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SETBACK FOR INDIA BLOC
BJP wins Chandigarh mayoral election
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'Missing' CM Soren shows up in Ranchi

Jharkhand CM holds talks with alliance partners; MLAs sign letter of support without name; ED officials tow away vehicle, impound cash

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-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



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

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. 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.

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Imran sentenced to 10 years in prison 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



Imran Khan

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 successor, Shehbaz Sharif, struggled to manage.

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» PAGE 12
'MIRROR IMAGE OF THE PAST'
» PAGE 15

14 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-1.

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.

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OPPORTUNITIES » PAGE 5

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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 Rubix**
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'

De Rossi's Roma beats Salernitana

The coach's stint at the club starts with two successive victories; he took over from manager Mourinho in the middle of January

EURO LEAGUES

Associated Press
ROME

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.

His second win came thanks to second-half goals from Paulo Dybala and Lorenzo Pellegrini.

Grigoris Kastanos pulled one back with a header



Elegant: Dybala's penalty broke the deadlock. AP

four minutes later.

The results:

Serie A: Salernitana 1 (Kastanos

70) lost to Roma 2 (Dybala 51-pen, Pellegrini 66).

LaLiga: Getafe 2 (Greenwood 21, Mayoral 36) bt Granada 0.

Nominations for the Moment of the Year

Sports Bureau

Indian sports had many moments to cherish in 2023. It is time to celebrate these landmark moments and achievements at the Sportstar ACES Awards.

Here are the nominees for the Moment of the Year award:

Virat Kohli moved clear of former teammate and India great Sachin Tendulkar with a record-breaking 50th ODI in the World Cup semifinal against New Zealand at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, the home ground of Tendulkar. Kohli reached the landmark in trademark fashion, completing a brisk two despite battling cramps. Once the milestone was reached, Kohli leapt and then bowed down to Tendulkar, his childhood hero, and the maestro heartily applauded from the stands.

Indian men's football team captain, **Sunil Chhetri**, secured victory with a decisive goal during the Intercontinental Cup match against Vanuatu. To share the joyous news of impending parenthood, he celebrated in front of his wife, the ball tucked warmly within his jersey – a customary gesture in football worldwide to announce such delightful moments to the fans.

When Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem pulled out on the eve of the Asian Games javelin throw final due to injury, **Neeraj Chopra's** path to Asian Games gold seemed guaranteed. But when the controversy surrounding Neeraj's first throw overshadowed the competition, **Kishore Ku-**

mar Jena stepped up by recording his personal best throw of 86.77 m, momentarily propelling himself to first place. Neeraj immediately embraced his countryman to celebrate his achievement. The Olympic champion eventually secured gold and Jena a well-deserved silver. "It was fun pushing each other," Neeraj said later. In that embrace, one saw a snapshot of Indian javelin's future.

Armless archer **Sheetal Devi** made headlines in October when she shot her way to three medals at the Asian Para Games. The 16-year-old, who hails from Kishtwar, Jammu and Kashmir, was born with phocomelia, a disorder causing underdeveloped limbs. Without arms, she learned to use a bow and arrow using her feet and started training full-time in archery only two years ago. Videos of her mounting the bow and using her right foot and mouth to steady the equipment before shooting perfect 10s

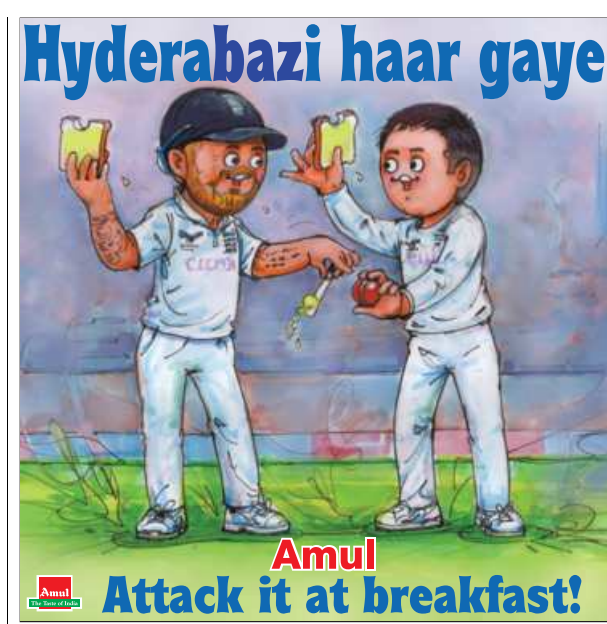
went viral. From celebrities to the political brass, praise flooded in for the resilience and talent of the young girl, who eventually went on to finish the year as the No. 1 archer in open compound.

Jyothi Yarraji secured the silver in the women's 100m hurdles at the Hangzhou Asian Games amidst a backdrop of controversy and drama. Initially disqualified for a false start, she was allowed to take part pending a thorough post-race review. The official verdict came approximately half-an-hour after the conclusion of the race. The decision not only vindicated Jyothi, but also pushed her from third to second. It was her fourth fastest run of the year, and the eighth time she ran under 13s in 2023.

The voting lines for the 2024 awards close on Jan. 31.

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INDIA TRIUMPHS
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Akshdeep betters National record

Sports Bureau

Punjab's Akshdeep Singh broke his own year-old National record as he won the men's 20km title in race walking's Indian Open in Chandigarh on Tuesday.

Also bettering the national record was Uttarakhand's Suraj Panwar. Akshdeep finished in 1:19:38s to retain his title while Suraj clocked 1:19:44. Tamil Nadu's Servin (1:20:03) and Punjab's Arshpreet Singh (1:20:04) took the next two spots.

The top four finishers bettered the Paris Olympics qualification standard of 1:20:10s. Paramjeet Singh Bisht and Vikash Singh finished in the top 10 today. However, only three can go to Paris and the final team is expected to be decided in June. Punjab's Manju Rani won the women's 20km gold (1:33.00s) in the absence of National women's record-holder Priyanka Goswami who is now training in Aus-



Akshdeep broke his national record in the men's 20km walk.

tralia. In the U-20 category, Uttarakhand's Himanshu Kumar won the 10km title while the junior women's winner Aarti of Haryana broke the national record on her way to gold.

The results: Men's 20km: 1. Akshdeep Singh (Pun) 1:19:38s National record, OR own 1:19:55s, 2023, 2. Suraj Panwar (Utk) 1:19:44.00, 3. Servin (Tamil Nadu) 1:20:03.00. **Women's 20km:** 1. Manju Rani (Pun) 1:33:00s, 2. Payal (Utk) 1:33:28, 3. Munita Prajapati (Utk) 1:34:14. **U-20: 10km:** Boys: 1. Himanshu Kumar (Utk) 41.11s, 2. Aditya Negi (Utk) 41.12s, 3. Roshan Kumar (Jkd) 41.28. **Girls: 10km:** 1. Aarti (Har) 47:03.00 National record, OR 49:01, Mansi Negi, 2021, 2. Vaishnavi Negi (Ukd) 49:31, 3. Chakpram Naocha (Man) 51:21.

THE HINDU GROUP

ACES SPORTS QUIZ

- In which international event of the year 2023 did the Indian Shooters bag 55 Medals including 21 Gold and 6 Paris 2024 quotas?
- Ojas Pravin Deotale and Jyothi Surekha Vennam won gold in their respective categories in which sport at the 2023 Asian Games?
- Who ended India's nearly four decade-long wait for a second medal in the men's singles badminton event at the Asian Games by winning the bronze in the 2023 Asian Games?

Scan the QR code, take part in the quiz and vote for your favourite stars.
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Answer to yesterday quiz:

- AVINASH SABLE
- SUPER HEAVY WEIGHT
- SPEED SKATING

SPORTSTAR ACES
2024
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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

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▼ 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

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’