poland is a dangerous young side. We also have a young team, including Harmeet Desai and Manav Thakkar. I am fit.

"Sathiyam is recovering from back injury and will be back. As for me, I have been focusing on Worlds for the last six months. We are confident," he said.

Sharath's mind is focused only on the Worlds. "It will be the be-all and end-all as far as I am concerned. India has never qualified for Olympics as a team. If we do it, we will get funding from SAI and other external sources. We are sorted for the next four years," he said. Sharath, however, is not keen on playing singles at Paris. "I might not try as it hasn't given me the motivation.

"I might not take part in the South Asian qualifying tournament as I don't want to compete with the youngsters whom I am mentoring.

"If we qualify in men's team, two singles places are guaranteed (TTFI can decide as to who should go). I don't want to go there, too. In doubles, I will contribute," he said.

Sharath is more than eager to give it his all for a final shot at Paris.

IN BRIEF



Messi and Suarez score but Miami falls to Al Hilal

Luis Suarez bagged his maiden goal for Inter Miami and Lionel Messi scored a penalty but it was not enough to stop the MLS side falling to a 3-4 defeat against Saudi Pro League side Al Hilal in Riyadh on Monday. An 88th-minute header from Brazilian Malcom settled an entertaining friendly after Miami fought back to 3-3 from 3-1 down early in the second half. The game was the latest leg of Miami's pre-season tour.

The result: Al Hilal 4 (Mitrovic 10, Al Hamdani 13, Michael 44, Malcom 88) bt Inter Miami 3 (Suarez 34, Messi 54-pen, Ruiz 55).

India loses to Netherlands in the quarterfinals

Mohammed Raheel's hat-trick went in vain as India suffered a 4-7 defeat against Netherlands in the quarterfinals of the FIH Hockey5s Men's World Cup in Muscat on Tuesday. Apart from Raheel (first, seventh, 25th minutes), Mandeep Mor (11th) scored for India. For Netherlands, Sander de Wijn (fourth, 15th), and Alexander Schop (10th, 26th) got a brace each, while Lucas Middendorp (12th), Jamie van Aart (13th), and Pepijn Reyenga (20th) also found the net. India will play Kenya in the fifth-eighth place match.



De Rossi's Roma beats Salernitana

Daniele De Rossi's dream start as the Roma boss continued when it earned a 2-1 win over Salernitana in Serie A on Monday. De Rossi took over from manager Jose Mourinho on Jan. 16 and won his first game against Verona four days later. His second win came thanks to second-half goals from Paulo Dybala and Lorenzo Pellegrini. The capital club rose three places in the standings to fifth. Dybala put the visitor ahead in the 51st minute from the penalty spot after Giulio Maggiore fouled Gianluca Mancini. Pellegrini doubled Roma's lead 15 minutes later. The Salernitana defense left him unmarked at the far post and he tapped home a cross from Rick Karsdorp. Grigoris Kastanos pulled one back with a header four minutes later but Salernitana fell to a fourth consecutive league defeat.

The results:
Serie A: Salernitana 1 (Kastanos 70) lost to Roma 2 (Dybala 51-pen, Pellegrini 66).
La Liga: Getafe 2 (Greenwood 21, Mayoral 36) bt Granada 0.

Rakitic leaves Sevilla, signs with Saudi's Al-Shabab

Former Croatia midfielder Ivan Rakitic has left Sevilla following a second spell at the club ahead of his move to Saudi Arabia's Al-Shabab, the LaLiga side said on Tuesday. "We have agreed a deal with Al-Shabab Club for the transfer of Ivan Rakitic, who will bring his second spell with us to a close," Sevilla said. Rakitic, who first played for the Spanish club from 2011-2014 following a move from Schalke 04, returned to Sevilla in Sept. 2020 and last year helped his team win a record-extending seventh Europa League title.



Russia demoted to team skating Olympic bronze

Kamila Valieva's doping ban has resulted in the Russia Olympic Committee team being demoted from the gold to bronze medal in the 2022 Winter Olympics team skating event, the International Skating Union (ISU) said Tuesday. The then 15-year-old's positive test in December 2021, for which she received a four year ban on Monday, has led the ISU to perform "a re-ranking of the Team event." The USA has been promoted to the gold medal with Japan in silver.

'Rohan is a terrific guy and has been a great representative for India'

Vijay Amritraj, felicitated for being inducted to the Hall of Fame, lauds Bopanna on his incredible achievement; says it would be disappointing if the Davis Cup team suffers a reverse in the World Group I Play-Off

TENNIS
Ashwin Achal
BENGALURU

Close to 43 years have passed since Vijay Amritraj reached a career-high men's singles ranking of 18. The passage of time, however, has not diminished his appeal.

Still dapper at 70, Amritraj was the cynosure of all eyes at an event hosted by The Leela Palace here to honour his induction into the Tennis Hall of Fame (contributor category). Amritraj held court effortlessly with his friendly demeanour and quick wit.

Birthplace of tennis
Amritraj will be inducted into the Tennis Hall of Fame at Newport (USA) – a city where he has won three titles (1976, 1980 and 1984).

"The setting in Newport is spectacular. It is the place where tennis was born in the USA," Amritraj



Classy raconteur: Amritraj held court effortlessly with his friendly demeanour and quick wit. SUDHAKARA JAIN

said. Amritraj took a moment to remember his late parents – Robert Amritraj and Maggie Dhairyam.

"My greatest talent was being born to the right parents," Amritraj said.

Amritraj praised Rohan Bopanna, who recently claimed the Australian Open men's doubles title to

become the oldest man to win a Grand Slam.

"You must have tremendous support from family, especially your spouse, to stay with it for this long duration of time.

"To play at 43 – the tough part is all the work that must be put in before matches. As you get older,

you slow down. The shot that was once routine is not routine anymore," Amritraj said.

"The advantage is that Rohan plays doubles. Doubles and singles is like night and day. If you have to run down everything for three hours, as you do in singles, it would have been

a nightmare. The good thing is that he has a good serve, so there will always be free points," he said.

"More than anything else, Rohan is a terrific guy. He's been a great representative for India," Amritraj added.

Later this week, India takes on Pakistan in a Davis Cup 2024 World Group I Play-Offs tie at Islamabad (Pakistan).

India will slip back to Group II if it loses – a scenario that does not sit well with Amritraj.

"I have never known what it is like to be in Group II. I never even knew a Group II existed. That is not where India belongs. It is the players' job to get us out of it," Amritraj said.

Don't take it lightly
Amritraj warned against taking the Pakistan team lightly.

"Firstly, I do not know how good the grass courts are in Pakistan. Their players are generally good on grass," he said.



Deepti. FILE PHOTO: EMMANUEL YOGINI

Deepti second among bowlers in T20I rankings

Press Trust of India
DUBAI

India's Deepti Sharma rose one place to joint second while teammate Renuka Singh also moved up a spot to 10th in the latest ICC women's T20I bowling rankings issued on Tuesday.

Pakistan's Sadia Iqbal took the joint second spot with Deepti after moving up one place. England's Sarah Glenn was at fourth after rising a rung. England's Sophie Ecclestone maintained a healthy lead at the top of the T20I rankings for bowlers. There was no change within the top 10 of the latest T20I rankings for all-rounders with Deepti retaining the fourth spot.

It's a historical tie, we will benefit from India team's visit: Pakistan tennis fraternity

Press Trust of India
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan has paid a huge price in the absence of international sporting events in the last decade, and the tennis fraternity is hoping that the arrival of the Indian Davis Cup team for the "historic tie" will inject fresh enthusiasm and provide a big boost to the game in the country.

The last time an Indian Davis Cup team travelled to Pakistan was in 1964. The AITA was not keen on sending its team this year too, but the ITF rejected its appeal and said categorically that there is no reason to believe that Indian players will face any security concerns in Pakistan.

International sporting events in Pakistan came to a halt after the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team bus in March 2009 in Lahore. Consequently, the country was barred from hosting world-level tournaments across sports.

The Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) could not host junior ITF events or senior men's Futures. There were no women's events and no Davis Cup team travelled to Pakistan till 2017.

It badly hit Pakistan tennis, which was nowhere near cricket in terms of popularity in the country as many promising players were forced to quit the game for lack of growth opportunities and exposure.

The ones who were playing at U14 level did not graduate to the men's level and competing abroad for ITF events is not easy either for Pakistani or Indian players considering the huge cost involved.

Things began to change in 2017 when Iran sent its teams to Islamabad. The arrival of Japan in 2021 also had a positive impact.

However, nothing matches the excitement and anticipation when India and Pakistan compete in Pakistan.

The reactions of Pakistan's top players, Aisam-ul-haq Qureshi and Aqeel Khan, best summed up the excitement. They are even hoping that this tie could pave the way for the arrival of Indian cricket team to Pakistan.

"We are very, very excited and happy, finally the Indian Davis Cup team is here. I have always believed that we should keep politics, religion, culture away from sports. That's the beauty of the sport and being a sportsman. I have always vouched for that," Qureshi, the only Pakistan player competing on ATP Tour, told PTI.

"For me it's the most historical tie, probably. I am super excited I think it is going to promote tennis in Pakistan, definitely. Already, it has created hype that Indian team is there officially. Hopefully, it will break barriers. I would be happy if this Davis Cup tie pushes the Indian cricket team to come to Pakistan."



Zeeshan.

Zeeshan is both captain and coach for Davis Cup tie

Sports Bureau
NEW DELHI

The All India Tennis Association (AITA) has asked coach Zeeshan Ali to take over the job of the captain as well for the Davis Cup World Group play-off tie against Pakistan to be played in Islamabad on February 3 and 4.

It was announced that the captain of the Indian team Rohit Rajpal has not been able to join the squad in Pakistan owing to personal reasons.

WTA event returns to Mumbai after six years

TENNIS

Sports Bureau
MUMBAI

Three top-100 players – Kayla Day of USA, Nao Hibino of Japan and Tamara Zidansek of Slovenia – are scheduled to compete in the L&T Mumbai Open \$115,000 WTA tennis tournament to be staged at the Cricket Club of India (CCI) courts from February 5.

In the first of its three editions, the Mumbai Open had witnessed the then 18-year-old Aryna Sabalenka, ranked 96 in the world, win her maiden WTA title in 2017. Sabalenka had lost to Maria Sharapova in the final of the Tianjin Open earlier that year and was happy to announce her arrival into the big league with the title in Mumbai, in her last tournament of that season.

In the current crop of players, Day had won the US Open girls' title in 2016 and is ranked 82 in the world. Nao Hibino has already won three WTA titles. Tamara Zidansek had

made the semifinals of French Open.

Notable among other exciting players is the 16-year-old Alina Korneeva of Russia, the No.1 ranked junior last year, who has already made her breakthrough into the women's field by reaching the third round of Australian Open this year. She had won the girls' title at the Australian Open last year.

The rest of the field, featuring players from around world, will also be strong, with the last direct entry being made with a rank of 179.

Only Prarthana Thombare has got a direct entry in doubles among the Indians, with Dutch partner Arianne Hartono. Ankita Raina and Rutuja Bhosale are also expected to make the main draw of doubles.

There will be four wild cards for the main draw and four for the qualifying event which are expected to be announced soon. That should help more Indian players stake their claim and gauge their strength against top class opponents.

Raiza Dhillon misses skeet final by one point

SHOOTING

Sports Bureau

Raiza Dhillon shot 114 and missed making the women's skeet final by one point in the shooting World Cup in Cairo, Egypt, on Tuesday.

Dhillon had shot a perfect 25 in the penultimate round to stay in contention for a final berth, but a 21 in the last round pulled her down to the 11th spot.

Ganemat Sekhon (112) and Areeba Khan (108) placed 15th and 22nd.

In men's skeet, Munek Bhatula was unable to build on his fine overnight effort of 74 out of 75, and placed 18th with a total of 119. He had 22 and 23 in the last two rounds.

Abhay Singh Sekhon (119) placed 16th, while

Asian Games silver medalist Anant Jeet Singh Naruka shot 115 for the 40th spot in a field of 64.

Competing in the Ranking Points Only (RPO) section, World Cup gold medalist Mairaj Ahmad Khan and Sheeraz Sheikh shot 118 and 109 respectively.

In the 25-metre rapid fire pistol event, Anish Bhanwala and Vijayveer Sidhu shot identical score of 119 for the 10th and 11th spots respectively. They missed the final by four points. Abhinav Choudhary shot 569 for the 28th place. In the RPO section, Sameer Ghulia and Adarsh Singh shot 573 and 567 respectively.

Despite not adding to its medals collection, India continued to stay on top of the medals table with two gold and three silver medals.

Prime Volleyball League in Chennai from February 15

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

The RuPay Prime Volleyball League, powered by A23, will be held from February 15 to March 21 at the Nehru Indoor Stadium here.

Nine franchises – Ahmedabad Defenders, Bengaluru Torpedoes, Calicut Heroes, Chennai Blitz, Delhi Toofans, Hyderabad Black Hawks, Kochi Blue Spikers, Kolkata Thunderbolts, and Mumbai Meteors – will vie for the trophy.

Defending champion Ahmedabad Defenders will face off against host Chennai Blitz in the opening game of the tournament on February 15, while last

year's runner-up Bengaluru Torpedoes will take on the Season-1 winner Kolkata Thunderbolts on the same day.

Super5s from March 11
The Super5s stage will take place between March 11 and March 18 in which the top five teams from the league stage will compete in a round-robin format to determine the final three teams. The team finishing first in the Super5s will earn a direct qualification for the final, while the teams finishing second and third will compete in the Eliminator on March 19.

The winner of the Eliminator will be the second team to book a spot in the final.

Rashford has taken responsibility for his actions: United

Associated Press
MANCHESTER

Manchester United said Marcus Rashford had "taken responsibility for his actions" after he was reportedly seen in a Belfast night spot last week and later reported himself ill.

The club confirmed on Monday it dealt with a disciplinary matter regarding the England striker. Rashford was left out of his team's 4-2 win against Newport in the FA Cup on Sunday, with United saying he was too ill to take part.

Afterward, manager Erik ten Hag said he would deal with the forward following his reported activities in the week leading up to the match. "Marcus has taken responsibility for his



Moving on: Rashford will be available for selection when United plays Wolves. REUTERS

actions. This has been dealt with as an internal disciplinary matter, which is now closed," United said. It did not say if he had been fined. Rashford will be available for selection when United plays Wolves in the Premier League on Thursday.

Part Shamar, part Bopanna: Gourav finds second wind with Pondicherry

Drawing inspiration from the ageless Indian tennis star, the 32-year-old pacer, whose origin mirrors the Caribbean fast bowler, has started to make an impact in Indian domestic cricket

Dhruva Prasad

In a week where Shamar Joseph's youthful exuberance and Rohan Bopanna's age-defying perseverance dominated sporting headlines, Pondicherry fast bowler Gourav Yadav, whose career is a mélange of both storylines, continued his domination in the wickets-takers chart of the ongoing Ranji Trophy.

At the age of 32, with 31 wickets in seven innings, Gourav feels his career is finally peaking and takes inspiration from 43-year-old Bopanna's Australian Open triumph.

"Thirty-two kya hota hai? Aapne Rohan Bopanna ko dekha na. At the age of 43, he is World No. 1. I can still play for another six to seven years with full intensity," he said during Pondicherry's match against Madhya Pradesh, where he added another eight scalps to his tally.

His origins, meanwhile, mirror those of Joseph, who worked as a security guard till the age of about 21 and who, until 12 months ago, would have dismissed his place in cricketing folklore as a pipe-dream.

Gourav, who hails from Bisoni Kilan, a small village of about 1200 to 1500 people in Madhya Pradesh, had never played with a leather ball till he was about 19 or 20.

"I used to play tennis-ball cricket in school and college. One day, the older boys told me that I bowl fast and that I should take a shot at bowling with a leather ball. I got myself admitted into a club in Bhopal and played there for about six to seven months. I was bowling quick with the leather ball too and received a lot of praise," he said.

With Indore being the epicentre of cricketing activity in MP, Gourav soon had to relocate from Bhopal.

"I went to Indore and played club cricket there. My village is in the Hoshangabad division, which is called Narmadapuram now. Someone asked me to play division cricket in Hoshangabad. From there, within two years, I came into the Ranji Trophy team. I was 22 or 23 [21] at the time," he added.

Though Gourav made his First-Class debut in 2012 against Gujarat in Indore, he got limited opportunities in his first four to five years on the domestic circuit, largely due to a slew of injuries that were in many ways the result of a late initiation into the game.

"I had a lot of injury issues initially. I would toil so hard in practice that I had no energy left after it. There was no time for my body to recover fully. Because I started playing so late, I was trying to compensate for it by bowling as much within two years as someone would have bowled in five years. That led to a lot of injuries, which set my career back a little bit," he said.

"MPCA (Madhya Pradesh Cricket Association) rated me so highly that the moment I was fit, they would select me after just a couple of selection matches... I could never play a full season. It's only since the last two seasons that I have been playing regularly," he added.

For Gourav, playing the Ranji Trophy wasn't only about pursuing his passion but also about proving a point and winning over his father, who was sceptical of his son's late entry into a sport that millions in the country aspire to play.

"I asked my father to give me two years to pursue cricket and I promised him that



SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

if I fail, I will never play the sport again. *Main kabhi bat-ball nahi uthaunga,*" he reminisces.

When his father would fret over his future in case his plans went awry, Gourav would assure him that he had no qualms about returning to his roots.

"Aap bhi toh kheti karke hummein paal rahe ho. Main bhi kheti kar lunga, usmein kya burai hai. (You have raised us with the income you got from farming. I will do the same. There's no harm in doing that)," he would tell his father.

But once Gourav made his entry into First-Class cricket and his name began appearing in the papers, his father was convinced and never disapproved of his son's choices again.

Gourav made another enterprising decision ahead of the 2023-24 season when he quit MP to play for Pondicherry. Though he was a mainstay in red-ball cricket and an integral part of MP's Ranji Trophy title triumph in 2021-22, Gourav was rueing the lack of opportunities in limited-overs formats.

In more than 10 years with the MP team, he had featured in only 16 List A and nine T20 games despite showing promise in both formats.

"I wanted more opportunities in white-ball cricket. I was playing red-ball cricket consistently but chances in white-ball cricket were few and far between. I was the highest wicket-taker in the Vijay Hazare Trophy [2019-20] for MP, but still, I didn't get too many opportunities in white-ball cricket," he explained.

What also irked Gourav and stalled his progress was MPCA's repeated refusal to allow him to attend trials and net sessions of Indian Premier League franchises.

"I wasn't allowed to attend trials on two or three occasions. CSK (Chennai Super Kings) had called me as a net bowler and they were going to take me to UAE, but they [MPCA] didn't allow me to attend the trials or even go there as a net bowler. And neither were they giving me chances in white-ball cricket, so I had no other option," he told *Sportstar*.

Gourav could finally attend the Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) camp last year as a net bowler, where he dismissed Virat Kohli on a couple of occasions on the first day.

"Virat Kohli came up to me and said, 'Where are you from? You are bowling really well,'" he recounts gleefully.

In his first full white-ball season since 2019-20, Gourav emerged as Pondicherry's leading wicket-taker in the Vijay Hazare Trophy last year, picking 14 scalps in seven games.

In the Ranji Trophy, he inspired Pondicherry's wins against more fancied sides such as Delhi and Uttarakhand before facing defeat against his former side MP on Sunday.

However, Gourav believes the team, which is only five First-Class seasons old, has got what it takes to qualify for the knockouts.

Although minute in the global context, that story would well be in keeping with the pacer's odds-defying journey and the sporting world's giant-killing mood of late.

THE GIST

Gourav had never played with a leather ball till he was about 19 or 20

He made his First-Class debut in 2012 against Gujarat in Indore

In more than 10 years with the MP team, he had featured in only 16 List A and nine T20 games

MPCA had repeatedly refused to allow him to attend trials and net sessions of IPL franchises

He finally attended the RCB camp last year, where he dismissed Virat Kohli

The pacer was Pondicherry's leading wicket-taker in the Vijay Hazare Trophy last year

Iran 'following dreams' in bid to clinch its first Asian Cup crown since 1976

Agence France-Presse
DOHA

Iran is "following our dreams" in trying to win the Asian Cup for the first time in 48 years, winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh said ahead of the last-16 clash with Syria.

Three-time champion Iran faces Syria in Qatar with a quarter-final against Bahrain or pre-tournament favourites Japan up for grabs.

Along with holder Qatar, Iran is the only team left in the competition which went through the group stage with a 100 per cent record.

"We know the importance of this tournament for the people of Iran and for ourselves," Feyenoord's Jahanbakhsh said on Tuesday.

"We are doing our best to follow our dreams."

Syria is in the knockout round for the first time and Iran is clear favourites, but Jahanbakhsh warned: "It's

going to be very difficult, they are very physical.

"They only conceded one goal in the group phase and are very good defensively.

"It is all about details," the 30-year-old former Brighton player, who captained Iran in its 1-0 group-stage win over Hong Kong, added.

"The biggest difference between the group phase and the knockout is that if you make one mistake, you can easily go out."

Iran's coach Amir Ghalenoei identified his Syrian counterpart, the experienced Argentine Hector Cuper—who guided Egypt to the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations final—as a formidable opponent.

Cuper called Iran one of the strongest teams at the tournament while his men squeezed into the knockout rounds with one win, a 1-0 victory over India, in three games.

It was the only goal Syria has



scored, but it has also only conceded once, in a defeat to Australia.

"We are optimistic and have big ambitions," the 68-year-old Cuper said.

"I want to make the long-suffering Syrian people happy and put a smile on their faces."

Syria, ranked 91 in the world to Iran's 21, will look to soak up pressure and hit its opponents on the break.

"My players have the spirit and talent to change the game at any moment," warned Cuper.



AFF

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