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BUSINESS AS USUAL
BY UNNY

RAJNATH SINGH TO VISIT AREA, REVIEW SITUATION

Day after torture probe, Army Chief visits Poonch: Behave in 'professional manner'

Brigadier of 13 Sector RR, CO, Company Commander moved out

AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

FOUR DAYS after a militant ambush on Army vehicles killed four Army personnel in Poonch, Army Chief General Manoj Pande reviewed the security situation in the sector on Monday and asked commanders on the ground to conduct operations in the "most professional manner".

Three local civilians were found dead after interrogations by the Army during the cordon-and-search operations to trace the militants a day later. *The Indian Express* had reported Saturday that of the eight civilians picked up by security personnel, three died and five were injured and admitted in the Government Medical College in Rajouri.

According to sources, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is expected to visit Rajouri and Poonch beginning December 27. He will review the security

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Army Chief General Manoj Pande in Poonch on Monday. *PTI*

'I am in video... they beat us, rubbed chilli powder on our wounds'

ARUN SHARMA
JAMMU, DECEMBER 25

ONE OF the men who was allegedly picked up by security forces in Poonch has told *The Indian Express* that he and the other detainees were stripped, beaten and smeared with "chilli powder on the wounds" until they lost consciousness.

Speaking from his hospital bed, Mohammad Ashraf (52) claimed he and four others were picked up by security forces last week after which "they removed our clothes and beat us with lathis and iron rods, and rubbed chilli powder on our wounds".

The civilians were allegedly picked up after four Army soldiers were killed in a militant ambush in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch on Thursday. Three civilians died allegedly during questioning, and five, including Ashraf, were admitted to Government Medical College Hospital in Rajouri on Saturday.

"I am the person in the viral video that shows a man being beaten with iron rods and lathis

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

'Court can't be placed to politically handle the Govt... the Court can't be the Opposition'

Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul's parting words: NJAC should have been tweaked to protect judiciary's predominance

APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT a weak Opposition is a "problem," and the absence of its MPs in Parliament an "important factor" in the perception of an overweening Government, Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul has made it clear that the judiciary cannot be expected to "politically handle the government." In other words, "the court cannot be the Opposition."

Justice Kaul, who retires after seven years in the apex court Tuesday, spoke to *The Indian Express* on a range of issues: from the tussle between a majority government and the judiciary to the functioning of the Collegium; the issue of granting bail to ensuring the personal liberty of a citizen.

Asked about the perception that the Supreme Court was too often giving the benefit of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

JUSTICE S K KAUL
OUTGOING SUPREME COURT JUDGE

NewsClick HR head moves plea to turn approver in UAPA case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

THE HUMAN resources head of NewsClick, Amit Chakraborty, has moved an application in a Delhi court, seeking permission to turn approver in a case filed under provisions of the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) against the news portal.

Chakraborty moved the application in the court of Special Judge Hardeep Kaur last week, seeking pardon in the case and expressing willingness to disclose information to Delhi Police, which is investigating the case.

According to procedure, Chakraborty's statement will now have to be recorded in front of a magistrate. The police will take a call on supporting his request in court after going through this statement.

NewsClick has been accused of acting with the intention to disrupt the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India and to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

As Modi skips annual summit again, Jaishankar goes to Russia for talks

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

WITH PRIME Minister Narendra Modi skipping Russia for the annual summit for the second year in a row, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday reached Moscow on a five-day visit to meet the Russian leadership.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

EXPLAINED

Signal to both sides

WHILE the PM skipping Russia — that is under US-led sanctions — is a signal to the West, Jaishankar's trip is a message to Moscow that Delhi has not abandoned its traditional strategic partner.

BACK TO INDIA

Passengers board the plane which was grounded at France's Vatry airport on suspicion of human trafficking. The flight, with 276 Indians aboard, left for Mumbai Monday. *AP* PAGE 6

MV CHEM PLUTO REACHES MUMBAI

Probe points to drone attack, deploying guided missile destroyers, says Navy

AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

SAYING THAT its preliminary assessment pointed to a drone attack on the India-bound merchant vessel, *MV Chem Pluto*, which arrived at Mumbai's outer anchorage on Monday afternoon, the Indian Navy announced the deployment of guided missile destroyers "to maintain a deterrent presence" in view of the recent attacks in the Arabian Sea.

Chem Pluto, a chemical/ oil tanker with a crew of 21 Indians and a Vietnamese, was on its way to New Mangalore from Al Jubail (Saudi Arabia) when it came under attack on Saturday, 200 nautical miles southwest of Veraval, Gujarat, leading to an explosion and fire. No casualty was reported.

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Damage caused to *MV Chem Pluto* in the drone attack. *ANI*

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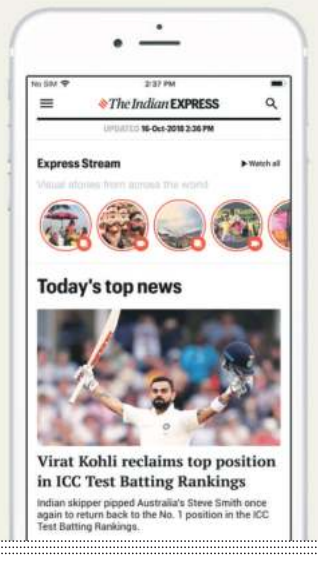

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5 LOWS FROM THE WORLD OF TECH IN 2023

There were highs, lows, and, well, a lot of drama in the tech world in 2023. Although Apple & Microsoft have seen sky-high valuations, big tech was in the spotlight for the wrong reasons. While regulatory clamped down on big tech firms continued, some used mass layoffs after being pressured by investors to scale down.

EDUCATION

NEET UG TOPPERS' TIPS

100th rank holder Ananya Mishra says she wants to help the poor after becoming a doctor

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EXPRESS AUDIO

50 shades of Christmas in India

On *3 Things*, writers Jerry Pinto and Madhulika Liddle talk about the many unique flavors of an Indian Christmas — from a village in Nagaland, to Bow Barrack in Kolkata, and from churches to Goa to even rural Jharkhand.

Ahead of Ayodhya ceremony, Sangh Parivar moves to intensify outreach

VIKAS PATHAK
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

THE CONSECRATION ("pran pratishtha") ceremony of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, scheduled for January 22 in the coming year, is set to witness the participation of about 8,000 invitees including 1,500-1,600 "eminent" guests. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and RSS Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat will address the Temple's inauguration function.

The Ram Temple Trust has invited all former Prime Ministers, all national party chiefs, Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, industrialists Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, the Dalai Lama, and film actors Amitabh Bachchan, Rajnikanth, Madhuri Dixit Nene among a legion of prominent personalities from different walks of life for the grand event.

It has also invited BJP stalwarts L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi as well as senior party leaders Uma Bharti and Vinay Katiyar — who had been the faces of the Ram Temple movement — for the occasion.

Sources in the RSS, however, say that the inauguration function would not be about Ayodhya alone, pointing out that the thrust of the Sangh Parivar's preparations is "Sabke Ram (Ram belongs to all)".

As part of this exercise, the members of the Sangh and VHP, an affiliate of the RSS, will undertake a door-to-door campaign throughout the country from January 1 to January 15 for distribution of "Akshat (rice)", which would be a symbolic invite for the people to organise gatherings in their own local temples on January 22 to mark the opening of the Ram Temple.

This outreach is not being mounted just across India but in foreign countries too, where the Sangh Parivar is also mobilising the Hindu communities to get them organise similar events in their localities on January 22.

"People are focusing on Ayodhya, but January 22 will be a much bigger programme on a national scale, with some events coming up across the globe. The local programmes that will happen in conjunction with the Ayodhya Pran Pratishtha will also go live online, giving the sense of the country and parts of the world acting in tandem with what is happening at Ayodhya," an RSS insider told *The Indian Express*.

For the BJP, the inauguration of the Ram Temple will bring to fruition a major ideological cause that it had been championing for more than three decades. It was the Ram Temple movement led by Advani, which had fuelled the BJP's rise as a leading contender for power at the national level, making it the principal challenger of the then dominant Congress.

The BJP camp feels that the Ayodhya event would send out a message in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls that besides the abrogation of Article 370, the Temple stands as another proof that the BJP has fulfilled what it promised to its core constituency despite vehement opposition from other parties.

The Temple may just be one of the issues that the BJP would highlight in its campaign for the Lok Sabha polls, slated for April-May 2024, but it has a "thematic link" with other issues, say party insiders.

Jagannath Temple to get special security battalion

SUJIT BISOYI
BHUBANESWAR, DEC 25

THE ODISHA government Monday approved the creation of a dedicated Special Security Battalion for Puri Jagannath Temple for security and crowd management.

The special security battalion will comprise around 1,200 personnel and placed under the command and control of the SP, Puri.

"The primary responsibility of the new battalion will be to ensure security to the shrine, which has been witnessing huge footfalls. The personnel will be specially trained for crowd management and tourist/devotee facilitation for ensuring a hassle free and orderly darshan by devotees," said an official.

The decision to create a separate battalion was taken based on the feedback given by chairman 5T and Nabin Odisha V K Pandian after discussion with all stakeholders, said an official statement.

According to temple administration officials, in post-Covid period, daily footfalls of devotees was estimated to be around 50,000 and it doubles and triples during the weekends and on important religious occasions. The flow of devotees is likely to increase substantially after the new heritage corridor project-Srimandira Parikrama project is opened for the public.

The Parikrama project, a 75-m free passage built around the outer walls (Meghanada Pacheri) of the shrine is aimed to ensure temple security and provide basic civic amenities to devotees. The project will be inaugurated on January 17.

Schemes of previous govt to continue: Rajasthan CM

Jaipur: Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma Monday said none of the welfare schemes launched by the previous Congress government in the state will be discontinued.

He was speaking at a function organised by the BJP to mark Good Governance Day on the birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Reacting to the allegations by the Congress that his government would discontinue the public welfare schemes launched by the previous government, Sharma said, "Congress people are saying our work, our schemes... I want to tell you that we will not stop any of the schemes."

The chief minister said free medicines will continue to be made available at government hospitals and the number of essential drugs would also be increased. Speaking at another programme in the district's Ajayrajpura area, Sharma said his government was committed to making Rajasthan a leader in public welfare. **PTI**

FROM PAGE ONE

FULL REPORTS ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Army Chief visits Poonch

situation and interact with troops and civilians in the area.

While the J&K Police has registered a First Information Report against unidentified persons for murder of the three civilians, the Indian Army has ordered a Court of Inquiry to probe the circumstances which led to the incident. The probe will also investigate the militant attack on the two Army vehicles which killed four soldiers.

In a post on X, the Army's Additional Directorate General of Public Information said, "General Manoj Pande #COAS visited #Poonch sector and was given an update on the prevalent security situation. #COAS interacted with commanders on ground, exhorted them to conduct the operations in the most professional manner and remain resolute & steadfast against all challenges." Much of the Poonch sector lies along the Line of Control.

Sources told *The Indian Express* that the Army Chief landed in Jammu, and proceeded to Dhera Ki Gali to take stock of the security situation in the area. He then went to Rajouri where he was briefed by the commanders in the chain.

General Pande subsequently addressed all officers on the operational aspects, and also asked them to be more professional in their conduct, practical in their approach, and not get swayed by emotions.

In the closed-door conference with senior commanders, Gen Pande is learnt to have expressed displeasure and directed strict action to be taken against anyone guilty of any misdemeanour, sources said. He is also learnt to have advised the senior officers to carry out a complete assessment of the area and make relevant changes in deployment, and conduct of operations, to avoid any loss of lives.

The areas of Rajouri and Poonch have seen multiple high visibility militant attacks this year. Some of these include the killing of five Army personnel in an explosion in a forested area in Rajouri in May. The previous month, on April 20, five soldiers were killed after militants ambushed their truck in Poonch.

In September, General Pande had visited forward areas along the LoC in the Rajouri sector to review operational preparedness and the security situation and interacted with troops there. Earlier, in May, General Pande and Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had visited Rajouri after a major military attack in the region.

The Indian Express had on Monday reported that a change of command at various levels is likely to take place in XVI Corps, including shifting out two senior officers from their current appointments because of lack of command and control.

According to sources in the military, three Army officers — the Brigadier heading the 13 Sector Rashtriya Rifles, the Commanding Officer of the unit concerned and a company commander have been moved out of their current roles on verbal orders.

The posting orders, sources said, are yet to be issued officially and are expected this week by which time the Court of Inquiry ordered by the Army will also be completed. This would establish if there were any lapses on the part of the Army personnel, and if they merit punishment, they said.

In the wake of the militant attack, the area is likely to see an increase in deployment with a brigade of a reserve formation being called in and/or a readjustment of troops.

• 'I am in video... they rubbed chilli powder on our wounds'

by Army personnel," Ashraf told *The Indian Express*, referring to a video that was widely shared on social media.

He said he has not been able to sleep since last Saturday due to the trauma. "Who can sleep when you have severe pain all over the body and the thoughts of torture haunt your mind the moment you close your eyes?"

From Hasbalote village in Rajouri district's Thanamandi area, Ashraf has worked as a lineman with J&K's Power Development Department since 2007, drawing a salary of Rs 9,330 per month. With that, he supports his three children — an 18-year-old daughter and two sons aged 15 and 10. His wife died on March 23 this year.

The other four admitted at the Rajouri hospital with Ashraf are Farooq Ahmed, 45, and Fazal Hussain, 50, as well as Hussain's nephews Mohammad Betab, 25, and another aged 15. They are all from the Thanamandi area.

A doctor at the hospital said all five have "soft tissue injuries" but did not elaborate further.

Ashraf said none of them can stand or even sit up properly. "They (hospital staff) take us on wheelchairs or stretchers when we have to be moved for tests or to go to the toilet," he said.

He claimed that he was picked up by security forces from his home around 9.30 am on Friday. "They took me to Manyal Gali near DKG (Dehra Ki Gali) where their colleagues were already sitting with Farooq Ahmed in a Tata Sumo. After some time, Mohammad Betab and his brother were also brought, and they all took us to their camp at DKG," he said.

"After we reached there, at 10.30 am, they switched off our mobile phones and started beating us with lathis and iron rods without saying anything," he claimed. "After some time, they removed our clothes and again started beating us with lathis and iron rods, and rubbed chilli powder on our wounds until we fell unconscious."

The 15-year-old, who is studying in class 10, is admitted in the same room at the Rajouri hospital. He claimed that during questioning, security personnel asked him whether he had provided food to militants and referred to a feast that was held at his house eight days prior to the militant attack.

"I told them that the feast was organised for the marriage of my brother, Betab," he said. He alleged that after these questions, he was beaten along with the others.

Betab is a labourer who worked in Kashmir, and had come home nearly two months ago for his wedding, which took place on December 15.

"I had planned to stay at home with my wife for around a month before going back to work in Kashmir," he said.

He also alleged that he was beaten up: "There is no skin left on my upper body."

He said he was picked up along with his brother and uncle Fazal Hussain by a police party from their home in Thanamandi on Thursday evening, just hours after the militant attack. The police allowed them to return home after three hours, telling them to report to Thanamandi police station the next day, he said.

However, on their way to the police station on Friday morning, "Army personnel called us on our mobile asking to first visit them at Manyal Gali. There, they took us into a vehicle and brought us to their post at DKG Top," Betab said.

The Army PRO has denied any knowledge about the five men admitted to the Rajouri hospital.

• As PM skips annual summit, Jaishankar goes to Russia

Shortly after his arrival, Jaishankar tweeted, "Arrived in Moscow. Look forward to my engagements."

India and Russia have an annual summit at the leaders' level, where the Indian Prime Minister and the Russian President visit each other's country every alternate year. So far, 21 annual summits have taken place alternatively in India and Russia. The last summit was held on December 6, 2021 in New Delhi, during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit.

After the war in Ukraine broke out, Modi did not travel to Russia for the annual summit last year, and Putin could not come for the G20 summit in Delhi in September this year.

While it was the Indian Prime Minister's turn to visit Russia for the annual summit, the visit has not taken place this year as well. No reasons have been cited so far, and "scheduling" has been the key challenge, sources said.

Jaishankar, who started his diplomatic career from Russia, has now gone there to meet the Russian leaders. During his visit, he will also travel to St. Petersburg.

"The time-tested India-Russia partnership has remained stable and resilient and continues to be characterized by the spirit of the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in New Delhi on Sunday.

The minister will meet Russia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and Trade Denis Manturov to discuss matters related to economic engagement. He will also hold talks with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov for discussion on bilateral, multilateral and international issues.

"Focusing on the strong people-to-people and cultural ties between our two countries, the External Affairs Minister's programme will include engagements in Moscow and St. Petersburg," the MEA said.

The two sides are expected to discuss various aspects of the bilateral relations, especially in areas of trade, energy, defence and connectivity.

India has a longstanding and wide-ranging cooperation with Russia in the field of defence. India-Russia military technical cooperation has evolved from a buyer-seller framework to one involving joint research, development and production of advanced defence technologies and systems.

India has a huge dependence on Russia for defence supplies — in the range of 60 to 70 per cent — although Delhi is trying to diversify its sources.

Since the Russia-Ukraine war, India has also been buying Russian oil at discounted prices, and that has helped it to cushion the inflationary pressure on the oil prices in the country.

While India has not yet explicitly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it has condemned the Bucha massacre as well as expressed concern at the nuclear rhetoric by the Russian leaders.

Putin has been appreciative of the Indian position several times, and praised Modi's stance — in the face of western pressure — publicly. Delhi has underlined that the crisis must be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue. Modi had, in September last year, told Putin that "this is not the era of war".

Russia is also an important partner for India in the area of peaceful use of nuclear energy. Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) is a flagship project between India and Russia in this sphere. KNPP Units 1 & 2 have already become operational and construction of Units 3 & 4 and 5 & 6 is going on.

The cooperation in the field of peaceful uses of outer space dates back to about four decades. The two countries are cooperating closely under India's first human spaceflight program "Gaganyaan".

Officials said that all these issues are expected to be discussed during Jaishankar's meetings.

• 'Court can't be placed to politically handle the Govt'

doubt to the government which has a strong majority in Parliament, Justice Kaul said: "A weak Opposition is also a problem. The absence of legislators from the Opposition in the Parliament is an important factor. Maybe in public perception, it is their inability to politically handle the government. Now, the court cannot be placed to politically handle the government… The court cannot be the Opposition. The judiciary is a check and balance, but to say, look, the government was doing this wrong and now, you have to do something about it — is wrong."

On how the judiciary responds to the government with a strong mandate, Justice Kaul said that since the 1950s, every majority government has been a "little tough." "It is perceived that this government is more aggressive but let us look at whether this government is more aggressive or whether any majority government becomes aggressive," he said.

Justice Kaul, whose last working day was December 22, was the second-senior most judge of the Supreme Court. A judge of the Delhi High Court, he was appointed to the SC in February 2017. He was part of the SC Collegium that dealt with judicial appointments.

On judicial appointments, Justice Kaul said that the Narendra Modi government's 2015 push to overhaul the process of appointments — the National Judicial Appointments Commission — must have been given a chance before it was struck down by the Supreme Court.

"The NJAC, I believe, was finished too suddenly and did not get a chance. One method could have been to keep the challenge (before the Supreme Court) pending, see how this would work and then maybe tweak it," he said.

'Bail is one thing that I feel very strongly about which is why I have talked to district courts about it. Wrongly granting bail is dishonest. Not granting bail is another nature of dishonesty... It is intellectual dishonesty'

However, he added that while he "may not be a votary" of the (collegium) system, the government must follow it since it is "still law."

Flagging that the "troublesome" part of the NJAC was the presence of six people which would force a veto against the judiciary, Justice Kaul said: "My own view is that the Chief Justice of India should have had a casting vote. It would have given a predominance to the judiciary."

He said that the NJAC could have been balanced if the judiciary's "predominance was protected." Politically, as well, he said, it could have "possibly been accepted if it had been tweaked rather than set aside." Kaul added that judges who were part of the bench "later on said that it should have been not so (set aside)."

Justice Kaul has been a votary of reform in the bail jurisprudence and is known for his liberal stance in granting bail.

"Bail is one thing that I feel very strongly about which is why I have talked to district courts about it. Wrongly granting bail is dishonest. Not granting bail is another nature of dishonesty… It is intellectual dishonesty. Keeping someone in custody during prosecution cannot be a substitute for a conviction," he said.

Disagreeing with the government's view that the bar for granting bail in serious economic offences must be higher, Justice Kaul said that there cannot be an alternate criminal justice system.

"To say that, well, the jurisprudence of bail for economic offences has to be totally different from the jurisprudence of bail otherwise does not gel with me. Sure, economic offences affect the society at large, but crime against the body also affects society at large. Are they completely different things when these offences also carry life sentences?" he said.

• NewsClick HR head moves plea

cause "disaffection" against India.

In August, the Delhi Police Special Cell registered an FIR under sections of the UAPA and the Indian Penal Code against NewsClick founder-editor Prabir Purkayastha and Chakraborty. Both were arrested in October.

NewsClick, in a statement, had termed the allegations as "absurd" and said the proceedings initiated against it were "a blatant attempt to muzzle the free and independent press in India".

Among the allegations in the FIR against Purkayastha were attempts to show Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh as "not parts of India", discrediting the government's fight against Covid, funding the farmers' agitation, and "putting up a spirited defence of legal cases" against Chinese telecom companies such as Xiaomi and Vivo.

Purkayastha and Chakraborty were arrested following day-long searches at more than 50 locations linked to the news portal, its employees and contributors. After the searches, the police said 46 "suspects" had been questioned and their "digital devices" seized.

In its remand application, the Special Cell stated that there were "secret inputs" that "foreign funds in crores have been infused illegally into India by Indian and foreign entities inimical to India in pursuance of conspiracy with the intention to disrupt sovereignty and territorial integrity of India, to cause disaffection against India and to threaten the unity, integrity, security of India".

The Indian Express had reported earlier that the Delhi Police had moved an application before a Delhi court to protect the identities of five "potential witnesses" in its probe against NewsClick and Purkayastha.

• Probe points to drone attack, deploying guided missile destroyers: Navy

The Navy dispatched a P8I maritime patrol aircraft and a warship, and the Coast Guard sent an offshore patrol vessel and a Dornier maritime surveillance aircraft to assist the Liberian-flagged commercial ship.

While there was some confusion over whether the attack was a missile or drone strike, the Navy, in a statement issued late Monday, said an analysis of the area of attack and debris found on the ship pointed towards a drone attack.

"The Indian Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal team inspected the vessel to make a preliminary assessment of the type and nature of attack," it said. "However, further forensic and technical analysis will be required to establish the vector of attack, including type and amount of explosive used."

"Considering the recent spate of attacks in the Arabian Sea, Indian Navy has deployed guided missile destroyers INS Mormugao, INS Kochi and INS Kolkata in various areas to maintain a deterrent presence," the Navy said in its statement.

According to the Navy, long-range maritime reconnaissance P8I aircraft are being regularly tasked to maintain domain awareness.

"Western Naval Command's Maritime Operations Centre is actively monitoring the situation in close coordination with Coast Guard and all concerned agencies," it said.

The Navy said a joint investigation by various agencies has begun.

In Mumbai, a joint team of the police, ATS (Anti Terrorism Squad), IB (Intelligence Bureau), Navy and Coast Guard inspected Chem Pluto on its arrival. "The Indian Navy is investigating the matter and as they asked us to assist, a team from Yellow Gate police station was sent," a senior Mumbai Police officer said.

"A lot depends on whether the location where the vessel was targeted is closer to Mumbai or Gujarat, following which the investigation shall be handed over to the respective state's police station," said a Mumbai Police officer, adding, "the captain of the ship will be able to confirm this."

"MV Chem Pluto has been cleared for further operation by her company-in-charge at Mumbai," the Navy said, adding that the ship was scheduled to undergo mandatory checks by the various inspecting authorities before undertaking Ship to Ship (STS) transfer of cargo.

This would likely be followed by docking and repairs of the damaged parts.

The incident came amid a series of UAV and missile attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on commercial ships in the Red Sea region, especially those bound for Israel, since October when the Israel-Hamas war began.

A Gabon-flagged commercial oil tanker, MV Sai Baba, on its way to India with 25 crew members, all of them Indians, also came under drone attack in the southern Red Sea on Sunday, along with another Norwegian-flagged ship. There were no casualties reported.

The US Central Command said Sunday's attack was carried out by the Houthis. On Saturday, it said Chem Pluto was hit by a drone launched from Iran.

Because of the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, many shipping companies are rerouting their cargo vessels through longer routes leading to higher fuel costs.

— With inputs from SAGAR RAJPUT, Mumbai

ALMOST ZERO VISIBILITY AT AIRPORT MONDAY MORNING

Densest fog so far this winter in Delhi, flight operations severely hit

ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND & UPASIKA SINGHAL
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

DELHI WITNESSED this winter's densest fog cover on Monday with visibility dropping to 0 metres at the Indira Gandhi International Airport and affecting flight operations.

Visibility at the airport remained at around 0 metres from 5.30 am to around 9.30 am, improving gradually after that, according to India Meteorological Department (IMD) scientists.

According to the Delhi Airport website, nine international flights and eight domestic flights flying out of Delhi and 11 flights flying into Delhi were delayed Monday morning.

The nine international flights heading from Delhi to Hong Kong, Paris, Newark, Sharjah, Bangkok, Dubai, Dhaka and Doha and eight domestic flights heading from Delhi to Ranchi, Patna, Mumbai, Bhubaneswar, Cochin, Ahmedabad and Port Blair were delayed on Monday, the site mentioned.

Additionally, 11 domestic flights arriving from Raipur, Guwahati, Jaisalmer, Mangalore, Chandigarh, Patna, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Cochin to Delhi, along with 11 international flights arriving from Melbourne, Dhaka, Phuket, Tokyo, Sydney, Sharjah, Hong Kong, San Francisco and Dubai to Delhi were delayed due to the fog conditions.

One flight from Delhi to Jaipur was cancelled, the site mentioned.

The heavy fog resulted in seven flights flying into Delhi being diverted to Jaipur and one to Ahmedabad.

At Safdarjung, the city's base weather station, visibility was better at around 200 m at 8.30 am. With 'dense' to 'very dense' fog expected on Tuesday and Wednesday as well, the IMD has issued an 'orange' alert for the city, which is a warning to be prepared.

When visibility is less than 50m, the IMD categorises the fog cover as 'very dense', and visibility of 199 m to 50 m is categorised as 'dense' fog.

Till Monday, the national capital had seen visibility drop to a low of 50 m at Palam on December 2.

Other parts of northwest India also recorded very dense fog on Monday, with visibility dropping to 0 metres at the airports at Amritsar, Agra, and Jaisalmer.

IMD scientist Kuldeep Srivastava said that the passing of a western disturbance helped bring moisture that aided fog formation. Additionally, winds over the city were light in the morning hours. "With faster winds, mixing takes place rapidly and fog will not form. There are a few factors that came together to contribute to the very dense fog cover on Monday. The presence of a significant amount of moisture and clear skies helped – when the sky is clear, temperature tends to rise during the daytime, and in the early hours, the earth radiates this energy back to the atmosphere, contributing to the formation of fog," he added.

Fog forms when water vapour condenses with temperatures dipping at night and in the early hours of the morning since colder air cannot hold as much moisture as warm air.

The minimum temperature early Monday morning was 7.8 degrees Celsius, close to the normal for this time of the year.

RK Jenamani, scientist, IMD, explained that local features at Palam may have contributed to the area having more moisture, and hence, denser fog than Safdarjung.

"Sometimes, there are local features that contribute to denser fog formation in some areas. Palam usually sees more fog hours than Safdarjung. In city areas, temperatures tend to be higher and moisture supply may be restricted because of concrete areas and roads," he said.

While moderate to dense fog is expected on Thursday, shallow to moderate fog is likely on Friday, going by the IMD forecast.

The minimum temperature is likely to remain at around 7 to 9 degrees over the next six days.

Dense fog engulfs New Delhi on Monday. The minimum temperature was 7.8 degrees Celsius. *Praveen Khanna*

Total number of delayed flights on Monday

According to flightradar24 - an online portal that tracks flights around the world in real-time - 248 flights arriving in Delhi were delayed and 8 were cancelled, and 430 flights leaving Delhi were delayed and 21 were cancelled till Monday evening.

A total of 678 flights were delayed and 29 were cancelled.

Earlier this month, the Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) unveiled its fog preparedness strategy for the IGI Airport to ensure secure operations amid challenging reduced visibility conditions.

Car hits divider in Noida, man on back seat dies, 2 injured

Driver was reversing car at high speed when it collided: Police

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NOIDA, DECEMBER 25

ONE PERSON died and two, including a woman, suffered serious injuries after their car collided with a divider in Noida on Monday. The accident took place at around 3am, near Mayur roundabout in Sector-126 police station area.

The person who died, has been identified as Tushar Chaudhary, a resident of Lucknow and an employee of an insurance company in Delhi.

Shubham, a resident of Agra, and Sagorika, a resident of Greater Noida and cousin of the deceased, are critically injured and are being treated in the Jaypee Hospital. One of them is in the ICU.

Police said that three of them, who were out for dinner, were searching for a place to eat. When they reached near Mayur roundabout, the car went out of control, bounced off the pavement and hit the roof of a nearby public bathroom on the roadside.

"There was dense fog at that time. While searching for a place to eat, Shubham took his car back to turn it. Since the speed of the car was very high, it collided with the divider. After crossing it, due to the impact of the collision, the car hit the roof of the toilet and overturned. The airbags in the front seats were deployed. But the person sitting in the back seat suffered serious injuries and died," said a senior Noida police official.

Police said that Shubham is a software engineer working in Greater Noida.

"Police immediately acted on the information of the accident. We have not received any complaint. If victim's family files any complaint, we will look into it. Prima facie, there appears to be no crime in the case," said the official.

The accident took place at around 3 am, near Mayur roundabout in Sector-126 police station area. *Express*

Wanted in 2020 rape, man nabbed on arrival from Bahrain, flees from custody

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

A MAN ACCUSED in a rape case fled from the custody of the CISF at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport last week, said officials on Monday.

The accused, identified as Amandeep Singh, had arrived at Delhi airport from Bahrain on December 20.

As there was a lookout circular (LOC) issued against him, he was stopped at the immigration counter and then handed over to the CISF personnel deployed there.

The man is accused in a rape case lodged in Ludhiana and had been on the run since April 2020, the police said

Officers said the personnel were going to hand him over to the Delhi Police when the accused fled. He jumped from counter number 33 in the arrival section of the immigration department and managed to escape, said the police.

Senior officers said one of the security personnel escorting him was in the washroom at the time of the incident.

Singh is an accused in a rape case lodged in Punjab's Ludhiana. The police said he had been on the run since April 2020 and left the country.

A fresh case under Section 224 (resistance or obstruction by a person to his lawful apprehension) of the Indian Penal Code has been lodged at the IGI Airport police station in connection with the incident.

DCP (IGI airport) Devesh Kumar Mahla confirmed the incident and said teams have been formed to nab the accused.

Noida resident arrested for 'objectionable comment' on Modi, Shah, Yogi in viral video

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NOIDA, DECEMBER 25

GAUTAM BUDDHA Nagar police Monday arrested a 49-year-old man for allegedly making inappropriate comments on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

A man's video had gone viral on social media after which the police took suo moto cognizance and arrested the man. The accused has been identified as Rampat Yadav, a resident of Hoshiarpur village in Sector-51, Noida.

The video shows a person from behind the camera seeking his views on the PM and the BJP government. In his response, the accused person allegedly makes inappropriate comments on the leaders.

The video that went viral on social media shows a person from behind the camera seeking his views on the PM and the BJP government. In his response, the accused allegedly makes inappropriate comments on the leaders.

"The video had gone viral on social media following which we took suo motu cognizance of it. The accused was identified and arrested from Sector 49. The accused was charged under Section 505b (statements conducting public mischief-with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, fear or alarm to the public, or to any section of the public whereby any person may be induced to commit an offence against the State or against the public tranquility) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 67 (Punishment for publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form) of the Information Technology Act, 2000," said a senior Noida police official.

The officer, further, said that the video was shot around a couple of months back and the police is verifying the affiliation of the accused, with any political party.

The accused is in the transport business.

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CBC-49107/12/0010/2324

PUBLIC NOTICE
General Public is hereby informed that State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA), Haryana, Bays No. 55 - 58, Paryatan Bhawan, Sector-2, Panchkula, Haryana vide their file no. SEIAA/HR/2023/395 and EC Identification No. EC23B038HR127466 dated: 08.12.2023 has accorded the "Environment Clearance" to M/s SS Group Private Limited having its Reg. office at; SS House, Plot No -77, Sector-44, Gurugram, Haryana – 122003 for Proposed Commercial Colony in the Revenue Estate of Village – Badha, Sector – 90, Gurugram, Haryana by M/s SS Group Pvt. Ltd and Others.
General Public is further informed that copy of said Environment Clearance Letter is available in the office of Haryana State Pollution Control Board, Panchkula and State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA), Panchkula, Haryana.
Place: Gurugram | Dated: 26.12.2023
M/s SS Group Private Limited
Reg. office at; SS House, Plot No -77, Sector-44, Gurugram, Haryana – 122003

DTU	IGI AIRPORT (T3)	MANDIR MARG	SIRIFORT
Very Poor	Very Poor	Very Poor	Very Poor
363 AQI PM 10	347 AQI PM 2.5	378 AQI PM 2.5	385 AQI PM 2.5

0 – 500 (At 5 pm)

0-50 Good | 51-100 Satisfactory | 101-200 Moderate | 201-300 Poor | 301-400 Very Poor | 401-500 Severe

SKYWATCH

FORECAST: December 26
Partly cloudy sky. Dense to very dense fog in the morning.
AQI: Very poor

MAX: 24 (3.3° C above normal) | MIN: 07 (0.5° C below normal)

BRIEFLY

'Delhi seeing 3-4 Covid cases daily'

New Delhi: Delhi Health minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Monday said that the national capital is seeing three to four Covid cases on average every day, and asserted that the city is well equipped to fight the virus resurgence. "We have been conducting tests and been receiving on an average three to four cases per day which is less than even one per cent. We have conducted mock drills and made all necessary arrangements," Bharadwaj told reporters on the sidelines of an event. **PTI**

Man sells properties 'attached by police', held

Noida: Gautam Buddha Nagar police Sunday arrested a person for allegedly selling and renting out properties attached by the police under Gangster Act proceedings, officials said on Monday. Police said that the accused is facing at least eight criminal cases including attempt to murder. **ENS**

OFFICE COMPROMISED: KUMAR; BHARADWAJ HITS BACK

Chief Secy, minister spar over report in Burari hospital case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

Kumar (L) has proposed suspension of Bharadwaj's staff for allegedly passing official notes by the minister to the AAP

DELHI CHIEF Secretary has accused the office of Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj of being "politically compromised", and has proposed the suspension of the minister's personal secretary for allegedly passing official notes by the minister to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar made the remarks in the Action Taken Report (ATR) in the Burari Hospital sexual harassment case.

Kumar, in the report, attached a screenshot of a post by the AAP's X (formerly Twitter) handle and said that it was made six hours before he received the directions to file a report in the matter on his email at 10.15 pm on Sunday.

The AAP handle, he said, had already posted the note at 4.15 pm.

"This becomes more important when the Hon'ble Minister is asking for an ATR within 6 hours from the undersigned," he said.

Bharadwaj, in turn, accused Kumar of "leaking" the report to the media, adding it raised doubts about his political neutrality.

The matter, however, escalated with Kumar proposing the suspension of Bharadwaj's secretary, and initiating "major penalty proceedings" against him for "engaging in political activities", to the National Capital Civil Service Authority (NCCSA).

Since the passage of the GNCTD (Amendment) Act in August this year, the matters of transfers and posting of officers in Delhi government are decided by the authority, of which the Chief Minister, Chief Secretary and Principal Secretary (Home) are members.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has, in the past, called the meetings of the authority a "farce" since the bureaucrats are in a majority in the three-member body.

Kumar, who was to retire from service in November, was given an extension of six months as the Delhi Chief Secretary by the Centre. The move was opposed by the AAP government in the Supreme Court, which ruled that granting extension to the Chief Secretary "cannot be construed to be violative of law".

The latest matter relates to the sexual harassment complaint of a woman, who was working as housekeeping staff on contract basis at the Burari Government Hospital, against her supervisors. An FIR in the matter was registered on December 19.

On Sunday, Bharadwaj had directed the Chief Secretary to form a committee to probe the allegations and submit an ATR within six hours.

The report stated that an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) formed by the health secretary and Medical Director of Burari Hospital had terminated the contract of the four housekeeping supervisors accused of sexual harassment by women workers and had requested the Delhi Police to inquire into the matter expeditiously.

While Bharadwaj, earlier on Monday, said that he had not received the ATR, he later alleged that the report was leaked by the office of the senior bureaucrat to the media.

"It is very surprising that the Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar's office leaked the ATR to the media. This raises doubts about the political neutrality of CS Naresh Kumar and strict disciplinary action should be taken against him and officers working with him for leaking the report…" a statement released by Bharadwaj said.

He also asked the Delhi Commission for Women chairperson, Swati Maliwal, to look into the matter as the ATR "contains the report of ICC".

"This ICC report, which has been shared widely by the CS office with the media, will also prejudice the police investigation which is at a very nascent stage. This will help the men who are accused of sexual harassment and asking for sexual favours from poor contractual women workers," Bharadwaj said.

Notably, the ATR contains the names of ICC members and mentions the names of the accused. However, it does not disclose the identity of the complainants.

Draw up plan to regularise unauthorised colonies in a month: L-G to officials

UPASIKA SINGHAL
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

FAR FROM TARGET

1,731	40-50 Lakh	8-10 Lakh	4 Lakh
unauthorised colonies in Delhi	no. of residents in such colonies	registrations required	registrations done

DELHI LIEUTENANT Governor (L-G) VK Saxena has asked officials to draw up the entire plan for regularising unauthorised colonies in the capital within a month. Besides, he has asked them to complete the regularisation work a year before the Parliament's set deadline of 2026.

Saxena gave the directions to officials in a meeting held last week in the wake of the recent Parliamentary approval to GNCTD Laws (Special Provisions) Act, 2023.

The L-G highlighted that prolonged challenges due to ambiguity in the boundaries of unauthorised colonies, repeated extension of cut- off dates, and uncertainty in slum clusters had prompted the formulation of PM-UDAY and PMAY Schemes in 2019. Noting that the onset of Covid pandemic had hindered operations, Saxena expressed surprise at the delay in implementation of the schemes, especially since the enactment of various versions of the Act has been in operation since December 2006.

The remarks were made during a high-level meeting chaired by the L-G on Saturday which saw key officials from the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Public Works Department (PWD), and Delhi Department of Urban Development in attendance.

With the regularisation and rehabilitation issues incorporated into the Master Plan for Delhi (MPD-2041), Saxena urged officials to provide specific timelines for complete implementation of PM-UDAY, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), and the Land Pooling Policy of the DDA.

Saxena directed officials to develop a concrete, time-bound plan for the registration, verification, and regularisation of unauthorised colonies, emphasising the need for a simplified and hassle-free process. He sternly warned against any negligence or corruption in this matter.

Earlier this month, during a debate in the Lok Sabha over extending protection to unauthorised colonies for another three years, Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri had noted that only 4 lakh registrations for regularisation have taken place in Delhi. According to estimates, a total of 8 to 10 lakh registrations were needed to complete regularisation.

CRACKS IN COMPLEX FOR JUDICIAL STAFF

PWD orders audit of Rohini buildings, FIR against contractor

GAYATHRI MANI
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

Department has also ordered show-cause notice against PWD engineers who executed the work

FOLLOWING COMPLAINTS of visible distress and cracks, and overall poor condition of the Rohini Court Judicial Officers Residential Complex, the Public Works Department (PWD) has ordered structural audit of the buildings. Besides, it has ordered strict action, including registration of FIR, against the contractor and blacklisting them from the PWD. The department has also ordered show cause notice against PWD engineers who executed the work.

According to an inspection report, there was visible distress at various places, and cracks had developed all across the three towers, parts of which were continuously falling on residents. Due to the poor condition of one of the buildings, a resident got injured after debris fell on him, rendering him bed-ridden for last three months, the report further stated.

Special Secretary, PWD, conducted an inspection of the premises on December 21.

As per the report, "The building plaster had developed cracks and the construction material was falling off from various places, which is causing a major hazard to life and public property. The flooring of various quarters was swollen and breaking in the upward direction, the RCC (Reinforced Cement Concrete) portion covering the columns, beams, chajjas and balconies was continuously eroding and falling down, exposing the reinforcement which also seemed corroded."

Officials said the reinforcement seemed visibly weak and swollen at places. The basement, which was being used for parking, was structurally losing its strength and exposed parts of beams pointed at the usage of low-quality construction material, they added.

The PWD also pointed out that the building had started to deteriorate within six months of its construction a few years back.

Further, noting that the Residents' Welfare Association (RWA) had raised the matter several times but the department did not take any action, the PWD has directed the Chief Engineer concerned to conduct a structural audit and submit the draft report by January 30, 2024.

In addition, the AHC, Vigilance, has been asked to issue show cause notices to the engineers concerned, including the SE, EE, AE and JE, who "executed the sub-standard work and paid the contractor duly". The order stated that the engineers will be asked to furnish an explanation following which major disciplinary proceedings, including suspension, along with recovery proceedings could be initiated.

SOAKED IN FESTIVITY

Devotees outside the Sacred Heart Cathedral on the occasion of Christmas, in New Delhi Monday. *Amit Mehra*

Nadda, Sachdeva call upon Sacred Heart Cathedral, extend Christmas greetings

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

BJP president J P Nadda, Vice President Baijayant Jay Panda, and Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva among others.

BJP NATIONAL president Jagat Prakash Nadda, Vice President Baijayant Jay Panda, and Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva among others visited the Sacred Heart Cathedral on the occasion of Christmas Monday.

Extending greetings to the citizens following the visit, the BJP national president said, "We all came here to seek blessings on Christmas…we all know that the life of Lord Jesus is a lesson for all…today is a day to remember his teachings and sacrifice for harmony among humanity and for the development of all."

The Delhi BJP president said the visit was in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas" vision.

"The PM has, on several occasions, underlined the BJP's inclusive approach towards all Indians, irrespective of any purported divisions, and that was the basis of our partaking in the celebrations of our Christian brethren on the big day," Sachdeva said.

Major bureaucratic reshuffle expected as PM to preside over chief secretaries' meet

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

PM Modi will preside over the three-day conference that will kick off tomorrow.

IN AN exercise which is expected to impact several key Delhi government departments, the Centre is likely to effect a significant bureaucratic reshuffle in the city over the coming days.

Sources said appointments on "significant posts" in departments under the Delhi government as well as the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) among others would be part of the rejig, which is expected towards the end of the month.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to preside over the 3rd National Conference of Chief Secretaries (CS) in the capital which, sources said, had held back the exercise so far. The conference will be held between December 27 and 29.

According to sources, the reshuffle is also likely to have a ripple effect on appointments in the Union Territories (UTs) of Puducherry and Chandigarh – which has been functioning without an Adviser to the Administrator, a post considered equivalent to that of the CS of states – since 1988-batch IAS officer Dharampal retired in late October.

Likely the last exercise of its kind before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the reshuffle, sources said, will see the transfer and posting of several senior Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers of the AGMUT or central cadre. The rejig is part of a larger exercise, which has been necessitated by the recent retirement of several senior IAS officers across the cadre which presides over appointments in Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram and the UTs.

In addition to the Adviser to the Administrator of Chandigarh, Dharampal, Delhi Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar, of the same batch and cadre, and J&K's Chief Secretary Arun Kumar Mehta were scheduled to retire by November-end.

While the tenure of Delhi's CS – a matter which reached the Supreme Court – was finally extended for a period of six months by the Centre, Mehta was replaced by 1989-batch AGMUT cadre IAS officer Atal Dulloo, the likelihood of which was reported by *The Indian Express* on October 25.

While Delhi and J&K got senior officers to helm their respective administrations, the Centre had not named Dharampal's successor in Chandigarh where the additional charge of Adviser has been held by 2000-batch Haryana cadre IAS officer Nitin Yadav since his predecessor's superannuation – which was likely to be factored in in the reshuffle.

Transport dept cancels licence of Zoomcar over violation of rules

GAYATHRI MANI
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

Firm is accused of operating private vehicles for commercial purposes, in violation of Rent a Cab scheme, 1989. *Archive*

THE DELHI transport department has recently cancelled the licence of Zoomcar – a cab-renting platform popular among Delhi residents for outstation travels, including the hills — for operating private vehicles for commercial purposes, in violation of Rent a Cab scheme, 1989.

According to officials, Zoomcar India Private Limited was running a scheme as part of which it was aiding transactions between private car owners and consumers in violation of rules, which require cab-renting companies to maintain at least 50 cabs of their own.

According to officials, the department received a complaint earlier this year regarding the alleged violations of rules. In May, the department issued a show cause notice to the company and asked it to explain and furnish its reply within a period of 10 days. However, the company did not reply to the notice.

According to the document, a copy of which is with *The Indian Express*, "In a violations to the Rental Cab Services scheme, M/s Zoomcar India Pvt Ltd adopted a scheme known as Zoomcar Host Services, which provides support for the transaction of private car between the hosts and lessees i.e, an agreement between the vehicle owner and the consumer, and conveniently kept itself out of agreement..."

It further stated: "...Whereas, Zoomcar itself is controlling the entire transactions from end to end between the private car owner wishing to rent out his car and a consumer looking to hire such a vehicle, and is actively facilitating the same between the vehicle owner and the lessee."

The order, undersigned by the special commissioner, transport, Shahzad Alam also stated that the said act of Zoomcar is a "sheer violation of sub clause (vii) of clause 5 of Rent a Cab Scheme 1989, which stipulate that the applicant maintains not less than 50 Motor Cabs of which 50% are air conditioned and duly covered by permit issued under the MV Act... under which comprehensive insurance and fitness certificate is mandatory under the provisions of the same act..."

Citing several other sections of MV Act, the transport department further said, "The private cars registered for private use are restricted to operate under the Rent a Cab Scheme...and thus M/s Zoomcar India Pvt. Ltd...inviting private registered car owner to have an agreement with the customers directly... is tantamount to committing violations of several sub clauses and sections of MV Act, and also sections of Delhi Motor Vehicle Taxation Act, 1962."

On the company not responding to the show cause notice, Alam said in his order: "This shows the licence holder did not intend to submit any reply in his defence and indirectly accepted the allegation as alleged in the notice. Thus, action is invited."

Officials said that keeping in view all the facts, the transport department has reached to the conclusion that the licence holder has committed a "grave misconduct". Thus, the department has decided to cancel the licence issued to Zoomcar with immediate effect, they added.

Further, Zoomcar has also been directed to surrender its original licence with immediate effect.

Officials said that Zoomcar was first issued the licence to operate in Delhi on November 22, 2014 with the validity up to November 21, 2019. Subsequently, the licence was renewed till November, 2024.

Zoomcar India Private Limited refused to comment on the matter.

FIR after hotelier gets extortion call from man claiming to be Goldy Brar

New Delhi: A South Delhi-based hotelier has alleged that he received multiple extortion calls from unknown person claiming to be Canada-based fugitive Goldy Brar who threatened him to vacate his property and shut it down. The Delhi Police has registered an FIR against unknown persons. An enquiry has revealed that the calls were made from a number with UK country code.

Complainant Bharat Sehrawat, owner of Impress Hotel, alleged the accused called him multiple times on December 18 and 20. **ENS**

DELHI CONFIDENTIAL

CLOSURE, CAUSE

THE ORISSA High Court has granted divorce to Biju Janata Dal MP Anubhav Mohanty from his actor wife Varsha Priyadarshini, ending a long and bitter legal battle. Earlier this year, a Cuttack family court had rejected the actor-politician's divorce petition. Now that the divorce has been granted, Mohanty most likely will start groundwork for the electoral battle next year. Also, he is set to take up the cause of harassed men, it is learnt.

LETTER OF GRATITUDE

AFTER THE BJP reached out to the Christian community on Christmas on Monday, party's Muslim women workers on Tuesday will hand over a letter to district magistrates across Uttar Pradesh, expressing gratitude to PM Narendra Modi for the welfare schemes aimed at benefitting them, and also for banning the practice of triple talaq. The letter wishes to see "Modi bhai jaan" as Prime Minister for the third term in 2024.

STAKING CLAIM

THE COMMUNIST Party of India (CPI), which had last won a Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh in 1991 and an Assembly seat in 1996, has decided to make a claim on three Lok Sabha seats in the state as a constituent of the INDIA bloc. In its two-day meeting that concluded on Sunday, party's state council has identified Ghosi, Ghazipur and Banda seats. The party will propose this when negotiations for seat-sharing begin with the Congress, SP, and RLD. In 1991, the CPI had won the Ghazipur Lok Sabha seat and in 1996, it won the Ghazipur Assembly seat.

PM hails Christians' role, says Christ's values 'guiding light'

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

ON THE occasion of Christmas on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India "proudly acknowledges" the contribution of the Christian community — from its role in India's freedom struggle to its "active participation" in social service.

In an interaction with members of the community at his residence here, Modi said he had "a very old, very close, very warm relations" with the Christian community. "When I was Gujarat CM, I used to frequently interact with the Christian community... Maninagar, from where I used to contest polls, has a large (Christian) population and due to this, I had a natural rapport," he said.

"The Christian community has played an important role in the freedom movement. Many thinkers and leaders of the Christian community were involved in the freedom struggle. Gandhiji had said that the Non-Cooperation Movement was conceived under the patronage of Sushil Kumar Rudra, principal of St Stephen's College," Modi said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with members of the Christian community at his residence on Monday. *PTI*

"The Christian community has continued to play an important role in giving direction to society. It actively participates in social service, and is always at the forefront of serving the poor and the deprived. Even today, across India, Christian institutions are making a huge contribution in important areas like education and healthcare," he said. "On the occasion of Christmas... India proudly acknowledges the contribution of the Christian community."

"Christmas is the day when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ... Jesus lived the values of compassion and service. He worked to create a society which is inclusive and in which there is justice for all. These values are like a guiding light in our country's development journey," he said.

Discussing the target of making India a developed nation by 2047, and the Fit India movement, the PM urged community leaders to raise awareness on these issues.

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

Anju Bobby lauds Modi: 'I am seeing a lot of changes'

New Delhi: Praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi for celebrating sports, former athlete Anju Bobby George on Monday took a swipe at previous governments and said she was in the "wrong era".

Speaking at a Christmas programme organised at the PM's residence, George said: "As a sportsperson, I was here for almost 25 years and I'm seeing a lot of changes. When I got India's first global medal 20 years ago, even my department was not ready to give me a promotion... But after Neeraj (Chopra) got a medal, I have seen the changes... —the way we are celebrating... I envy them because I was in the wrong era."

She said: "Women empowerment is not just a word now. Every Indian girl is ready to dream and they know their dreams will come true." George won the bronze medal in long jump at the 2003 World Championship in Athletics in Paris. **ENS**

Women participation in NREGS continues to rise, 59% this fiscal

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

WOMEN PARTICIPATION in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was the highest in 10 financial years, with the proportion of women person-days in the total touching 59.25% till December 24 during the current financial year 2023-24, shows official data.

The rates of participation of women in the MGNREGS, defined as women person-days out of the total in percentage, stood at 57.47% in 2022-23 and 54.82% in 2021-22. It was 53.19% during 2020-21 at the time of the Covid-19 outbreak and 54.78% in 2019-20 during the pre-Covid period.

Data on NREGS portal shows of the total 238.62 crore person-days under the NREGS during 2023-24 till December 24, the figure of women person-days was 141.37 crore or 59.25%.

The number of women person-days was 169.90 crore (57.47 %) of the total 295.66 crore in 2022-23. The lowest percentage of women participation in the NREGS over the last 10 financial years was recorded in 2020-21 at 53.19%. Women participation figures in NREGS for 2023-24 is based on data available up to December 24 and there might be a marginal change at the end of the financial year in March-end 2024.

However, the broad trends indicate a steady rise in the women participation in the rural job guarantee scheme.

While the southern states like Kerala (89%), Tamil Nadu (86%), Puducherry (87.16%) and Goa (72%) have recorded women participation rate of over 70%, it has been hovering around 40% or below in northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh over the years.

In 2023-24, 5 states/UTs with the lowest women participation rate under NREGS are: UTs of Jammu and Kashmir (30.47%) and Lakshadweep (38.24%), Uttar Pradesh (42.39%), Madhya Pradesh (42.50%) and Maharashtra (43.76%).

However, an uptick has been reported in 3 of them during the current financial year: Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Lakshadweep.

For instance, it was 37.87% in 2022-23 which increased to 42.39% in 2023-24. Similarly, Lakshadweep saw an increase to 38.24% from 26.67% and from 41.80% to 42.50% in Madhya Pradesh. In the financial year 2023-24, a total of 5.38 crore families availed NREGS till December 24, 2023 which was 6.18 crore in 2022-23 and 7.25 crore in 2021-22.

As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the female Labour Force Participation Rate has increased in the country in recent years.

The rise was sharp in rural areas. In rural areas, the female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), defined as the percentage of persons in the labour force among the persons in the population, increased to 30.5% in 2022-23 (July-June) from 18.2% in 2017-18. The female unemployment rate has declined to 1.8% in 2022-23 from 3.8% in 2017-18.

PARTICIPATION IN PAST 10 YEARS

Financial year	Days out of total (%)
2014-15	54.88
2015-16	55.26
2016-17	56.16
2017-18	53.53
2018-19	54.59
2019-20	54.78
2020-21	53.19
2021-22	54.82
2022-23	57.47
2023-24	59.25

Source: https://nrega.nic.in/

Kalyan Banerjee says mimicry his fundamental right

Kolkata: Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee, who sparked a controversy over his mimicry of Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar in the Parliament complex recently, said that mimicking entailed his right to freedom of expression.

At an event in his Lok Sabha constituency Serampore in Hooghly, Banerjee said on Sunday that he would repeat the act a thousand times. "Mimicky is an art form. It is my fundamental right... The right to dissent and protest is also a fundamental right. You can put me in jail for this, but I will not step back," said Banerjee, who was suspended from the Lok Sabha with others from two Houses of Parliament. **ENS**

Answer may not lie in discussion: Kharge on Dhankhar's meet invite

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

ACCUSING THE government of having "weaponised" the suspension of Opposition MPs as a convenient tool to "undermine democracy", Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge has told RS Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar that "it would be distressing when history judges the presiding officers harshly for Bills passed without debate and not seeking accountability from the government".

Kharge was replying to the second letter on the disruption of parliamentary proceedings and the suspension of MPs by Dhankhar, who had alleged that the disorder by the Opposition in the House was deliberate and part of a strategy. Arguing that disorder was detrimental to the core of principles of parliamentary democracy, Dhankhar had argued that the suspensions are effected to serve public interest to ensure passage of Bills in the House.

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge; RS Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar. *File*

"It would be distressing when history judges the presiding officers harshly for Bills passed without debate and not seeking accountability from the government...," Kharge replied.

On Saturday, Dhankhar had said that "we need to move ahead", and invited Kharge for an interaction on December 25 "or a time of your convenience" at his residence. In his reply, Kharge said he agrees with the Chairman on moving ahead, but stressed that the "answer may not lie in a discussion in the Chairman's chambers, if the government is not keen on running the House".

Kharge said he was currently out of New Delhi and would meet Dhankhar when he is back.

It was not a rebellion: Pawar to Ajit over 'Cong split' remark

Pune: NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Monday took a swipe at Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's reference of the "1978 move" by the former against the then state CM Vasantdada Patil, and said that it was "not a rebellion, but a decision taken after mutual consultation".

In 1978, Pawar, then 38, had split the Congress. Ajit on Sunday said he "took a stand after crossing 60, while some went down that path at the age of 38".

On Monday, Pawar said, "In our times, there was no rebellion. We used to sit and make decisions. So, there was no such thing (rebellion)... There was no question of anyone complaining." **ENS**

Criminal laws, telecom Bills get President assent

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

PRESIDENT DROUPADI Murmu Monday gave assent to the three new criminal law Bills, which were passed by Parliament last week. The President also cleared the Telecommunications Bill, which seeks to overhaul the country's century-old telecom law to make the sector investor-friendly.

The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 will replace the IPC, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita will replace the CrPC, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam will replace the Indian Evidence Act.

While the three laws have now been notified in the official gazette, the Ministry of Home Affairs will notify the date when they will come into effect.

Congress leader P Chidambaram said, "The successor government in 2024 must be to review these laws and remove the draconian provisions...the (Indian Penal) Code is more often than not used against the working class and weaker sections, the law will become an instrument of oppression against these sections of the people..."

LAUNCH OF MADAN MOHAN MALAVIYA'S COLLECTED WORKS

Modi targets previous govts on corruption: 'Now, narrative is about welfare schemes'

DIVYA A
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

UNDERLINING THAT his government follows the principle of good governance and not power, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Monday attacked the previous regimes for indulging in widespread corruption while his government has turned the narrative towards welfare schemes.

Modi released the first series of 11 volumes of collected works of Madan Mohan Malaviya spread across about 4,000 pages, during an event organised by the Ministry of I & B. The volumes comprise Malaviya's unpublished letters, articles and speeches, including memorandums, the editorial content of Hindi weekly '*Abhyudaya*' started by him in 1907, besides pamphlets and booklets written by him.

"*Hamare desh mein ek dharna ban gayi thi ki bade bade ghotalon aur ghaplon ke bina sarkar nahi chal sakti. 2014 se pehle, hum lakhon crore rupaye ke ghotalon ki charcha sunte the* (There was a notion that in our country governments cannot operate without scams and embezzlement. Before 2014, we used to hear about scams amounting to lakhs of crores). But our government has changed that mindset. Today, the narrative is about lakhs of crore worth government schemes," the PM said during his 20-minute speech.

President Droupadi Murmu, V-P Jagdeep Dhankhar, PM Narendra Modi, LS Speaker Om Birla, former President Ram Nath Kovind and other dignitaries at Sadaiv Atal, Monday. *Praveen Khanna*

He said his government is setting up several institutions committed towards nation-building, just like 'nation first' was supreme for Mahamana, a title often used for the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) founder. Apart from BHU, PM mentioned Malaviya's contribution towards setting up Rishikul Brahmasharam in Haridwar, Bharti Bhawan Pustakalaya, Prayagraj, Sanatan Dharma Mahavidyalaya in Lahore.

"India today is becoming the creator of many institutions of national and international importance. These institutions will work to give a new direction not only to 21st-century India but also to the 21st-century world", he said.

Drawing an analogy between the ideologies that influenced both Malaviya and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, whose birth anniversaries are on the same day and are observed as Good Governance Day, Modi reiterated that the government is striving to achieve the dreams and aspirations of Malaviya, Vajpayee and every freedom fighter by giving emphasis to good governance.

"Good governance means being service-centric rather than power-centric," Modi said. "Good governance is when policies are made with clear intentions and sensitivity and every deserving person gets his rights without discrimination."

Today, he said that citizens need not run from pillar to post for basic facilities. Highlighting the impact of 'Modi Ki Guarantee' vehicle, he said crores of new Ayushman cards were handed out to those who were left behind previously within 40 days of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra. Stressing the role of transparency, he said, "If every penny of a taxpayer is spent in the public interest, this is good governance. Good governance has resulted in 13.5 crore people coming out of poverty."

Modi recalled that his name was proposed by the family members of Malaviya when he came to contest the election from Varanasi in 2014.

'HUMAN TRAFFICKING'

The plane grounded by police at the Vatry airport in eastern France takes off on Monday. *AP*

Grounded plane leaves France for Mumbai, 276 Indians on board

Out of 303 passengers, 25 including 2 minors allowed to stay back; 2 detained

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PARIS, DECEMBER 25

A ROMANIAN aircraft carrying 276 passengers, mostly Indians, on Monday left for India four days after they were detained by the French authorities at an airport near Paris over suspected "human trafficking". "The plane, which had been grounded since Thursday, departed shortly after 14.30 p.m (local time)," BFM TV, a French news broadcast television and radio network, reported.

The Nicaragua-bound charter flight that took off from Dubai in the United Arab Emirates carrying 303 passengers was grounded at the Vatry airport, 150 km east of Paris, on Thursday over suspected "human trafficking".

On Sunday, the French authorities allowed the A340 aircraft, operated by Romanian company Legend Airlines, to resume its journey.

According to the Marne prefecture, the plane had 276 passengers on board. Indeed, 25, including two minors, have expressed the wish to apply for asylum and are therefore still on French soil. Two others, who were brought before a judge today, have been released and placed on assisted witness status, the channel said. The asylum application will be analyzed at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport.

"Thank French Gov and Vatry Airport for quick resolution of the situation enabling Indian passengers to return home & hospitality. Also for working closely with embassy team, present throughout at the site to ensure welfare and smooth & safe return. Thank agencies in India, too," the Indian Embassy in France said in a post on X.

It is reported that the plane will first land in the UAE and then proceed to Mumbai.

The situation was for a while confusing, according to the airline's lawyer, Liliana Bakayoko.

Speaking to BFMTV, she said that some passengers did not want to return to their country of origin and that they had refused to board the plane initially this Monday morning.

"We are very relieved. We were impatiently waiting for this," the lawyer for the airline was quoted as saying by the channel. The lawyer added that the company will continue to be "available to investigators", and "will seek damages from its client because it has suffered significant harm".

The passengers include a 21-month-old child and 11 unaccompanied minors.

The police custody measures for two passengers of the flight were lifted on Monday. The two men were taken into custody on Friday on suspicion of having played a role in what could be an illegal immigration ring.

The Public Prosecutor's Office specifies that a judicial investigation has been opened for aiding the illegal entry and stay of foreigners in the territory as part of an organised gang and participation in a criminal association.

The airline's lawyer has denied any involvement in the trafficking. A "partner" company that chartered the plane was responsible for verifying the identity documents of each passenger, and communicated the passengers' passport information to the airline 48 hours before the flight, Bakayoko said.

According to the reports, the travel may have been planned by the Indian passengers to reach Central America from where they can attempt to enter the United States or Canada illegally. But an anonymous tip indicated that passengers were "likely to be victims of human trafficking" in an organised gang.

With Mayawati keeping distance, voices within BSP to join INDIA bloc

LALMANI VERMA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

EVEN AS BSP president Mayawati has preferred to maintain a policy of keeping away from the INDIA alliance and the BJP-led NDA, a section of the party wants her to align with the Opposition bloc.

A BSP insider said the party can win only if it connects with voters outside its traditional base of Jatav Dalits. "This will be possible only if we enter an alliance (with INDIA)," he said. BSP's Jaunpur MP Shyam Singh Yadav said, "In my personal opinion, all parties, including the BSP, should unite against the BJP. However, we will follow what Behenji (Mayawati) decides." He also felt a divided Opposition would benefit the BJP as votes would split.

Another BSP MP said, "Given the current political scenario, it will be better if we join hands with the INDIA bloc. The BJP will stand to benefit if the BSP contests the polls alone and cuts into the vote of the INDIA bloc. Moreover, the BSP stands to lose if it goes alone as Muslim votes seem to be consolidated in favour of the Congress due to its alliance with the SP and RLD."

The BSP, whose electoral fortunes have been on the decline since 2012, saw a revival in 2019 when it won 10 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh as a part of the grand alliance with SP and RLD. Its current strength in the Lower House of Parliament stands at nine after Ghazipur MP Afzal Ansari was disqualified in May following his murder conviction.

Following the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BSP parted ways with the SP and fought the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls last year alone. It returned with only a single seat and a vote share of just over 12%.

Asked about the parliamentarians' views, Uttar Pradesh BSP chief Vishwanath Pal only said, "Behenji has asked us to prepare to fight in all 80 seats in the state. Candidate selection too has begun," he said.

MP govt expansion: Vijayvargiya, Prahlad among 25 new ministers

ANAND MOHAN J
BHOPAL, DECEMBER 25

TWELVE DAYS after Mohan Yadav was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh along with two deputies, he got a ministry on Monday. Among the 25 inductees were senior leaders Prahlad Patel and Kailash Vijayvargiya.

The shortlisting followed multiple consultations with the central leadership, and the new ministry has 18 Cabinet members, including Patel, Vijayvargiya, Nirmala Bhuria, Narayan Singh Kushwaha, Nagar Singh Chouhan, Uday Pratap Singh, Lakhan Patel, Kuwar Vijay Shah, Rakesh Singh, Karan Singh Verma, Sampatiya Uikey and Pradyumna Singh Tomar; as well as six ministers of state (MoS) (Independent charge) and four MoS. Of the 25 included as ministers Monday, as many as 11 are OBCs, apart from six SCs, four STs and remaining belonging to upper castes.

CM Yadav is also an OBC. Three are Scindia supporters – Tulsi Silavat, Govind Singh Rajput and Pradyuman Singh Tomar. Incidentally, in the previous Shivraj Singh Chouhan Cabinet, there were 10 Scindia loyalists. There are five women ministers. Madhya Pradesh can have a 35-member ministry, meaning there are seven more slots that could be filled later.

Governor Mangubhai Patel administers the oath of office to state Cabinet ministers Rakesh Singh, Prahlad Patel, Kailash Vijayvargiya and others at Raj Bhavan in Bhopal, Monday. *PTI*

Of the seven MPs fielded by the BJP in the Assembly polls, Faggan Singh Kulaste and MP Ganesh Singh had lost. Of the five who won, four have been included as ministers, with only Reeti Pathak not making it. Of the 33 ministers in the Chouhan Cabinet, 31 had contested the Assembly polls, and 19 won. The nine who have been repeated include CM Mohan Yadav and Deputy CMs Rajendra Shukla and Jagadish Devda.

Gwalior-Chambal and Bundelkhand regions each have four ministers, while three are from Vindhya region. The OBC thrust in the new ministry underlines the BJP strategy of buffering its base against the Opposition's demand for a caste census. It will dent the Congress assault against the BJP over sidelining of its former CM Chouhan, still the party's tallest OBC leader in the state.

After the oath-taking ceremony for the new ministers, CM Yadav said, "...Those who work must be given an opportunity. I feel happy that under Modi, the new Cabinet will make new records."

63 JN.1 cases in India so far, most in Goa, says govt

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

AT LEAST 63 cases of the new variant JN.1 have been detected in India, with the highest 34 in Goa. Besides Goa, 9 cases have been detected in Maharashtra, 8 in Karnataka, 6 in Kerala, 4 in Tamil Nadu, and 2 from Telangana, according to Union Health Ministry officials. India has been witnessing an uptick in Covid-19 cases since the beginning of the month.

At least 627 new Covid-19 cases were reported in the country in the last 24 hours, with the highest in Kerala. Of the 4,054 active cases, 3,124 are in Kerala, which also reported one death.

With a global uptick in JN.1 cases, the WHO last week designated it as a 'Variant of Interest' separate from its ancestor BA.2.86. While it has only one additional mutation on the spike protein as compared to its ancestor, there has been an increase in its prevalence as compared to other variants in circulation.

JN.1 accounted for 39-50% of all variants in circulation in the US as per the US Centres for Disease Control.

Nitish praises Vajpayee, brushes aside rumours of rift in Opp alliance

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, DECEMBER 25

PRAISING THE "large-hearted and broad-based politics" of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Bihar CM Nitish Kumar Monday said Vajpayee played a key role in making him the CM in 2005 but quickly added that he had not been upset with INDIA bloc.

The Bihar CM was talking to mediapersons on the sidelines of a function to mark birth anniversary of the former PM.

Amid speculation of JD (U) reopening its communication channel with BJP after not being given any key role in INDIA bloc, the JD (U) supremo said: "We have gathered here to pay tribute to Atal ji under whose prime ministership I had worked as a Union minister. He also played a key role in making me CM (in 2005)."

Asked about rumblings in the JD (U) and INDIA bloc, he said: "These days, some people speak to get some personal benefits but no one is going to gain anything from it." Downplaying reports of being upset with INDIA bloc, he said: "I do not want anything for myself. My only attempt and wish is to work together (with allies)."

Poonch civilian deaths: Police lodge murder FIR

BASHAARAT MASOOD
SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 25

THE JAMMU and Kashmir police have registered a murder case in connection with the deaths of three civilians, who were allegedly picked up by security forces in the aftermath of a militant ambush in Poonch that killed four Army soldiers on Thursday.

According to the FIR, after Thursday's militant ambush, "... Army troops were carrying out searches in the general area of Topi Peer, Sawani, Bafliaz to locate the terrorists who escaped after the attack. During searches, Army troops detained a few local youth for questioning."

"Reportedly three such youths, namely Safeer Hussain, son of Mir Hussain; Mohd Showkat, son of Nazir Hussain; and Shabir Ahmad, son of Wali Mohammad – all residents of Topi Bafliaz (in) tehsil Surankote – have succumbed to injuries. As such, cognisable offence under section 302 (murder) of IPC is made out," the FIR states.

The FIR, filed on December 22 at the Surankote police station in Poonch, states that a separate report will be submitted in the case. An officer said: "The FIR is based on preliminary information… We will add names of the accused to the FIR based on the statements of the (injured) victims and their families."

Poonch video leaked to instil fear in people: Mehbooba Mufti

Terming Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "*Dil aur Dilli ki doori khatam karni hai*" a rhetoric, People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti said by putting her under house arrest, the government wanted to send a message that people of Jammu and Kashmir had "no voice and no one who will enquire about them". "By arresting me, they (government) want to send a message that people of J&K have no voice and no one who will enquire about them," she said on Monday.

Alleging that the government is treating people as the enemies of the state, Mehbooba said the video showing Army men allegedly torturing civilians in Poonch was leaked to instil fear in people. She was put under house arrest as she was planning to visit Surankote in Poonch.

"They beat people, torture them in custody, make a video, and circulate it," she said, adding: "It is common sense that a civilian cannot make a video in the Army custody and circulate it...How much fear do they want to instil in all of us?"

China to provide consular protection to Vivo employees held in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BEIJING, DECEMBER 25

CHINA ON Monday said it will provide consular protection and assistance to the arrested employees working for China's smartphone maker Vivo in India and expressed its firm backing to the Chinese business in protecting their lawful rights and interests.

The Enforcement Directorate last week arrested three vivo-India executives in connection with its money laundering probe against the Chinese smartphone maker and some others.

Asked for her reaction to the arrests, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here on Monday that China is closely following the issue.

"The Chinese embassy and consulates in India will continue to provide consular protection and assistance to the individuals concerned in accordance with the law," she said.

"The Chinese government firmly supports Chinese businesses in safeguarding their lawful rights and interests. We hope that India will fully recognise the mutually beneficial nature of the business cooperation between our two countries and provide a fair, just, transparent and non-discriminatory business environment," she said.

China Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning. *AP file*

Interim CEO of vivo-India Hong Xuquan alias Terry— a Chinese national — Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Harinder Dahiya and consultant Hemant Munjal have been taken into custody under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The federal agency had earlier made four arrests in the case which included mobile company Lava International's MD Hari Om Rai, Chinese national Guangwen alias Andrew Kuang and chartered accountants Nitin Garg and Rajan Malik. They are in judicial custody at present.

Cheetah let out into Kuno wild enters Rajasthan; tranquilised, brought back

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SHEOPUR, DECEMBER 25

A CHEETAH that was released into the wild was tranquilised and brought back to Kuno National Park (KNP) in Sheopur in Madhya Pradesh on Monday after it strayed into Rajasthan's Baran district, an official said.

The cheetah, Agni, was released into the wild along with another cheetah named Vayu in Parond forest range, which is part of Ahera tourism zone of Kuno National Park, on Sunday, he said.

"Agni reached the forest of Baran district in neighbouring Rajasthan. The cheetah was tranquilised on Monday and brought back to KNP. Agni is being shifted into an enclosure," the official said.

Eight cheetahs from Namibia were flown to KNP in September 2022, while 12 were brought from South Africa in February this year. Four cubs were born in March this year.

Since March this year, nine cheetahs, including three cubs have died. The remaining 15 cheetahs were in 'bomas' (special enclosures) since August.

Four cheetahs have been released into the wild so far.

Chennai murder: Cops say accused was upset as techie was talking to other male friends

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHENNAI, DECEMBER 25

BEING EMPATHETIC appears to have cost R Nandhini, a software engineer from Madurai, her life. Little did she or her family suspect that her once-school classmate would go to the extent of murdering her.

Her classmate Vetrimaran, a trans-man, made her believe that he would give her a surprise on her birthday eve on Saturday and convinced her to accompany him to a deserted place in Ponmar in Thalambur police limits. He then blindfolded her and chained her limbs as a "surprise", slashed her neck and wrists, emptied a can of petrol and torched her before fleeing from the spot, said police.

Hearing her cries, a few passers-by alerted the police. However, before she was rushed in an ambulance to the Chromepet Government hospital for treatment, Nandhini gave out the mobile number of Vetrimaran, police said.

"Initially, he came to identify Nandhini and had accompanied her to the GH but later disappeared," a police officer said. He was nabbed Sunday and later remanded in judicial custody.

Police investigation revealed that Pandi Maheswari, 26, studied with Nandhini at a school in Madurai. Nandhini had continued her friendship even after Maheswari changed the name to Vetrimaran. He was in regular touch with her. He got incensed when she started avoiding him. "He became over-possessive when he noticed her talking to other male friends. There was an argument between them over this," said a police official.

On December 23, on Nandhini's birthday eve, Vetrimaran called and asked her to meet him as he planned "a surprise" for her birthday.

After presenting her new clothes, he took her to an orphanage near Tambaram and made a donation. On the way home, he took Nandhini to Ponmar where he blindfolded her, tied her limbs, inflicted cut injuries on her neck and wrists, doused petrol and torched her, and fled.

After completing her studies, Nandhini moved to Chennai and got employed in a software firm and was residing at her paternal uncle's home in Kannagi Nagar. "Had Nandhini told us there was a problem then we would have helped her. Being empathetic cost Nandhini her life," her father said.

Her elder sister said the family got a call from the police saying her sister had been set afire and that she was dead. On Sunday evening, the police handed over Nandhini's body to her family on her birthday.

सत्यमेव जयते
Government Of India

Tribute to the Bravery and Sacrifice of Sahibzaade

VEER BAAL DIWAS

Venue : **Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi**

Date : **26 December 2023** | Time : **10:30 AM**

In the august presence of

Narendra Modi

Prime Minister

"The saga and the life's message of our Sahibzaadas should reach every child of the country. They should take inspiration from them and become dedicated citizens of the country."

Various events across the country

- **March-past** by children
- Rendition of **Shabad Kirtan** by Sikh children
- **Martial Arts** demonstration by children
- **Interactive quiz** on MYBharat platform and MyGov portal
- **Digital exhibitions** and special gatherings in schools and childcare organisations (CCI) all over India

Watch the live telecast of the programme from Bharat Mandapam on DD News

In special collaboration with- Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee

CBC 46101/13/0004/2324

EXPRESS INTERVIEW

JUSTICE SANJAY KISHAN KAUL

'NJAC didn't get a chance, judiciary's predominance should have been protected (with) CJI's casting vote'

JUSTICE SANJAY KISHAN KAUL, who retires from Supreme Court on Tuesday after a seven-year tenure, speaks to APURVA VISHWANATH

JUSTICE KAUL was appointed as a Delhi High Court judge in 2001. He was the Acting Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court and Madras High Court before he was appointed a judge of the Supreme Court in 2017. He was part of many key verdicts, including the 2017 privacy ruling, same-sex marriage case and Article 370

Justice Kaul at his Akbar Road residence in New Delhi with his dog Simba. *Praveen Khanna*

What are your post-retirement plans?

Number 1 is to relax. I plan to spend a lot of time in Kashmir. One of my properties is being done up for tourist purposes and I'm planning to rebuild my home which was burnt down. It was a 90-year-old cottage and I've got permission to rebuild it. It's a heritage property by the lake and the idea is to do it up like it was when the family was there.

By God's grace I'm not in need of money, so I will work only to keep my mind occupied. If there are arbitrations or opinions that come my way, I will do that at a pace that I can control but, otherwise, I want to spend time with my grandchildren.

What is your view on post-retirement roles offered to judges by the government?

Why should a tribunal interest me? I have done this for almost 40 years as a lawyer and a judge. Then there is Governorship and, the way I see it, it compromises my standing. That means I did things because I wanted something from the government.

Would a Rajya Sabha nomination also fall under this category?

All political posts. I am not meant for this as I do not want patronage. But different people have different perspectives. If somebody were to ask me, yes, I'd say I have a special interest in Kashmir. I would like to see peace in that area. Other than that nothing interests me. I believe in what I wrote in the 370 judgement. I know there is some criticism about it, but I'm not bothered by it. The creation of Kashmir, it's coming into India and the manner it came in – it is a case by itself. I've always felt that it was meant to, ultimately, (be) completely merged in a phased manner. So it is taken a little time now, that's a political decision whether to do it or not to and that political decision is taken by somebody. Even if there are two views possible about the procedure in which it is done, I think something which advances the interest of the country in many manners and helps the state to stabilise is more important.

But some of the critique is how the judiciary gives the benefit of the doubt to the government which has a strong majority in Parliament…

I may not agree with all judgements. I was a party to the Rafale verdict and my own thinking is that we are not to sit in judgement over contracts. This has been my judicial view in all contractual matters and I was looking after tender matters in the High Court for a very long time. There are very limited parameters on which you examine these issues. Otherwise, commercial activity will be affected. My view was in their buying a plane, if there is a criminal issue, then go and prosecute; you cannot come before us (citing) Article 32 of the Constitution for breach of fundamental rights. My views on bail are perceived to be fairly liberal and very different to that of the government. Even on judicial appointments, I've held a different view.

It is perceived that this government is more aggressive but let us look at whether this government is more aggressive or whether any majority government becomes aggressive.

Let's take from 1950. All of them will always be a little tough and that is part of the job. They don't like anybody to interfere and the judiciary's job is to check and balance. So it is the natural flow of the task which the judiciary has to perform. You look at Mrs Gandhi's time or even Pandit Nehru's time… when they established majority governments… You see how many changes in law were brought and, of course, the view then was that they were socialist in character. Today, many things are happening in terms of where the government wants to take its economic policy.

A weak opposition is also a problem. The absence of legislators from the opposition in the Parliament is an important factor. Maybe in public perception, it is their inability to politically handle the government. Now, the court cannot be placed to politically handle the government… The court cannot be the opposition. The judiciary is a check and balance but to say, look, the government is doing this wrong and now, you have to do something about it — is wrong.

Sometimes we forget the past. When there is a strong executive, there will be a little pushback for the judiciary. 1990 onwards, we have had coalition governments. So the judiciary was able to advance its cause, sometimes even transgress into some areas, I feel. But with a majority government coming, it was expected that some steps would have to be taken back.

Courts have often flagged that legislation is passed without debate in a rushed manner… such as farm laws, criminal law bills or regarding the appointment of the chief election commissioner last week…How should the judiciary look at these aspects when challenged in court?

The judiciary's task is different from their task. How much pre-consultation should there be is the Parliament's task. Now, this government has a system by which apparently — consultation takes place in a different manner… not so much in the public domain but behind closed doors.

My view is that before a law is brought into force, there should be a legal impact study. For example, Section 138 of the Negotiable Instruments Act (which criminalises cheque bounce), I have said that you suddenly cannot bring a law without seeing how the system would be impacted. That is one aspect and the second aspect is legislative drafting. It is a very important skill and that is now almost entirely outsourced. Nicely drafted legislation prevents unnecessary litigation. All said and done, nobody can say that our criminal laws have not stood the test of time…take the Evidence Act. I am not going into what measures should be taken or not but it is an extremely well-drafted legislation.

But how the government gets it (drafting legislation) done and where it is outsourced is one thing… but today we are a very divided society in some ways. That is, because, politically, either people are with the government or very anti-government. There are many things which the government does, which are good, but maybe things which we may not agree with… traversing that middle path has become more difficult.

> One of my properties is being done up for tourist purposes and I'm planning to rebuild my home which was burnt down. It was a 90-year-old cottage and I've got permission to rebuild it. It's a heritage property by the lake and the idea is to do it up like it was when the family was there. By God's grace I'm not in need of money...

There is a charge of judicial evasion against the Supreme Court…that important issues concerning the government have not been heard before they have become fait accompli.

There are some cases which are purely legal cases. But over the last few years, not necessarily under this government… the number of what I would call politico-legal cases has increased. They are basically political decisions, which have legal ramifications. So the court, of course, has to deal with the legal ramifications. But they get hyped to different levels because of the political consequences. And very, very divergent politics, has meant there is inability to have a dialogue. I have always been a votary of dialogue but we have reached a place where, you know, as if there is no other opinion possible. It is all right to disagree.

Do such political stakes weigh in on a judge's mind?

We are all humans….our training is to keep personal beliefs, other factors aside and as much as possible, take a dispassionate view of things. I personally take a call after thinking and come to the conclusion that I believe what I'm doing is right, it is very subjective. We also change our views but at the time of the decision, we do what is right then. The test I have applied is to see whether my heart and mind say that what I'm doing is the correct thing. As long as it is so, it does not bother me even when there has been some tussle with establishments. I say establishments because by the time you become a Supreme Court judge, you would have dealt with multiple governments and as a Chief Justice of a High Court with (the) state government.

But for economic offences, the government argues that there must be a high bar for granting bail.

I do appreciate the difference between serious economic offences and other offences. So, therefore, the law is a little different for serious economic offences. But then with today's technology, you cannot have prosecution continuing for years together which means you have to keep people in custody.

To say that, well, the jurisprudence of bail for economic offences has to be totally different from the jurisprudence of bail otherwise does not gel with me. Sure, economic offences affect the society at large but crime against the body also affects society at large. Are they completely different things when these offences also carry life sentences?

It is almost becoming an alternate criminal justice system where the punishment is the period in custody because you don't know whether you will be able to convict or not. That is not how the criminal justice system should work.

Bail hearings in these political cases are like final hearings. It is a complete waste of time to my mind. How much judicial time goes in this…… Especially when you're not actually proceeding with the trial. I believe a serious thought should be given on how many cases have seen convictions and how much time it has taken for conviction. So the government can weigh which cases it should litigate.

There is concern that stringent laws meant for serious, economic offences or terrorism are, in a sense, used to stifle opposition…

Yes, but the solution is to focus on a better prosecution system. When these cases are decided swiftly, that is a signal. How do you explain that we have so few forensic labs that you don't get a report on time? In cases I have handled, I have (said) outsource it because it can't be a reason to keep somebody in custody indefinitely. The problem is also that nobody is washed in milk (doodh ka dhula). The only solution to more balanced approaches is if trials proceed quickly. You'll know whether he's done something or not done something.

How does the Supreme Court fare on bail?

I think the Supreme Court is sending mixed signals on this. Maybe there has to be a uniformity and a pattern in what is done. See, unlike many countries, we don't have one single Supreme Court. Each bench of the Supreme Court is a Supreme Court so a litigant also takes a chance because there are different perceptions which may arise in each bench.

One solution is: say, on a regular hearing day (Tuesday to Thursday), possibly three judge-benches across the board would be a better idea instead of two. If something is worth admitting in the Supreme Court, it may be worth spending three judges on it.

Judges come from different courts, different scenarios, different type processes, different parts of the country. We are a wide, varied country also…we are not unitary in character in the Supreme Court. Three-judge benches I feel gives more stability. At the admission stage, a case can go to two judges. But the question is whether there is thought put into all of this. Is there someone looking into these things?

Isn't that the role of the Chief Justice?

To some extent, yes. In the High Court, the Chief Justice checks up on how many cases are there and who is deciding them. A High Court Chief Justiceship is one of the most challenging tasks. In the Supreme Court, the difference is that it is a very registry-oriented court. Whatever happens is really between the Chief Justice and the registry.

What about the institutional response on how the SC handled the sexual harassment allegation against CJI Ranjan Gogoi?

The institution does get troubled. Well, no doubt, it is troubling. There are different perspectives on how that issue should have been tackled. Transparency doesn't mean sitting in a glass house. Every institution has some aspects of transparency, some inner mechanism on how it works. Therefore, it is important that those boundaries are respected.

What about transparency in judicial appointments?

The problem with today's system is everybody has a view on everything without having studied how it is. So in actuality a Chief Justice carries out some element of a search on who to appoint. He consults…at least, I consulted judges across the board in high court, got their opinion, consulted some and found out who are the lawyers who are meaningful and respected and get their opinions. I would seek an informal intelligence report.

Then gender representation, community representations, subject representations… because Chief Justice only hears largely writ petitions and appeals and not criminal side cases. So you try to structure and get the right talent because it's the High Court which is the base. After the Collegium recommends, it goes to the ministry, IB input, government input, state input, then the consultee judges of the Supreme Court, then only a HC judge gets appointed.

So, whenever you have a Supreme Court appointment, at least when I came to the Collegium, I insisted that I want to see to it that their judgements (are) circulated. We still have a perspective, but in the appointment process, the government has always had a role and (that) will remain. Some creases have to be ironed out. ...Many times it happens that the view of who the government wants or maybe desirous of having as a judge and who we think is good enough may also tally.

In the case of Justice Victoria Gowri, the Collegium was caught off guard…

But it went through the whole process…the people who woke up suddenly, why did they wake up suddenly? So there are agendas on both sides. That is the problem. I don't think there has been any complaint on her judicial performance so far.

Her name went through the whole system without her party membership being flagged?

These kinds of things, it's very difficult for the judiciary to find out. We are dependent on the government or government agencies to some extent for these inputs. That can be a problem. I think it is important to remember that a judge doesn't only decide government cases. The government must look to see that good people are appointed to the bench.

> A weak opposition is also a problem. The absence of legislators from the opposition in the Parliament is an important factor. Maybe in public perception, it is their inability to politically handle the government. Now, the court cannot be placed to politically handle the government... The court cannot be the opposition...

There is a charge of opacity of the Collegium from even within the system…Judges who were transferred say they do not know why they were suddenly packed off.

There are many reasons for transfers. Sometimes doubts are cast about a judge and since impeachment is the only option, transfers are preferred. Second, is handling temperament issues. These are what I label as judgeship not resting easy on the shoulder. There are cases in which judges are persuaded to shift out also because some of the good judges may get a better exposure somewhere else… Maybe in bigger courts. This is the only check and balance really for a High Court judge and we have not developed any other system... Yes, I have known of cases where someone is wrongly transferred. In the collegium, I was part of, I can't think of any chances that can be labelled wrong. There may be some differences in perspective, but sometimes there is a consensus even if you hold a different view.

What about Justice Sanjib Banerjee? A Chief Justice of a major High Court saying he only got an email about his transfer without any reasons..

So I also got an email when I was transferred from Punjab and Haryana to Chennai. It ultimately was a very satisfying move but that's a different matter. It's not that somebody talked to me…I only got to know the reasons when I broached the topic later.

Is that the best way to handle a constitutional office?

You're probably right, I would have thought that somebody should have called me and told me that, look, we want you to take over the Court or something. I'm not averse to the thought process where there should be better counselling and attention to this. On Justice Sanjib Banerjee, I have had a very high opinion of him and honestly, what happened should not have happened with him. I must say that though I was a former judge of Madras High Court, I was never consulted on his transfer.

On judicial appointments, has the government proposed names to the collegium?

Theoretically, no. It is a recent thing, where the Collegium has said no, and the government is sending it back (for reconsideration). (In) very few cases maybe we may have reconsidered but by and large we have reiterated recommendations where we said no and have so far stuck by it.

What is your prescription for the government on appointment of judges?

I may not be a votary of this method of appointment of judges, but still it is law, it must be followed just like it must be equally applied when it supports the government. The Parliament passed a law unanimously. And then the court quashed it. That is something which this government has not been able to (come to terms with). The collegium system is (a) judicial creation, it is not part of the Constitution. The exigency of that situation possibly required it and it worked well for many years. Maybe when the problem started, it was not worked well…I wouldn't blame the system alone.

The NJAC, I believe, was finished too suddenly and did not get a chance. One method could have been to keep the challenge (before the Supreme Court) pending, see how this would work and then maybe tweak it. In any case, the troublesome part of the NJAC was the presence of six people which would force a veto against the judiciary. You needed a 4:2 majority otherwise there would be a deadlock with 3:3.

My own view is that the Chief Justice of India should have had a casting vote. It would have given a predominance to the judiciary. Once that is done, then the appointment must go through and there should not be a second look at it by the government. NJAC could have been balanced if the judiciary predominance was protected. I think politically also…it could have possibly been accepted if it had been tweaked rather than set aside. Judges who were part of the bench later on said that it should have been not so (set aside)…

So, in my view, sitting across the table and dealing with it is preferable than any endeavour that would need side discussions. Because then you can tell the government why you feel something can't be done or can be done. World over, governments have a say in judicial appointments and I don't know of a country where there is no say. So India was, in some way, unique when it brought in the collegium system.

For more pictures and longer version of the interview, visit WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

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THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

ON THE PAGES OF LIFE, YOUR LOVE HAS LEFT A STAMP, BUT WHO WILL PAY THE DUES?

— AMRITA PRITAM

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A PROMISE TO KEEP

Punjab government's crackdown on drug menace is a step in the right direction. A lot more needs to be done

AN INVESTIGATION BY this paper into Punjab's long tryst with the drug menace and a renewed crackdown by the state administration to curb it has thrown up disquieting details: Of the 11,156 FIRs filed under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act by Punjab Police between April 1, 2022, and February 28, 2023, women are at the centre of nearly 10 per cent of the cases. Barring a Covid-19-induced lull in 2020, this upward graph has been the trend in the drug trade in the state since 2019. Other findings include the rise in popularity of *nasheeli goliyan* — pharmaceutical opioids — over *chitta* or heroin; a suspiciously uniform pattern of apprehension of suspected users-peddlers registered in FIRs highlighting concerns of loopholes that can be exploited for acquittals; and the fact that major dealers continue to evade arrests.

As a border state, Punjab's centrality to the Golden Crescent (Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan) trade route of heroin and cocaine has long rendered it vulnerable to the scourge of drugs, morphing it from a transit point to one of the major end consumers. In March this year, speaking in the state assembly, Punjab Health Minister Balbir Singh had pegged the number of individuals grappling with addiction at 10 lakh. From April 1, 2020, till March 31, 2023, Punjab has reported 266 deaths due to overdose of narcotic and psychotropic substances. Since Bhagwant Singh Mann assumed office in March 2022 with the promise, like that of his predecessors, of eradicating the menace, his government has adopted a two-pronged approach — a severe crackdown on suppliers, including seizure of their properties, and an awareness and rehabilitation campaign that focuses on prevention and restitution through creative campaigns such as cyclothons, street plays and gully cricket.

It is a step in the right direction, given that so long as there is demand, supply chains will continue to spring up. But this paper's investigation also throws up issues that require the understanding and addressing of deeper, systemic fault lines. The greater involvement of women in the drug trade indicates a direct link with poverty -- many of the women peddlers belong to denotified tribes or are from EWS or rural backgrounds, thrust into the trade by their husbands or families or by a temptation to get rich quickly. A large number of these women are from the Malwa region, the largest political region of Punjab, parts of which continue to score very low on social indices. Easier access and availability of education, alternate vocations and opportunities of reintegration into society might be a good place to start for finding the way out of this crisis. The setting up of all-women anti-drug committees in some Malwa villages is a welcome step. But it is equally important to keep the focus on dismantling the organised mafia. While minor drug seizures are crucial to push the case for prevention over rehabilitation, Punjab's problems will continue unless those at the top of the organised network are brought into the net. The government must keep up the momentum to make good on its promise.

A DISSENTING NOTE

MPC member suggests need for a rate cut. Monetary policy must be guided by objective of maintaining price stability

UP UNTIL DECEMBER, there were expectations that interest rates in the US, and much of the developed world, would stay higher for longer. However, the US Federal Reserve's dovish tone in its December meeting was in sharp contrast to these views. The projections accompanying the Fed meeting indicate the possibility of three rate cuts next year. This surprised the markets. The 10-year US bond yield fell sharply and is currently hovering around 3.9 per cent. In comparison, in its December meeting, the monetary policy committee did not provide any indication of a policy pivot. Rather, it noted that "policy must continue to be actively disinflationary to ensure anchoring of inflation expectations and fuller transmission." In his statement, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das also reiterated that even as inflation has fallen, "the target of 4 per cent CPI is yet to be reached and we have to stay the course."

However, in an interview to this paper, Jayanth Varma, member of the monetary policy committee, has said that "we are approaching the point where an interest rate cut is necessary to prevent an excessive real interest rate." He argues that the real interest rate of 2 per cent now is "excessive", and that a "real rate slightly below 1.5 per cent is appropriate". Varma has voted against the MPC maintaining its stance of remaining focused on the withdrawal of accommodation. Another MPC member, Ashima Goyal, has in the past indicated that a real interest rate of around 1 per cent is suited for the economy.

Any move to either change the stance of monetary policy or to cut interest rates will depend on the trajectory of retail inflation. If there is a sense of comfort that inflation is nearing the central bank's target of 4 per cent, then Varma believes that monetary policy can be "less restrictive". This opens up the space to cut rates. In its December meeting, the RBI had projected inflation at 5.6 per cent in the third quarter and 5.2 per cent in the fourth quarter of this year. For next year, it expects inflation at 5.2 per cent in the first quarter, 4 per cent in the second quarter and 4.7 per cent in the third quarter. However, there is some uncertainty over this trajectory of inflation, especially food inflation. While one-off food price shocks can be looked through, monetary policy, as Das has noted, "has to stay alert to the risk of such shocks becoming generalised and derailing the ongoing disinflation process". The actions of the MPC must be guided by the objective of ensuring price stability.

AMRITA & IMROZ

Theirs was an unusual story, full of affection, generosity and poetry

PYAR SABSE SARAL *ibaadat hai, behte paani jaisi*, love is the simplest worship, like flowing water, wrote painter and poet Imroz in his poem, *Ibaadat*. Like most of Imroz's poetry, these lines, too, were dedicated to his partner and writer Amrita Pritam, one of the most significant women writers from Punjab and a leading voice in the 20th century. Theirs was an unusual love story. In the '50s, a few years after she became a household name post her seminal work from 1947 — *Ajj akhhan Waris Shah nu* — which captured the pain and loss of Partition, Amrita met Indarjeet Chitrakar, better known as Imroz. From Lyallpur in undivided Punjab, at the time, Imroz illustrated for the Urdu magazine, *Shama*, and also designed posters for films — he worked for Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* in 1957. After Imroz passed away last week in Mumbai at 97, his last rites were performed by Amrita's granddaughter Shilpi, who looked after him till the end.

Imroz was seven years younger to Amrita, and an admirer of her work, when he fell in love with her. The two began living together when Amrita was still married to her husband, Pritam Singh, and even as her own affection was reserved for poet Sahir Ludhianvi, who never committed to her. Imroz would drop Pritam at the AIR building, pick her up after her programme and drop her home on his scooter. Sitting behind him, she would trace Sahir's name on his back. "How he bore the weight of these words on his back I do not know. I only knew he accepted me, my madness," Amrita wrote in her autobiography, *Rasidi Ticket*.

A writer once asked Imroz if he was ever jealous of Sahir. "Not at all," he said. "A person who is loved by Amrita is dear to me, too. That is why you will see a picture of Sahir in my room."

The Pir Panjal challenge

With terror activity shifting to Poonch-Rajouri, Army must call upon institutional memory to find the way

SYED ATA HASNAIN

THE INDIAN ARMY is not used to persistent negative encounters that upset its tremendous track record in counter-terrorist operations. It does not claim continuous success either, as negative encounters did occur in the past intermittently — although mostly after long intervals. That was when the strength of terrorists was high, intelligence less reliable, and even speculative search and destroy operations were productive in contacts. The recent run of encounters in the depth areas of the Poonch-Rajouri sector have resulted in more losses for the Army than the terrorists, in an environment in which the strength of terrorists is much diluted, but better technologies are available. In addition, while the Kashmir zone — the traditionally more volatile area — is relatively quiet, it's the Pir Panjal (South) in the Jammu sector which has, in recent months, witnessed more operational activity and presence of terrorists.

Why has terrorist presence and activity shifted to the Poonch-Rajouri sector? The answer is clear. Terrorism is like water; it takes the path of least resistance. Kashmir is too hot for Pakistan to make a strong statement on its "relevance" and "capability to calibrate" — both issues that are important to Pakistan's doctrine of proxy hybrid war. Kashmir's strong and layered counter-infiltration (CI) and counter-terrorism (CT) grid makes planning of proxy operations difficult. The Poonch-Rajouri sector has had a chequered history of local support, which enabled Pakistan to establish a strong proxy presence in the forested and rocky tracts of the Pir Panjal (South). Although this waned over time, perhaps some clandestine efforts to recultivate the population have occurred in recent years, with some reported antipathy among the Gujjar community. However, there is only speculative evidence of this. The abrogation of Article 370 has also made Kashmir less conducive to separatist trends.

Secondly, is there any truth that the Army's redeployment of some formations from this sector has led to the dilution of optimum deployment? From May 2020 onwards when the Ladakh sector was activated, some troops were lifted from the Jammu sector and redeployed there. There may have been some dilution, but HQ Northern Command has always been watchful of this and has followed the basic principle of redeploying and creating other reserves. In any case, the Rashtriya Rifles troops from the Poonch-Rajouri sector were never disturbed. Yet, when adversary focus comes on a sub-sector, some redeployment for a stronger grid, especially the presence of uncommitted response elements, must be arranged. Some of this has already been done, a little more could follow.

> Kashmir is too hot for Pakistan to make a strong statement on its 'relevance' and 'capability to calibrate' — both issues that are important to Pakistan's doctrine of proxy hybrid war. Kashmir's strong and layered counter infiltration (CI) and counter-terrorism (CT) grid makes planning of proxy operations difficult. The Poonch-Rajouri sector has had a chequered history of local support, which enabled Pakistan to establish a strong proxy presence in the forested and rocky tracts of the Pir Panjal (South).

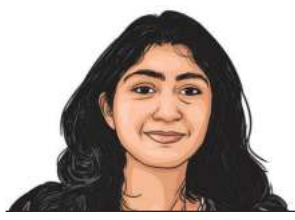
Has the Indian Army encountered anything similar in the past? If so, how did it deal with it? My own experience in the Valley in 1999-2001, provides an answer. The move of the Army's 8 Mountain Division from North Kashmir to Kargil in June 1999 opened up wide spaces for the entry of terrorists from across an unfenced LoC. They adopted the tactics of suicide attacks on Army and police camps. It was rumoured that some Pakistan Army elements were providing the field leadership. There were big contacts and raging battles with the Army for the better part of the next 18 months or so. Redeployment did take place and the Kilo Force was created to take charge. I do not think tactical or operational space has been lost in Poonch-Rajouri and the overall capability of Pakistan to sustain any success is still limited. Besides, the Indian government's demonstrated capability for retaliation when an undetermined threshold is crossed will keep Pakistan on tenterhooks.

So, is this about drills, SOPs and minor tactics? Does the Army accept the need for a review of some identified weaknesses — for example, the inevitable aspect of convoy security, hardening of operational vehicles, enhancing the size of movement of reinforcements, etc? I recall 2007-08 when there were several ambushes in the Valley from maize fields which terrorists stopped from being harvested. We reviewed all movements, SOPs and response drills with special emphasis on the first two minutes of contact when most casualties occur. The Army is an organisation adept at self-learning. It only needs reminders of legacy events and the methods that are available in-house. I recommend brigade-sized operations to be conducted in the lower reaches of the Pir Panjal with drone support, as the foliage cover is lowest at this time. This needs to be reinforced by a strong public outreach, as done in the Valley.

Lastly, and very importantly, the unfortunate post-event happenings remain allegations until a thorough investigation is carried out. Three local civilians have died under questionable and suspicious circumstances. With experience, I may state that the Army is an institution in which ethics cannot be diluted. Even if mistakes have occurred, the transparency of an inquiry and suitable disciplinary action is something that is expected of it. Senior commanders and political and civil society leaders will need to be balanced in their utterances and the media must not speculate. Such events have a nasty way of upsetting much of the balance achieved by the bold decisions of August 5, 2019. An immediate drive to address the emotions prevailing among the local communities in the area of Pir Panjal South must be undertaken by direct contact and interaction. Its effect on the Valley must not be underestimated and precautionary measures must also be taken there. The gunning down of a former SSP at Baramulla indicates there is more to come. Rumours will be rife and adversaries and their cohorts will be on the lookout to exploit this.

Over the last 33 years, such moments have often come and gone. I think the nation needs to remain reassured of the ability of the government and Army to see it through.

The writer, a member of the National Disaster Management Authority, is former corps commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps



IF YOU LOOK AWAY

Reading Joe Sacco's 'Palestine' in 2023 — bearing witness does not matter

SUKHMANI MALIK

"THIS IS NOT an era of war," they say. At important international summits, India and the world's leaders have been driving this point home. Meanwhile, the last count of civilian casualties in Gaza was 20,258. Of this 8,200 are children, and there are another 7,000 that are missing – presumably, under the rubble. Due to the collapse of Gaza's health system, the Health Ministry has failed to provide regular updates since November 10.

Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, a nine-issue collection of comic strips depicting the artist-journalist's two-month stay in the Occupied Territories (his words), has recently been rushed into reprint. The trigger — Hamas' October 7 attack.

The collected works are narrated from Sacco's point of view. An American, plucked from within the Empire and dropped into the thick of its consequences, amid those condemned to suffer it, Sacco has the sensibilities that most Westerners do when it comes to the "Middle East", albeit perhaps with a little more context than most. This characteristic nonchalance about the lives and trials of Palestinians he is around is despite his being sympathetic to the Palestinian cause from the very first comic — much more so than the average American.

He says, at one point, "I mean sure I had sympathy for a homeland lost, but what were the problems of Palestinians to me next to [Leon] Klinghoffer, who ate Brand X cornflakes and probably borrowed my ladder…" Naming the game and yet being under its spell, unlearning in real time — that's the process Sacco commits to showing to readers.

> We thought bearing witness was enough. Once we know, suffering shall end. As it turns out, that we know, does not matter. The systems are not failing those killed, the systems are built to kill. And now, once again, a lot of us know. In the background, the bulldozer is charging ahead anyway. This is not an era of war. Not if you look away.

Twenty years, another intifada, tens of thousands of illegal settlements and one "war" later, reading Sacco's *Palestine* is an exercise in cruel irony. The litany of losses faced by Palestinians, the aggression of the occupation have only escalated since Sacco first sketched them out. Israel may be hailed by the West as West Asia's "only democracy" — but from the ground, what one bears witness to cannot be wished away by a PR machinery.

In Balata, Sacco meets young boys who show him the mandatory ID cards they have to carry which indicate whether or not they were involved in the intifada. In a village close to the Green Line, he meets a woman whose home has been demolished, her son imprisoned and daughter-in-law barred re-entry into the area. He meets a man whose son was shot dead in the street. He meets prisoners from Ansar III and hears stories of torture and resilience. Right after, he talks of the Landau Report by the Israeli government, which concluded that excessive force was used but none of the officers involved should be charged. In the interest of "defending Israel", it further concluded that "moderate pressure" can be used. Two sub-chapters follow. They are titled and depict the "Moderate Pressure" in question.

Through *Palestine*, Sacco, in 2001, laid bare in shocking contrast the words and ways in which injustice against the Palestinian people is normalised and legalised. Reading it now allows a peek into the systems that enable thousands of civilian casualties and captures the moment of impact for most who are hit. Palestinian journalists today, from Plestia Alaqad to Motaz Azaiza, are/were all doing the same thing. Documenting life and death in Gaza, laying bare the ugliness of the assault they are under. Turns out, the Empire had a contingency plan for what happens when the gig is up — "we just keep going".

Despite multiple UN resolutions in which the overwhelming majority lay with calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, Israel and much of the West have managed to veto almost every single one. Then, of course, there's the small matter of Palestine not even being a member state of the UN. There are calls for investigation of war crimes and yet there seems to be no force in this world that can even stagger the onslaught.

We thought bearing witness was enough. Once we know, suffering shall end. As it turns out, that we know, does not matter. The systems are not failing those killed, the systems are built to kill. And now, once again, a lot of us know. In the background, the bulldozer is charging ahead anyway. This is not an era of war. Not if you look away. As the Palestinian poet Noor Hindi wrote in 2020 in the poem, *Breaking [News]*: "I'm holding a lightning bug/ hostage in one hand, its light dimming in the warmth/ of my fist, and in the other, a pen, to document its death./ *Isn't that terrible?*"

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INDIAN EXPRESS

Janata wins Lok Sabha seat in Bulandshahr

UP Congi set-up in for major changes

Heavy turnout for gram panchayat polls

Maruti to use cars for non-residents

DCM CLARIFIES

DECEMBER 26, 1983, FORTY YEARS AGO

UP, BIHAR BY-ELECTIONS

THE JANATA PARTY won the Bulandshahr Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh while the Congress (I) and the CPI candidates were involved in a neck and neck race in the prestigious Bettiah Lok Sabha constituency in Bihar as counting of votes polled in the by-elections held on December 23 entered the final phase. Former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Banarasi Das (Janata) won the Bulandshahr seat defeating his nearest Congress (I) rival Imtiaz Mohamed Khan by a margin of 14,000 votes.

GRAM PANCHAYAT POLLS

A HEAVY TURNOUT of voters in spite of chilly weather marked the polling for the gram panchayat elections in New Delhi. According to officials, an estimated 70 per cent of the three lakh-strong rural electorate cast their votes. There were long queues at village schools. In the urbanised Chattarpur village in Mehrauli block, the atmosphere was that of a general election, with posters, banners and buntings dotting the area.

16 EXECUTED IN IRAN

SIXTEEN PEOPLE WERE executed in Iran at dawn after being found guilty of drug trafficking. The radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, said the 16 had been convicted of supplying and distributing narcotics, particularly heroin, and setting up an international gang to smuggle the drugs. They were executed in Shurabad after being found guilty by the anti-narcotics department of the central revolutionary court.

POPE ON CHRISTMAS

POPE JOHN PAUL II in a Christmas Day message to Rome and the world, strongly attacked arms spending and called for a dialogue to find "equitable and honourable" solutions to tensions. He asserted that "enormous sums" being spent on weapons deprive the starving people of food and "make even more threatening the clouds gathering on the horizon of humanity."

THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

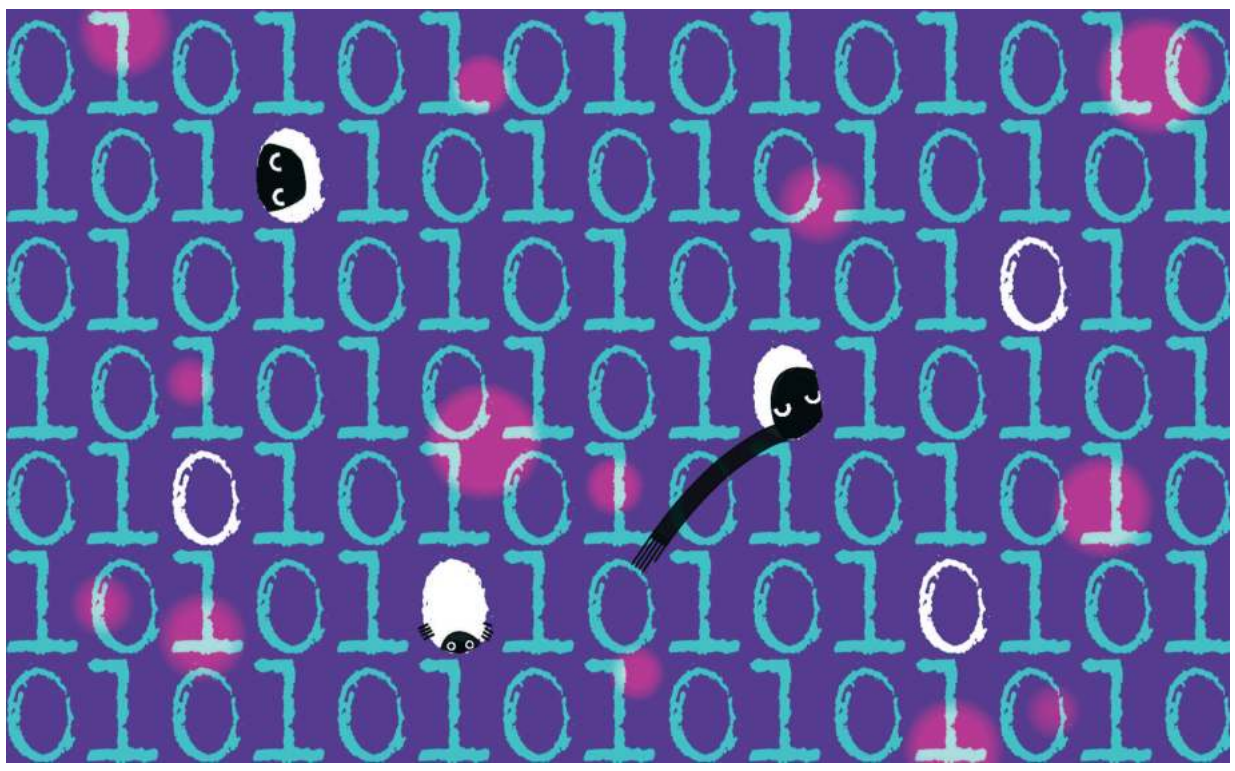
"Safety is the least that the government can ensure after depriving voters of any real choice in the election by incapacitating the main opposition... The EC should exercise the full extent of its authority to ensure accountability."

— THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Safety and cybersecurity

Data breaches reinforce necessity of putting people at the centre of policy in Digital India

MISHI CHOUDHARY



C R Sasikumar

IN OCTOBER, RESECURITY, a US company, informed the world about the availability of Indians' personal data on the dark web. It would have been easy to ignore this amid the deluge of bad news filling our news feeds but for the size and sensitivity of data. The seller of the data set was providing verifiable, sensitive information of 55 per cent of the Indian population — roughly around 815 million (81.5 crore) citizens. This included personally identifiable information like name, phone number, Aadhaar number, passport number and address. All for a paltry sum of $80,000. On December 18, we learnt that Delhi police had arrested four individuals in this matter.

This is obviously not the first time that Indians' sensitive information has been leaked. Earlier in the summer, multiple reports surfaced about a leak that exposed the personal information of individuals registered on the CoWin website. Last year, in November, Delhi's prestigious AIIMS had to work with pen and paper to register a sea of patients after a ransomware attack. Why does this keep happening? Data breaches are at an all-time high in the world. Yet, some countries are more vulnerable than others.

It is easy to dismiss these leaks as they happen every day, but the leaking of sensitive information makes the breach reported in October different.

Thieves who have stolen names, Aadhaar numbers and passport information can use that information not only to sign up for new accounts in the victim's name, but also to commit tax identity theft, online-banking theft and other financially motivated scams. We are already seeing a rise in cyber frauds, with people losing their life savings, taking on debt and suffering shame and stigma for having been scammed. As per the World Bank, "India is one of the fastest growing economies of the world and is poised to continue on this path, with aspirations to reach high middle income status by 2047". Our mobile phone usage, enhanced banking access and the ever-growing market size that generates enormous amounts of data not only makes us attractive to companies but also to bad actors.

No country is safe from data breaches. In fact, the Biden administration has issued multiple Executive Orders to modernise and implement stronger cybersecurity standards in the federal government. When such instances happen, the Computer Emergency Response teams spring into action and impacted users are informed and educated about what steps they can take to reduce the chance that their information will be misused. Basically, a near-term and a long-term plan is devised and executed. This is "Incident Response". These strategies and tactics have been instrumental in reducing the impact of data breaches. In India, all we see are denials, semantic hand waving and some incomprehensible word salads from ministers, rinse and repeat. Citizens are never informed about the leak of their personally identifiable information or educated about any recourse. They are left to their own devices until the next breach happens.

If the government of India were a business, it would have seen a sharp decline in its stock value, coupled with a mean market cap loss of billions of dollars resulting in a credit rating downgrade. But because market forces don't apply to governments, the Indian government continues to operate without a long term cyber security strategy.

Some might ask: How can Aadhaar be a problem, it's so great? Despite a crystal-clear prohibition issued by the Supreme Court against making Aadhaar registration mandatory, the central government and enthusiastic parties in both state governments and industry proceeded to adopt Aadhaar-based technology and impose requirements for Aadhaar registration for social services and benefits — from educational scholarships to booking railway tickets to marrying voter ID databases to Aadhaar. By making Aadhaar registration mandatory, the government imposed on every Indian citizen an unmanaged risk of digital environment catastrophe.

When we went to the Supreme Court, some judges recognised that the Aadhaar number is the "bridge" linking all the silos of information and behavioural data collected through the vehicle of the "smartphone" in contemporary networked society. The Court also recognised that UIDAI's "Verification Log" contains enough data about the activities of citizens that a "leak" would involve an unconstitutional violation of privacy. But it did not do much, saying that UIDAI's computer security will eventually become "foolproof". That was in 2018.

The constant flow of news about data breaches, whether at Comcast or UIDAI, is normalising massive losses of personal data. Despite all the puffery and all the claims about how Aadhaar makes India a world leader, no one has so far intimated how we are managing the obvious harms that are plaguing our society. From Brookings to Moody's to the CAG, everyone has called out UIDAI on its failure to properly regulate its client vendors and address security, lack of transparency and accountability.

The plan cannot be for perfect security, operating flawlessly forever, for Aadhaar. No government can, at present, promise perfect security for even its most critical personnel data. No "platform" company, with all the immense profits can claim to guarantee perfect security of customer data. No Indian citizen can, or should, trust a story in which Aadhaar data security is never breached because breaches do occur regularly.

> It is easy to dismiss these leaks as they happen every day, but the leaking of sensitive information makes the breach reported in October different. Thieves who have stolen names, Aadhaar numbers and passport information can use that information not only to sign up for new accounts in the victim's name, but also to commit tax identity theft, online-banking theft and other financially motivated scams. We are already seeing a rise in cyber frauds, with people losing their life savings, taking on debt and suffering shame and stigma for having been scammed.

India's recently introduced Data Protection Act does nothing to address sensitive health information. Under Clause 17(4), in fact, the government is exempt from provisions of data retention and erasure of personal data. Unless that data can make a difference in making a decision about a data principal, right to correction, completion and updation is also not available.

Here is some basic advice on what the Government of India should do: Make the prevention, detection, assessment, and remediation of cyber incidents a top priority. Recognise the importance of digital infrastructure as essential to national and economic security of the population. Make the state digital infrastructure trustworthy by increasing transparency and accountability. A cyber security board should be established with government and private sector participants that has the authority to convene, following a significant cyber incident, to analyse what happened and make concrete recommendations for improving cybersecurity. Adopt a zero-trust architecture, and mandate a standardised playbook for responding to cybersecurity vulnerabilities and incidents. Urgently execute a plan for defending and modernising state networks and updating its incident response policy.

Finally, put people at the centre of all policies. Informing them immediately, helping them protect themselves and remediate fallout from cyber incidents should be the government's responsibility.

We want a Digital India. Just not the Digital India we are living in at the moment.

The writer is the founder of Software Freedom Law Centre, India

Look beyond headline numbers

Despite economic momentum, concerns persist over investment and quality of employment for a rapidly increasing workforce

ISHAN BAKSHI

THE SECOND QUARTER GDP growth estimate, despite its statistical quirks, surpassed even the most optimistic of projections. It also seems to have reaffirmed the more cheerful medium-term projections of the Indian economy. Yet, beyond the headline growth numbers, there are some glaring contradictions in the economy.

First, it should be a matter of concern that this seemingly healthy economic momentum has, so far, not translated into a commensurate increase in more productive employment opportunities for the millions entering the labour force every year. With each passing year, the employment challenge is only becoming more severe.

To provide some perspective: India's workforce rose from around 460 million in 2017-18 to roughly 560 million in 2022-23 — an increase of 100 million workers over a five-year period. But, during this period, employment in the more productive manufacturing sector grew by just a shade above two million on average each year, while in the less productive agriculture sector, it rose by more than eight million. (The absolute numbers are based on population projections).

Second, not only were seven of 10 new entrants to the workforce self-employed, but almost seven of the 10 new entrants were also women, with a greater share from rural areas. These new entrants were more engaged in small establishments or as unpaid helpers in household enterprises, and not in regular salaried or casual wage employment.

Notions of empowerment via self-employment ring hollow considering their meagre earnings. Not only have real incomes (adjusting for inflation) of self-employed women in rural areas barely risen, but they actually earn less compared to others. For instance, during April-June 2023, the average gross earning of self-employed females in rural areas was Rs 5,056 during the last 30 days. In comparison, for males it was Rs 13,831. For the regular wage/salaried female employees in rural areas, the average earning (during the preceding month) was Rs 13,825, while for males, it was Rs 17,274.

Alongside this increase in self-employment, there has also been a steady rise in demand for work under NREGA. The number of individuals working under the scheme rose from 7.5 crore in 2017-18 to 8.75 crore in 2022-23, and has so far touched 7.38 crore this year, with women increasingly accounting for a greater share of person days of work. These trends suggest that not only is the rise in female workforce participation possibly an outcome of financial distress, but they also point towards the limited options available for more productive jobs. It is worrying that such trends have persisted despite growth firming up.

Third, perhaps a consequence of limited job opportunities, of strained incomes, is the surge in households availing unsecured personal loans. The loans availed could have been to meet their consumption needs and/or for financing self-employment activities. As per RBI data, outstanding unsecured personal loans of banks rose from Rs 10.5 lakh crore in March 2022 to Rs 13.3 lakh crore in March 2023, and by September 2023 had touched Rs 14.5 lakh crore. To put this growth in context: In September 2023, just the personal unsecured loan book of banks, not the entire retail loan portfolio, was equivalent to 42 per cent of total outstanding loans to industry, up from around 33 per cent in March 2022. And this does not include loans by NBFCs. This increase in such loans has been so rapid that the RBI has been forced to take action to slow down its pace, to obviate problems for the financial sector. While some signs of stress are visible, hitting the brake hard on these loans, as what seems to be happening, could have implications for household incomes and consumption.

These trends do, in part, explain why the appeal of redistributive palliatives pervades the political class — more so, when juxtaposed with an asset price boom and a fast-growing, highly productive services economy, especially the IT sector. It should thus be no surprise that despite the economy growing at 7 per cent, political parties are locked in a game of one-upmanship in announcing measures such as providing free food grains for another five years and schemes such as the Ladli Behna Yojana.

Fourth, it should be equally concerning that despite this steady economic momentum, the massive ramp-up in public sector capex, the PLI scheme, and healthy bank and corporate balance sheets, there are indications that private sector investments remain uneven, and have not revived to the extent hoped. In fact, as per CMIE, new investment project announcements plunged in the September quarter. And, as per the RBI's October monetary policy report, investment activity in the first half of the year "drew strength mainly from government capex". The "crowding in" has so far failed to materialise.

What has picked up is investments in physical assets (real estate) by the relatively more affluent households. This can be inferred from the bank credit numbers. Housing loans outstanding rose from Rs 16.8 lakh crore in March 2022 to Rs 19.36 lakh crore in March 2023, and by September 2023, had touched Rs 20.53 lakh crore. To provide a frame of reference: The housing loan book was equivalent to 59 per cent of the industrial loan book of banks in September 2023, up from 53 per cent in March 2022. And this also does not include NBFCs. As the household sector accounts for roughly two-fifths of all investments in the economy, it could have played a part in driving up the investment rate during this period.

This combination of a rapidly growing workforce, where new entrants are more reliant on less productive forms of employment in the least productive sectors, and an investment cycle that is more dependent on governments and households than the corporate sector, calls for a more measured, nuanced assessment of the country's growth prospects.

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Passing of the G20 baton

Brazil can use its position to help solve world's financial inclusion challenge

AMITABH KANT AND MARK SUZMAN

IN 2024, BRAZIL has a chance to make a mark on the world. Last month, India turned over the presidency of the G20 to Brazil. It's the first time Brazil has led the G20, a group of leaders from the world's largest economies who solve problems through economic cooperation. The question is: What can Brazil do with this new position of global influence?

One obvious answer: Help solve the world's financial inclusion challenge.

About a fifth of all adults are unbanked, despite significant progress over the past two decades. They have no safe space to store their money, which makes it nearly impossible to build wealth or escape poverty. The good news is we have a proven solution to this problem: Digital public infrastructure (DPI).

Twelve years ago, India was home to more unbanked people than any other country. According to the Bank for International Settlements, the country wasn't projected to achieve an 80 per cent "financial inclusion rate" until 2064. But things moved faster than expected — almost by 50 years. By 2021, 78 per cent of Indians had bank accounts, and there was no gender gap in access.

How did India pack a half-century's worth of progress into less than a decade? The government constructed a combination of systems that could authenticate people's identity and enable governments, businesses and individuals to instantly send and receive money regardless of which providers host the underlying accounts. This is the well-known "India Stack," which is just one of the great examples of DPI being built around the world to do everything from sending citizens relief payments to facilitating telehealth visits to providing farmers with real-time weather data and planting guidance.

Brazil also rapidly expanded financial inclusion through DPI. In 2020, Brazil's central bank launched Pix, an instant payment system that is now one of the fastest-growing in the world. The central bank then introduced an open finance regime that enables users to share their banking data with a range of credit, insurance and savings providers. Today, 84 per cent of adults in Brazil have a financial account, up from 56 per cent in 2011. About 80 per cent of adults actively use their accounts – among the highest in the world.

These investments spur growth. For nations with particularly low rates of financial inclusion, investments in DPI can increase GDP by 12 per cent. DPI sits in between the hard telecom infrastructure, like cell towers, and digital services and tools, like the apps on people's phones. Think of it like digital roads. Without governments building highways, companies can't deliver products and services to customers. Once a government builds the mechanisms for digital "transport", a company or government agency can use the platform to identify potential customers, request consent to access their data for product customisation and transact with them without having to negotiate with an incumbent payment or data exchange provider.

Of course, these digital roads need the equivalent of traffic signals and safety barriers, including regulatory safeguards and systems to ensure data privacy and prevent cyber-attacks. They also need to be built efficiently.

Countries don't need an end-to-end "stack" for every sector. We don't see the education ministry building one road for school buses while the health department builds another for ambulances. Roads, like electrical wires and fibre optic cables, are meant to carry all manner of traffic. That's not the case in the digital world. Increasingly, every agency is building its own systems for identification, payments, and data-sharing, which is often redundant and wastes precious resources. This is just one challenge in constructing DPI, and the G20 is indispensable in solving it.

When G20 leaders met in Delhi in September, they produced the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, which reflected enormous progress from the security of personal data to ensuring that the systems through which people bank and send money could be linked together, or interoperability. India also did important work placing the needs of women and people from the Global South at the centre of the DPI discussion.

Brazil has included DPI as a priority for the G20 by including it in its Digital Economy Working Group. The G20 can build upon this work in three important ways.

First, guidance. We need to develop clear international DPI design principles to ensure these systems are inclusive, interoperable, and secure against cyber-attacks and privacy breaches. The G20 can bring together a wide range of stakeholders to do this, including the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank.

Second, technology sharing. Only a handful of countries have built DPI well, and we need them to keep sharing their expertise with those who haven't built out their digital infrastructure yet. One way is by contributing to the open-source code libraries that house the building blocks of DPI, like MOSIP, Mojaloop, and the Global DPI Repository, which came out during India's G20 presidency.

Finally, we need more financing. The G20 should set its sights on a target set by the recent "50-in-5" campaign and help 50 more low- and middle-income countries build high-quality DPI over the next five years. There are a host of initiatives to help provide the funding. The Gates Foundation has called for additional investment of $500 million worldwide, while India's Social Impact Fund and organisations like Co-Develop have set out to raise money.

As Brazil assumes the presidency, we hope leaders lay the groundwork for digital innovation that will lead to a healthier, more prosperous world. If the G20 maintains the momentum in 2024 that India kicked off, the entire world may be able to pack decades' worth of progress into a few short years.

Kant was India's G20 Sherpa. He has previously served as the CEO of NITI Aayog. Suzman is CEO, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

J&K'S SECURITY ISSUE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Hold to account' (IE, December 25). It is optimistic for the Centre to envisage the immediate return of normalcy in J&K after the SC upheld the decision to abrogate Article 370. The deaths of four soldiers in an ambush by terrorists and the Army allegedly torturing three civilians to death warrant attention. No doubt the death of men in uniform is condemnable, but it is not an excuse for their colleagues to unleash brute force on civilians. The government must initiate corrective processes. Disdain for democratic processes and overemphasis on arms cannot secure peace.

S S Paul, *Nadia*

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Hold to account' (IE, December 25). Three civilians have allegedly died in army custody in Kashmir. Security forces in J&K work in hostile environments. Such high pressure jobs can lead to judgement errors but errors in such a sensitive area are unacceptable, especially in the post-370 era. Taliban's return in Afghanistan, political instability in Pakistan and the Israel-Hamas war can all influence the security situation in J&K. India's biggest guard against terror is the people of Kashmir. That's why having early elections in J&K is highly important .

Sanjay Chopra, *Mohali*

INDIA'S TARGETS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Poised for Viksit Bharat' (IE, December 25). The country's socioeconomic framework is heavily influenced by policies crafted by our leaders, elected or otherwise. According to the World Bank, India is currently a lower-middle income economy. On the other hand, according to the latest reports released by the IMF, India is in a very bright spot. Apart from a few areas of improvement, it is ready to achieve its target to become a four trillion economy by 2024 — along with being a 10 trillion economy in PPP terms. The nation needs a sustainable push through policies and controlled inflation rates.

Himanshu Raj, *Jammu*

ART OF DIPLOMACY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Grand gesture, small details' (IE, December 23). The politicians tasked with the responsibility of directing the nation's foreign policy cannot do so efficiently without a professional foreign service. Diplomats are expected to know both — the nuances of strategic postures and details of tactical actions necessary to obtain the strategic goals set by political executives. India's ambition of leadership of the Global South can not be fulfilled unless our diplomats are equally enthused.

Shubhada H, *via email*

TOP OF THE WORLD

Pope Francis. *Reuters*

VATICAN CITY

Pope blasts arms industry over war in Gaza

Rome: Pope Francis on Monday blasted the weapons industry and its "instruments of death" that fuel wars as he made a Christmas Day appeal for peace in the world and in particular between Israel and the Palestinians. he begged for an end to Israel's military campaign in Gaza and the "appalling harvest of innocent civilians" as he called for humanitarian aid to reach those in need.Francis devoted his Christmas Day blessing to a call for peace in the world. He called for governments and people of goodwill in the Americas to also address the issue of migration. **AP**

GUYANA

UK to send naval ship amid border dispute

London: Britain will deploy a naval ship off Guyana later this month, its ministry of defence said on Sunday, as the South American nation faces a border dispute with neighbour Venezuela over the oil-rich Essequibo region. The deployment follows a visit by a British junior foreign minister to Guyana earlier this month, intended to offer the UK's support for the country, an ally and former British colony. Guyana and Venezuela agreed earlier this month to avoid any use of force and not to escalate tensions in the long-running dispute. **AP**

UKRAINE

Received $1.34 bn World bank aid: Minister

Kyiv: Ukraine received $1.34 billion under the World Bank's public expenditures for administrative capacity endurance in Ukraine, the Ukrainian finance ministry said on Monday. The ministry said in a statement the financing consisted of a $1.086 billion loan from the World Bank, $190 million grant from Norway, $50 million grant from the United States and $20 million grant from Switzerland. It said the funds would be used to partially compensate for non-security and defence-related expenditures of the Ukrainian state budget, including old-age social payments and payments to employees of the state emergency service. **REUTERS**

RUSSIA

Fire on nuclear powered cargo ship put out

Moscow: Russia said on Monday that emergency workers had put out a fire on a Soviet-era nuclear-powered cargo-icebreaker ship and the state company which runs the vessel said there had been no casualties and no threat to the security of the reactor. The fire broke out on Sunday in one of the cabins of the Soviet-made Sevmorput ship, which is currently at dock in Murmansk. **REUTERS**

OVER 250 GAZANS KILLED IN A DAY, HEALTH OFFICIALS SAY

Netanyahu visits Gaza as Palestinians mourn deadly strike that killed dozens

In 2nd visit amid war, PM says Israel will further deepen fight

REUTERS & NYT
GAZA, CAIRO, DECEMBER 25

PRIME MINISTER Benjamin Netanyahu visited Israeli troops fighting in the Gaza Strip on Monday, vowing to stay the course of the war even with the death toll mounting. His trip came hours after Gazan health officials reported that a devastating overnight strike on a crowded neighborhood had killed dozens.

The trip was the Israeli leader's second known visit to Gaza since the war began. Netanyahu has been facing increasing pressure from the United States to lower the intensity of the war, but he said on Monday that Israel would "deepen" the fighting in coming days.

The strike late Sunday in central Gaza underscored the risk to civilians as fighting intensifies. Gazans were mourning the victims in the neighborhood, Al Maghazi, where many who have fled fighting in other parts of the enclave have sought shelter.

Gaza Health Ministry initially said 70 people had died in Sunday's attacks on Al Maghazi, with many others still buried.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu in Parliament said on Monday that Israel would not succeed in freeing the remaining hostages held in Gaza without applying military pressure.

"Military pressure, operational pressure and political pressure and that's why there is one thing we won't do - we will not stop fighting," Netanyahu said.

Nearly 20,700 people have been killed by Israeli airstrikes, including 250 in the last 24 hours, according to Gaza authorities. Thousands more are believed to be dead under the rubble.

The vast majority of Gaza's 2.3 million population have been driven from their homes, and the United Nations says conditions are catastrophic.

A building destroyed in an Israeli strike at the Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza. *Reuters*

Israeli strike kills senior Iranian military official

REUTERS
BEIRUT, DECEMBER 25

AN ISRAELI air strike outside the Syrian capital Damascus on Monday killed a senior adviser in Iran's Revolutionary Guards, three security sources and Iranian state media said.

The sources told Reuters that the adviser, known as Sayyed Razi Mousavi, was responsible for coordinating the military alliance between Syria and Iran.

Iranian state television said he had been "among those accompanying Qassem Soleimani", the head of the Guards' elite Quds Force who was killed in a U.S. drone attack in Iraq in 2020.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said the assassination of Mousavi showed weakness on the part of Israel.

"This act is a sign of the Zionist regime's frustration and weakness in the region for which it will certainly pay the price," Iranian media cited Raisi as saying.

3 WEEKS AFTER CONTACT LOST

Jailed Russian Opposition leader Navalny located in penal colony

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MOSCOW, DECEMBER 25

ASSOCIATES OF imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said on Monday that he has been located at a prison colony above the Arctic Circle nearly three weeks after contact with him was lost.

Navalny, the most prominent foe of Russian President Vladimir Putin, is serving a 19-year sentence on charges of extremism. He had been imprisoned in the Vladimir region of central Russia, about 230 kilometers (140 miles) east of Moscow, but his lawyers said they had not been able to reach him since December 6.

His spokesperson, Kira Yarmysh, said he was located in a prison colony in the town of Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region about 1,900 kilometers (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow. Navalny is "fine — at least as much as possible after such a long stage" and a lawyer visited him, Yarmysh told *AP*.

The region is notorious for long and severe winters. The town is about 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Vorkuta, whose coal mines were among the harshest of the Soviet Gulag prison system.

"It is almost impossible to get to this colony; it is almost impossible to even send letters there. This is the highest possible level of isolation from the world," Navalny's chief strategist, Leonid Volkov, said on *X*. His team was particularly alarmed when he could not be found because he had been ill and was allegedly denied food in an unventilated cell.

Yarmysh said the transfer was connected with the Russian presidential election in March.

Alexei Navalny in a protest in Moscow in 2019. *AP*

EXPLAINED

Impact on Presidential elections

WHILE PUTIN'S reelection is all but certain, given his overwhelming control over the country's political scene and a widening crackdown on dissent, Navalny's supporters hope to use the campaign to erode public support for Putin and his military action in Ukraine. He has been behind bars in since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow after the nerve agent poisoning that he blamed on Kremlin. Before his arrest, he campaigned stronlgy against official corruption.

"They deliberately sent him to this particular colony... as not to give him any opportunity to communicate with the outside world," Yarmysh said.

"It is not surprising they began to transfer him to another colony right now, so that he could not interfere with Putin's campaign."

Russian minister says forces gain control of east Ukraine town

REUTERS
MOSCOW, DECEMBER 25

RUSSIAN FORCES have gained full control of Maryinka, a town in eastern Ukraine, Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu told President Vladimir Putin, one of Russia's most significant gains since the capture of Bakhmut in May.

Most accounts of Maryinka, southwest of the Russian-held regional centre of Donetsk, describe it as a ghost town.

Putin said control of the town, which was once home to 10,000 people, will allow the Russian forces to move enemy combat units away from Donetsk.

"Our troops (now) have the opportunity to reach a wider operational area," he said in a video of the exchange between him and Shoigu posted online by a Kremlin journalist.

Russia's last major success on the battlefield was the capture in May of Bakhmut, theatre of some of the bloodiest fighting.

Ukraine launched a counteroffensive in June aimed at retaking land in the country's south and east, including Bakhmut. Kyiv's forces have made little progress in the counteroffensive in the face of entrenched Russian resistance.

There have been no comments so far from Ukraine on the latest developments.

KYIV SAYS 28 OUT OF 31 RUSSIAN DRONES SHOT BY AIR DEFENCE

Kyiv: Russia launched 31 drones and 2 missiles at Ukraine overnight, mostly targeting the south of the country, with air defences destroying 28 drones and both missiles, the Ukrainian military said on Monday. "No people were injured," the military added. There was no immediate comment from Russia. **REUTERS**

MIGRANTS' MARCH IN MEXICO

A caravan of migrants from Central America, Venezuela, Cuba and other countries marching through Mexico on Sunday, heading toward the US border. *AP*

- **The march came just days before US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's arrival in Mexico City to sort out new agreements to control the surge of migrants seeking entry into the US.**
- **The march is a clear indication that joint efforts by the US' Biden administration and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's government to deter migration are falling short.**
- **López Obrador in May agreed to take in migrants from various South American countries turned away by the US for not following rules that provided new legal pathways to asylum and migration.**

SAEED'S SON ONE AMONG NOMINEES

Hafiz Saeed-backed party candidates to contest in Pak polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAHORE, DECEMBER 25

A NEW political front organisation of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks mastermind Hafiz Saeed has fielded candidates for most of the national and provincial assembly constituencies across Pakistan for the February 8 general elections, saying it wants to make the country an Islamic welfare state.

Saeed, the founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), has been in jail since 2019 after being convicted for several years in multiple terror finance cases along with some other leaders of the banned Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD).

The Pakistan Markazi Muslim League (PMML) party - set up by Saeed has chair as its electoral symbol. In a video message, PMML President Khalid Masood Sindhu said that his party is contesting on most of the national and provincial assembly seats.

Sindhu is a candidate for NA-130 Lahore, from which Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supremo and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif is also contesting. Saeed's son Talha Saeed too is a party contestant, but when contacted, Sindhu denied his party's link with Saeed's outfit. "The PMML has no backing of Hafiz Saeed," he said on Monday.

In 2018, the Milli Muslim League (MML) was the political face of JuD. It had fielded candidates on most seats, especially in Punjab province but failed to win a single seat. For the 2024 polls, the PMML has been formed because of a ban on the MML.

The US has placed a USD 10 million bounty on Saeed, a UN-designated terrorist. Saeed-led JuD is the front organisation for the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

26/11 attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed is in jail since 2019.

Two Kuwaitis kidnapped on Iraqi desert hunting trip, say officials

REUTERS
ANBAR (IRAQ), DECEMBER 25

SECURITY FORCES are searching for two Kuwaitis who were kidnapped while on a hunting trip in a desert area in Iraq, two security officials said on Monday.

A police colonel confirmed the kidnapping took place on Sunday in a desert area between Anbar and Salahuddin provinces.

However, an Iraqi foreign ministry statement referred only to one Kuwaiti national.

It said Iraq's Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein told his Kuwaiti counterpart Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Iraqi government would "determine the fate of the Kuwaiti national". The statement followed a call between the two ministers Monday.

Iraqi security officials said an initial investigation showed that one of the hunters' vehicles was attacked by gunmen and contact had been lost with them.

The desert region is known to be a hiding place for Islamic State militant groups that are still active, the two security sources said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the incident. Hunters from wealthy Gulf states often make trips to Iraq's southern and western desert in search of hawks.

Milei's reforms push fuel prices by 60% in Argentina

THE NEW YORK TIMES
BUENOS AIRES, DECEMBER 25

IN ARGENTINA, a country synonymous with galloping inflation, life is becoming even more painful under the country's new president, Javier Milei.

When Javier Milei was elected president on Nov. 19, the country was already suffering under the world's third-highest rate of inflation, with prices up 160 percent from a year before. Milei's spokesman, Manuel Adorni, said pushing inflation was an inevitable consequence of finally fixing Argentina's economy. The previous leftist government used complicated currency controls, and consumer subsidies to inflate official currency value and keep key prices low.

Milei also discourages protests by threatening to cancel welfare plans of anyone involved, attracting decry from rights groups. **NYT**

EYEWITNESSES SPEAK OF SUNKEN BOAT OFF INDONESIA, WITH OVER 200 ROHINGYA REFUGEES ONBOARD

'They were crying, but how could we help? We too would've died'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
PIDIE (INDONESIA), DEC 25

THEIR SCREAMS and sobs could be heard from the ailing boat soon after it emerged into view amid the vastness of the Andaman Sea. Crowded on board were tiny babies and children, mothers and fathers begging to be saved.

The passengers were ethnic Rohingya Muslims who had fled surging gang violence and rampant hunger in the squalid refugee camps of Bangladesh, only to find themselves adrift with a broken engine. For a moment, it appeared their salvation had arrived in the form of another boat carrying Rohingya refugees that had pulled up alongside them.

They wanted to help, but they also wanted to live.

Since November, more than 1,500 Rohingya refugees fleeing Bangladesh in rickety boats have landed in Indonesia's northern province of Aceh. On Thursday, Indonesian authorities spotted another five boats approaching Aceh's coast.

This account of two boats in distress at sea — one was saved, the other vanished — was told to *AP* by five survivors from the vessel that made it to shore.

It provides the first clues into the fate of the boat carrying up to 200 Rohingya refugees that has been missing for weeks. On Dec. 2, the United Nations refugee agency, the UNHCR, put out an urgent message about the two boats in distress and urged countries to look for them.

But in the case of the boat that remains missing, it appears no one searched.

The story of the missing boat and its passengers begins the way most Rohingya boat journeys do — with tearful goodbyes in sweltering shelters in the camps of Bangladesh, where more than 750,000 Rohingya fled in 2017 following sweeping attacks by the military in their homeland of Myanmar.

The boat Jubair and his family were on was chugging across the sea, carrying 180 Rohingya bound for Indonesia. It was overloaded, but the engine was still working. Days into journey, the passengers on Jubair's boat spotted another vessel in the waves with broken engines, panicking passengers as water was seeping into it.

Those on Jubair's boat worried if they got too close, the people on the distressed vessel would jump onto their boat, sinking them all. According to Hussain, another passenger, their captain also issued a warning: "If you try to jump into our boat, we won't help you."

The boats but moved forward tethered together, until a vicious storm crashed down on them, severing them.

"They were crying and shouting loudly, but how could we help?" Jubair says. "We would die with them."

For days, Jubair and his fellow passengers languished at sea, their food and water gone. Eventually, a plane spotted them, and a Navy ship arrived, delivering food, water and medicine, and helped them reach the shore.

Weeks have passed, and the families of those on board the lost boat have heard nothing. Regional governments either did not respond to requests for comment or said they were unaware of the boat. **AP**

In the case of the boat that remains missing, it appears no one searched despite UN alerts. *AP*

On the front burner, in an election year

A lot of Indian politics is now about competitive welfarism, and it will be on full display during the Lok Sabha elections. The BJP will seek to ride its cultural nationalism push to a third straight term. It will have its eyes on several projects for the coming years — One Nation, One Election, and Census and delimitation among them. In many ways, 2024 could be among India's most consequential elections

MANOJ C G

LOOKING AT 2024 ELECTION YEAR

POLITICS

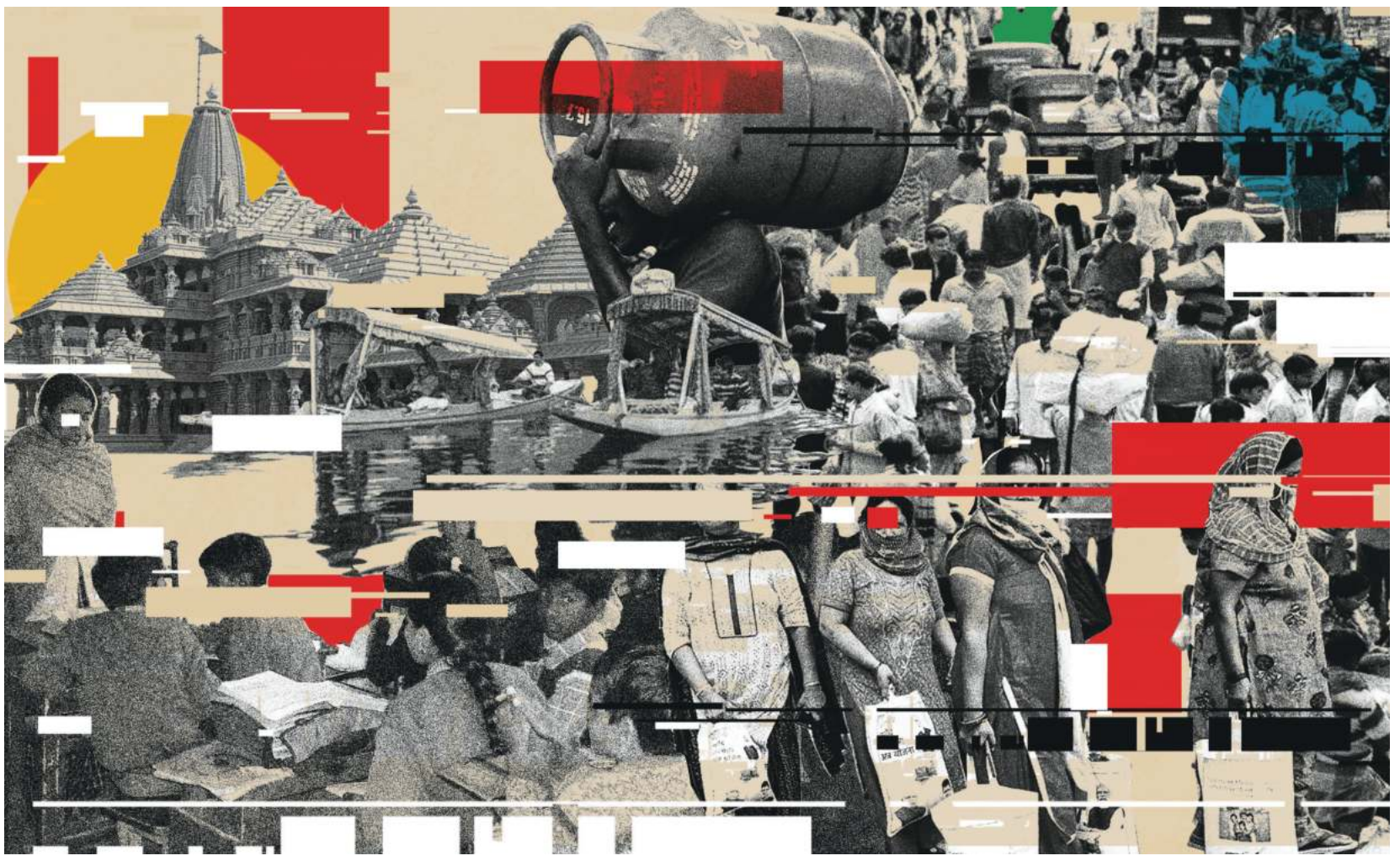

Illustration: Suvajit Dey

TWO WORDS, 'unprecedented' and 'historic', were heard repeatedly on both sides of the political divide in 2023. They were intended to capture the dynamic shifts, highs and lows, and far-reaching changes in Indian politics this year.

India hosting the G20 summit for the first time, and the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament were billed as historic.

The coming together of anti-BJP parties in the largest opposition bloc ever in terms of the number of parties, and Rahul Gandhi's cross-country yatra, perhaps the first time since 2014 that he had stepped out of his comfort zone, too, were billed as historic.

The opening of the new Parliament building was historic too, as was the passage of Bills replacing colonial era criminal laws.

The disqualification of a Lok Sabha MP — Rahul — following conviction in a defamation case was unprecedented, as was the expulsion of another MP — Mahua Moitra — for sharing her Parliament login credentials.

Also unprecedented: the mass suspension of MPs from Parliament, the wipeout of the grand old party in the Hindi heartland, the allegation by the US that an Indian intelligence official directed an unsuccessful plot to kill a Khalistani separatist on American soil.

2024 — the year of the world's biggest election exercise, followed by important elections in India's states, possible new geopolitical uncertainties and foreign policy challenges for the country, and the much-talked about rise of India as an economic powerhouse — could be marked by its own historic and unprecedented developments.

Here's a look at issues and developments that could define the discourse and shape of India's politics in the new year and beyond.

Competitive welfarism

As the Lok Sabha elections come closer, the political discourse will become more shrill and probably nastier. History, real and made-up, will be invoked, called into question, and debated. The politics of polarisation could return. Nationalism, of the cultural and other varieties, will take centrestage. And competitive welfarism — call it freebies, cash-transfers, guarantees, promises — will dominate the political and election narrative.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already signaled a shift to the left of centre in his welfare push, coupled with direct cash transfers. It is a key element in the Modi bouquet that the BJP offers to voters — the other elements being Hindutva, a muscular nationalism, and civilisational resurrection.

Even before the results of the five Assembly elections came in earlier this month, the government had rolled out the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, a nationwide mass contact campaign to spread information and raise awareness about government schemes ranging from housing, food security, and healthcare to LPG cylinders, pensions, and clean drinking water.

The Congress, which had promised the poorest 20% of families an annual cash transfer of Rs 72,000 in its 2019 manifesto, tasted success in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka with the promise of a raft of doles — which it called guarantees. But by the end of the year, the Congress's welfarism appeared to have been eclipsed by what the PM and his party repeatedly referred to as "Modi *ki* guarantee".

Nevertheless, the indication from the Congress camp is that it is formulating an economic plan with a heavy dose of welfare promises for the Lok Sabha elections. It is clear that the Opposition will seek to make livelihood issues like unemployment and price rise a key part of the campaign. Indications are the government may not announce any new schemes — but some existing schemes could well be topped up. The PM has already announced the extension of the free food-grains scheme for another five years; the BJP's manifesto could promise more.

J&K, cultural nationalism

Electoral democracy will return to Jammu and Kashmir next year, albeit after a judicial decree. The Assembly was dissolved in November 2018, and the state was bifurcated into two Union Territories nine months later. While the Supreme Court has directed the Election Commission to conduct elections to the J&K Assembly by September 30, the big question is whether statehood will be restored to the UT. The court gave no directions in this regard.

But the government does realise that the world is watching — and robust, free, and fair elections in J&K will add to its standing in the Global South.

Consigning Article 370 to the dustbin of history was one of the main ideological projects of the Sangh. Another, the opening of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya, will happen on January 22 — in a grand ceremony with the Prime Minister, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. It will provide a huge leg-up to the BJP's Hindutva campaign ahead of Lok Sabha elections.

So what next in the BJP's cultural nationalism project? Earlier this year, the PM referred to a Uniform Civil Code — "how can a country run with two kinds of law", he asked. The Law Commission of India is already working on a report on the UCC.

The Kashi Vishwanath Temple-Gyanvapi Masjid case is progressing fast. The Allahabad High Court has set a six-month deadline for completion of proceedings before a Varanasi court in a suit by Hindu plaintiffs seeking possession of the mosque complex. It has dismissed petitions by the UP Sunni Central Waqf Board and the mosque committee, ruling the 1991 original suit is not barred by The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.

One Nation, One Election

Slowly but steadily, the government is working to synchronise elections for the Lok Sabha and all state Assemblies. The Ram Nath Kovind committee is expected to come up with its recommendations on simultaneous elections some time next year — the timing will be key. The opposition sees this as a hugely disruptive idea.

Elections in Maharashtra, Haryana, and Jharkhand will be due by the end of 2024. It remains to be seen whether some of these polls are advanced to gradually move towards One Nation, One Election.

The Law Commission is backing the idea, and is likely to frame tentative timelines for simultaneous elections for the 2024 and 2029 cycles. The sense in political circles is that the Modi government, if it wins a third term, would push for it by the 2029 LS elections.

The Election Commission has told the Kovind panel that it needs up to a year's "lead time" to arrange the required additional number of EVMs and VVPATs.

DRIVEN BY IDEOLOGY

EVENTS IN 2023 were frequently described as a being 'historic' and 'unprecedented'. 2024 — the year of the world's biggest election exercise, followed by important elections in India's states, possible new geopolitical uncertainties and foreign policy challenges for the country, and the much-talked about rise of India as an economic powerhouse — could be marked by its own historic and unprecedented developments.

THE CULTURAL NATIONALISM project of the BJP and Sangh will drive the political narrative around the elections. Two of the Sangh's major ideological projects — consigning Article 370 to the dustbin of history and the building of a grand Ram Temple in Ayodhya — have been achieved. What could be next? The Uniform Civil Code, possibly, and other pending temple-mosque disputes.

Backward caste politics

Politics in Maharashtra has been roiled by demands from the Maratha community for reservation in jobs and educational institutions. The Congress government in Karnataka has not been able to publish the findings of a caste survey conducted by the state backward classes commission. Meanwhile, Bihar has published the findings of its caste survey, and passed a Bill in the Assembly increasing the overall quota for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Extremely Backward Classes, and Other Backward Classes to 65%.

The Congress, which went into the recent state elections talking about social justice and caste census, realised after the results that these issues had limited resonance on the ground. Even so, the Congress and most other INDIA bloc parties believe the plank of caste and social justice can counter the BJP's Hindutva push.

The BJP and the Sangh Parivar too know caste census can be a sensitive political issue, which will need careful handling. Thus, the RSS quickly disassociated itself from the remarks of one of its functionaries against the idea of a caste census. And the Prime Minister has repeatedly said that he considers the poor, youth, women and farmers as the "biggest castes", whose uplift will make the country developed.

Biting the reforms bullet

Should Modi return for a third term, he will equal the record of Jawaharlal Nehru. The big question is whether he will gather the courage to unleash a fresh set of radical economic reforms. In its two terms so far, the government has made half-hearted or piecemeal efforts in this direction, choosing to instead privilege welfarism in the governance model.

Reforms in sectors like agriculture, land, labour, fertiliser subsidies, and electricity generation and distribution can be contentious and difficult also because they need the support of state governments — a difficult challenge in a fractured polity.

Modi has repeatedly said India will become the third largest economy in his third term in office. The question is whether his government will attempt these reforms in its quest for high economic growth.

In the Budget for 2021-22, the Finance Minister had announced plans to take up privatisation of two state-run banks, along with IDBI Bank and a general insurance company. It is to be seen whether the government, if it is voted back to power, will try to move the needle on disinvestment and structural reforms.

Delimitation and the Census

While passing the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament earlier this year, the government said that the 33% quota for women would kick in after the next Census and the delimitation exercise that will follow. Delimitation will increase the number of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies, and will thus ensure that the reservation of one-third of seats does not affect male MPs and MLAs.

In 2002, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government had decided to freeze the contentious delimitation exercise for 25 years. So delimitation will now happen on the basis of the first Census after 2026. The earliest the Census process can now happen is in 2025 — if house-listing, the first step in the long process, can begin in 2024. If the government is indeed looking to complete the delimitation exercise before the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, the Census data will have to be published within one or two years after 2025.

NEXT: THE ECONOMY

EXPLAINED HEALTH

If you have a cold, how do you know if it is the flu or the new Covid strain?

ANKITA UPADHYAY & RUPSA CHAKRABORTY
NEW DELHI, MUMBAI, DECEMBER 26

IT'S WINTER and a lot of people are typically complaining of sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, fever, or bodyache. These could be symptoms of influenza or, especially in North India, pollution-related upper respiratory chest infection. But these could also be symptoms of Covid-19, which is spiking again.

How do you differentiate between Covid and the flu?

Symptoms overlap, and only way is to test.

"You can't differentiate among the symptoms otherwise. We have been getting cases of the flu for the last three months, but in the absence of testing, we don't know if there were Covid cases among them. If you don't test and send samples for genome sequencing, how will you know the character of the virus?" Dr Rommel Tickoo, Director, Internal Medicine at Max Hospital in Saket, New Delhi, said.

Early this year, a study published in the *BMJ* flagged the fact that "with vaccination, immunity from prior infection, and the evolution of [the] Omicron [strain of the virus] to cause overall less intense acute infection, the presentation of symptoms has evolved".

The symptoms are now mostly confined to the upper respiratory system — fever, myalgia (pain in the muscles), fatigue, sneezing, sore throat, and cough.

Dr Tickoo said that any influenza-like illness should be taken seriously, especially in an immuno-compromised group, and an RT-PCR test should be conducted. It also makes sense to start testing and thermal screening people randomly at airports, he said.

In cases of pollution-related illnesses, patients usually report wheezing or difficulty in breathing in addition to cough, cold, and sore throat, Dr Tickoo said.

So should everyone with symptoms of a cold get tested?

Doctors say you can skip the test if symptoms are mild and you are otherwise healthy, but if they are fairly pronounced or severe, you should test immediately — especially if you have co-morbidities, are over 60 years old, or pregnant.

Atypical symptoms of Covid include diarrhoea and other gastro-intestinal issues. Paracetamol is a safe medicine, but should not be used indiscriminately, especially in the elderly and diabetics. Should the symptoms last beyond two days, a doctor should be consulted. "If you have fever higher than 100 degrees on day three with persistent cough and intense bodyache, you need to go to a doctor," Dr Tickoo said.

How worrying is the current outbreak of Covid?

Most doctors say it is unlikely that the worst days of the pandemic in 2020 or 2021 will return, but it is important to stay vigilant. "Though JN.1 seems more transmissible, the vaccine and infection-acquired immunity can still shield us from hospitalisation and other complications like pneumonia," Dr Tickoo said.

Dr Rahul Pandit, Chair, Intensive Care Unit at H N Reliance Hospital in Mumbai and a former member of the Maharashtra Covid task force, said Covid is here to stay as a winter bug.

Dr Lancelot Pinto, senior pulmonologist and epidemiologist at Mumbai's Hinduja Hospital, said, "Studies have shown that colder temperatures and drier air create an environment conducive to the stability and transmission of respiratory viruses, potentially contributing to the heightened impact of Covid-19 during the winter months."

The unique characteristics of the Covid virus, such as its longer incubation period and ability to spread asymptomatically, contribute to its distinct impact on winter health dynamics, Dr Subhash Salunkhe, former chairman of the Covid-19 task force, said.

A 2020 study had shown that even a 1% decrease in humidity could lead to a significant 6% increase in the number of Covid-19 cases. The Omicron wave hit in December-January, and the JN.1 subvariant is spreading now.

Additionally, seasonal factors affecting human immune responses can drive the virus to adapt. These mutations can lead to the emergence of new variants, influencing the virus's behaviour and potentially impacting its transmissibility and severity of illness during the winter months.

JN.1, when compared to its parent BA.2.86 lineage, has an extra spike mutation, L455S, amplifying its immune evasion capabilities.

Could coronavirus variants become more virulent?

As immunity develops through infection or vaccination, the severity of illness typically diminishes over time. Most respiratory viruses entail initial severe outbreaks followed by milder infections due to immune memory. "While the emergence of variants is a concern, it doesn't necessarily indicate heightened lethality, reflecting a common feature in the evolution of viruses," Dr Salunkhe said.

As it transforms into a winter bug, Covid-19 will persist as a risk for those with compromised health conditions and co-morbidities. Dr Pradeep Awate, the former surveillance officer of Maharashtra, said it is very important to research long Covid vulnerabilities in the Indian population. "The majority of existing studies are derived from Europe and the US," he said.

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PERSONAL

I,Fir Dos Banu,W/o Rais Ahmed,R/o 1945 Gali Baradari Kucha Chelan DaryaGanj Delhi-110006,have changed my name to Firdous Bano.
0040705194-2

I Ritika D/o Anil Kumar R/o D-15, Main Kanti Nagar, Krishna Nagar, H.O East Delhi, Delhi-110051, have changed my name to Ritika Chaudhary
0070880387-1

I Meenakshi W/o Sh. Shiv Prakash R/o B-3676, Gali No.100, Block-B, Sant Nagar, Burari, Delhi-110084 have changed my name to Meenakshi Raturi for all purposes. 0040705172-2

I Mohd Islam S/o Natthu Hasan R/o 810-B, First Floor, Pocket-K, Rajiv Ratan Awas, Bapraula Phase-2, Najafgarh, South West Delhi, Delhi-110043 have changed my name to Ishan Mansoori for all purposes.
0040705172-6

I,Sorabh Jain,S/O-Shri Parveen Jain,R/O-140,Veer Nagar,Jain Colony,Delhi-110007,have changed my name to Saurabh Jain for all purposes.
0040705195-1

I,Sanjeev Bhasin S/o Mohan Lal Bhasin,R/o Flat.no.870, GH-5&7,Paschim-Vihar,Delhi-110087,have changed my name to Sanjeev Kumar Bhasin. 0040705194-10

AI,SURESH AGGARWAL S/O-PARMANAND AGGARWAL, R/O-B-165 GALI.NO-2,MAJLIS PARK ADARSH NAGAR DELHI-110033,HAVE CHANGE MY NAME TO SURESH KUMAR AGGARWAL,FOR ALL PURPOSES. 0040705195-2

I,SUNITA W/O RAMESH KUMAR SHARMA R/O,T-291 ROAD NO-20 NEAR M.C.D.SEHOOL BALJEET-NAGAR PATEL NAGAR, DELHI-110008,HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO SUNITA SHARMA.
0040705195-7

I,SONIA W/O PAWAN KUMA, R,O,37/GF HAPPY HOME, OMAXE CITY BAHADURGARH JHAJJAR H.R-124507,HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO SONIA RANI. 0040705195-5

I,Ramesh Singh s/o Hark Singh r/o D 90 3rd floor g.no.5 kh.no.83,Mahavir Enclave New Delhi 110045,have changed my name to Ramesh Singh Airy for all purposes. 0040705195-3

I,RENU MANJIT SINGH KALRA,W/O MANJIT SINGH KALRA K-11/8,1st FLOOR,DLF PH-2, GURGOAN,HARYANA-122001,HAVE CHANGE MY NAME TO RENU KALRA,FOR ALL PURPOSES. 0040705194-4

I,RAMESH SHARMA,S/O GIRDHARI LAL SHARMA R/O,T-291-ROAD NO-20 NEAR M.C.D.SEHOOL BALJEET NAGAR PATEL NAGAR DELHI-110008,HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO RAMESH KUMAR SHARMA. 0040705195-6

I,Prince Baisala S/o Rajender SIngh,R/o H.No.13,Village Atmadpur,Sector-30, Faridabad,have changed my name to Prince Baisla.
0040705194-7

I,PAWAN JASUJA S/O OM PRAKASH JASUJA R/O 37/GF HAPPY HOME, OMAXE CITY BAHADURGARH JHAJJAR H.R. -124507,HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO PAWAN KUMAR.
0040705195-4

I,Om Parkash,S/o Puran Lal R/o H.No.426/1,Link Road,Old Faridabad, Faridabad,have changed my name to Om Parkash Mittal. 0040705194-6

I,Meena Kumari W/o Joginder Singh, H.No.24,Kotla-Vihar Phase-II,Tilangpur Motla,Delhi,have changed my name to Meena Devi.
0040705194-9

I,MANJIT SINGH,S/O-MOHINDER SINGH R/O-K-11/8,1st-FLOOR,DLF PH-2, GURGOAN,HARYANA-122001,HAVE CHANGE MY NAME TO MANJIT SINGH KALRA,FOR ALL PURPOSES.
0040705194-5

I,KUNAL GOEL S/O RAJENDER PRASAD GOEL R/O-1901/141,GANESH PURA-A,TRI-NAGAR,DELHI-110035 HAVE CHANGED MY MINOR DAUGHTER'S NAME FROM RIDHI GOEL TO RADHVI GOEL FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSES.
0040705107-12

I,Asloom S/o Suleman R/o Village.- Chhapra,Tehsil-Nuh,District-Mewat Nuh. (Haryana), have changed my name to Aslup,for all Purposes. 0040705194-1

I,Aridhi Madan W/o Ayush Jain,R/o B-5/24 Vallabh,Vihar Sector-13,Rohini Delhi-110085,have changed my name to Aridhi Jain.
0040705194-8

I Khushboo D/o Sh. Baldev Oraon R/o 28/20, Tuglak Road, New Delhi-110011 have changed my name to Khushboo Oraon for all purposes. 0040705172-7

I Shishant S/o Sh. Devender Choudhary R/o H.No.218, Khichdi Pur, Kalyanpuri, East Delhi-110091 have changed my name to Shishant Dedha for all purposes. 0040705172-4

I,.MOHD PARVEZ ALI,S/O.ZAHID ALI,ADD:-MASURI DISTRICT GHAZIABAD UTTAR PRADESH 201302,changed my name to PARVEZ ALI,for all,future purposes. 0040705195-8

I, Wasiullah,R/o 1853 Gali Patte Wali Sui Walan DaryaGanj,Delhi-110002,Have Changed My Minor Son Name,From Wasi fullah To Wasif Ullah. 0040705194-3

I, Satvinder Pal Singh S/o Ajit Singh R/o C-8/237-B, Keshav Puram, Delhi, have changed my MINOR son name from Samrat Talwar to Samrat Singh Talwar permanently
0040705189-2

I, Sandhya Khera W/o Sourabh Malhotra R/o A-4/141, Sector-4, Rohini, Delhi-110085 have changed my name to Sandhya Malhotra 0040705178-2

I, Mohd Kasim Khan S/O Mohd Shafik Khan R/o,H.No.E-203-D, Roop-Nagar,Harsh-Vihar, Hari-Nagar Extn.,Part-3, Badarpur, Delhi- 110044,have changed my minor daughter's name Sameera to Saira Khan, Aged-16- Years. 0040705207-1

I, HIMANSHU, S/O PREM KUMAR, R/O H.NO-353 THIRD FLOOR, DHAKKA JOHAR, BHAI PARMANAND COLONY, DR. MUKHERJEE NAGAR, NORTH WEST DELHI, DELHI-110009. Have changed my name to HIMANSHU KATHPAL For all future purposes 0070880369-1

I, AMIT KUMAR S/o Shri Ishwar Chandra, R/o B-56A, B Block, South Ganesh Nagar, Shakar Pur Baramad, Shakarpur, East Delhi, Delhi-110092 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as AMIT KUMAR GUPTA 0040705176-1

I Yogendra Kumar Kashyap S/o Madan Gopal Kashyap R/o D-413, Pocket-3, Bindapur DDA Flat, Uttam Nagar, Delhi-110059, have changed my name to Yogendra Kashyap
0070880370-1

I Vikash Sharma S/o Sh. Ravinder Sharma R/o RZ-26P/69B, Gali No.39/7, Indra Park, Palam Colony, Palam Village S.O.,South West Delhi, Delhi-110045 have changed the name of my minor son from Aradhy to Aradhy Bhardwaj for all purposes.
0040705172-5

I Vanita Randhawa alias Vanita Kukreja alias Vanita Kumari Kukreja D/o Sh. Sharwan Kumar W/o Sh. Balbir Singh R/o 10/44, First Floor, Subhash Nagar, Tagore Garden S.O., West Delhi, Delhi-110027 have changed my name to Vanita Randhawa for all purposes.
0040705172-1

I Vaibhav S/o Arun Kumar R/o D-15, Main Kanti Nagar, Krishna Nagar, H.O East Delhi, Delhi-110051, have changed my name to Vaibhav Chaudhary 0070880385-1

I Tenzing Doma Bhtia D/o Tseten Bhutia and W/o Ashish Atri R/o C-22, Upper Ground Floor, Acharya Kriplani Road, Near Jyoti Model School, Adarsh Nagar, Delhi-110033, have changed my name to Tenzing Doma Bhutia
0070880386-1

I Shiv Prakash S/o Sh. Om Prakash R/o H.No.3676, Street B-100, Sant Nagar, Burari, Delhi-110084 have changed the name of my minor son from Samyak to Samyak Raturi for all purposes.
0040705172-3

Bhardwaj Bhavya Mahesh W/o Abhishek Gupta R/o H.No-17, Raj Nagar, Pitampura, Delhi-110034 have change my name as Bhavya Gupta permanently
0040705189-1

LOST & FOUND

I, Vedansh Gupta have lost my class 12 th marksheet of 2021,UID 6937965 of ISC, Aryan School . If found,contact 8355028109 .
0050233326-1

We, Prabhujyoti Singh Paul & Manju Paul, both R/o N-195, Ground Floor, Greater Kailash-1, New Delhi, would like to inform that the original conveyance deed of our Flat F-G03, Tulip Ivory, Sector 70, Gurgaon, Badshahpur, Haryana, have been lost in transit. If found, please contact. 9810168331.
0040705172-9

I, Jaideep Chaudhray S/o Madhusudan Chaudhary R/o-B-21 2nd Floor Nizamuddin West, New Delhi-110013, have lost my original Provisional Allotment Ref: JGNOCA023201 dated-29.06.2013 issued by Jaypee Greens. Finder Contact above address 0040705178-1

I Firoz Ahmad S/o Mr. Khursheed Ahmad R/o C-39/A-19, Gali No.5, Rani Garden, Shastri Nagar, Delhi-110031 have lost my Original GPA(Regd.), ATS, Payment Receipt, Affidavit & Possession Letter executed on 15.03.2005 by Khursheed Ahmad in favour of Feroz Ahmad W.R.T. Property No.C-39-A-19, Rani Garden, Shastri Nagar, Delhi-110031. Finders may contact at above address.
0040705172-8

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0070877719-6

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Public at large is hereby notify that my client (1) Shri Rajnish Najhawan S/o Late Shri O. P. Najhawan and (2) Smt. Geeta Midha W/o Shri Umesh Midha are the absolute and lawful owners of the entire property bearing No. E-149, situated at Preet Vihar, Delhi-110092. After the death of their parents namely Late O. P. Najhawan expired on 13.07.2007 and his wife namely Late Promila Najhawan has died on 08.02.2018.

If anyone found or have any objection/Claim for any type such as any Loan, Mortgage, Surety, Security etc. over the said property regarding then contact to the undersigned within 10 days of this Notice. Thereafter no body have any right on the said property. And my client shall have full right to sell the said property to any intending buyer and receive the consideration in their own name.

SAHIL ARORA (Advocate)
Office No.107, First Floor, M.S. Chambers, Aruna Park, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110092
+91-9811912277, 9811812277

Public Notice

I, Aditya Malik, Advocate under the instructions and on behalf of my client namely Mrs. Manisha Sharma presently residing at R/o D-2/82 Vatika City, Sector 49, Gurugram, Haryana-122001, having UIDAI Adhaar Card No. 445316193937, cause this notice to general public at large that my aforesaid client has debarred and disowned her parents and brother namely (father) Mr. Birbal Sharma (Mother) Mrs. Kanta Sharma & (Brother) Manav Sharma, all R/o B-37, Ground Floor, Platinum Deluxe Floors, Aardee City, Sector-52, Gurugram, Haryana-122011 from all her movable and immovable properties throughout India. Furthermore our client namely Mrs. Manisha Sharma relinquish all her rights and title in the ancestral properties along with all the movable and immovable properties of joint HUF. The act and conduct of parents i.e. Mr. Birbal Sharma and Kanta Sharma along with brother Manav Sharma of our client is not in consonance with the temperament and social image of our client. Now our client have no concern with her parents and brother and our client shall not be responsible for any of their act or deed. Thus henceforth our client out of her own free will has completely severed all her relation with the aforesaid persons i.e. her parents and brother. Anybody dealing with the aforesaid persons shall do at their own risk and responsibility and our client shall not be liable for any act deeds of the aforesaid persons.
Aditya Malik (adv.) 406, Amber Tower, Commercial Complex, Azadpur Delhi-33

PUBLIC NOTICE

The General Public is hereby informed that Sh. Jatinder Asija S/o Lt. Sh. N. D Asija along with his wife Ms. Anjana Asija, R/o-H-3/156, Vikaspuri, New Delhi-110018 (herein after referred to as 'My Client's) have disowned, disinherited and had severed all relation from their son namely Sh. Aman Asija and his Wife Namely Ms. Heena Asija due to the harassment, stress and agony being caused to them on their account since 15th September 2023. My clients have debarred them from all of their moveable & immoveable properties. Sh. Aman Asija and His Wife Namely Ms. Heena Asija has no power or authority to incur any debts on the security of my clients properties. My Clients shall not be liable for their acts & deals. If Any person deals with Sh. Aman Asija and His Wife Namely Ms. Heena Asija in any manner whatsoever. He/she will be doing the same at his/her own risk and Sh. Jatinder Asija and his wife Ms. Anjana Asija will not be liable or responsible.

MUKUL BHIMANI (ADVOCATE) D/1746/2018
Office: H3/151, Vikas Puri, New Delhi-110018
Contact No.: +91-9810543151

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public at large hereby informed that **Property Bearing No.44, Block-B, Sector-31, Noida Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar U P** is jointly owned by Sh. Tarun Kumar & Late Smt. Raj Kumari Ahuja by virtue of **Transfer Deed Cum Sale Deed** which is duly registered as Doc No. 8778 dated 31.10.2011 & after death of Late Smt. Raj Kumari Ahuja **Transfer Letter dated 11.08.2016** issued by Noida Authority in favour of Sh. Tarun Kumar. **Original Will** executed by Smt. Bimla Bhatia W/o Late Sh. PL. Bhatia in favour of Sh. Pradeep Bhatia S/o Late Sh. PL. Bhatia vide Doc No.539 Vol No.76 dated 31.07.2001 in respect of the captioned property is informed as lost and lost report filed with P.S. Crime Branch vide LR No.1267781/2023 dated 23.12.2023

It is hereby notified that any person or entity, firm/ company, Bank, financial institution having claim any charge, interest or lien or claim on the basis of documents mentioned above or otherwise and/or objection thereof, he/she/they may lodge/notify the same to the undersigned with documentary proof within 15 days from the day of publication, failing which the title shall be deemed to be clear and marketable without any defect, encumbrance, flaw and impediment.

Sd/-
NIRMAL KUMAR
Advocate
Chamber No.599 Patiala House Court New Delhi

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is, hereby informed through this notice to general public that my client Pardeep Jain S/o Shri Jai Kumar Jain and Mrs. Nirmala W/o Pardeep Jain Both. Resident of B-32, Yadav Nagar, Delhi-110042 Presently at E-4/63, Sector-7. Rohini. Delhi-110085 on 5.09.2023 execute a sale deed having registration no. 2246 dated 5.09.2023 in favour of Mr. Jagminder Pahal S/o Shri Mahabir R/o Village Gumar, Tehsil Ganaur, Distt Sonipat and Mr. Ramesh Kumar S/o Shri Ran Singh R/o Village Jahri, Tehsil & District Sonipat, Haryana of the area i.e. 130-135 Sq. Gaz of land bearing no. 19 kanala, 18 Marle, khewat no. 53/56, khana no. 78 killa no. 31/23/2(1-11) 31//24/2 (5-16) 31/25/1 (7-14) 35//4/1/1/1 (4-4) revenue estate of Baraut, Tehsil Ganaur, District Sonipat, Haryana but Mr. Jagminder Pahal S/o Shri Mahabir and Mr. Ramesh Kumar S/o Shri Ran Singh in the sale deed no. 2246 dated 5.09.2023 with malafide intention mentioned excess/wrong area of land 130-135 Sq. Gaz to 3016 Sq. Gaz and now my above said clients Pardeep Jain S/o Shri Jai Kumar Jain and Mrs. Nirmala W/o Pardeep Jain going to file suit for cancellation of sale deed dated 9.05.2023 registration no.2246 and my client appeal to the general public to not purchase/mortgage or deal with the above said land or if any person or any association/company/ trust purchase/ mortgage the deal with the above said land. he/she shall do so at his/her own risks, cost and consequences.

Sd/-
Mandeep Bansal
Advocate
D-2377-B/06
Off.-D-11/88, Sec-7, G.F, Rohini, Delhi-110085

PUBLIC NOTICE

The general public is hereby informed that Mr. Ram Gopal Goel and his wife Mrs Shashi Goel resident of B-703 Amrapali Princely Estate sector 76 Noida (herein after referre to as "my client") have disowned and disinherited their son Mr. Saurabh Goel, and his wife Anjli Goel & His / Her son Harshil Goel from all their movable and immovable properties and have also severed all ties with him due to the stress and agony being caused to them on his account. If any person deals with Mr. Saurabh Goel and his wife Anjli Goel & His / Her son Harshil Goel in any manner whatsoever he/she will be doing the same at his/her own risk and Mr. Ram Gopal Goel and his wife Mrs. Shashi Goel will not be liable or responsible.

(MOHIT KUMAR GUPTA)
ADVOCATE
Chamber No.-290, Gali No.-7, Civil Court, Surajpur, Greater Noida, Gautambudh Nagar - 201306, U.P. +91-9999806062

PUBLIC NOTICE

BE IT KNOWN TO ALL AT LARGE THAT MY CLIENTS MRS. PUSHPA DEVI AND SH.RAM PRASAD R/O.54-B, GALI NO.9, SHIV MANDIR, GAUTAM COLONY, NARELA, DELHI-110040, HAVE SEVERED AND CEASED ALL THEIR RELATIONS WITH THEIR SONS ROHIT KUMAR HIS WIFE GEETA THEIR DAUGHTERS KHUSHI, BHAVYA AND ASHWANI KUMAR HIS WIFE DEEPIKA, HIS SON KESHAV AND ALSO DISOWNED/DEBARRED THEM FROM ALL OF THEIR MOVABLE AND IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES/ASSETS. MY CLIENTS SHALL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY OF THEIR ACTS, DEEDS OR ACTIVITIES, AND IF ANY ONE ENTERS INTO ANY KIND OF DEALINGS WITH THEM INCLUDING ANY OF THEIR ASSETS, HE/SHE/THEY SHALL DO SO AT HIS/HER/THEIR OWN RISK COST AND CONSEQUENCES WHICH MAY KINDLY NOTE.

Sd/-
KULDEEP KUNDRA
(Advocate)
B-204, North Ex-MALL, Sector-9, Rohini Delhi-85

Public Notice

Public at large to be informed that my Clients Sant Prashad Alagh S/o Late Prem Prashad Alagh & his wife Savita Alagh R/o Block AG-1, DDA MIG Flat No-77C Vikas Puri ND-18 had evicted their son Shiv Prashad Alagh from their family on dt. 20/02/2022, now they have forgiven their son Shiv Prashad Alagh and have made him a legal heir as part of their family which overturns all the previous injunctions.
Ramesh Chander (Adv)
Ch-68,Western Wing,Tis Hazari

PUBLIC NOTICE

The General Public is hereby informed that my clients Mr. Sanjay Kumar S/o Ram Kumar and Mrs. Sudesh Rani W/o Sh.Sanjay Kumar both R/o L-93, Chanakya Place Part-2, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059 have disowned their sons Yogesh Kumar and Ved Parkash from all their movable & immovable properties and have severed all relations from both of them. Any person dealing with them shall be doing at his own risk, cost. My clients shall not be responsible in any manner for any kind of his deed, act. **PRAVEEN RASTOGI**
(Advocate)
Enrl No.D-244/06

PUBLIC NOTICE

IT IS HEREBY INFORMED THAT MY CLIENT SHRI RISHABH CHOUDHARY IS THE OWNER OF UPPER GROUND FLOOR WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS OF FREEHOLD BUILT UP PROPERTY NO. 1/10087, MEASURING 100 SQ. YARDS OUT OF KHASRA NO.357, SITUATED AT THE AREA OF VILLAGE BABARPUR, IN THE ABADI OF GALI NO.3, WEST GORAKH PARK, ILLAQA SHAHDARA, DELHI-110032. & IN THIS PROPERTY Shri Kapoor Singh DOES NOT POSSESS THE SURVIVING MEMBER CERTIFICATE & DEATH CERTIFICATE.

IF ANY OTHER CLAIMENT HAS ANY RIGHT IN THE AFORESAID PROPERTY, HE/SHE SHOULD INFORM & GIVE INTIMATION TO THE UNDERSIGNED WITHIN 15 DAYS FROM THE DATE OF ISSUE OF THIS NOTICE.

Sd/-
Subhash Gupta (Advocate)
Enrl No. D-446/2002
125, First Floor, Anand Nagar, Inderlok, Delhi-110035

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is for the information of the general public at large that my client Ms Kailash Arora W/o Surinder Arora, R/o H. no.2, New Mohinder Nagar, Opposite Indira Theatre, Canal Road, Jammu, Currently at New Delhi, Do hereby cancel the Power of Attorney- SPA Dt 26.08.2023, Duty Attested vide notary register entry serial no 438/23 and any other document executed by herself in favour of Sh: Deepak Kumar Sharma, S/o Satpal Sharma. R/o H.no. 584, Gali no.3, Ramesh Tyagi Colony, Jharoda Majra, Burari, North Delhi 110084 vide this Public Notice. Therefore, my clients shall not be responsible in future for any act and deeds, done on behalf of the above mentioned SPA and any other document and if any person dealing with him shall be doing so at his/her own risk and responsibility.

Sd/-
Amit Nayyar & Sunil Kumar
Advocates
299, First Floor, Western Wing, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to the General Public that my clients Sh. Jaswant Singh S/o late Sh. Naza Singh and Smt. Paramjeet Kaur W/o Sh. Jaswant Singh both R/o A-3, Janta Colony, Shivaji Vihar, Raghubir Nagar, New Delhi-110027, has disowned and disinherited their SON HARPREET SINGH and HIS FAMILY MEMBERS, R/O A-3, JANTA COLONY, SHIVAJI VIHAR, RAGHUBIR NAGAR, NEW DELHI-110027 from all their properties movable and immovable whatsoever and wheresoever situated due to his temperament issues. My clients have also severed all the social and economical relations with them. Anybody dealing with them, shall be at his/her/their risk, cost and consequences and my clients shall not be responsible for the same.

Sd/-
O.P. SHARMA
Advocate
Enrol. No. D/3599/13
Chamber No. 473, Western Wing
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi-110054

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to public at large that Sh. Ativ Gupta, S/o Sh. Ajay Gupta has been allotted Unit No. 2131 Tower Gold in project Mahagun Medalleo. That Sh. Ativ Gupta has rights & interests in the said flat. All persons are hereby informed not to enter into, deal and/or carry out any transaction with Mahagun Infratech Pvt. Ltd. in respect of above property on basis of any document whatsoever. If anyone has already carried out or carrying out any transaction in relation to the above property, kindly inform the undersigned on the below mentioned address within 7 days from the present public notice.

Rahul Malhotra (Advocate),
Enrol No. D/1921/2013,
G-37, LGF, Lajpat Nagar-3, New Delhi-110024,
Mob.: 9899218215

सार्वजनिक सूचना

सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि मेरे मुवक्कील श्री रमेश कुमार गर्ग पुत्र स्वर्गीय रामपाल गर्ग निवासी 3910/16, कन्हैया नगर, त्रि-नगर, दिल्ली-110035, ने अपने दुसरे नंबर के बेटे (मोहित गर्ग व उसकी पत्नी कंचन व इनके बच्चो) को मेरे मुवक्कील के प्रति दुर्व्यवहार के कारण अपनी चल व अचल सम्पत्ति से हमेशा के लिए बेदखल कर दिया है, भविष्य में मोहित व उसकी पत्नी कंचन व इनके बच्चो से यदि कोई भी व्यक्ति किसी भी प्रकार का लेन-देन करता है, तो उसका मेरे मुवक्कील रमेश कुमार से कोई लेना-देना नहीं होगा।

Sd/-
RAVINDER KUMAR
Advocate
Enrl. D/2846/2011

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known my client ASHA RANI W/O LATE SH. OM PRAKASH RESIDENT OF DDA FLAT NO. 42, POCKET-7, SECTOR A-6, NARELA, DELHI-110040 has disowned and severed all her relations with her younger son namely SANDEEP SHARMA AND HIS WIFE NISHA AND THEIR SON DANISH and debarred them from her movable and immovable properties/assets due to their misbehavior, unfamiliar activities, intolerable act, misconduct and going against my client and my client do not want to keep any relation with them. Anybody dealing with them in civil and criminal matter shall be doing at his/her/their own risk, cost and responsibility and my client and her family shall not be liable for their any act.

Naveen Khurana
(Advocate)
Enrl.No.D/3290/2022

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Online Tender Document for M.P. Police

POLICE HEADQUARTER, M.P., BHOPAL

No. PHQ/15/GPC/ 5652-1 /2023 Bhopal, Dated 19/12/2023

"ONLINE TENDER NOTICE"

Online tender are invited by Deputy Inspector General of Police (Provisioning) Police Head Quarter, Bhopal on behalf of DGP MP Bhopal for Furniture Items on website **https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app**

Sr	Name of Item	Quantity	EMD Paid Online Through mptenders.gov.in	Tender Fees (Rs.)
1	SOFA SET 5 SEATER	22 Nos.	26,400/-	2000
2	CENTRE TABLE	22 Nos.	10,800/-	1000
3	WOODEN BOOK SHELF WITH GLASS DOOR	20 Nos.	6,600/-	1000
4	PLASTIC MOULDED CHAIR WITH ARMS WITH CUSHION	50 Nos	10,800/-	1000
5	VISITOR BENCH	30 Nos.	9,000/-	1000
6	STEEL ALMIRAH	20 Nos.	3,750/-	1000

1. Cost of tender document (Tender Fee) is non refundable and cannot be exempted in any condition & must submit online through website **ttps://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app**.
2. Tender document can be download from the website of MP Police (www.mppolice.gov.in)
3. Bids shall be submitted online only at MP Tenders website: **https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app**
4. Critical Date Sheet:

Published Date	19/12/2023 के 16:00 बजे
Bid Document Download Start Date	20/12/2023 के 12:00 बजे
Pre Bid Meeting Date	27/12/2023 के 16:00 बजे
Bid Submission Start Date	30/12/2023 के 11:00 बजे
Bid Submission End Date	08/01/2024 के 14:00 बजे
Bid Opening Date	09/01/2024 के 16:00 बजे

5. Intending Bidders are advised to visit this website regularly till closing date of submission to keep themselves updated as any change/ modification in the tender will be intimated through this website only by corrigendum / addendum/ amendment.
6. Bids will be opened as per date/time as mentioned in the Tender Critical Date Sheet. After online opening of Technical-Bid the results of their qualification as well Price-Bid opening will be intimated later.

Sd/-
(D.R.Teniwar)
D.I.G. (Provisioning)
For: Director General of Police M.P.

G-22115-23

Online Tender Document for M.P. Police

POLICE HEADQUARTER, M.P., BHOPAL

No. PHQ/15/GPC/ 7282-3/2023 Bhopal, Dated 11/12/2023

"ONLINE TENDER NOTICE"

Online tender are invited for 3 months For Rate Contract by Deputy Inspector General of Police (Provisioning) Police Head Quarter, Bhopal on behalf of DGP MP Bhopal for FSL Items on website **https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app**

Technical specifications of required items with quantity of MP FSLs			EMD Paid Online Through mptenders.gov.in	Tender Fees (Rs.)
S No.	Name of Plasticware	Approx Quantity	4,20,000/-	10,000/
1	0.2 ml PCR tube with Flat Cap, Sterile, DNase & RNase Free, Autoclavable, clear	100000 nos		
2	Nitrile Gloves Large thickness 4 mils or better, 100 pcs per pack	30000 nos		
3	Nitrile Gloves Medium thickness 4 mils or better, 100 pcs per pack	120000 nos		
4	Nitrile Gloves Small thickness 4 mils or better, 100 pcs per pack	40000 nos		
5	Latex examination gloves, Medium size 100 pcs per pack	50000 nos		
6	1.5ml Microcertrifuge tube, DNase & RNase Free, graduated with froasted labelling surface, clear, Sterile	200000 nos		
7	2.0ml Microcertrifuge tube, DNase & RNase Free, graduated with frosted labelling surface, clear, Sterile	100000 nos		
8	96 Well plate semi skirted, Sterile, DNase & RNase Free, for 3500×L Genetic Analyzer	5000 nos		
9	96 Well plate semi skirted, Sterile, DNase & RNase Free, for QuantStudio 5 real time PCR System	3000 nos		
10	Centrifuge tube conical bottom with capacity 50 ml, Sterile, leak proof, graduated, DNase, RNase Free, Screw caped, clear, tubes can with stand up to 15000xg	10000 nos		
11	Centrifuge tube conical bottom with capacity 15 ml, Sterile, leak proof, graduated, DNase, RNase Free, Screw caped, clear, tubes can with stand up to 15000xg	10000 nos		
12	Centrifuge tube conical bottom with capacity 5 ml, Sterile, leak proof, graduated, DNase, RNase Free, Screw caped, clear, tubes can with stand up to 15000xg	10000 nos		
13	Filtered Micro Tip up to 10 XL/20µl, Racked, Low retention, Sterile, Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free,	200000 nos		
14	Filtered Micro Tip up to 10µl, Racked, Low retention, Sterile, Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free	200000 nos		
15	Filtered Micro Tip up to 20µl, Racked, Low retention, Sterile Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free	100000 nos		
16	Filtered Micro Tip up to 50µl, Racked, Low retention, Sterile, Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free	100000 nos		
17	Filtered Micro Tip up to 100µl, Racked, Low retention, Sterile, Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free	100000 nos		
18	Filtered Micro Tip up to 200µl, Racked, Low retention, Sterile, Universal tip, DNase & RNase Free, graduated	200000 nos		
19	Filtered Micro Tip up to 1000µl, Racked, Low retention Sterile, compatible with universal pipettes, DNase & RNase Free, graduated	250000 nos		
20	5 ml tips compatible with brand pipettes, Sterile, DNase & RNase Free, graduated, 100 nos refling with box	10000 nos		
21	10 ml tips compatible with ependroff/gilson pipettes, Sterile, DNase & RNase Free, graduated, 100 nos refling with box	20000 nos		
22	5 ml Tip box with cover	200 nos		
23	10 ml Tip box with cover	200 nos		
24	Rack for Microcentrifuge tube (1.5ml) 48 Places	200 nos		
25	Rack for Microcentrifuge tube (1.5ml) 24 Places	200 nos		
26	Rack for 50ml tube 12 Places or more	200nos		
27	Rack for 15 ml tube 20 Places or more	200nos		
28	Rack for 5 ml tube 24 Places or more	400 nos		
29	Reversable rack with Cover 0.5/1.5ml tube, 96 places	400 nos		
30	PCR tube rack with cover, 96 places	400 nos		
31	Optisealer for 96 well Plate RT PCR, 100pcs per pack	5000 nos		
32	Pipettor stand, 5 places per pack	50 nos		
33	Sterile petri plates, 90mm, 500 per pack	5000 nos		
34	Sterile petri plates, 150 mm, 500 per pack	2500 nos		
35	Tough spots 9.5mm diameter, 5000 spots per roll (Heat & dye resistant)	50 roll		
36	Disposible Mask made up of non-woven febric, Triple layered, indivually packed, Sterile, 100 pc per pack	10000 nos		
37	Disposible Apron, Medium size	2500 nos		
38	Forceps Pointed -Stainless Steel 6"	500 nos		
39	Forceps Pointed-Stainless Steel 8"	500 nos		
40	Forceps blunted -Stainless Steel 10"	500 nos		
41	Forceps blunted -Stainless Steel 8"	500 nos		
42	Forceps blunted -Stainless Steel 6"	500 nos		
43	Tissue paper roll, premium quality, minimum 250 pools	1000 roll		
44	Absolute Alcohol AR grade, Pack Size-500ml	500 nos		
45	Absolute Alcohol, Molecular Biology Grade, pack Size-500ml	250 nos		
46	DNA Concentration Device 0.5ml, Volume capacity 0.5ml. 30 kDA, vertical V-shape membrane, device compatible for Phenol-chloroform DNA extraction process.	5000 nos		
47	DNA Concentration Device 4 ml Volume capacity 4ml, 30 kDA, vertical V-shape membrane, Device compatible for Phenol-chloroform DNA extraction process.	2500 nos		
48	Weighing Dishes	1000 nos		

1. Cost of tender document (Tender Fee) is non refundable and cannot be exempted in any condition & must submit online through website **https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app**.
2. Tender document can be download from the website of MP Police (**www.mppolice.gov.in**)
3. Bids shall be submitted online only at MP Tenders website: **https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app**
4. **Critical Date Sheet:**

Published Date	12/12/2023 Time 12:00 PM
Bid Document Download Start Date	13/12/2023 Time 12:00 PM
Pre Bid Meeting Date	19/12/2023 Time 12:00 PM
Bid Submission Start Date	23/12/2023 Time 12:00 AM
Bid Submission End Date	02/01/2024 Time 14:00 PM
Bid Opening Date	03/01/202.4 Time 16:00 PM

5. Intending Bidders are advised to visit this website regularly till closing date of submission to keep themselves updated as any change/ modification in the tender will be intimated through this website only by corrigendum / addendum/ amendment.
6. Bids will be opened as per date/time as mentioned in the Tender Critical Date Sheet. After online opening of Technical-Bid the results of their qualification as well Price-Bid opening will be intimated later.

Sd/-
(D.R. Teniwar)
D.I.G. (Provisioning)
For: Director General of Police M.P.

G-22136/23

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GOLD	USD RATE	OIL	SILVER
₹62,972	₹83.16	$79.27	₹75,448

Note: Gold, silver rates at Delhi spot market, gold per 10g, silver per 1 kg; Crude oil (Indian basket) as of December 21

SENSEX: 71,106.96 ▲ 241.86 (0.34%) **NIFTY:** 21,349.40 ▲ 94.35 (0.44%) **NIKKEI:** 33,254.03 ▲ 84.98 **HANG SENG:** 16,340.41 ▼ 280.72 **FTSE:** 7,697.51 ▲ 2.78 **DAX:** 16,706.18 ▲ 18.76

BSE, NSE were closed on Monday. International market data till 1900 IST

FACED CHALLENGES DUE TO WESTERN SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA: GOVT

'India's Russian crude imports averted havoc in global oil market'

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

GLOBAL CRUDE oil prices would have surged and created "havoc" in the international oil market had India not ramped up oil imports from Russia in the aftermath of Moscow's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the petroleum and natural gas ministry told the department-related parliamentary standing committee.

"If they (Indian refiners) had not imported Russian oil into India, which may be a big number of 1.95 million barrels per day, that deficiency would have created a havoc in the crude oil market and the prices would have shot up by about $30-40," a petroleum ministry representative was quoted as saying in a recent report of the standing committee on petroleum and natural gas. The report was tabled in Parliament on December 20.

"The crude oil market is such that in the market of 100 million barrels per day, if the OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) says that they are going to reduce it by one or two million barrels per day, prices increase by 10 to 20 per cent and reach up to $125-130. If India does not absorb--I would call it absorption--1.95 million barrels per day, these prices would have reached $120-130. It would have created a havoc," the petroleum ministry representative added. The report did not name the representative.

India has a refining capacity of over 250 million tonnes per annum, or 5 million barrels a day. *File*

Usually, senior bureaucrats of the petroleum ministry represent the ministry before the standing committee.

India is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil and depends on imports to meet over 85 per cent of its requirement. The country has a refining capacity of over 250 million tonnes per annum, or 5 million barrels a day.

From a marginal player in India's oil imports before the war in Ukraine, Russia now tops the list of New Delhi's crude suppliers.

As the West began shunning Russian oil following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, Russia started offering deep discounts on its oil to willing buyers. Indian refiners started snapping up the discounted Russian crude, irking many in the West, which wanted Russian oil to be shunned by buyers to curb Moscow's ability to finance the war in Ukraine through oil sales. India has maintained that as one of the top importers of crude, it will buy oil from anywhere it can strike a good bargain.

While crude oil prices did breach the $100-per-barrel mark in initial months following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they retreated as oil markets regained supply balance. In 2023, the price of global benchmark Brent crude has not breached the $100 mark even once. Currently, Brent is hovering around $80 per barrel.

"Diplomatically, we are a sovereign country and could say that we have been doing what is good for the country as well as the world," the petroleum ministry representative said.

On the question of difficulties being faced by Indian refiners in importing oil from Russia, the ministry told the panel that due to Western sanctions on Russia, challenges include payments and logistical arrangements like shipping and insurance. The ministry said in its submission that not all Indian banks "smoothly process" payment in dollars for Russian oil purchases.

"Due to economic sanctions...crude oil buyers are facing challenges in making logistics arrangement (ships availability, insurance for ships), getting insurance coverage for crude oil and making payments. Hence, Indian buyers...arrange import of Russian origin crude oil grades from the counterparties on delivery basis, where the seller takes responsibility in delivering crude oil (with suitable Insurance coverage) at discharge ports in India," the ministry said.

With major Western powers imposing a $60-per-barrel price cap on seaborne Russian crude from December 5, 2022 and Russian oil being bought on delivered basis, Indian refiners have faced some issues with banks demanding documentary proof from them that the price of oil, excluding delivery-related overheads like freight and insurance costs, was indeed in line with the price cap.

'India has potential to grow at 10%... but land, labour reforms are important'

INDIA HAS the potential to grow at 10 per cent. The strength of the economy lies in its demography, young population, consumption, investment and diverse skill sets, says ANAND RATHI, Founder and Chairman, Anand Rathi Group. goods and services tax (GST), Jan-Dhan and tax digitisation are some of the reforms that have aided the growth in the economy. "Our advantage is that because we are developing later, we are also going ahead fast, technology-wise," he told HITESH VYAS and SANDEEP Singh in an interview. Edited excerpts:

THE EXPRESS INTERVIEW

WITH ANAND RATHI
FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN OF ANAND RATHI GROUP

While there has been euphoria around India's economy, how do you see the recent strong bull run in the markets? Does it raise any concern?

I genuinely believe that the right thing is happening in the country. We have entered into a capex cycle now driven by the infrastructure. World over the highest growth has come when the infrastructure was part of the growth story. If you look at China, Japan or the United States, the best years of gross domestic product came there when infrastructure was created. That is where I think, we lagged behind, but we are catching up now. If you see budgets over the last few years, the amount of investment announced for the infrastructure has really increased. Higher investment is possible because our tax revenue has increased rapidly, which gives us more headroom to spend money on infrastructure.

I believe that 10 per cent growth is reasonable to expect (for India). This is the potential assessment (for India's growth) as there are many variables to it, including the global scenario. The strength of our economy lies in the demography, young population, consumption, investment, housing, entrepreneurship and diverse skill sets. Reforms that have contributed to growth include GST, Jan-Dhan Yojana and tax digitisation. Some of the major bottlenecks of growth include high interest rates, which have now come down, power costs and logistics.

Two important reforms which are still pending are land and labour. Do you see it as a concern?

Reform is a continuous process. In a democracy, it takes a longer time to achieve anything. How many years did GST (implementation) take? If our economy has to grow at 10 per cent, we need reforms...land and labour reforms are important. Every government has brought in reforms, and this government has accelerated those.

Are we reaping the benefits of the infrastructure created so far or is in the process of being created?

We have seen vast improvement. Earlier it used to take four days for a truck to come to Mumbai from Kolkata, but it comes in 2.5 days. Initially, tolls were created and today we have the fasttag, which has smoothened the entire process. Our advantage is that because we are developing later, we are also going ahead fast, technology-wise. Our major strength lies in digitisation.

We have seen the Sensex and Nifty touching record highs. How sustainable is this rally?

I think no one knows the market right. But we know one thing, the market which goes up, will come down. What are the risks in the market? The biggest risk in the market is volatility, and volatility is related to the period...one month's volatility would be higher than one year, and one year's volatility would be higher than three years. If you look at the last 25 years, in most of the years the difference between high and low has been more than 10 per cent. Markets will remain volatile. If someone asks me the target for the index over the next year, my answer would be, I don't know. But in five years, I can say that the index would cross 1 lakh level.

Are there concerns about the valuation of stocks?

Valuation depends on an individual's assessment. There are bulls and bears in the market. Bulls buy in the market and bears sell. FIIs sold $30 billion in fifteen months. They sold because they thought in the emerging markets, India's valuation is high. They sold during September and October when the market was down, but are now buying. Short-term value is dependent on demand and supply. I won't recommend people to look at valuation. I don't have any concerns. If you want to remain invested for five years, buy stocks of a good company at any valuation.

There has been a rise in mutual fund folios. At the same time, the money coming into mutual funds from smaller towns has also increased multifold. How do you see this change?

Equity, as an asset class, gives the highest returns. What percentage of financial savings are now going into equities? It is very low…not more than 10-12 per cent. What should it ideally be? It should be 25-30 per cent. If an asset class is good, the money will flow into it. So, both the number of investors and the total amount of investment will keep on increasing. The monthly SIP (systematic investment plan) flow is currently $2 billion per month and it will increase to $5 billion soon.

What would be your advice to retail investors looking to invest in the market?

My suggestion would be not to look at the short-term volatility. In the short term, markets will go up and down…it cannot run in one direction. If you want to invest in the markets, come with a vision of five years. Also, do not time the markets.

Upcoming spectrum may see subdued response from telcos

JATIN GROVER
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

THE UPCOMING spectrum auction, which the government is expected to conduct over the next three months, may see a subdued response from telcos as demand is likely to be restricted to airwaves which will be up for renewal in some circles, sources said.

Against the Rs 1.5 trillion-worth of 5G spectrum sold in the last auction, this time the spectrum auction is estimated to fetch around Rs 8,000-9,000 crore, officials said.

The main reason for telcos not going for aggressive bidding this time is that they already have ample spectrum. With no scope of 5G monetisation, they don't see the need to spend further. The combined capital expenditure of Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel in FY 2023-24 (FY24) is expected to be around Rs 75,000 crore.

In the upcoming auction, spectrum bands in 600 MHz, 700 MHz, 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 2100 MHz, 2300 MHz, 2500 MHz, 3300-3670 MHz, and 26 GHz worth about Rs 2.7 trillion is expected to be put on sale by the government.

Renewal of spectrum is due in 900 and 1800 MHz bands in eight circles - Uttar Pradesh (East), Uttar Pradesh (West), West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, North-East, and Odisha in February by Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea.

Reliance Jio may bid for some fresh spectrum.

The combined capital expenditure of Jio and Bharti Airtel in FY24 is expected to be around Rs 75,000 crore. *File*

Last month, Bharti Airtel's managing director and chief executive officer Gopal Vittal said that the company will be spending a lot less on the future spectrum auctions as it does not require additional airwaves.

"I would not imagine that the company needs further spectrum for some time to come. The only place where some small chunks of spectrum may be needed is renewable spectrum in three or four circles, but it is a function of the traffic pattern. How much do we need? Do we need it at all? Those discussions are still underway," Vittal had said during the July-September quarter earnings call.

In the last spectrum auction, Reliance Jio spent Rs 88,078 crore towards 5G spectrum, followed by Bharti Airtel at Rs 43,084 crore, and Vodafone Idea at Rs 18,799 crore. **FE**

'Office demand jumps 92% in Oct-Dec in top six cities'

Office space demand increased on better demand of workspace from corporates and co-working operators, as per Colliers India.

"The Indian office market not only navigated initial uncertainties but exceeded expectations and emerged successfully during 2023"

ARPIT MEHROTRA,
Managing Director, Head of Office services, Colliers India

OCTOBER-DECEMBER PERIOD

2023: 20.2 mn square feet

2022: 10.5 mn square feet

- The contribution of tech sector to office leasing has been steadily decreasing from around 50% in 2020 to 25% in 2023
- The sectoral contributions from BFSI and Engineering & Manufacturing sectors especially have almost doubled

Source: Colliers India/PTI

TOP SIX CITIES

BENGALURU: Rose 58% to 5.5 mn sq feet

CHENNAI: More than four-fold jump to 4.3 mn sq ft

DELHI-NCR: Demand for office space grew 61% to 3.1 mn sq ft

HYDERABAD: Gross leasing rose 57% to 2.7 mn sq ft

MUMBAI: Witnessed 87% increase in demand to 2.6 mn sq ft

PUNE: Office leasing doubled to 2 mn sq feet

Reliance witnesses surge in gap between standalone, consolidated net profits

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

THE GAP between Reliance Industries Ltd's standalone and consolidated net profit has more than doubled to Rs 22,400 crore in the last couple of years, as the retail and telecom businesses housed in separate subsidiaries saw significant growth, a report said.

"The gap between Reliance's standalone and consolidated profit after tax (PAT) has increased significantly - from Rs 8,400 crore in FY20 (April 2019 to March 2020) to Rs 22,400 crore in FY23, as telecom and retail have ramped up," JP Morgan said in a note that used data from the firm's annual reports to reconcile the difference between the two reported profit numbers. Reliance reported a standalone net profit of Rs 30,902 crore in 2019-20 fiscal year, which grew to Rs 44,205 crore in 2022-23 fiscal. Consolidated net profit soared from Rs 39,354 crore in FY20 to Rs 66,702 crore in FY23.

As many as 335 individual standalone companies/associates/joint ventures accounted for the difference between Reliance's consolidated and standalone PAT for the year FY23. Around 40 per cent of these (133) reported profits for the year. This breadth of companies is down from 498, which were part of consolidated accounts in FY20.

"These look like large numbers, but several standalone subsidiary companies are part of a single business group / operation (such as for US shale, or the multiple ethane shipping JVs)," it said.

Reliance's telecom and retail subsidiaries / associates / JV accounted for around 89 per cent of the gap between consolidated and standalone profits (pre-minority / eliminations) in FY23 - but that still leaves about $400 million in net profits from other businesses. Dwelling into the annual reports, JP Morgan said there is a sharp increase in profitability of group companies that seem to be in the business of trading crude/product/petchem/ethane in FY23 (from Rs 170 crore in FY22 to Rs 1,460 crore).

Adani Green inks pact with SECI for supply of 1,799 MW solar power

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

ADANI GREEN Energy (AGEL) on Monday said it has signed a power purchase agreement (PPA) with the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) to supply 1,799 MW of solar power.

With the signing of this balance PPA, AGEL has completed the power offtake tie-up for the entire 8,000 MW manufacturing-linked solar tender awarded to it by the SECI in June 2020, a company statement said. According to the statement, AGEL has announced the execution of a PPA with the SECI to supply 1,799 MW of solar power.

"Aligned to India's target of 500 GW non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, Adani Green is determined to deliver in excess of 45 GW renewable energy, a five-fold increase," Amit Singh, CEO, AGEL, said in the statement.

BRIEFLY

SoftBank sells shares worth $310 mn in FirstCry

New Delhi: Japanese conglomerate SoftBank has sold shares worth $310 million in omnichannel retailer FirstCry, which is likely to file a draft paper for IPO this week, sources said on Monday. "SoftBank recently sold shares worth Rs 630 crore in FirstCry. It was picked up by a few high net worth individuals. With this sale, SoftBank has realised USD 310 million from two rounds of stake sale in FirstCry," a source told *PTI*. The source said that the sale values FirstCry in the range of $3.5-3.75 billion. SoftBank had invested $400 million in FirstCry at an enterprise valuation of $900 million. **PTI**

First rupee payment for oil to UAE: India looks for more deals, no targets, say officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

INDIA'S FIRST-ever payment in rupees for crude oil purchased from the UAE is helping the world's third largest energy consumer push for taking the local currency global, as it looks for similar deals with other suppliers, officials said, adding internationalisation is a process and there are no targets.

With the nation more than 85 per cent dependent on imports for meeting its oil needs, India has been pursuing a three-pronged strategy of buying from the cheapest available source, diversifying sources of supply and not breaching any international obligation like the price cap in case of Russian oil. While the strategy helped save billions of dollars, when it ramped up imports of Russian oil that was shunned by some in West post Ukraine war, it is looking to settle trade in rupees instead of dollars in a bid to cut transaction costs by eliminating dollar conversions.

India in July signed an agreement with the UAE for rupee settlement and soon after Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) made payments for purchase of a million barrels of crude oil from Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) in Indian rupees.

Some of the Russian oil imports too have been settled in rupee. Officials said the default payment currency for import of crude oil has been the US dollar for several decades and the currency traditionally has liquidity as well as lower hedging cost. But to boost the rupee's role in cross-border payments, the Reserve Bank of India allowed more than a dozen banks to settle trades in rupees with 18 countries since last year.

Since then, India has been encouraging big oil exporters such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia to accept the Indian currency for trade settlements, officials said, adding the first success happened in August this year when IOC made the rupee payment to ADNOC.

More such deals may happen in future, they said, insisting there was no target as internationalisation is a process and cannot happen overnight.

Year ahead: Indian IT companies likely to be on rocky path in 2024 as well

SAMEER RANJAN BAKSHI
BENGALURU, DECEMBER 25

INFOSYS LOSING a $1.5-billion artificial intelligence (AI) deal from a global firm last week, and muted revenue growth guidance by Accenture, are clear indicators that domestic information technology (IT) firms are from a recovery path, at least till the first of 2024 calendar year. Any chances of revival can only be expected by October, according to analysts.

True, the emerging area of generative AI shows some potential, but analysts say that deals in this segment will not be big enough to make up for the slowdown in the core domains like Banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) which make up for the bulk of the revenue. They have a point as most of the Generative AI works are now at pilot and proof of concept stage and will take time to scale up. "Enterprises across most sectors are focused on cost-reduction priorities. Many have outlined cost savings targets that stretch into 2024. The re-prioritisation of spends toward focus areas of investment is not yet complete. Commentaries of select banks and financial services firms do not indicate a healthy increase in technology budgets yet. These do not inspire confidence of a significant recovery in discretionary spending at least in 1HCY24 (January-June)," Kotak Institutional Equities said in its note. In a separate note, the brokerage firm observed that the recent earnings and outlook commentary by Accenture reaffirmed their expectations of cautious near-term demand. While rate cuts can reduce macro uncertainty and spark spending in the future, haze around the near term continues, it stated.

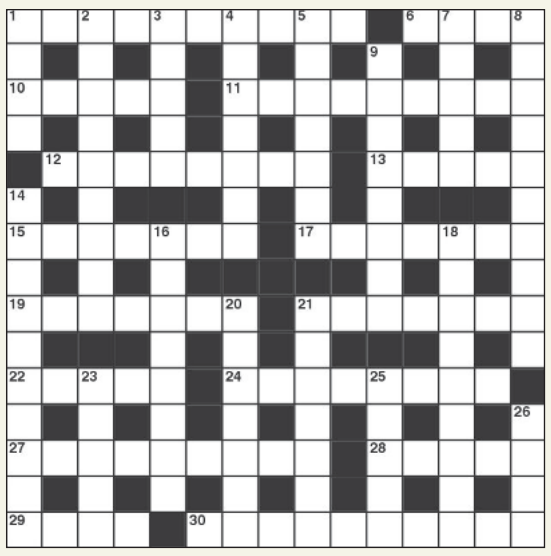
UnearthInsight sticks to 5 per cent - 6 per cent revenue growth for FY24. *File*

"Significant recovery in discretionary spending, at least in 1HCY24, appears a low probability event. We expect 8-9 per cent industry growth in FY25(April 2024-March 2025)," Kotak said.

According to UnearthInsight, tech spend recovery cycle will start post June or July 2024 "as rate cuts should help ease inflation drawing consumer confidence/spend and eventually allowing companies/businesses to invest in tech not just for optimising costs but also helping improve margins and also invest in transformation tech for experience, ease, efficiency through Cloud, Gen AI and Digital tech plus". UnearthInsight sticks to 5 per cent - 6 per cent revenue growth for FY24 and 6 per cent - 7 per cent estimated revenue growth potential for FY25 due to continued lower visibility on consumer spend recovery leading to lower tech spend.

Motilal Oswal in a note hinted that the ongoing weakness in discretionary spend that it saw in Accenture would be echoed by Indian peers as well. It said continued weakness in CMT (Communications, Media and Technology) is an ongoing overhang on Tech Mahindra. **FE**

CROSSWORD 5244



ACROSS

1 Constituent part of cattle food (5,5)
6 Record is within a couple of figures (4)
10 Conception many find perfect (5)
11 Start badly but get a jewel; that's the plan (9)
12 Hear a gun go off and speak to someone angrily (8)
13 It's pleasant embracing an eastern relative (5)
15 Wild demon, by the way, in an extreme situation (7)
17 Insults having little point? (7)
19 Exercise done by prisoner (7)
21 Show how old one is in a symptom of exhaustion (7)
22 Girl of Roman extraction (5)
24 Light baskets (8)
27 A table leg gets broken, but it's of no importance (9)
28 Belief in sacred office (5)
29 Consumes a set recipe (4)
30 Will he cure plane sickness? (4,6)

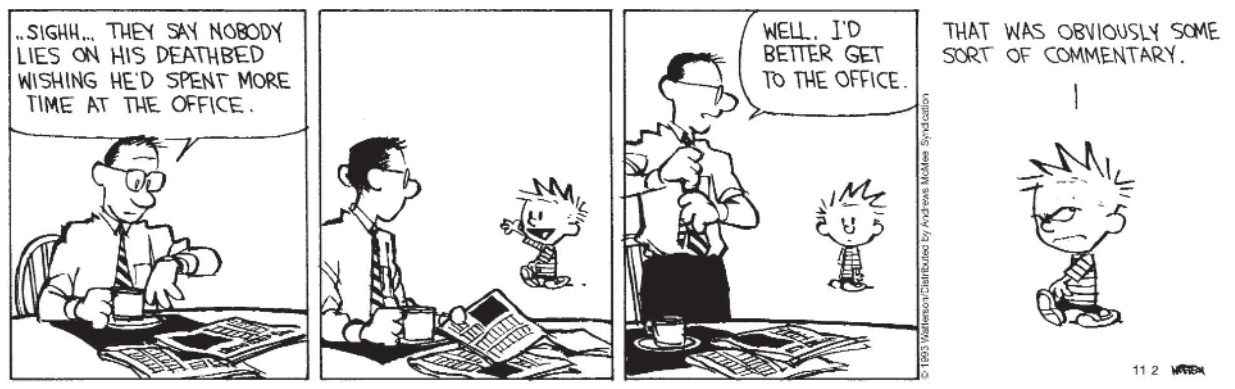
DOWN

1 Note an inscription that will hold attention (4)
2 Ragtime band leader was great (9)
3 Foals are frisky after a tonic perhaps (3-2)
4 A new song hit right away (2,5)
5 Sailor obtains marks for shooting (7)
7 One loses one's head when in a corner (5)
8 Remunerate ace postmen perhaps (10)
9 Do these orders refer to the national anthem? (8)
14 Handsome individual and competent (10)
16 Refugees are not at home with actors (8)
18 Breathe irregularly at what should be regular (9)
20 Speech impediment? (7)
21 Go to the front (7)
23 Just what one is entitled to (5)
25 Painting is dry and firm (5)
26 Round trip to ancient town (4)

Solutions Crossword 5243 Across: 1 Jackpot, 5 Ought, 8 Unwelcome, 9 Oil, 10 Tots, 12 Well done, 14 Shadow, 15 Rapids, 17 Sediment, 18 Stop, 21 Ego, 22 Reticence, 24 Taste, 25 Demands **Down:** 1 Jaunt, 2 Cow, 3 Pole, 4 Tooled, 5 Overload, 6 Geologist, 7 Tellers, 11 Trapdoors, 13 Commerce, 14 Suspect, 16 United, 19 Press, 20 Scum, 23 Nun

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis

CALVIN & HOBBES by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong

DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
You are beginning to doubt whether a number of financial commitments are really worth the bother. In any case you'll have to settle bills for purchases or other obligations which are due to work out more costly than you feared.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)
The planets maintain their tense alignment today with an interesting aspect from Neptune to the Sun adding to the sense of confusion. Above all, you should observe the old rule that the more logical your approach, the happier will be the outcome.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)
Venus' helpful presence is boosting your morale, and whatever else happens today, it will be your sense of status and responsibility that is crucial to your well-being and happiness. A colleague at work may seem determined to disagree.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)
These are uncertain times and you're not the only person to have financial cares, so stop being so self-indulgent. How about relaxing for a change and splashing out some of your hard-earned cash on a treat for you and your friends? Work still seems to be going slowly, so take it easy if you can.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)
Take domestic matters in hand and pay close attention to any and all possible causes of family friction. Some of the decisions that need to be taken may seem hard now but will be worthwhile in the long run. Your costs still appear to be rising, so keep an eye on unnecessary expenditure.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
It looks very much as if someone is trying to get the better of you, possibly without your being fully aware of what they're up to. In any event, your behaviour in the past will assure friends that you are now in the right. Family members may be unconvinced, though.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)
You may as well prepare yourself for what could be a hectic and trying day, but there's no reason at all why you shouldn't come through with flying colours, having gained enormously in self-respect and confidence. Your optimism shines through in the end.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
With Mercury still pestering the Sun, it's doubtful whether you'll be able to give a straight answer to a straight question, but it doesn't really matter as long as you know what you mean and other people aren't too confused.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)
At all costs don't give other people the impression that you've been using them for your own ends, even if there has been a hint of exploitation in your relationships lately. There should be more room for give and take. In fact, the more you give, the more you'll receive.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
Venus continues to confer its blessings on your finances, raising prospects for renewed prosperity. Hopefully the emotional traumas of the past will now be no more than distant memories. Remember the importance of discretion in relation to current relationships, and don't open your mouth when you shouldn't.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
Your ruling planets, Saturn and Uranus, are currently making a rather powerful aspect to each other, and you may be under considerable pressure. But every cloud has a silver lining and even apparently major crises will bring welcome benefits in your direction.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
The planetary position is generally favourable, especially now that Venus and Jupiter are poised to help you on your way, and any difficulties you are currently facing are very much the result of your own bad management. So the solutions lie with you more than with the stars.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

Your mind will answer most questions if you learn to ___ and __ for the answer.
- William S. Burroughs (5,.,4)

GVAAE

ANSULT

DTYIR

COOPWX

SOLUTION: AGAVE, DIRTY, SULTAN, COWPOX
Answer: Your mind will answer most questions if you learn to **relax** and **wait** for the answer. - William S. Burroughs

SUDOKU 5423

Difficulty Level 4s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy;
3s = Medium; 4s = Hard;
5s = Very Hard;
6s = Genius

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

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5422

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

UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY

General Public is hereby informed that one male person was admitted in DDU Hospital, Delhi vide MLC No. 10041/23. During the treatment declared dead by doctor. In this regard a **DD No. 16A dated 14.11.2023** has been lodged at **P.S. Ranhola, Delhi.** The description of the dead body is given as under **Name:** Nanu **S/o:**Pachanand Das, **R/o-** Jai Vihar Masjid Wali Gali, Ranhola, Delhi, **Age:** 22 years, **Height:** 5'7", **Complexion:** Sallow, **Wearing:** Black colour T-Shirt and Pant and Red colour Shawal.
Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the dead person but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about this dead person please inform undersigned.

SHO
P.S. Ranhola, Delhi
DP/14806/OD/2023 **Ph. : 011-28363001, 28363002, 7065036128**

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

Murari

General Public is hereby informed that a person namely **Murari S/o Babu Lal, R/o** H.No. 7479, Tail mill Gali Nabi Karim, Delhi has been missing/kidnapped from his house at 8:30 AM the jurisdiction of P.S. Nabi Karim, Delhi. In this regard a **DD No. 43A** dated **16.12.2023** has been lodged at P.S. Nabi Karim, Delhi.
The description of missing/kidnapped person is as under:

Age : 40 years, **Height** : 5'6", **Face** : Round, **Complexion** : Shallow, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing :** Red Color Jacket & Blue Color Pajama
If anyone having any clue/information, about the missing/kidnapped male kindly inform to the following:-

Website : http://cbi.nic.in
e-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in
Fax : 011-24368639
Ph. : 011-24368638, 24368641
DP/14752/CD/2023

SHO
P.S., Nabi Karim Delhi
Ph : 011-23521081
8750870428

HIMACHAL PRADESH STATE ELECTRICITY BOARD LIMITED
"(A State Govt. Undertaking)"

"Press Tender Notice" (E-tendering mode only)

ONLINE TENDERS are hereby invited on partial turnkey basis (two part bid)by the undersigned for & on behalf of Managing Director, HPSEB Ltd., Shimla-4, from the Bidders / Joint venture firms having A-Class Electrical contractor license from Chief Electrical Inspector, for the following work:-

Sr. No.	Tender No.	Description of Work	Estimated / NIT Cost	Earnest Money	Cost of Tender Documents inclusive GST (Non - refundable)	Completion Period
1.	CEO/M&C/ T No.17/ SOP-LWSS Koti/2023-24	Providing SOP to LWSS Various GP's Stage-I,II, III & IV in Electrical Section Koti under Electrical Sub Division HPSEBL, Junga under ED No -I HPSEBL Shimla.	Rs. 98,79,222.81	Rs. 98792	Rs. 1180/-	12 Months

Key Dates:-

1.	Date of online publication	30.12.2023
2.	Start date and time of bid submission	30.12.2023, 11: 30 AM
3.	End date and time of bid submission	18.01.2024, 11:30 AM
4.	Date and time of opening of techno comm. bid	19.01.2024 11:30 AM

The bid document is available online and bid shall be submitted on line on website **https://www.hptenders.gov.in.** Bidders would be required to register in the website which is free of cost. For submission of bids, the bidders are required to have digital signature certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized certifying authority (CA). Aspiring bidders who have not obtained the user ID and password for participating in e-tendering in HPSEBL may obtain the same from the website **https://www.hptenders.gov.in**. DSC is mandatory to participate in e-tendering. Bidders already possessing valid DSC issued from authorized CAs can use the same in this tender.

"Save Energy for the Benefit of Self & Nation"

(Er. Rakesh Kumar)
Chief Engineer (OP) South,
HPSEB Ltd., Shimla-4.

UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY

General Public is hereby informed that one male person was found dead in KM Pole 18/01-18/03, 17/29-17/31 UP Main Line Near Khera Kala Village, Fatak, Delhi dated 22.12.2023. In this regard a **DD No. 28A dated 22.12.2023** has been lodged at **P.S. Subzi Mandi Railway Station, Delhi.** The dead body has been preserved for identification at Subzi Mandi Hospital Mortuary, Delhi for 72 hrs. The description of the dead body is given as under **Name:** Unknown, **S/o:**Unknown, **R/o-** Unknown, **Age:** 35-40 years, **Height:** 5'7", **Complexion:** Sallow, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Fat, **Injury Mark:** Head Decapitated, the lower part of the chest is Decapitated, Hand Injury, Left Leg Amputated below the knee, Right Leg Broken, **Wearing:** Gray colour full Sleeve T-shirt and White colour Baniyan & Bare footed.
Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the dead person but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about this dead person please inform undersigned.

SHO
P.S. Subzi Mandi Railway Station, Delhi
DP/14836/Rly/2023 **Ph. : 011-23692455, 7011994394**

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr. P. C.

Whereas a complaint has been made before me that accused person namely **Ran Singh Director/Authorized Signatory of Relcom Technology Pvt Ltd.R/o Plot No. 325, Sector-17, HSIDC Industrial Estate Bahadurgarh Haryana**. have committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence **CC.No.7722/19 u/s 138 N.I Act. has been registered at P.S.Shalimar Bagh Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said, **Ran Singh** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said, **Ran Singh** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).
Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused, **Ran Singh ofcc. No. 7722/19 u/s 138 N.I Act. registeredat PS. Shalimar Bagh Delhi** is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before **29.01.2024**.

By Order
Ayush Sharma Ld,MM North
West Room No.113 1st floor
DP/14518/NW/2023 Court matter **Rohini Courts Delhi**

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(SECTION 82 Cr.P.C.)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that the accused **Bittu @ Raju**, S/o Satnarayan, R/o Jhuggi no. 40, Y Block, Camp no. 1, Nangloi, Delhi, has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 308/2018, u/s 392/411/34 IPC**, registered at **P.S. Nangloi, Delhi**, and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said accused **Bittu @ Raju**, cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Bittu @ Raju**, has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of said warrant).
Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Bittu @ Raju**, of case **FIR No. 308/2018, u/s 392/411/34 IPC**, **P.S. Nangloi, Delhi**, is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before **02.03.2024.**

By order
Shubham Devadiya,
Metropolitan Magistrate - 05 (West),
Room no. 336A,
Tis Hazari Court, Delhi
DP/14720/OD/2023
(Court Matter)

Regional Office, Samastipur : Panchwati Complex, Mohanpur Road, Samastipur (Bihar) Pin-848101

यूनियन बैंक ऑफ इंडिया Union Bank of India
भारत सरकार का उपक्रम A Government of India Undertaking

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provison to Rule 8 (6) / 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rule, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the constructive/symbolic possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of Union Bank of India (secured creditor), will be sold on **"As is where is", "As is what is"** and **"Whatever there is"** on the date mentioned below, for recovery of dues as mentioned hereunder to Union Bank of India from the below mentioned Borrower(s) & Guarantor(s). The Reserve Price and the Earnest Money Deposit are also mentioned hereunder :

Name & Address of Branch	Name & Address of Borrower/ Mortgagor/ Guarantor	Amount Due	Property Details	Reserve Price/ EMD/Bid Multiplier
Union Bank of India, e-cb Chapra Branch, Ramakant Complex, Mauna Chowk, Chapra-841301 BM Mr. Rohit Kumar Mob.9992377724	**Borrower 1.: M/s Shailendra Stationary Stores** (Proprietor Sri Shailendra Kumar) , **2. Sri Shailendra Kumar, S/o Sri Bharat Prasad Sahu,** (Proprietor Shailendra Stationary Stores & Co-applicant Manju Soni), **3. M/s Nidhi Enterprises** Proprietor Smt Manju Soni, W/o Sri Shailendra Kumar, **4. Smt Manju Soni,** W/o Sri Shailendra Kumar, (Borrower Manju Soni, Guarantor M/s Shailendra Stationary Store & Proprietor M/s Nidhi Enterprises), All At Purani Gurhati, Post - Sahebganj, Chapra, Distt Saran, Bihar 841301	**Rs.** 39,56,429.16 as on 31.07.2023 plus Interest and other Expenses	Land & Building in the name of Smt. Manju Soni W/o Sri Shailendra Kumar Vinit, situated at Chhota Telpa, PS Chhapra, Distt - Saran bearing Khata No 455 Khesra No 762, Ward/Taluka-05 & 06 Tauzi No 4314, Thana No. 288, Area-3.122 decimal. **Boundry: N-** Nij Yogendra Pd & others, **S-** 4 ft road then Rudal Rai, **E-** 4 ft road, **W-** Md Khalil Miyan.	Rs. 60,35,000.00/- Rs. 6,03,500.00/- Rs. 10,000.00/-

Date and Time of e-auction 11.01.2024 at 11:00 AM to 05:00 PM (with 10 minutes unlimited auto extension)
For detailed term and condition of the sale, please refer to the link provided in **https://www.unionbankofindia.com** and **https://ibapi.in** For Registration, Login and Bidding Rules visit **https://www.mstcecommerce.com/ auctionhome/ ibapi/index.jsp**

Date : 22.12.2023
Place : Saran
Authorised Officer
Union Bank of India

WESTERN RAILWAY - VADODARA DIVISION

SIGNAL & TELECOMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT
E-TENDER NOTICE

Tender Notice No. S&T/BRC/23-24/ 26/SIG-R Date:20.12.2023; Sr. DSTE/ Vadodara acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites e-Tenders against Tender No. SandT_ BRC_23-24_26_SIG-R. Bidders will be able to submit their original / revised bids up to closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. **(1) Name of work with its location:** Supply, installation, Alteration in EI, testing and commissioning in connection with the work of (1) LC 1, 2 & 19X PRTN-DB Sec. Elimination of LC Gate by providing ROB and (2) Proposed POH siding taking off from Dabhoi station. **(2) Approx. cost of the work:** ₹ 1,43,52,000.88/- **(3) Earnest Money to be Deposit:** ₹ 2,21,800.00/- **(4) Date & time for submission of e-tender and opening of e-tender: 18.01.2024 @ 15:00** Hours and **18.01.2024 @ 15:30** Hours. **(5)** Web side particulars and notice for location where complete details can be seen etc. **http://www.ireps.gov.in** Senior Divisional Signal & Telecommunication Engineer, 2nd Floor - Annex Building, DRM's Office, Western Railway, Pratapnagar, Vadodara - 390 004 273

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APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that this person (depicted in the photo) **Name:** Unknown, **S/o:** Unknown, **R/o:** Unknown, **Age:** about 35-45 Years, **Sex**: Male, **Height**: approx 5'5" **Complexion:** Fair, **Built:** Medium, **Face:** Round, **Injury Mark:** Cut Mark on Two fingers of Left Hand, **Wearing:** Brown color Jacket, Brown color Sweater of Nike Company, Black color Lower, Blue color inner of Oswal Company, Brown color underwear of Dollar Company and Black color shoes of Spark Company in Feet found dead at near Water Treatment Plant Kachi Nahar, Rohini, Delhi on 22.12.2023 by 11.48 am under area of P.S. K.N. Katju Marg, Delhi.
In this regard a **DD No. 68A dated 22.12.2023** has been lodged at P.S. K.N. Katju Marg, Delhi
Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this person but no clue has come to light so far.
Dead Body has been preserved in Mortuary of BSA Hospital, Delhi for 72 hours. If any person having any information or clue about this person may kindly inform to the following.

SHO
P.S. K.N. Katju Marg, Delhi
DP/14823/RD/2023 (UIDB) **Ph.: 011-27571162, 8750870327**

SEARCH FOR MISSING

Horam SIngh

General public is hereby informed that this man namely **Horam Singh**, S/o Ramsharan Das, R/o Village New Khilli, Block Tehsil Bah, District Agra, UP, is missing since 27.11.2023 at about 10:00 AM from Mundka Industrial Area, Delhi. In this regard a case vide **DD No. 67A, dated 29.11.2023,** has been lodged at **P.S. Mundka, Delhi**. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the missing man but no clue has come to light so far.
The description of the missing man is as under:
Gender: Male, **Age:** 20 years, **Height:** 5'0'', **Complexion:** Wheatish, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** White shirt, black pant, bare feet.
If anyone has any information regarding this missing man, kindly inform to the following:

E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax : 011-24368639
DP/14780/OD/2023

SHO
P.S. Mundka, Delhi
Ph. No.: 7065036126
E-mail: sho-mundka-dl@nic.in

For All Advertisement Booking

Call : 0120-6651214

POCH UNFAZED BY DISCIPLINARY RECORD

London: Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino is defending his team's unwelcome position as the Premier League side with the most yellow cards this season. Pochettino said Chelsea's 56 bookings in 18 league games did not show a lack of discipline but rather his players' desire to compete. **AP**

BRIEFLY

FIFA threatens to suspend Brazil

Rio de Janeiro: FIFA warned Brazil it could suspend its national teams and clubs from international competitions if an intervention by its soccer body leads to the election of a new president in January. FIFA said in a letter to a Brazilian soccer executive that the country's soccer body CBF could face suspension if it does not heed its call to wait and instead holds a swift election to replace Ednaldo Rodrigues as president regardless. The document was obtained by *The Associated Press*. A Rio de Janeiro court removed Rodrigues and all his appointees at CBF from office on Dec. 7 due to irregularities in his election last year. Brazil's two highest courts upheld that ruling last week. Soccer's governing body FIFA historically rejects government and third-party interference in its member associations, which ultimately could leave five-time World Cup winners Brazil out of major competitions until the crisis is solved. The Rio court ruling also named José Perdiz, the head of Brazil's top sports court, as an intervener to organize new elections for the presidency within 30 working days. FIFA said in previous letters to CBF it considers the intervention to be undue. Sunday's letter was signed by FIFA's Kenny Jean-Marie, its chief members' association officer, and CONMEBOL's deputy secretary-general, Monserrat Jiménez Garcia. **AP**

Jaismine, Manisha cruise to semifinals

Greater Noida: World Championships bronze medallist Manisha Moun and Jaismine Lamboria cruised to the 60kg semifinals with facile victories at the Women's National Boxing Championship here on Monday. Representing Services, Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Jaismine used her long reach to literally pummel Poonam Kaithwas of Maharashtra and notch up a Referee Stops Contest (RSC) win in the quarterfinal. The talented southpaw made good use of her straight jabs to disorient her opponent. **PTI**

Naveen impresses in big Dabang Delhi win

Chennai: Captain Naveen Kumar scored 11 raid points as Dabang Delhi registered a thumping 38-29 victory over Bengal Warriors in a Pro Kabaddi League match on Monday. Following Monday's masterclass, Naveen also surpassed 1000 raid points in the PKL. Dabang Delhi took an early 3-0 lead with Naveen and Ashu Malik effecting raids in the third minute. The Delhi side continued to pile on the pressure and reduced the Warriors to two members on the mat. Moments later, Delhi inflicted the first 'all out' of the match with a fine tackle on Shrikant Jadhav, taking an impressive 9-2 lead. **PTI**

AIFF president calls review meeting

New Delhi: All India Football Federation (AIFF) President Kalyan Chaubey has called for a meeting with the Referees Committee and Chief Refereeing Officer Trevor Kettle on December 31 to review the refereeing situation in the country. A team of referee assessors will also attend the meeting which will also discuss the way forward on the matter. "AIFF President @kalyanchaubey is set to meet the members of the Referees Committee, AIFF Chief Refereeing Officer Trevor Kettle, and a team of Referee Assessors on December 31, 2023, to review refereeing issues and discuss a way forward," the AIFF said. **PTI**

For few of India's top stars, 2023 was when they had to pause, reflect and reboot. Some had injuries others lost form. All in the hope that when the big day comes, they'll be ready and recharged for the challenge.

After fall, Mira eyes leap year

Injuries to her back, shoulder, thigh, wrist, hip haven't diluted Olympic medallist resolve to raise the bar for an encore at Paris

MIHIR VASAVDA

ALL MIRABAI Chanu offers when asked to recap her 2023 is stony silence.

Vijay Sharma, her coach, manages a few words. Although they might not be too flattering. "Bohut hi bekaar (very bad)," the Dronacharya awardee despondently admits.

It's been that kind of a year for Mirabai. One where she has spent as much time, if not more, on the surgeon's table and sitting before a psychologist as she has lifting weights and defying gravity, which she so gracefully does. One where she has endured more injuries than the number of competitions she's participated in.

In the last 12 months, India's top lifter – and the only medal hope from the sport at the Paris Olympics – lifted weights in just two events. And during this period, her body snapped as many times.

The wrist, the shoulder, the back and the hip, combined with the thigh, have all troubled Mirabai so much that even her mind - which remains stubborn and strong when the 4-foot-11-inch 49kg pocket-sized dynamo lifts iron more than twice her weight - started playing games.

"It's been tough," Mirabai broods. "I wonder sometimes why is this happening? Did I do anything wrong? Or is it something else? These thoughts do occur. But we are constantly on the lookout for ways to cure this."

The hunt for a cure took Mirabai and Sharma far beyond the secure and familiar training environment in Patiala to a physiotherapist's lab in the United States and a surgeon in Mumbai. Thus, the project to 'fix' Mirabai Chanu was relaunched.

Her build-up to the Tokyo Olympics was overshadowed by a 'mysterious' back injury. As the Paris Games approach, Mirabai finds herself in a race against time yet again. Deja vu.

Dire it might seem but trust Mirabai, with an easy, infectious laughter, to dismiss the concerns nonchalantly. "Ho jaega (It'll be okay)," she says. "Just a professional hazard."

'One truckload of training'

What Mirabai calls a professional hazard is described half-jokingly as 'inhuman' by Sharma.

For close to a decade, once or sometimes more often in a week, Mirabai has been lifting close to 'one truckload' of weight. That is her maximum training load, which is calculated as the total value of the number of sets, repetitions and weights.

Last year, after Mirabai defended her Commonwealth Games title in Birmingham, two-time CWG gold medallist Sathish Sivalingam explained what her body goes through each time she lifts the barbell.

"When someone like Mirabai, who is 49kg, holds a barbell weighing 119 kg (her best lift in the clean-and-jerk segment) to her throat, how do you breathe? The entire body goes numb," Sivalingam, a former national and CWG record holder, had said.

Sharma goes a step further and gives a peek into what goes on behind the scenes daily so that on competition day, Mirabai can make jaws drop.

"For years, she has lifted hundreds of kilos in training every day," Sharma says. "That eventually takes a load on your body. When we talk about injuries and fitness, it is very important to understand this side of our sport – daily we are punishing our bodies."

So high are the standards in training that they don't even count anything less than 70 per cent intensity. "There'll be three snatch lifts, around 90 kg each, followed by three clean-and-jerk lifts, 110 kg at least. And then, you rest and repeat. We programme these high-intensity sessions based on our recovery," Sharma says.

Mirabai might have Popeye-like strength, but lifting iron each day has left her bruised.

In 2020, when American physiotherapist Aaron Horschig evaluated her – Mirabai at the time couldn't lift even half the load she normally would – it read something like this: Right shoulder instability and weakness; left shoulder mobility restrictions; left hip mobility and stability problems; backache… the list was endless.

Injured hip and shoulder

Dr. Dinshaw Pardiwala, who has the trust of India's top athletes to fix their broken bodies and torn muscles, calls Mirabai's load-bearing capacity 'exceptional'. "(But) there's also a fine balance. Slight issue here and there, and you end up with an injury. That's the nature of the sport," Pardiwala says.

> **Mira has had a slew of injuries one after the other. When you are a low-weight category lifter, you are lifting loads way beyond your body weight. When you are doing that, you are pushing your body to the absolute limit .**
>
> **Dr Dinshaw Pardiwala**
> Doctor treating Mirabai

"Mira has had a slew of injuries one after the other. The main thing in weightlifting is that especially when you are a low-weight category lifter, you are lifting loads way beyond your body weight. When you are doing that, you are pushing your body to the absolute limit. In this scenario, in other sports like cricket, performing at 80-90 per cent might be okay as your skill levels offset fitness. But in weightlifting, unless you are absolutely 100 per cent there is no way," Pardiwala explains.

That's what was happening to Mirabai when she first met him in September. She could pull off lifts up to 80-90 per cent of her capability but when she had to go all out, the muscles wouldn't take the load.

Since September, Mirabai – through Olympic Gold Quest – has met Pardiwala four times in person apart from monitoring her progress every week.

When she first met him, Mirabai complained of pain in the right side of her hip. "She had a tear in a muscle in her right hip, which runs down the thigh. There are convertible muscles there and the muscles in the hip are very important when you come up from a deep squat position. It's a position that may not give you pain while standing but to rise from a deep squat, you have to use that muscle a lot," Pardiwala explains.

By the end of October, the hip injury had healed. But then, Mirabai's shoulder gave up. "Again a bad injury for a weightlifter primarily because there's a muscle – the rotator cuff – that enables strength in the shoulder," Pardiwala says.

It's a layer of muscles, the doctor adds, that allows the shoulder to stabilise 'so that the larger muscles like the deltoid, the power muscles, can do their job'.

Unfortunately for Mirabai, the rotator cuff is torn. It's a relatively small tear that won't need surgery, Pardiwala assures. But it's serious enough to keep her away from doing what she loves the most – lifting weights.

"With these tears, best is to rest it out initially; allow it to heal because they are traumatic tears. Once they heal, you increase the load and as loads increase, you get to normalcy. She is at a stage right now when you rest it out. She has a good amount of clinical healing there and is meeting all her goals of rehab well," Pardiwala says.

With the physio monitoring 'each and every step', Mirabai hasn't been lifting 'truckloads' in training. But she still has to do basic strength and conditioning work so that when she's eventually ready to lift, the body can cope with the increase in workload.

Target: 207kg

Amidst all this, what keeps Mirabai and Sharma relatively relaxed is the fact that she has already qualified for the Olympics. Her best effort of lifting a total of 200kg, at the World Championship last December, has placed her second in the Olympic Qualification Ranking.

So, unlike most Indian athletes whose first task will be to secure a place in the Paris-bound contingent, this gives Mirabai the freedom to focus on her rehab for the next seven months.

"It's a good thing I have qualified," she says. "For most, the biggest quest, a source of tension, is to qualify for the Olympics. So I am glad that's worked out already for me."

Sharma says the year has made them wiser, especially in terms of their training routines. He understands the pitfalls of overtraining better but none of this has stopped him and Mirabai from plotting the path to the podium in Paris.

They have set themselves a target – 207kg, 5kg more than what she lifted at the Tokyo Olympics. If she manages that, Mirabai will remain in contention to defend her silver medal given the Chinese weightlifters are still way ahead, as seen at the World Championships this year.

The two Chinese – Jiang Huihua and Hou Zhihui – lifted 215 and 211 kg respectively but since a country can field just one lifter in a weight category, a fit Mirabai is confident of putting up a fight.

"In the next seven months, we have to protect ourselves and take us to the range of 207 kg so that we can put up a proper fight. We have to reach that level," Sharma says. "We are wise We know what has happened, what can happen and what we need to do. If we are careful in training, we will be okay."

WHAT 2023 TAUGHT, WHAT 2024 MEANS

THE INJURY: After recuperating from the wrist and back injuries in the first half of the year, Mirabai suffered two critical injuries in the last four months – in the right hip and the shoulder. Just when the hip healed at the end of October, the shoulder snapped as she suffered a small tear in the rotator cuff – a group of muscles that provides stability so that the larger muscles can do their job, according to Dr. Dinshaw Pardiwala.

THE REHAB: A key reason for the injury is training overload and while her injury won't need surgery, Mirabai has been advised total rest. So, at present she is doing just that – although she does indulge in routine strength and conditioning sessions. Once she recovers, the training load will be increased gradually until it reaches the normal level.

WHAT NEXT: Pardiwala has said Mirabai is meeting all her recovery goals at present and he continues to monitor her progress weekly, while a physio oversees 'each and every step' she takes. Her long-time coach Vijay Sharma said, once she recovers fully, their target over the next seven months – until the Paris Olympics – is to lift in the range of 207 kg, which will keep her in the medal hunt at the Games.

Organisers made fun, police unhelpful: Chess players after Spain robberies

AMIT KAMATH
DECEMBER 25

AS MANY as six chess players from India lost valuable possessions, including laptops, cash, electronics and even a passport, when they were in the Spanish coastal town of Sitges to compete in the Sunway Sitges Chess Tournament.

The list of players who were affected by three separate incidents of break-ins into their apartments includes grandmaster Sankalp Gupta, international master Dushyant Sharma, woman grandmaster Srija Seshadri, woman international master Mounika Akshaya, woman international master Arpita Mukherjee and woman FIDE master Vishwa Shah. There was a sizeable contingent of over 70 Indian players competing at the event.

The first incident happened in the room shared by GM Sankalp Gupta and international master Dushyant Sharma on the 19th of this month. Three days later, two separate apartments were hit on the same day in the space of a few hours: in the first one, an apartment shared by five players including WIM Mounika Akshaya was hit and in the second, the apartment that had WIM Arpita Mukherjee and WFM Vishwa Shah was burgled.

All three apartments were in the official accommodation buildings identified for the Indian players by the tournament organisers, located within two kilometres from where the event was happening. So far no players of any other nationality have complained of their apartments being broken into or their possessions going missing.

"I lost my laptop, laptop charger and airpods. My roommate Dushyant lost his passport and had to drop out of the tournament to go to the Indian Consulate the next day to get documentation made to travel back to India," GM Sankalp Gupta told *The Indian Express*. While Sankalp and Dushyant were playing matches when their room was broken into, the second incident happened when the five players had gone for a 45-minute walk. In the third incident, players had allowed themselves just a short window of three hours of sleep when the incident happened.

"It was very bizarre. They took my airpods, but left my roommate's behind. They stole my roommate's passport, but left mine behind after rummaging through the bag it was in. I can still track the location of my airpods, they're at the same location for the last three days. I know exactly where they are in Barcelona: an area called La Mina. I told the police that and asked if I should go myself to retrieve them. They told us that it was one of the most dangerous areas of Barcelona and dissuaded us from going there," Sankalp added.

Screengrab via video post on X.

In a statement, even as the organisers tried to empathise with the players, they made a veiled attempt to shift the blame on the affected players. "...It is speculated that an unfortunate oversight in locking doors or windows may have been a contributing factor," the organisers said. The statement also said that they had hired a security guard to patrol the area after the first incident and that the apartment where the third incident had happened was under CCTV surveillance and that it had not caught anyone breaking into the apartment.

"Because we had heard of the incident with Sankalp, we were already very cautious. So we went for a walk, but not before ensuring every door and window was properly locked. Besides, one person was sleeping in the apartment. If that person was not there, all five of us would have lost our belongings. When we came back, my laptop, my purse and my roommate Srija Seshadri's phone were missing. But when we went to the balcony, my purse and my passport were thrown there. They took money and silver ornaments, but my passport was luckily left behind," Mounika recollected.

"The organisers helped us file a complaint but the police told us on our face that it's going to be no use."

Sankalp also dismissed the claim from the organisers that the players had been careless in locking doors and windows. He said that after the second incident, many of the Indian players were on high alert.

"Players in Arpita and Vishwa's apartment went to sleep at 3:00 am. When they woke up at 6.30 am, their mobile phones which were in the same room as they were, kept beside them as they slept, had been flicked. In this third incident, things could have been a lot worse as the women were present in the house," said Sankalp before adding: "The thing I am most angry about is that later we found reviews for the apartments on the internet which said there had been similar incidents in the past. So this was not a one-off or isolated incident. And still, they did not have any preventative measures in place."

The players claimed that there was just the one security guard to patrol the almost 2-kilometre-wide area and that there were minimal CCTV cameras present.

"When we asked the organisers for compensation for things we had lost because this was their official apartment, they made fun of us. They said they will compensate by providing dinner," said Mounika.

India's selection revolves around bowling options at Centurion

VENKATA KRISHNA B
DECEMBER 25

WITH MOHAMMED Shami missing the series with an injury, India have a couple of decisions to make in the bowling front for Centurion, which is South Africa's Gabba. South Africa have won 22 of the 28 Tests though India won a Test here on their last tour with KL Rahul scoring a century and Shami taking five wickets.

No batting surprises

This will be India's first away Test without both Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane since 2012. With Shubman Gill at No 3 and Shreyas Iyer at No 5, it now gives the team the sort of intent that they have been seeking. With Yashasvi Jaiswal accompanying skipper Rohit Sharma at the top and Virat Kohli in at No 4, India's batting has the ingredients to ace the conditions. That they have KL Rahul – who had an outstanding tour last time – coming in at No 6 as wicketkeeper only shows India's batting might. Add Ravindra Jadeja at No 7, you can't ask for a better batting order.

Ashwin vs Thakur

This is a battle that has been going on since the 2021 tour of England. With Jadeja missing the last South Africa tour, Ashwin played all three Tests, but picked up only three wickets, going wicketless in the final match at Cape Town. Back then, Thakur had a good outing, picking up seven wickets in an innings at Johannesburg.

Centurion, on the other hand, has always been a venue where the fast bowlers do bulk of the work. Out of 41 instances of bowlers taking a five-wicket haul in an innings here, only three have been taken by spinners. There is a high chance of rain on Day 1 and moderate rain on Day 2, and India seem inclined towards playing Thakur, who may not be as solid as Ashwin with the bat, but can make notable contributions.

Third seamer?

Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj should start. It leaves one spot: Mukesh Kumar or Prasidh Krishna? Mukesh, who made his debut in the Caribbean, is known for seam movement though he doesn't have the pace. He is a workhorse, who bowls the ideal red-ball length --- which hits the top of off-stump. Such bowlers have made merry in South African conditions.

Prasidh, on the other hand, is a different variety and one that India missed last time. Since moving on from Ishant Sharma, India's attack hasn't looked complete without a tall fast-bowler. That Prasidh also happens to be a hit-the-deck bowler and can surprise the batsmen with the extra bounce makes for a compelling case. With pace by his side, Prasidh could well be India's trump card with the ball, particularly if they use him in short bursts. He is not known to bowl long spells, but in bowler-friendly conditions, you seldom need one. Given this is also Jasprit Bumrah's first Test since July 2022, India may not be pushing him a lot. So whether they take the field with two seamers, who could be used only for short spells, is also something they have to ponder.

Pot of gold at the end of Rainbow

India fought in 2018, disappointed in 2022, but can they finally win a Test series in South Africa now?

SANDIP G
DECEMBER 25

TWO THEMES have recurred in India's recent trips to South Africa. Of new beginnings and of conquering the elusive shore. The 2018 tour was Virat Kohli's first big overseas assignment as captain, his make or break phase on the road; the next was coach Rahul Dravid's maiden series outside the subcontinent as the team's head coach. Both times, hopes were high that India would return with a historic series triumph for the first time in the country. Both times they failed, as South Africa remains an unconquered bastion, the only one, for Indian cricket, the hurt and hope making the series all the more fascinating.

The narratives remain much the same before the latest attempt in South Africa unfolds on Tuesday. It's a fresh start for Indian cricket, which has moved on from some of the familiar faces in the batting line-up in an important year that also features a five-Test series apiece against England and Australia.

Add the sleepover tour of Bangladesh, and this really is the Year of Tests, apart from the theme-disrupting one-month distraction that is the T20 World Cup. And like in the previous two tours to South Africa, there is genuine hope that India would breach the bastion, which they have frequently stormed but not conquered.

For, South Africa is not as intimidating at home as they once used to be, The nightmarish 90s are long gone, the terror-inducing aughts is just a bad memory. In the last four years, they have surrendered series wins to Sri Lanka (who won 2-0 in 2019) and England, losing six of their last 15 games.

The nine wins had been mustered against India. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and West Indies. India, too, has shed the cold dread of travelling to South Africa as they once did. They have won a Test in four of their five visits, snatched series lead twice and ran them close several times. India have buried the fear, but not burned the burden of history.

From 2006, India-South Africa encounters have produced great optics—vibes, energy and a high level of skills. Some of their duels have been stuff of legends, spectacles entrenched in the psyche, memories that roll forth in an instance.

Like the Sachin Tendulkar-Dale Steyn bout of high-class batting and topnotch swing bowling; or VVS Laxman's Durban masterclass; or Jacques Kallis's defiant rearguard in Cape Town, or the Faf du Plessis-AB de Villiers resistance. in Johannesburg. The rivalry is richer than you had presumed.

Though not as romanticized as the games in Australia, India's exchanges with South Africa have produced riveting cricket.

The games move along at a breakneck pace— wickets fall in a heap, runs arrive at a frantic clip, the ball kicks off the surface, seams this way and that; bounce-savvy batsmen unfurl strokes that burn the grass in the journey to the fence, cheered by a laidback crowd on grass-bank sun-bathing with a mug of beer and braai on the side, and the matches concluded fast. Just seven of the 23 Test matches between the two teams in South Africa have ended in draws (most of those heavily rain-influenced). In the last 14 meetings, just two have ended with split honours, despite rain interruptions in several games.

"We came pretty close the last two times when we toured here but again we have come to this place with lot of confidence to try and achieve what nobody (Indian) team has ever achieved in this part of the world"

ROHIT SHARMA
-INDIA CAPTAIN

Bumrah's return to Tests

Almost every game made the audience traverse through the heightened emotional ebb and flow as only Test matches could. The forthcoming fixtures promise much the same. South Africa's batting is in flux, the bowlers are crippled with injuries; India have a callow opener untested in hostile batting climes, a group of batsmen who have not played red-ball cricket in a while, one of their bowling trinity is absent due to an injury, as is their generational wicket-keeper, recouping from an accident. Both teams are flawed, both could be uncertain of their first, yet there is a buzz, a fervent wave of anticipation that assures to kill your post-lunch siesta.

There is an undulating excitement of Jasprit Bumrah returning to bowling in Tests after 16 months ago. He is a white-ball discovery, born to bowl with a red ball. In shorter versions, he is thrilling; in Tests, he is an experience. He would be without his most trusted ally, Mohammed Shami, but Mohammed Siraj could transform into a demonic proposition.

It would have been a festival of fast bowling metronomes but for the injury-enforced absence of Anrich Nortje and potentially Kagiso Rabada and Lungi Ngidi. But the new wave of seamers would be keen to leave an impression.

The gangly Marco Jansen already has in the last series; Nandre Burger tormented India in the ODI at St George's Park. Though the surfaces tend to be notoriously pacer-friendly, a trio of diverse spinners could enthrall the audience. Keshav Maharaj, Ravindra Jadeja and Ravi Ashwin are distinct as they come. Maharaj is the classical specimen; Jadeja the post-modernist, and Ashwin the fusion great, capable of strutting numerous riffs and ragas.

There is the intrigue of the unknown. Would Yashasvi Jaiswal continue his dream start to the Test career? Can Shubman Gill inherit the mantle of Kohli as the torchbearer of India's rich batting heritage and score his first Test hundred outside Asia? After all, tours to South Africa present the ultimate test of mettle for Asian batters, where even the great Dravid averages a measly 29.71, Could Tony de Zorzi bat as audaciously as he did in the ODIs? Can Deal Elgar, the last of cricket's stonewalling openers, end the series on a high? There are ample subtexts to this series. The predominant themes, though, would be new beginnings and breaching the final frontier.

(South Africa vs India, First Test Day 1, Live on Star Sports Network and Disney+Hotstar, 1:30PM onwards.)

"Playing against India comes with a lot more eyes and a lot more scrutiny in terms of everything we do. So it's accepting that. And the other, more obvious one, is the skill factor on the field."

TEMBA BAVUMA
-SOUTH AFRICA CAPTAIN

The SuperSport Park cricket stadium will host the first Test between India and South Africa. *Reuters*

Can Gill erase his one technical weakness, and prove himself in SA

SRIRAM VEERA
DECEMBER 25

FOR A WHILE now, Shubman Gill has been rightly touted as the next big thing in Indian cricket but there is one issue that has been pegging him back: the slow weight-transfer onto the front foot that has often seen him losing his stumps or being trapped LBW or spooning a return catch to full-length deliveries.

James Anderson, Kyle Jamieson, Mohammad Shami (in the IPL), Chris Woakes, Tim Southee and Pat Cummins have all been successful with that delivery against him.

A good batsman can fall like that, but an aspirant to the throne should be better than just good.

"Has he started to shift his weight forward better?"

It was a query from Kane Williamson's longtime batting coach David Johnston, in Shubman Gill's international debut year. "I saw him as an U-19 kid here in New Zealand, excellent batsman; just had one area of concern when the ball is on a good length and nips back in.

"His whole set-up is such that he prefers standing tall at the crease or pushing back, and is late in getting forward. He should be fine in Australia or South Africa's bouncy conditions but might have a few issues in England, New Zealand and elsewhere where that kind of bounce isn't there. But it's just a small thing, he is too talented not to have sorted it. But yeah, just keep an eye on it."

Amazingly, Gill hasn't sorted it yet, and it has often been his downfall in international cricket. As predicted by Williamson's coach, he sparkled in Australia in 2021, but that flaw has proved to be his downfall elsewhere.

It's not a weakness in the conventional sense of the word. If he corrects it in the conventional manner of pressing forward, it can affect his whole successful set-up at the crease that he is understandably loath to change. It's a natural technique that developed from his childhood days of playing on cement tracks in his village courtyard. It demanded him to stand tall and punch on the up or press back and fist. It's also a reason for his short-arm swat pulls to look so natural when the ball bounces up from even back of a length.

Shubman Gill's problem in weight-transfer onto the front foot has seen him losing his wicket to full-length deliveries. *Reuters*

To change that with possibly a tiny forward-trigger is to mis-shape his natural set-up. So he has tried to offset it with other means. Chiefly, with an exaggerated front-shoulder lean-in stance in his last few Tests. Almost as if reminding himself that he can't afford to have his weight back too much, and should be ready to spring forward when the length demands it. It works, but then comes the ball, after a series of set-ups by the bowler, when he finds himself a tad late in moving forward. And that's all really good bowlers need.

Awareness leads to solution

In many ways, batting is about transferring weight and being still when playing a shot. Unlike Williamson, who looks to get forward with a small press but then that step is just the start of Williamson's negotiations, not the end.

"From that forward press, depending on the length, Kane either pushes back or gets forward further," Johnston says. "He doesn't allow the bowler to dictate lengths by being crease bound." Gill does.

It's not that he isn't aware of the problem. "There are one or two important elements. Like your shoulder should be aligned towards the ball, you should be a little side-on while playing, you should be in a good position even if your feet are not moving that well. If you are positioned well in relation to the ball, you will manage," Gill once told *The Indian Express*.

To his credit, he has great hands and trusts them to get him out of jail but when the ball moves a bit from that full good length, he is asking too much of them.

Gill is a very self-aware batsman who has pieced his technique minutely. "As a player, you should know what things you need to work on, and where the opposition is looking to get you out. If you know that, it becomes easier to tackle," Gill had said. "In cricket, there is no technique that can be termed 'out-proof'".

Clearly, he does see the weight-transfer as an issue as he has tried to offset it by reducing his initial back-foot movement. Also, for a brief while in the recent past, he would stand with a noticeable lean-in of the front shoulder. So he has tinkered around.

In South Africa, though there is no Anrich Nortje who deals in that good length with pace, he will be up against Kagiso Rabada and Lungi Ngidi, a tall left-handed seamer in Marco Jansen as well as right-arm pacer Gerald Coetzee. In theory, as Williamson's coach said, Gill should prosper in South African conditions as he did in Australia, but if the pacers have done their homework aligned with the demands of the conditions, it can get tricky.

If cloudy conditions force the South African pacers to hit a full length in search of movement, rather than hurl it short of length as they might do on home tracks, it can get interesting for Gill. The best young Indian batsman of this generation, on paper, has to show that he is the best young Indian batsman of this generation - on the field.

Injuries mean Pakistan's 15-Test losing streak in Aus may be hard to break

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DECEMBER 25

PAKISTAN GOES into Tuesday's Boxing Day match against Australia on a 15-match test losing streak, not having won Down Under since November 1995.

The team's ever-expanding injury list heading into the Melbourne Cricket Ground test won't make ending the streak any easier.

Pakistan spinner Noman Ali became the second player in two days to withdraw from the touring squad for the remainder of the three-test series due to illness and injury. Left-arm spinner Mohammad Nawaz will replace Ali in the squad, the selection committee said on the weekend.

Ali, who didn't play in the 360-run defeat in the first test at Perth last week, underwent surgery for appendicitis in Melbourne on Saturday. "Noman Ali complained of sudden and severe abdominal pain yesterday, leading to examinations and scans in emergency that confirmed a diagnosis of acute appendicitis," a Pakistan team statement read.

"Post-surgery he is stable and doing fine. He will be discharged later (on Saturday)." The latest blow for the tourists comes after fast bowler Khurram Shahzad, who took match figures of 5-128 in his impressive test debut in Perth, was ruled out for the remainder of the series with a rib stress fracture and muscle tear on Thursday. Leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed, who missed out the first test, was also ruled out of the test because of a leg injury.

Pakistan traveled to Australia with a weakened bowling lineup after fast bowler Naseem Shah was ruled out due to a long-term injury and Haris Rauf opted to play in Australia's Big Bash League instead of joining the touring squad. "It is really unfortunate that Noman Ali is not available for the test matches," chief selector Wahab Riaz said. "Due to logistical challenges, including visa issues for any new player, and considering the requirement for a left-arm spinner, Nawaz was the best available choice for the side." Australia opener Usman Khawaja, who was reprimanded by the International Cricket Council for wearing a black armband in support of Palestinians in Gaza during the first test, was not expected to wear it on Tuesday for the start of the second.

He risked further sanction by the ICC if he wore it again, and said last week he had no plans to wear the armband again during this series. ICC regulations prevent cricketers from displaying messages of political, religious or racial causes during international matches. Khawaja was born in Pakistan and is the first Muslim to play test cricket for Australia.

On Sunday at training, though, Khawaja was seen with the image of a dove holding an olive branch — recognized as a universal symbol of peace — on his right boot and on the back of his bat. But the left-hander's application to the ICC to be allowed to display the images during the Melbourne test was turned down.

Australia captain Pat Cummins feels the dove symbol supports his teammate's right to have strong beliefs, but accepts the governing body's ruling. "We really support Uzzy. He's standing up for what he believes and I think he's done it really respectfully," Cummins said Monday.

"But obviously there's rules in place and I believe the ICC have said they're not going to approve that. They make up the rules and you've got to accept it." Khawaja was wearing plain black shoes and was greeted warmly by members of the Pakistan team as players from both sides went through light training sessions indoors at the MCG on Monday.

Australia is expected to name an unchanged lineup for the match. The final Pakistan lineup will be confirmed at the toss.

The third test is scheduled to begin Jan. 3 at the Sydney Cricket Ground — where Pakistan had its last win in Australia nearly 30 years ago.

Mohammad Nawaz was called up to bolster an injury-hit squad. *AP*

Cummins backs Khawaja on dove logo

Melbourne: Australian captain Pat Cummins on Monday came in support of his teammate Usman Khawaja, saying the opener's attempt to bring to the fore the humanitarian crisis in Gaza was "not offensive".

Cricket's global governing body ICC has rejected Khawaja's application to have a sticker showing a black dove holding an olive branch on his bat and shoes during the Boxing Day Test against Pakistan.

Cummins said he finds no difference between Khawaja displaying a dove logo on his shoe and bat to raise awareness of humanitarian issues and teammate Marnus Labuschagne displaying an eagle on his bat which signifies a personal religious message.

"We really support Uzzy. He's standing up for what he believes and I think he's done it really respectfully," Cummins told reporters on the eve of the second Test at the MCG.

"As I said last week, 'All lives are equal', I don't think that's very offensive and I'd say the same about the dove." Backing his 37-year-old colleague who was born in Pakistan capital Islamabad, Cummins added, "That's Uzzy. I think he can really hold his head high with the way he's gone about it. **PTI**

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