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HAPPY REPUBLIC DAY

ON THIS OCCASION

PEOPLE'S GOVERNANCE TOOK ANOTHER STEP FORWARD BY

LAUNCHING 4 WELFARE SCHEMES

RYTHU BHAROSA

INDIRAMMA ATMIYA BHAROSA

INDIRAMMA INDLU

NEW RATION CARDS

People's Government: Path to Progress and Welfare for All

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Dog bite crisis

Punjab's stray dog crisis is spiralling out of control, with over two lakh dog bite cases reported in 2024. Ludhiana, Patiala and Mohali are leading the pack, with Mohali alone recording 16,047 cases. Yet, despite the alarming statistics and public outcry, Punjab is dragging its feet on providing financial compensation to victims, as mandated by the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

The tragic mauling of a nine-year-old boy in Nabha is a grim reminder of the growing menace. The problem is rooted in unregulated garbage dumps and sites like "hadda podi", where animal remains are carelessly discarded, creating a haven for feral dogs. Urban eateries dumping bones and meat waste add fuel to the fire, making the problem even worse. The authorities appear more reactive than proactive. While the Nabha SDM has ordered vaccinations and awaits reports, this piecemeal approach won't solve a crisis of this magnitude. Punjab needs a comprehensive action plan involving sterilisation drives, waste management reforms and education campaigns. Without this, incidents like Nabha will only multiply.

Adding insult to injury, the state has failed to honour the high court's directive to compensate victims adequately — Rs 10,000 per tooth mark and Rs 20,000 for severe wounds. For victims, this lapse is a double blow: suffering both physical trauma and bureaucratic indifference. The State Rabies Control Programme offers free vaccines, but lax enforcement of vaccination schedules could worsen health outcomes.

As rising numbers of canine fury point to a silent emergency of epidemic proportions, Punjab must act decisively. It must collaborate with municipal bodies, health authorities and animal welfare groups to make cities safer for people and animals alike. Tackling dog bites needs proactive measures, not band-aids.

What did the ILO report state about international migrants? | Explained



GNS News Agency, Jan 25

The story so far: By addressing labour market shortages in host nations and contributing remittances to home countries, International Migrants (IM) continue to make contributions to world economic growth, the fourth edition of 'Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers', released by the International Labour Organization (ILO), said. What did the ILO state? In 2022, IMs made up 4.7% (167.7 million) of the global labour force, defined as both employed and unemployed (but available for work); over 30 million more than in 2013. An estimated 155.6 million were employed and 12.1 million unemployed. The share of IM men in the total employment for males globally was estimated at 4.7% and that of IM women at 4.4%. However, between 2019-2022, the rate of growth dipped annually to less than 1%, influenced among other factors by the pandemic.

What about age and gender?

A higher proportion of IM males were employed — 61.3% out of a total of 102.7 million. Conversely, only 38.7% female IMs were employed out of a total of 64.9 million in 2022. All the same, the number of women IMs has steadily risen ever since the ILO began compiling global estimates in 2015. One explanation for the smaller proportion of women in the global labour force is their lower representation in the total population of IMs. At 74.9% (125.6 million), prime-age adult IM workers — those aged between 25 and 54 years, both men and women — constituted the largest majority of IM workers in the labour force in 2022. Less than one out of 10 IMs were below 25. Way behind the above category, at 9.3% were young IM workers, aged between 15-24 years, numbering 15.5 million, in the global labour force. IMs aged between 55-64 years were 12.5% and those above 65 at 3.4%.

Which economic sectors attract IMs?

The largest proportion of IMs, 68.4%, were concentrated in the services sector, even higher than non-migrants. Women IMs held the dominant share in this arena at 80.7%, as against 60.8% among their male counterparts. The corresponding figures for non-migrant women and men in the services industry were 59.4% and 46.3% respectively. Significantly, the dominance of IMs in this sector has remained consistent over the decade, upwards of 67% between 2013-2022. In industry, the proportion of IMs was 24.3% and that of non-migrants 24.2%. In agriculture, IMs accounted for 7.4%, whereas non-migrants were at a significantly higher share of 24.3%.

Which are the main host countries?

High-income countries absorbed the largest number of IMs, accounting for 68.4% (114 million people), in key sectors such as services, especially in the provision of care. At about a quarter of this share, 17.4% (29.2 million), were distributed among upper-middle-income countries. For an entire decade between 2013-2022, high-income and upper-middle-income countries have consistently remained primary destinations for IMs. The share of IM workers in northern, southern and western Europe in the year 2022 was at 23.3%, increasing by less than one percentage point after 2013. In Northern America on the other hand, the share of IMs in the labour force in 2022 was at 22.6%, a more than one percentage point decrease over the same decade. The Arab states accounted for 13.3% of IM workers in 2022, down three percentage points over 2013. A combination of ageing populations, growing demand in the care economy and greater economic opportunities means that high income countries will continue to remain attractive destinations for the bulk of IMs.

Actor-politician Vijay set to throw his weight behind Parandur farmers, opposed to airport project



GNS News Agency, Jan 25

Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam chief Vijay is all set to meet on Monday farmers and people likely to be affected by the proposed Parandur airport project near here, to express solidarity with them, and he is expected to take on the ruling DMK which is keen on project implementation. Vijay's visit, proposed to take place later in the day, would be the first such exercise for him after forming the party last year and it would be on the 910th day of

protest against the project, according to the Parandur struggle committee (Parandur Pasumai Vimana Nilaya Thitta Ethirippu Poratta Kuzhu), spearheading the protest. "Vendam Vimana Nilayam, Vendum Vivasayam," (Don't need airport, need agriculture) the committee wrote on the black board displayed prominently on the wall of the temple at Ekanapuram village, an activity done everyday without fail, for over 2 years now.

In view of the proposed interaction, the sleepy villages near Sriperumbudur witness busy activity and the area teemed with vehicles and people. According to the committee, Vijay would be meeting farmers and people from 13 villages at a marriage hall as police have 'denied' permission to hold the interaction at Ekanapuram Dr Ambedkar ground citing security reasons. TVK general secretary N Anand and functionaries of the party have inspected the venue of the proposed meet. Vehicle arrangements have been made to facilitate the people from all the 13 villages to meet TVK chief at the designated venue, the panel said. Fifty-year old Vijay formed his party in 2024 and held a big public meeting at Vikravandi, billed as a show of strength, and the party had already made it clear that its goal is to win the 2026 Assembly election and form the government.

Gujarat angioplasty deaths: Hospital chairman sent to 10-day police remand

GNS News Agency, Jan 25

A court in Ahmedabad on Sunday sent Kartik Jasu Manilal Patel, a key accused in the Gujarat angioplasty deaths case, to 10-day police remand. Patel is the primary investor and chairman of Ahmedabad Bariatrics and Cosmetics Private Limited, which owns Khyati Multispecialty Hospital, alleged to be involved in the misuse of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) scheme by conducting unnecessary angioplasty procedures.

A statement from the Gujarat government on Sunday said Patel was arrested by the Detection of Crime Branch (DCB) from his home in the Ambli area of Ahmedabad on Saturday at 11.45 am, shortly after he landed in the city on an Emirates Airlines flight from Dubai. He was arrested two months after two PMJAY beneficiaries died at Khyati Multispecialty Hospital. PMJAY is the Centre's health insurance scheme, which aims to provide coverage up to Rs 5 lakh annually per family for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation. Patel, who had been absconding for a total of 66 days since three FIRs were filed against him on November 13, 2024, on charges including but not limited to culpable homicide not amounting to murder, and attempt at culpable homicide, was produced before Judge HR Patel in the rural court in Ahmedabad. The prosecution sought 14 days remand of the accused based on 12 points of investigation.

On the arguments made by special public prosecutor Vijay Barot, the court saw fit to grant the Crime Branch 10 days remand of the accused, until January 28. Patel is the last of nine accused in these three cases to be arrested by the Crime Branch of Ahmedabad city police. ([https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/pmjay-angioplasty-death-hospital-chairman-apprehended-](https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/pmjay-angioplasty-death-hospital-chairman-apprehended-9785426/lite/)



9785426/lite/) Earlier on Saturday, a DCB statement stated that Patel is the chairman of the hospital and all financial decisions were made only with his approval. It also said that Patel gave unsecured loans to the hospital through his other firm and increased his stake in the hospital's holding company.

As per the police, Patel left India on November 3, which was eight days before two men from the Boricha village in Mehsana—Mahesh Girdhar Barot, 52, and Nagar Moti Senma, 75—died after undergoing allegedly "completely unnecessary" angioplasty at Khyati Multispecialty Hospital following a free medical camp organised in that village. According to the police, Patel first went to Sydney, and then visited other cities like Melbourne, in Australia. Then, on November 11, he and his wife reached New Zealand and stayed there until November 18. Meanwhile, the three FIRs against him had already been filed. On November 18, he and his wife travelled to Dubai in the UAE, where they stayed in the Al Karama area of the city, said the police. He returned to India on the intervening night of January 17 and 18, and the police soon arrested him.

Saif Ali Khan stabbing case: From bathroom window to duct shaft and ladder, Mumbai police find attacker's 19 fingerprints from crime scene



GNS News Agency, Jan 25

The Mumbai police said they have found as many as 19 fingerprints of Bangladeshi national Mohammed Shariful Islam, alias Vijay Das, who allegedly attacked Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan at his house on January 16 in a failed robbery attempt, from the crime scene. Sources in the Mumbai police told The Indian Express they managed to lift the accused's fingerprints from the crime scene, the bathroom window from where he entered and exited, the duct shaft, and the ladder he used to enter the building from the duct, among other places. The police believe they are one of the strongest pieces of evidence they have against Islam, 30, to secure a conviction in the Saif Ali Khan stabbing case. The Mumbai police ran these fingerprint samples through the state and national databases, but they didn't match anyone. "We should have then realised that the rob-

ber could be from outside and probably a Bangladeshi national, as a huge number of people illegally enter the country from there," said a police officer who is a part of the probe. On Monday, the police brought Islam from a lockup to the Bandra Police Station for further investigation.

A team is likely to take him to Saif Ali Khan's house on the 11th floor of the Satguru Sharan building on St Terrasa Road, Bandra West. Islam, who has already admitted before the police that he committed the crime, would be asked by the police to narrate the sequence of events — how he entered the building and fled after having a confrontation with the actor. After attacking Khan, Islam escaped to Dadar via the Bandra station from where he went to Worli. The police traced his route with the help of CCTV cameras at the Bandra Railway Station, Dadar, and then Worli. After he was seen eating parathas at a food stall, the police then traced the stall owner, who gave them the details of the UPI transaction Islam made to pay for the parathas and a water bottle. This number led police to the labour camp, near Ghodbunder, in Thane. Meanwhile, another police team managed to track his contractor, Jitendra Pandey, who was captured on another CCTV at Andheri with Islam. Pandey dropped Islam somewhere on his bike, said a police officer. From Pandey, the police also learnt that Islam could be in Thane, and then after hours-long searches by more than 100 policemen from the Mumbai police, the Crime Branch, and the Thane police, Islam was eventually caught hiding in mangrove bushes. He was produced in a Bandra court on Sunday and was remanded to five days of police custody.

Delhi High Court seeks status report from police in AAP MLA Naresh Balyan's bail plea in MCOCA case

GNS News Agency, Jan 25 Delhi HC seeks police stand on bail plea of MLA Naresh Balyan Balyan was arrested by the Delhi Police on November 30, 2024, in connection with an extortion case, and was granted bail on December 4, 2024, but was arrested in a separate case lodged under provisions of MCOCA. (File Photo) The Delhi High Court Monday sought a status report from the Delhi Police on AAP MLA Naresh Balyan's regular bail plea in a case filed against him under the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA). Through his counsel, Balyan pointed out that he was arrested under the MCOCA case immediately after he was granted bail in an extortion case, and requested bail, saying he wants to participate in the poll process as his wife is contesting in the Delhi Assembly elections 2025. "Two co-accused have just given my reference but I don't have any case with them at all. Anyone can say anything against me. In none of the cases I'm an accused with them... I understand they have the power to arrest anyone, accuse anyone... He (Balyan) himself has filed complaints against the same gang... not

even a single day custody should be given in this case... I'm a sitting MLA, please grant me interim bail. I'm not a criminal... At least, I can come out and participate in the elections," said senior advocate Vikas Pahwa, appearing for Balyan. Justice Vikas Mahajan issued notice to the prosecution, seeking a status report from the police, and posted the matter next for consideration on January 23. A Delhi court on January 15 denied bail to Naresh Balyan in the MCOCA case. Balyan was arrested by the Delhi Police on November 30, 2024, in connection with an extortion case, and was granted bail on December 4, 2024, but was arrested in a separate case lodged under provisions of MCOCA. Balyan, who represents the Uttam Nagar constituency in West Delhi, was arrested hours after the BJP played an audio clip of what it claimed was a conversation allegedly between him and gangster Kapil Sangwan.

The original case is based on a police complaint filed by Gurcharan, a resident of Mohan Garden in West Delhi, alleging he received an extortion call from Kapil Sangwan in July 2023, demanding Rs 1 crore.

Senior citizen found dead in her five-star hotel room in Mumbai



GNS News Agency, Jan 25

Mumbai police According to the Mumbai police, the woman has been identified as a city resident, and had been staying at the hotel since January 6. A 60-year-old woman was found dead in a room at a five-star hotel in South Mumbai Sunday afternoon, said the police, adding they suspect she may have passed away due to natural causes.

According to the Mumbai police, the woman has been identified as a city resident, and had been staying at the hotel since January 6. "As of now, there is no evidence suggesting any suspicious circumstances surrounding her death. Preliminary post-mortem results revealed no visible injuries or signs of foul play. However, the viscera has been preserved for further examination to determine the cause of death," said a senior police officer. The police also said the woman was unmarried, and her family members are being contacted. The Marine Drive police have registered a case of accidental death and are continuing their investigation. "We are waiting for the detailed post-mortem report, as it will shed more light on the cause of her death," an officer added.

Ex-serviceman jumps in front of approaching Metro train in Bengaluru, saved by alert staff

GNS News Agency, Jan 25

Bangalore, Bengaluru, Bangalore news, Bengaluru news. Identifying the person as Anil Kumar Pandey, 49, a former Air Force officer from Bihar, officials said the incident occurred at around 10.25 am. An ex-serviceman jumped in front of an approaching Metro train in Bengaluru's Jalahalli station Monday but was rescued by alert staff members.

Identifying the person as Anil Kumar Pandey, 49, a former Air Force officer from Bihar, officials said the incident occurred at around 10.25 am. In a statement, the Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) said that after the man jumped, "immediately Emergency Trip System (ETS) was operated" and he was rescued, adding that, "As per preliminary information, no injuries were reported." The Metro rail corporation said the incident led to a brief disruption of services on the Green Line till 10.50 am. "From 10.25 am to 10.50 am, four trains were operated in a short loop between Yeshwanthpur and Silk Institute instead of up to Madavara Metro station during this period," it stated.

AAP's Inderjit Kaur, a school principal, is first woman mayor of Ludhiana



GNS News Agency, Jan 25

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Inderjit Kaur, the newly elected first-time councillor from ward number 13, was on Monday appointed as the first woman mayor of Ludhiana. The announcement was made by Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. The post of Ludhiana Mayor was reserved for women this time. With over a decade of experience in teaching, Inderjit Kaur is a principal at a private school. She holds a commerce degree, an MBA, and a BEd. Additionally, she is the women's wing president of the AAP for Ludhiana district.

Mann also announced Rakesh Parashar as Ludhiana's senior deputy mayor and Prince Johar as deputy mayor. Rakesh Parashar, a five-time councillor and a former Congress leader, who again won this time on an AAP ticket, is the brother of AAP's Ludhiana Central MLA Ashok Parashar Pappi. In Ludhiana Municipal Corporation polls held on December 21, the AAP won 41 seats in the 95-member House, seven short of the majority mark of 48. The Congress won 30, the BJP 19, the Shiromani Akali Dal 2, and Independents 3. However, later seven councillors from other parties, including four from the Congress, one from the BJP and 2 Independents, joined the AAP.

Massive security at Sealdah court ahead of RG Kar rape-murder accused's sentencing: 500 cops, 3-tier barricades

GNS News Agency, Jan 25

The entire Sealdah court area in Kolkata was cordoned off on Monday morning, with a three-tier barricade system and massive police deployment, ahead of the sentencing of the prime accused in the R G Kar rape-murder case. At 10.40 am, the accused, Sanjoy Roy, was brought to court in a convoy of two police cars with blacked out windows and several police vans. More than 500 police personnel have been deployed at the court, including Deputy commissioner, assistant commissioner, and inspectors level officers. Sessions court judge Anirban Das will deliver the quantum of punishment to the accused.

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Another farmer ends life over delayed crop loan waiver in Telangana's Adilabad

Adilabad: A 59-year-old farmer died by suicide as he was allegedly depressed over his inability to repay mounting debts at Varthamannur village in Bazarhathnour mandal on Saturday. Bazarhathnour Sub-Inspector Apparao said Mailarapu Narsaiah was found hanging from a tree in his agriculture field. He was distressed over the financial crisis caused by the delay in the crop loan waiver and Rythu Bharosa investment support scheme, with which he was planning to repay his debts. Narsaiah grew the cotton and red gram crops on his 6 acres of land and took another 3 acres on lease from another farmer by borrowing a loan of around Rs 5 lakh.

Fire breaks out from underground gas pipeline in Jeedimetla industrial area; No casualties reported

Hyderabad: A fire broke out following a leak in an underground gas pipeline at Bahadurpally in Jeedimetla industrial area in the early hours of Saturday. No casualties were reported.

On being alerted, technicians from the Bhagyanagar Gas Limited and personnel from the Fire Department and local police rushed to the spot. A fire engine reached the spot and doused the flames. The gas technicians took up repairs to the damaged pipeline. The Dundigal police are investigating. They suspect that flames from a camp fire lit by unidentified persons near the gas pipeline led to the leak and subsequent fire.

Enlightened voters make democracy stronger: President Murmu



GNS News Agency, Jan 25

Voters should have the determination to rise above narrowmindedness, discrimination and inducements while exercising their franchise, besides having faith in democracy, President Droupadi Murmu said on Saturday, January 25, 2025. Enlightened voters make democracy stronger,

she asserted while addressing a 15th National Voters' Day event in the national capital.

Delivering her address in the presence of Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and S.S. Sandhu, and representatives of political parties, she lauded the poll panel for using new technologies and the latest software in improving and making more transparent the poll process. The president said she was confident that Indian democracy would continue to set examples for the global community. "Besides having faith in democracy, voters should have the determination that they will rise above narrowmindedness, discrimination and inducements while exercising their franchise ... Enlightened voters make democracy stronger," she asserted. National Voters' Day is being celebrated for the past 15 years to mark the inception of the Election Commission on January 25, 1950, a day before India became a republic.

Indonesia is an 'important partner' of India in 10-nation ASEAN bloc as well as in Indo-Pacific, says PM



GNS News Agency, Jan 25

India and Indonesia on Saturday (January 25, 2025) agreed to give a new momentum to the overall bilateral ties and especially concurred on working jointly in the areas of defence manufacturing and supply chains, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto for wide-ranging talks. Mr. Subianto, on a three-day visit to India, will be the chief guest at the Republic-Day celebrations at Kartavya Path on Sunday (January 26, 2025). In his media statement following the talks, Mr. Modi described Indonesia as an "important partner" of India in the 10-nation ASEAN bloc as well as in the Indo-Pacific,

noting that both countries are committed to a rules-based order in the region. "We agree that the freedom of navigation should be ensured in line with international law," Mr. Modi said amid growing global concerns over China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the Indo-Pacific region.

"We held extensive discussions on various aspects of our bilateral ties," the Prime Minister said, adding that India and Indonesia have agreed to work jointly on defence manufacturing and supply chains. An agreement signed between India and Indonesia on Saturday (January 25, 2025) in the maritime security sphere will further strengthen cooperation in crime prevention, search and rescue and capacity building, Modi said. He said both sides talked on the need to diversify the trade basket and market access to boost the overall economic ties. "We decided to strengthen cooperation in areas like FinTech, artificial intelligence, internet of things and digital public infrastructure," the Prime Minister noted. He also said that both sides laid stress on cooperation in maritime security, cyber security, counter-terrorism and de-radicalisation. In the talks, the Indian side also welcomed Indonesia's BRICS membership. In his remarks, the Indonesian leader described the talks as "very frank" and said both sides have agreed to expand cooperation in many key sectors of common interest. "I have given directions to our officials that we need to accelerate the economic partnership with India," Mr. Subianto said.

Tamil Nadu CM Stalin requests Modi, Shah not to replace Governor; says Ravi's tenure in T.N. helped DMK grow

GNS News Agency, Jan 25

DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Friday (January 24, 2025) requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah not to replace R.N. Ravi as the Tamil Nadu Governor, contending that his continuation in the post helped the DMK grow further in the State. Despite all the reservations that the DMK had against Mr. Ravi, the party favoured his continuation in Tamil Nadu Raj Bhavan only because it helped further the growth of the DMK in the State, Mr. Stalin said, while welcoming youth who had quit a political party to join the DMK.

"Have we ever adopted a resolution in the Assembly seeking to replace the Governor? No, we did not bring about any such resolution. He should remain. The DMK is growing further because of him," Mr. Stalin said, addressing cadre at the party headquarters Anna Arivalayam in Chennai. Speaking about the upcoming Assembly session, during which the customary Governor's Address to



the House has been scheduled, Mr. Stalin said: "He [Governor] should come to the House. We will give him the prepared speech text. He should not read it and stage a walkout. And the people should watch all of it."

Girls lead the charge in veer gatha winners

GNS News Agency, Jan 25

The fourth edition of veer gatha (tales of valour) competition, which aims to educate school students about the bravery and sacrifices of the country's gallantry award winners, saw the participation of over 1.76 crore students from 2.5 lakh schools across the country. The 100 winners from them, which includes 66 girls, were felicitated by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan on Saturday (January 25, 2025). At another event, Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth gave away prizes to the winners of the national school band competition. One of the winning school bands from Jharkhand will be present during Republic Day while another band will be part of Beating The Retreat.

During the felicitation ceremony of veer gatha, each winner was presented with a cash prize of ₹10,000, a medal, and a certificate. These super 100 are among the approximate 10,000 special guests who will be witnessing the Republic Day Parade at Kartavya Path on Sunday (January 26, 2025). "India's stature has grown on the global stage due to the Prime Minister's dynamic leadership. Today, when we speak on any international forum, the whole world listens. This has been made possible due to the hard work of every Indian, including our brave soldiers, scientists and young ignited minds. We have a major young population of about 50 crore youth. How can a country with such creative minds not develop?" Mr. Singh said addressing the students. During the event, Param Vir Chakra Awardee Subedar Major Sanjay Kumar shared his inspiring experience from the 1999 Kargil War, urging students to embody



the values of bravery, selflessness and integrity in their lives. "True bravery lies not only in combat but in standing up for what is right in everyday life," he told the young participants. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Pradhan emphasised that initiatives like veer gatha educate school students about the valour and sacrifices of the brave gallantry award winners while nurturing the creativity of young minds.

He noted the record-breaking participation of 1.76 crore students from over 2.5 lakh schools who engaged in activities such as drawing, painting, and essay writing, paying heartfelt tributes to the countries gallantry awardees. For the national school band competition, the jury appointed by the Ministry of Defence, which included members from each of the three Services, selected the winners upon the culmination of the Grand Finale of the Competition which was held on January 24 and 25.

Revanth Reddy brought more embarrassment than investment to Telangana from Davos: BRS



GNS News Agency, Jan 25

Hyderabad: Highlighting what he called poor representation of Telangana at the prestigious Davos summit by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, BRS leader Sravan Dasoju said on Saturday that due to Revanth Reddy's incoherence, ignorance and lack of preparedness to uphold Telangana's

pride on an international dais, he was exposed thoroughly.

Slamming Revanth Reddy for a billboard put up by him targeting BRS president K Chandrashekhara Rao and BRS working president KT Rama Rao, Sravan labelled it a malicious attempt to tarnish the image and reputation of the BRS leadership. He also criticised Revanth Reddy's improper and unprofessional attire, poor communication skills and false claims about investment amounts, stating that these actions had only brought embarrassment to the State. He accused Revanth Reddy of resorting to cheap propaganda and cheap theatrics to divert public attention from his inefficiency. Instead of addressing his glaring failures and delivering results, Sravan remarked that Revanth Reddy had stooped to the lowest level in politics, which was unbecoming of a leader who claims to represent the aspirations of Telangana. He emphasised that true leadership was about action, vision and delivering results, not distractions or manipulation, and condemned the continuing attempts of Revanth Reddy to belittle the BRS leadership.

Centre finally notifies Unified Pension scheme option for government staff covered by NPS

GNS News Agency, Jan 25

The Unified Pension Scheme shall be applicable to such Central Government employees who are already covered under NPS and who "choose" the UPS option, the notification said, indicating workers will have to actively enroll into the UPS. "The existing Central Government Employees under National Pension System, on the effective date of operationalisation of the Unified Pension Scheme option, as well as the future employees of Central Government can choose to either take the Unified Pension Scheme option under the National Pension System or continue with the National Pension System without the Unified Pension Scheme option," it said.

For those exercising the UPS option, their retirement corpus will comprise of two funds. First, an individual corpus with employee contribution and matching Central Government contribution made through their working lives, and second, will be a pool corpus with additional Central Government contribution. The official order detailing the scheme stressed that "for the sake of clarity", it is made clear that any employee who exercises the UPS option under the NPS, shall not be entitled for and cannot claim, any other policy concession, policy change, financial benefit, any parity with subsequent retirees etc. later, including post-retirement.

The UPS, announced in late August, was formulated as a step to address concerns of government employees about the NPS, by a high-level panel led by former Finance Secretary and the present Cabinet Secretary TV Somanathan. The government had announced that employees covered under the NPS who have already retired would also be covered by the UPS. The formal notification states that the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Au-



thority (PFRDA) will determine the mechanism for making available the top-up amounts for such retirees who opt for the UPS, relative to the payouts they receive under the NPS. In August 2024, the NDA government reversed a 21-year-old measure to reform India's civil services pension system boldly brought in by the Atal Behari Vajpayee government. Instead, it unveiled what it called a new "Unified Pension Scheme" (UPS) that is virtually akin to the Old Pension Scheme (OPS), and assures government employees of 50% of their last drawn pay as a lifelong monthly benefit. The UPS, approved by the Union Cabinet on Saturday, also assures officials a periodic dearness relief hike in line with inflation trends, a family pension equivalent to 60% of a government worker's pension in the case of their demise, and a lumpsum superannuation payout in addition to gratuity benefits at the time of retirement. Besides, a minimum pension of ₹10,000 a month has been promised for those who complete at least 10 years of central government service.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah releases third and final part of BJP's sankalp patra



GNS News Agency, Jan 25

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday (January 25, 2025) released the third and final part of BJP's 'Sankalp Patra', in New Delhi. While releasing the third part and final part of the BJP's Sankalp Patra Mr. Shah said "BJP's manifesto is made out of trust and not false lies." The Union Home Minister said "The BJP is promising full ownership of property that is being given under the MOHUA's PM Awas Yojana. The BJP will ensure that all the sealed shops in the capital are opened in the next six months. BJP will give people of the colonies established after partition ownership of their homes instead of leases like it has been until now." Mr. Shah further added "For gig workers, the BJP will make a gig workers board and we will give their children scholarships. We will make an integrated public transport system." The Union Home Minister said "We will provide 50,000 government jobs and 20,000 self employment jobs for youth. And for tourism, we will make a Yamuna river front, and other things." Mr. Shah reiterated "We will end manual scavenging in capital." He said "A very serious lie has been spread by the AAP, I was told by people working in my home that they are getting calls that if BJP comes to power, they will stop the welfare schemes given

to the poor of the capital. But I am telling you today, PM Modi has said that no welfare schemes will be stopped in Delhi. And what he says, he makes sure it happens. I want to appeal to the AAP to not spread these lies but I know they will continue this dirty politics because those who did not listen to Anna will not listen to me also", before releasing the third part of the manifesto

Arikepudi Raghu wins Governor's Award for Excellence in helping differently-abled

GNS News Agency, Jan 25

Sangareddy: His day begins very early searching news articles in the newspaper for human interest stories. After spending a few hours going through newspapers, he zeroes in on a person whom needs help.

Meet Arikepudi Raghu, who has been selected for the first-ever Governor's Awards for Excellence-2024. Raghu has reached out to thousands of such people during the last two decades and was selected for the award for his work on the welfare of the differently-abled. He started his journey by supporting differently-abled woman Marathamma, who had arrived at the Sangareddy Collectorate in 2017 seeking a three-wheeler vehicle. Since Marathamma was an intermediate student then, officials of the disabled welfare department could not give a vehicle for her because only degree and PG students were eligible under the scheme. After coming to know about her struggles, Raghu, a retired BDL-Bhanur employee, mobilised funds from his friends and colleagues and bought her a vehicle.

Poor demand hits investments by private sector in Q3



With domestic demand seen waning amid a spike in inflation and input costs, investment plans by India's private sector took a notable hit, falling 1.4% in the October-December 2024 quarter (Q3) after a fleeting recovery in the second quarter (Q2) of 2024-25. However, government capex plans registered a sharp growth, lifting overall fresh investments in the economy by 9.9% in Q3 to ₹11.46 lakh crore from an updated tally of ₹10.43 lakh crore recorded in Q2. This rise was led by a 34.6% spike in fresh investments by State governments over Q2 levels, almost thrice the 11.8% growth in new outlays announced by the Union government. New investments by foreign players rose 44.2% sequentially, albeit from a low base, to ₹1.02 lakh crore. This spike to largely thanks to a single ₹70,000 crore steel project announced by Arcelor Mittal Nippon.

Rising input costs Domestic investors, however, pulled back fresh investment plans by 1.4% from Q2 to nearly ₹6.11 lakh crore in Q3. Moreover, total private sector projects slipped sharply from 1,253 in Q2 to 1,061 in Q3. Private investors' share in new investment projects dropped to 62.2% in Q3 from 66.2% in Q2, as per data from Projects Today, a firm that has been tracking new and ongoing investment projects in the country since 2000.

"The slowdown in domestic private investments during the third quarter of FY2025 reflects the apprehensions of India Inc. over rising input costs, driven by high inflation and ongoing geopolitical uncertainties," Shashikant Hegde, director and CEO of Projects Today, told The Hindu. He added that weak corporate results and flagging urban demand in Q2 may have also dimmed investor appetite. India's GDP growth had slowed to a seven-quarter low of 5.4% in Q2. "The outlook for 2025-2026 remains optimistic, as

favourable economic conditions like easing inflation, and the execution of policy interventions to spur consumption and growth, are expected to stimulate private investment activity," Mr. Hegde reckoned, even as he mooted a continued government capex push in core sectors.

New power projects At almost ₹2.28 lakh crore, new investments by States surpassed the Centre's ₹2.05 lakh crore announcements in Q3, and accounted for almost 20% of all new outlays. In Q2, the value of new projects announced by the Centre was higher than the States. Mining, irrigation, and pharma, as well as the employment-intensive construction and automobile sectors clocked deep contractions in fresh outlays relative to Q2. Infrastructure investments were only fractionally higher by 0.8% at ₹4.25 lakh crore, but new electricity projects grew a sharper 21.9% to ₹4.5 lakh crore to account for the largest share of 39.3% in new investments through Q3.

"Such investments, particularly in transport and social infrastructure, are essential for sustaining the overall economic momentum, as they not only lay the groundwork for long term growth but also complement private sector initiatives by improving the business environment and reducing operational bottlenecks," Mr. Hegde explained. Rajasthan woos highest investment

There was a significant shuffling among States that accounted for the top shares of new investment projects. Rajasthan emerged as a surprise leader, with fresh project outlays in the State — by both public and private investors — rising almost three times over Q2 to about ₹2.25 lakh crore in Q3. Maharashtra and Gujarat, which were the top two States in Q2, moved one rank lower as a consequence, while Tamil Nadu was edged out of the top 10 States, after being the third-ranked State in terms of investment plans in Q2. In Q3, new projects in Tamil Nadu amounted to just ₹18,066 crore, 60.8% below its Q2 tally of ₹46,119 crore. Haryana, with 80 investment projects worth about ₹25,800 crore, entered the top ten States' list, replacing Jammu and Kashmir that had ranked 10th in Q2. Reflecting the overall private sector slowdown, the third quarter saw a decline in the announcement of mega projects worth at least ₹1,000 crore. In all, 228 mega projects with a total worth of over ₹7.69 lakh crore were announced in Q3 of 2024-25, as against 232 projects worth ₹8.4 lakh crore announced in Q2, pointing towards a fall in private investment, Projects Today said.

Indian cryptography research gears up to face the quantum challenge

GNS News Agency, Jan 25

Fundamental research in cryptography that's used worldwide to facilitate internet banking, e-commerce services, and secure messaging systems is now taking root in India as well. The principal goal of those developing or using cryptographic systems is to improve system security. Cryptography — from the English roots of "hidden writing" — is the name for techniques that secure information by converting plain text into ciphertext. It is concerned with the creation and use of encrypted messages that only the sender and the receiver can understand and which a malicious actor who interferes with the communication can't.

Sending secret messages isn't new. Archaeologists have unearthed clay tablets made by the ancient Mesopotamians in which they wrote down cryptic formulae to make ceramic glazes. In the first century BC, the Roman dictator Julius Caesar used the eponymous Caesar cipher to relay messages of strategic value to his generals. More recently, many Polish codebreakers fled their country after Adolf Hitler invaded it in 1939 to work with reputed British mathematicians, including the father of modern computing Alan Turing, to crack Germany's famed Enigma cryptosystem. Turing's work in particular established much of the foundational theory for modern algorithmic computing. Scientists have devised many sophisticated methods to prevent adversaries from cracking secret codes and gaining unauthorised access to sensitive information. These methods achieve their goals by using algorithms and protocols to protect some data's confidentiality, integrity, authenticity, and non-repudiation. 'Hard' problems Cryptographic algorithms convert messages in ways that make it very difficult, very expensive or both to decode them. A common way to achieve this has been to place some sensitive information behind the answer to a very difficult problem. An agent can access the information by solving the problem, so the harder the problem, the more inaccessible the information.

"Hence the search for harder and harder problems — for instance, even those that quantum computers may find hard to solve," R. Ramanujam of the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, said. As computational techniques evolve, particularly with advancements in quantum computing, the interplay between complexity and cryptography will continue to be a crucial area of research and development, he added. Modern cryptographic systems are built on problems that demand far too many resources to be solved.

"As they say in the crypto community, if your cryptosystem is broken, either a spy is dead or a million dollars is missing," Ayan Mukherjee, an assistant professor at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, said. "Such is the seriousness of the effect of a broken cryptosystem. Thus, oftentimes, people use the old and the trusted to secure their communications." This is also why, he added, "The field of cryptography is very slow-moving."

"There is a close connection between complexity theory and cryptography, hence many [researchers] work on these connections, clarifying notions and building finer techniques," Ramanujam said. Areas where Indian researchers are working extensively include communication complexity (the amount of communication required to complete a computational task), proof complexity (the computational resources required to prove or disprove statements), and algebraic coding theory (using algebra to encode and decode data).

Locks and keys The goal is to make sure an adversary, especially one with enormous computational resources, can't crack the code. At the heart of any cryptosystem is the key: a secret value an algorithm uses to encrypt or decrypt data. The Caesar cipher is a simple example. It works by mapping the existing alphabet to one where the starting letter is offset by some number of letters. This number is the key. For example, if the key is 14, the encrypted alphabet begins with the letter Q (the 14th letter) rather than A. Thus the words FIGHT FOR ROME become TWUVH TCF FCAS. When the sender encrypts data with a key, only someone who knows the key can decrypt the message and read it. More sophisticated systems use two keys — one each for the sender and the receiver

— and map them in a separate secret way.

A famous example is public-key cryptography, which is used to secure information over the internet. The receiver uses a single algorithm to generate two keys called the public key and the private key, and shares the public key with the sender. Any message the sender encrypts with the public key can be decrypted by the private key. Researchers prefer the algorithms that generate keys to be one-way functions, a name in mathematics for functions that are simple to use but hard to crack. In cryptography, this means they can be used to easily encrypt messages but can't be cracked without knowing the key. As Ramanujam put it, the challenge is like protecting a house with a strong alarm system that the house's residents can still use without training.

Some one-way functions are very difficult to crack and thus very secure — but which also take a long time to decrypt messages. This is one of the principal reasons mining for bitcoins has become a very energy-intensive process. The bitcoin system uses a one-way function that has required more computational resources to decrypt messages as the size of its blockchain has increased. This is why some cryptography researchers in India and abroad are working on simplifying the decryption side in particular. Researchers are also considering whether shorter proofs (of the hard problems) can be used to verify the integrity of data in artificial intelligence and large language models.

Cryptography isn't just a mathematical or academic curiosity but is of considerable practical interest, Yael Kalai, whose work on proofs won her the 2022 Turing Award, told the 11th Heidelberg Laureate Forum in September (the author was in the audience). "In today's world, the biggest problem we have to solve is trustworthiness," she said. Since researchers have solved the problem of authentication and security in communications, she added, the current problem is computation. "People are computing things for us. How do we know that they are computing correctly? How do we certify the huge and often crazy computations people are coming up with? That is a huge new research problem now." Possibility of disruption

Two research areas that could disrupt current cryptographic systems with significant economic and social consequences are homomorphic encryption and quantum information technologies, per a recent paper by the Organisation of Economically Developed Countries (OECD). Homomorphic encryption is a cryptographic method that allows certain calculations to be performed on encrypted data without the need to decrypt it first and without accessing the secret key. The result of such computations remains in encrypted form and can be revealed later, when necessary. According to the paper, this technique could surmount the problem of processing encrypted data without decrypting it first, which increases risk.

Second, a mature quantum computer could easily break some encryption methods widely used today. Some researchers are thus working on algorithms that can resist attacks powered by a quantum computer, an enterprise called quantum resistant cryptography (QRC). In fact marrying cryptography with quantum physics paves the way for encryption technologies based on the laws of quantum physics, which can be more convoluted than mathematical concepts alone. Researchers worldwide have been working on QRC since 2006, including in publicly funded research projects in the European Union and Japan. In India, Mukherjee's group at IISER Pune, and those at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and the Raman Research Institute (RRI), both in Bengaluru; the Centre for Development of Telematics, New Delhi; and at Pondicherry University are working on it as well. A huge deal Cryptography research in India is taking off in other aspects, too, catching up with that in the European Union, the U.S., and China. The National Quantum Mission the Cabinet approved in 2023 includes a research hub for quantum communication. The mission is to enable satellite-based secure quantum communications between ground stations over 2,000 km, long-distance secure quantum communications with other countries, inter-city quantum key distribution over 2,000 km, and multi-node quantum networks, among other outcomes. The Indian Space Research Organisation is also planning to launch a satellite with ultra-secure quantum communication capabilities.

Recasting insolvency resolution



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The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC) is one of India's most significant economic reforms, introduced to address the challenges of insolvency resolution in a structured and time-bound manner. At the time of its introduction, the IBC was seen as an important tool that would help India's standing in the business world and bring bad borrowers and big defaulters to book. Yet, as the law matured, certain issues have cropped up that demand attention, particularly regarding institutional capacity and procedural efficiency. The recent Supreme Court of India judgment in Jet Airways (State Bank of India & Ors. vs The Consortium of Mr. Murari Lal Jalan and Mr. Florian Fritsch & Anr.) has laid bare the many structural infirmities that are plaguing India's insolvency regime. A double burden

The effective implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) hinges on the performance of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and its appellate body, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT). These tribunals face the dual burden of handling corporate insolvencies under the IBC and cases under the Companies Act. This institutional architecture, however, suffers from what might be termed "temporal disjunction". Conceived in 1999 based on the Eradi Committee's recommendations and operationalised in 2016, the NCLT's structure reflects the economic realities of a bygone era, leaving it ill-equipped to meet contemporary demands. With a sanctioned strength of 63 members — many of whom divide their time across multiple benches — the NCLT has become a bottleneck for insolvency resolutions and corporate transactions such as mergers and amalgamations. Compounding the issue, several NCLT benches do not operate for the full working day, even when not tasked with handling cases from other benches. As a result, delays have worsened. According to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), the average time for insolvency resolutions increased to 716 days in FY2023-24, up from 654 days in FY2022-23. This is despite the Supreme Court's repeated calls for adherence to the specific timelines provided in IBC, including in the Jet Airways case, where the Court has stated that the "NCLTs/NCLATs need to be sensitised of not exercising their judicial discre-

tion in extending the timelines...in such a way that it may make the Code lose its effectiveness thereby rendering it obsolete".

The need for domain expertise The current framework's deficiencies are manifest across other dimensions. What stands out the most is the qualitative dimension of institutional capacity. The current method of appointment ignores the need for domain experience. As the Court noted in the Jet Airways case, "Members often lack the domain knowledge required to appreciate the nuanced complexities involved in high-stakes insolvency matters...". This creates a paradox where an institution tasked with resolving complex cases is hindered by a lack of specialised knowledge.

However, the problems run deeper than capacity limitations. There is also the bureaucratic labyrinth. There is no effective system in place before the NCLTs for urgent listings. And as noted by the Supreme Court, the staff of the Registry is given wide powers to list or not to list a particular matter. Perhaps most troubling is what the Court has termed a "growing tendency" among NCLT and NCLAT members to ignore or defy its orders, which threatens the very foundation of India's judicial hierarchy. This is not merely about institutional efficiency. It is about institutional integrity. Sparse use of alternatives The procedural framework further exacerbates these constraints. The requirement for a mandatory hearing for all applications including for progress reports, which is not in any way necessary from the standpoint of natural justice, results in considerable delays. The limited use of alternative dispute settlement methods adds to the problems of an already overworked system. Various jurisdictions across the globe contend with similar challenges pertaining to institutional capacity and procedural efficiency. Nevertheless, the magnitude of India's scale, its endemic corruption and its economic ambitions necessitate solutions that transcend mere incremental enhancements. The recent reform proposals, including the initiative for mandatory mediation prior to the submission of insolvency applications, present a degree of optimism. Further, there needs to be a hybrid model that values judicial experience and domain expertise. Also, the time is ripe for procedural innovations that go beyond piecemeal changes. The creation of specialised benches for different categories of cases could enhance both efficiency and expertise and ensure that mergers and amalgamations are cleared in time. Pertinently, infrastructure must not remain an afterthought. Adequate courtrooms and a qualified, permanent support staff are critical to sustaining these institutions within the broader economic framework. Above all, India's insolvency regime must evolve beyond mere debt resolution to serve as a proactive driver of economic rejuvenation, especially as the country aims to attract greater foreign investment. At this very important point in time, the choice is clear. The time for a bold reimagining is now. V.V. Sivakumar is an advocate in the Madras High Court. Saai Sudharsan Sathiyamoorthy is an advocate in the Madras High Court

How H-1B visas impact the U.S. tech industry

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The last week of 2024 didn't exude the holiday spirit for several folks in the tech world. A section of billionaires, politicians, and tech workers were piqued by a specific U.S. immigration policy that allows skilled foreign workers to work in the country. A verbal mudslinging began after President-elect Donald Trump appointed Sriram Krishnan as his senior policy advisor on Artificial Intelligence (AI). Within days after the announcement, Laura Loomer, a prominent MAGA supporter, wrote rancorous social media posts against the decision, calling Indian immigrants "third world invaders." The right-wing influencer then doxxed Mr. Krishnan, sharing his domicile details scoured from the U.S. Federal Election Commission (FEC). While Ms. Loomer apologised for doxxing Mr. Krishnan, she remains rooted in the idea that the number of skilled foreign workers must be reduced in the U.S. as the programme is negatively impacting native workers.

Mr. Krishnan, an Indian immigrant who came through the ranks of top tech firms in the Silicon Valley, supports simplifying the legal process for tech workers to enter the U.S. His stance has been echoed by several tech billionaires. His to-be-peer in the Trump administration, former PayPal executive David Sacks, came in support of the a16z's general partner and clarified that Mr. Krishnan did not advocate for the removal of restrictions for a green card but was only seeking the removal of country-specific caps. Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, both immigrants and Mr. Trump's picks to overhaul the U.S. government, are supportive of the skilled foreign worker visa programme. The world's richest man even said he would "go to war" to defend the programme. In an X post, he wrote: "The reason I'm in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla, and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H1B." The H1-B issue has not just split MAGA supporters; it has also turned some prominent Democrats, who were pro-immigration during the election season, into H1-B programme bashers. For instance, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders said the main function of the H1-B visa "is not to hire 'the best and the brightest' but rather to replace good-paying American jobs with low-wage indentured servants from abroad." Heated debates on the H1-B visa programme are not a new phenomenon. It helps to know the programme's brief history — at least from the time it went through a major revision in the 90s — and its net impact on wages and productivity in the U.S. A brief history In the early 90s, the U.S. enacted the Immigration Act of 1990 to increase the number and diversity of immigrants coming into the country and to adapt to the changing economic and social needs of a globalising world. The legislation significantly revised and expanded the H1-B visa programme. Apart from mandating employers to file an application with the labour department that hiring H1-B workers will not adversely affect wages and working conditions of U.S. workers, the law established an annual cap of 65,000 new H1-B visas for each fiscal year. These changes led to a substantial increase in the number of H1-B visas issued and made the programme more accessible to U.S. employers seeking high-skilled foreign workers. This, in turn, contributed to the programme's role in attracting skilled workers at a time when American companies were facing intensifying global competition, especially from Japan in high-tech and manufacturing sectors.

Silicon Valley was emerging as a global tech hub, creating unprecedented demand for scientists, technology professionals, engineers, and mathematicians (STEM workers). Traditional industries in other parts of the country were also undergoing rapid computerisation, requiring STEM talent that wasn't readily available in the domestic workforce. The cap on H1-B visas were hiked to 1,95,000 during the dot-com boom before returning to the base cap. Then, in 2004, an additional 20,000 slots were added for advanced degree holders from U.S. universities. Since 1990



to 2019, roughly 4.5 million H-1B visas were issued, and in the fiscal year of 2023, 72% of approved H-1B petitions were for beneficiaries born in India, and 65% of all approved H-1B petitions were for workers in computer-related occupations.

The impact of H-1B workers A 2013 study, titled 'STEM Workers, H-1B Visas, and Productivity in U.S. Cities' by economist Giovanni Peri, found that H-1B workers had a positive impact on the wages of native college-educated workers and overall productivity in U.S. cities

The study examined the influx of foreign STEM workers through the H-1B visa programme and their impact in 219 cities between 1990 to 2010. It noted that H-1B-driven increases in STEM workers boosted wages for native college-educated workers. A one percentage point increase in the foreign STEM share of a city's employment led to an increase of around 7-8 percentage points in the wages of native college-educated workers. Also, wages of non-college-educated native workers saw a positive, though smaller, increase. These workers experienced a 3-4 percentage point increase in wages for every one percentage point increase in the foreign STEM share of employment. The study estimates that the growth in foreign STEM workers may account for 30% to 50% of aggregate productivity growth in the U.S. between 1990 and 2010. Fast forward to 2024, and the impact of foreign workers on U.S. wages and productivity continued to be positive. In a follow-up study, titled 'Immigration's Effect on US Wages and Employment Redux', economists Alessandro Caiumi and Giovanni Peri note that immigrants and native workers complement each other in the labour market. In their research that examines the broader impact of immigration on the U.S. labour market between 2000 and 2022, they found that immigrants often specialise in different and complementary occupations compared to native workers. In a separate study that documents the impact of H-1B workers on innovation and product commercialisation, Harvard Business School Professor William Kerr notes that skilled immigrants have contributed significantly to U.S. patent activity, particularly in emerging technologies. Jennifer Hunt, Professor of Economics at Rutgers University, has shown in her research that H-1B workers who transition to permanent residency tend to be particularly innovative and entrepreneurial, often founding companies that create jobs for U.S. workers.

Talent conundrum in the age of AI Despite the positive impact of H-1B workers on the U.S. economy, opponents of the visa programme are clamouring for restrictions and lowering the number of legal immigrants. Some criticisms, particularly the ones against Indian tech services companies like Infosys and Cognizant, are well-laid.

These companies developed a business model that combined offshore development centres in India with on-site presence in the U.S., facilitated by H-1B visas. This model, sometimes called the "global delivery model," transformed how technology services were delivered to U.S. companies, but it did not truly make a path-breaking innovation for the U.S. economy. These companies typically rank among the top H-1B sponsors annually.

Booming solar farms in the U.S. put thousands of hungry sheep to work



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On rural Texas farmland, beneath hundreds of rows of solar panels, a troop of stocky sheep rummage through pasture, casually bumping into one another as they remain committed to a single task: chewing grass. The booming solar industry has found an unlikely mascot in sheep as large-scale solar farms crop up across the U.S. and in the plain fields of Texas. In Milam County, outside Austin, SB Energy operates the fifth-largest solar project in the country, capable of generating 900 megawatts of power across 4,000 acres (1,618 hectares). How do they manage all that grass? With the help of about 3,000 sheep, which are better suited than lawnmowers to fit between small crevices and chew away rain or shine. The proliferation of sheep on solar farms is part of a broader trend — solar grazing — that has exploded alongside the solar industry. Agrivoltaics method

the most recent figures from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Because solar fields use sunny, flat land that is often ideal for livestock grazing, the power plants have been used in coordination with farmers rather than against them

Shepherd JR Howard accidentally found himself in the middle of Texas' burgeoning clean energy transition. In 2021, he and his family began contracting with solar farms — sites with hundreds of thousands of solar modules — to use his sheep to eat the grass. What was once a small business has turned into a full-scale operation with more than 8,000 sheep and 26 employees. "Just the growth has been kind of crazy for us," said Mr. Howard, who named his company Texas Solar Sheep.

Positive response Some agriculture experts say Mr. Howard's success reflects how solar farms have become a boon for some ranchers. Reid Redden, a sheep farmer and solar vegetation manager in San Angelo, said a successful sheep business requires agricultural land that has become increasingly scarce. "Solar grazing is probably the biggest opportunity that the sheep industry had in the U.S. in several generations," he said. The response to solar grazing has been overwhelmingly positive in rural communities near South Texas solar farms where Redden raises sheep for sites to use, Mr. Redden said. "I think it softens the blow of the big shock and awe of a big solar farm coming in," he added.

Agrivoltaics itself is not new. Solar farms are land-intensive and require a lot of space that could be used for food production. Agrivoltaics compensates by allowing the two to coexist, whether growing food or caring for livestock. There is a lot still unknown about the full effects of solar grazing, said Nuria Gomez-Casanovas, an assistant professor in regenerative system ecology at Texas A&M University. Not enough studies have been done to know the long-term environmental impacts, such as how viable the soil will be for future agriculture, although Ms. Gomez-Casanovas suspects solar grazing may improve sheep productivity because the panels provide shade and can be more cost-efficient than mowing. "We really have more questions than answers," she said. "There are studies that show that the land productivity is not higher versus solar alone or agriculture alone, so it is context-dependent."

Parties and their 'presidential' problems

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Over the past few weeks, political circles in Karnataka have been abuzz with intense discussions on the post of the State unit presidents of all the three major political parties, i.e., the Indian National Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Janata Dal (Secular) or JD(S). Both the ruling Congress and the Opposition BJP have been besieged with dissident activities to unseat the incumbent chiefs, while the JD(S) is anxious about the appointment of a new president amid rumours of the Congress making efforts to poach JD(S) legislators.



Ironically, the leaders of all parties are taking potshots at rival political leaders on the issue of party leadership. There are some curious subplots too, such as the fact that the Belagavi-based Jarkiholi brothers — Ramesh and Satish — being in the forefront of seeking changes in the BJP and the Congress. The key issues

Shivakumar, who took charge of the party in March 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, has completed his tenure and what is in place now is only an interim arrangement. A full-fledged president is required to lead the party into the taluk panchayat and zilla panchayat elections. The statements and counter-complaints have been so intense that the All India Congress Committee President, Mallikarjun Kharge, has asked all to "shut up and do their jobs.". The BJP too has been facing rebel trouble, with a section of veteran leaders opposing the first-time legislator and BJP State President, B.Y. Vijayendra. Appointed in November 2023, he is the son of former Karnataka Chief Minister and Lingayat strongman B.S. Yediyurappa. Not only is the group led by the senior legislators Basanagouda R. Patil Yatnal and Ramesh Jarkiholi openly defying the party's diktats but it is also attempting to undermine Mr. Vijayendra's authority by making personal allegations, ultimately seeking his removal. The dissident group has accused Mr. Vijayendra of making compromises with the Congress on political issues, thus diluting the BJP's core ideology. Both groups have made multiple visits to New Delhi to meet central leaders, and Mr. Yatnal has been issued notice for his actions. The lack of unity and effective leaders besides perceived groupism have affected the BJP.

The saffron party is seen as having lacklustre outings in the legislature sessions where the ruling Congress's powerful Ministers and leaders have successfully defended the government despite there being major allegations of corruption and scandals. Though Mr. Vijayendra has been appointed for a term of three years, Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that a BJP State unit President will be elected soon. Mr. Vijayendra has expressed his readiness to face this election just as the dissident group has said it is. The JD(S), whose fortunes seem to be plummeting with each election, is also looking for a new president since the incumbent, H.D. Kumaraswamy, who is the Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel, is unable to find the time to carry out his duties. A perceived move to promote his son, Nikhil Kumaraswamy — he has, so far, faced three consecutive electoral defeats — has been put off for the time being. The party has announced that the new president will be 'elected' by April 2025. In the past, the first family headed by the party supremo and former Prime Minister, H.D. Deve Gowda, had a say in appointing the presidents.

In the Congress, the intervention of central leaders seems to have had a limited impact on the discussion of replacing Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) President D.K. Shivakumar, who is also the State's Deputy Chief Minister. Senior cabinet Ministers from the Congress continue to make statements in the public domain, and these include K.N. Rajanna, Satish Jarkiholi and G. Parameshwara. Battered by the veiled attacks from his detractors, a miffed Deputy Chief Minister went to the extent of saying that "the president post was not sale in any store". The Ministers have been speaking about the party's "one man one post" formula and Mr. Shivakumar being saddled with two important portfolios that is affecting organisational work. Internally, however, it is being speculated as the effort by those loyal to Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to unsettle and weaken Mr. Shivakumar's hold on the party, who is waiting in the wings to helm the government.

The Chief Minister's loyalists have argued that Mr.

Justice Narasimha stresses on 'timely justice'

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Justice PS Narasimha, Judge, Supreme Court, Justice Aniruddha Bose, Director, National Judicial Commission, Justice Dhiraj Singh Thakur, Chief Justice of A.P. High Court, and other delegates outside the AU Convention Centre, where a two-day South Zone conference of Judicial officers began, in Visakhapatnam,

Justice PS Narasimha, Judge, Supreme Court, Justice Aniruddha Bose, Director, National Judicial Commission, Justice Dhiraj Singh Thakur, Chief Justice of A.P. High Court, and other delegates outside the AU Convention Centre, where a two-day South Zone conference of Judicial officers began, in Visakhapatnam. There is a need to reduce the pendency in courts, and the stakeholders in the judicial process should deliberate on the challenges, and come up with solutions to reduce delays in the dispensation of justice, opined the speakers at the inaugural of a judicial conference, here on Saturday (January 18).

They were speaking at the inaugural of the two-day South Zone-II Regional Judicial Conference on "Court Dockets: Explosion and Exclusion", organised by the National Judicial Academy in collaboration with the High Court of Andhra Pradesh and A.P. Judicial Academy, which began at the District Court, here Judge in the Supreme Court of India Justice PS Narasimha said that conferences like these facilitate judges and lawyers to reflect frankly, and to find out where things were going wrong. The outcome of this conference should reflect in the disposal of cases by judicial administrators. Stressing on the importance of timely justice, Justice Narasimha said: "Time swallows or eats away the remedies that people are seeking." He gave examples of property disputes and matrimonial matters that were taking years together to come to a conclusion. "While technology aids us to do our job better, AI (Artificial Intelligence) is a step ahead and it is not just to aid us but to replace us. We are here because we are able to analyse, understand and apply. It's this decision making of a judge that will be substituted by AI. We get so used to it that a time will come when we stop thinking and start delegating our role to AI," he said. Director National Judicial Commission and a former Judge of the Supreme Court Justice Aniruddha Bose opined that the rising number of cases was due to the willingness of more and more people to approach courts for redressal of even simple grievances, apart from the shortage of judges and procedural issues.

In his welcome address, Chief Justice of A.P. High Court Justice Dhiraj Singh Thakur said that technology has simplified the process and it could have profound impact on the timelines for disposal of cases. He felt that obsolete procedures could be done away with and Alternate Dispute Redressal mechanism should be encouraged. Chief Justice of Uttarakhand High Court Justice G. Narendar and Chief Justice of Jharkhand High Court Justice MS Ramachandra Rao were on the dais. Principal District and Sessions Judge, Visakhapatnam, Alapati Giridhar and a host of judges from the district were present on the occasion.

A surge in radical governments, the hope of democracy



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One thing seems fairly certain now. If an Islamic radical group were to seize power by force, then the world will be willing to legitimise it and forgive its past deeds. But till the time such a group does not capture power, it will either be fought tooth and nail and/or treated like an enemy. We had Afghanistan in 2021. We now have Syria in 2024.

When the Taliban captured power on August 15, 2021, 13 members of the United States troops were killed in an Islamic State (IS) suicide attack, and \$7.1 billion worth of U.S. weaponry was left behind in Afghanistan. However, the U.S. and the West as well as China and Russia bent backwards to work with the Taliban. The West justified this by saying that this would wean the Taliban away from supporting terrorism and help in the protection of women's and minorities' rights. They talked about "inclusive government" but democracy was not uppermost in their minds. The then UN Special Representative to Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons, even told the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that the Taliban was 'misunderstood'. Treated with kid gloves

The ultimate irony was how "karma" had come full circle. In the days preceding the Taliban's capture of Afghanistan, the "Troika Plus", of the U.S., China and Russia with Pakistan, had tried to coordinate their efforts in Afghanistan to keep India completely out and ignore our vital interests. In the UNSC, even an innocuous reference to the Heart of Asia Conference on Afghanistan was deleted from the draft statement because India was one of the countries attending it. But when the events of August 2021 unfolded, India was the president of UNSC that month. Any text or resolution required India's concurrence. When UNSC Resolution 2593, after the Taliban takeover, was passed on August 30, India left its imprint particularly in the paragraph relating to Afghan soil not being used for terrorist activities. The express reference to terrorists and terrorist organisations in the UNSC Resolution 1267 sanctions list was inserted at India's behest, where it coordinated closely with the U.S. side. This was necessary to remove any ambiguity about Pakistani terrorist organisations associated with the ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaeda, including the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed — listed in 1267 — from using Afghan soil to launch terrorist attacks on India. In December 2021, the UNSC allowed the Taliban to get donor money directly into its coffers. With no political will among the P-5 or the West to demand accountability for implementing UNSCR 2593, the Taliban soon denied girls school education, imposed restrictions on women, and stopped all moves for an inclusive government. Now, the world looks the other way.

Now, Syria and Bangladesh And now Syria in 2024. We have just witnessed a radical Islamic leader Abu Muhammad al-Jolani or Ahmed al-Shaara of the Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) seize power, culminating in the toppling of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Al-Jolani was earlier leader of the al Qaeda in the region, with links to international terror groups. His radical outfit, the HTS, which was earlier an al Qaeda wing in Syria called the Jabhat al-Nusra, still features in the U.S. State Department list of terror groups. Mirroring what they did with the Taliban, the U.S. and the West have lined up behind the HTS and its leader. The first move of the U.S. was to remove the bounty of \$10 million on al-Jolani's head for his capture. Capturing power can help evade capture also. This is wonderful news for Islamic terrorists and extremist groups gaining ground, especially in Africa such as in Mali, and adopting IS and al

Qaeda techniques to topple governments. But the world is preoccupied with Ukraine and West Asia. Now, India has a situation brewing closer to home, in Bangladesh.

Even if the collapse of the elected government in Bangladesh has been largely due to an autocratic government stifling democratic forces and losing the plot, under the guise of supporting regime change, the U.S. clearly downplayed the interests of its "strategic" partner India. It is propping up the interim military-led government of Muhammad Yunus, which is seen as tolerating, even encouraging, Islamic radical groups in Bangladesh and is a threat to its minorities. The last thing India needs is the revival of Islamic radicalism in Bangladesh, where the last 16 years have seen the two countries and its peoples come closer in a variety of ways for mutual benefit. When Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League came to power in 2008, it was seen as free and fair elections with a cleaned-up electoral list and the Bangladesh Army staying on the sidelines. The people overwhelmingly rejected the violent past of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of Khaleda Zia and their Islamic radical partners such as the Jamaat-e-Islami. Just when one thought that the Jamaat-e-Islami stood discredited for siding with Pakistan in the 1971 war and rejected by the people of Bangladesh for causing mayhem and disrupting lives, the popular student protests of 2024 and the ensuing military coup have given them a fresh lease of life.

While there is no doubt that the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) — affiliated to the Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), the Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing, the Islami Chhatra Shibir, the Hefazat-e-Islam, the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP) have taken advantage of the situation, it is not as if the people of Bangladesh have embraced them wholeheartedly. Consequently, these radical groups have tried to shore up support for their extremist ideologies by attacking the minority communities, forcing the interim government to release Islamic extremists from prison (such as like Jashimuddin Rahmani, head of the ABT), and adopting shrill anti-India rhetoric, conflating the dismantling of Sheikh Hasina's legacy with attacks on India. India should be careful not to fall into this trap. Religious hate has been on the rise around the world. It was when this writer was India's Permanent Representative to the UN that India brought up, for the first time, in 2021-2022, the rise of religiohobia against non-Abrahamic religions, including against Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists. India condemned all forms of religious hate, whether in the U.S. and the West or in Bangladesh and the neighbourhood. While India may have taken its eye off the ball when it came to the Sheikh Hasina government, it cannot ignore Islamic extremism again rearing its head in Bangladesh and posing renewed danger to India's national security — something which New Delhi successfully prevented over the last 16 years.

The larger picture However, for both sides to view the unfolding events purely through a religious lens — be it an Islamic lens or Hindu lens — would be a mistake. This has been counterproductive before and will be so now. In fact, Islamic radicals are baiting India, and, unfortunately, so are the officials who have been appointed as advisers to Mr. Yunus, precisely to polarise forces within their own country. On the other hand, India has the larger perspective in mind to protect its bilateral relations from damage. It has reiterated its readiness to do business with the interim government. India has removed most irritants in its bilateral relations in the last two decades, except maybe for the sharing of Teesta river waters.

What is forgotten is that when Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) revolted in February 2009, just after the first clean elections of Bangladesh in December 2008, it was India which gave its rock solid support to the newly-elected government and helped save democracy. It is in Bangladesh's own interest that this military coup does not translate into an Islamic coup and goes the way of Syria or Afghanistan. The silver lining is that, having tasted the power of democracy in 2008, and now in 2024, it will be difficult to put the clock back. T.S. Tirumurti was Permanent Representative/Ambassador of India to the United Nations (UN), New York (2021-22) and President of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for August 2021.

Israel frees 90 Palestinian prisoners as ceasefire takes hold

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The first three hostages were released from Gaza and the first Palestinian prisoners were freed from Israeli custody as the fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas took hold following 15 months of war, with mixed emotions and more difficult steps ahead over the next six weeks. Palestinians across Gaza began making their way home, and the first trucks with a surge of humanitarian aid began to enter the devastated territory.

The ceasefire that began on Sunday morning raises hopes for ending the devastating conflict and returning the nearly 100 remaining hostages abducted in Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack. But major questions remain about whether fighting will resume after the six-week first phase. First came the release of Emily Damari, 28; Romi Gonen, 24, and Doron Steinbrecher, 31, in a tense handover to the Red Cross on a Gaza City street. Footage showed them surrounded by a crowd of thousands, accompanied by masked, armed men wearing green Hamas headbands. The women were taken to Israeli forces and then to Israel, where they hugged family members fiercely and wept. Damari was shown raising her bandaged hand in triumph. The military said she lost two fingers in the Oct. 7 attack. In Tel Aviv, thousands of people gathered to watch the news on large screens erupted in applause. For months, many had gathered in the square weekly to demand a ceasefire deal. "An entire nation embraces you," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said. Over seven hours later, the first Palestinian prisoners were released. They had been detained for what Israel called offenses related to its security, from throwing stones to more serious accusations such as attempted murder. Israel's military, which occupies the West Bank, warned Palestinians against public celebration — the release took place after 1 a.m. — but crowds thronged the buses after they left the prison, some people climbing on top or waving flags, including those of Hamas. There were fireworks and whistles, and shouts of "God is great." Those released were hoisted onto others' shoulders or embraced. The most prominent detainee freed was Khalida Jarrar, 62, a member of a secular leftist faction that was involved in attacks against Israel in the 1970s but later scaled back militant activities. Since her arrest in late 2023, she was held under indefinitely renewable administrative detention orders that were criticized by human rights groups.

The next release of hostages and prisoners is due on Saturday, with 33 hostages and nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees to be freed over the ceasefire's

42-day first phase. In just over two weeks, talks are to begin on the far more challenging second phase. Freed Palestinian prisoners react from inside a bus that arrived with them after their release from an Israeli jail as part of a hostages-prisoners swap and a ceasefire deal in Gaza between Hamas and Israel, in Ramallah, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on January 20, 2025. Freed Palestinian prisoners react from inside a bus that arrived with them after their release from an Israeli jail as part of a hostages-prisoners swap and a ceasefire deal in Gaza between Hamas and Israel, in Ramallah, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank

This is just the second ceasefire in the war, longer and more consequential than a weeklong pause in November 2023, with the potential to end the fighting for good. But Netanyahu, who had been under pressure from both the Biden administration and President-elect Donald Trump to achieve a deal before Monday's U.S. inauguration, has said he has Trump's backing to continue fighting if necessary. Meanwhile, Israel's hard-line national security minister said his Jewish Power faction was quitting the government in protest over the ceasefire, reflecting the political friction that some Israelis said delayed a deal. Itamar Ben-Gvir's departure weakens Netanyahu's coalition but will not affect the truce. Across Gaza, there was relief and grief. The fighting has killed tens of thousands, destroyed large areas and displaced most of the population. "This ceasefire was a joy mixed with pain, because my son was martyred in this war," said Rami Nofal, a displaced man from Gaza City. Masked militants appeared at some celebrations, where crowds chanted slogans in support of them, according to Associated Press reporters in Gaza. The Hamas-run police began deploying in public after mostly lying low due to Israeli airstrikes. Some families set off for home on foot, their belongings loaded on donkey carts. In the southern city of Rafah, residents returned to find massive destruction. Some found human remains in the rubble, including skulls. "It's like you see in a Hollywood horror movie," resident Mohamed Abu Taha said as he inspected the ruins of his family's home. Already, Israeli forces were pulling back from areas. Residents of Beit Lahiya and Jabalya in northern Gaza told the AP they didn't see Israeli troops there. One resident said they saw bodies in the streets that appeared to have been there for weeks. In Israel, people remained divided over the agreement. Asher Pizem, 35, from the city of Sderot, said the deal had merely postponed the next confrontation with Hamas. He also criticized Israel for allowing aid into Gaza, saying it would contribute to the militant group's revival.



Securities Transaction Tax collection jumps 75% despite market volatility



Despite the volatility in the stock market, the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) collection has shot up by over 75 per cent to Rs 44,538 crore as of January 12, 2025 as against Rs 25,415 crore raised in the same period in 2024. The rise in collections comes despite a hike in STT on futures & options (F&O) of securities that was levied in a bid to curb speculative market activity in the F&O segment.

The Budget 2024-25, presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on July 23, had proposed to double the STT on F&O of securities, effective October 1, 2024. However, STT collection has been on the rise since July and the rise continued even when the stock market rose sharply and then encountered a major correction between July and December 2024. While STT mobilisation was Rs 16,634 crore on July 11, 2024, it jumped to Rs 30,630 crore on October 10, Rs 35,923 crore on November 10 and Rs 40,114 on December 17. The BSE Sensex which was at 80,429.04 on July 23 last year hit an all-time peak of 85,978.25 on September 27 last year before correcting to 76,499.63 on January 14, 2025.

The increase in STT, which is levied on transactions in specified securities, came at a time when the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) raised concerns over the rise in volumes in futures and options segment, which can pose a risk to macroeconomic stability. Securities Transaction Tax collection jumps 75% despite market volatility. The increased STT collections are also adding to the revenue kitty of the government. With Rs 44,538 crore collected so far, STT revenue has already breached the budget estimate of Rs 37,000 crore for the ongoing financial year 2024-25. In the previous financial year 2023-24, the STT revenue was estimated to be Rs 32,000 crore (revised estimate) and Rs 25,085

crore in 2022-23. STT on futures and options of securities was increased to 0.02 per cent and 0.1 per cent respectively. Earlier, the rate of levy of STT on the sale of an option in securities was 0.0625 per cent of the option premium, while the rate of levy of STT on the sale of a future in securities was 0.0125 per cent of the price at which such futures are traded. The rate of levy of STT on delivery trades in equity shares is 0.1 per cent on both purchase and sale transactions. However, the premium turnover in F&O declined since after the Sebi slapped restrictions on derivative trading in the wake of rampant excessive speculation by retail investors — it declined from Rs 54.38 lakh crore in September 2024 to Rs 43.99 lakh crore in December 2024, and to Rs 17.47 lakh crore in January 2025 (till January 14th) on the NSE. "Retail investors were active in the cash market and mutual funds also pumped money into the market as they received huge inflows despite the volatility in the market. The STT collection figures show that it has no correlation with the market fall or rise. STT increased when the market rose and also when it later declined," said an analyst. The increase in STT, which is levied on transactions in specified securities, came at a time when the Sebi and the RBI raised concerns over the rise in volumes in futures and options segment. In fact, the Rs 4,424 crore rise in STT collection from December 17 to Rs 44,538 crore by January 12 happened at a time when the BSE Sensex witnessed a correction of over 3,000 points. Since STT is charged only to the seller, on a round-trip premium turnover of Rs 10,000 in options STT increased from Rs 6.25 to Rs 10. Similarly, in futures, STT led to an increase from Rs 1.25 to Rs 2 for every Rs 10,000 of turnover. When retail investors flooded the F&O segment three years ago, policy makers were worried about losses to them. Nine out of 10 investors were losing money in this segment. While STT collection has increased in the last five months, major market players are lobbying for a reduction in the levy.

Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) in its proposal for the Budget 2025-26 has requested for reduction in STT for arbitrage funds and equity savings funds. "For mutual funds as an investor, the STT on futures and options should be reinstated to the earlier rates," AMFI said in the proposal. The mutual fund body said that arbitrage and equity savings funds mainly use futures and options for hedging as the underlying assets. "The available arbitrage has now been reduced due to an increase in short term capital gain tax. Further, the increased STT on futures will add to the cost of these funds," it said.

'Invest in agri-productivity to boost consumption demand, focus on public health issues & strengthen tax administration': Bharat Ramaswami



With the rupee under pressure, continuing high food inflation, slower economic growth, and uncertainty about the impact of Trump's second term, it may be wise to be cautious about the immediate prospects of the Indian economy. On the other hand, it is an opportunity as well. Typically, reflections on policy priorities occupy the first part of the Finance Minister's speech. They assume an outsized importance this year. The FM could use the Budget to signal India's commitment to policies and reforms that would continue India's momentum among the large economies of the world.

Last year the FM announced the elements of an economic strategy. Four population groups — the poor, the youth, women and farmers — were to receive special attention. Their welfare was to be achieved by actions in 9 priority sectors including agriculture, employment, manufacturing, urban development and infrastructure. All of these are needed initiatives on which much has already been said. The Finance Ministry should issue a paper on the progress achieved in these sectors. That would ensure accountability and purchase credibility for future pronouncements. In addition, the Budget of last year promised an economic policy framework that would set in motion the 'next generation of reforms' for employment and growth. This Budget would be an opportune time to redeem the promise. An ideal framework would consider macro-economic stability, the necessity to invest in people and infrastructure and the imperative to actively engage with the world through trade and investment. Ideally, the framework would resist sector-specific policy support or be very selective in this regard.

The framework would also recognise the federal polity. GST is a case in point. While the simplification of rates cannot be achieved by the Centre alone, the Centre can point to the direction of reform. On its own, it can revise processes to reduce the burden of compliance. To solve such perennial problems in tax administration, the government should task a standing committee of outside experts to flag anomalies and impractical rules. This will save the government, taxpayers and the economy a lot of money. India is faced with two major and pressing public health issues. The first is air pollution. It is acute in north India, but other parts of the country are not exempt from it either. The health costs are large. If unchecked, it will drain the region of investments and talent. The second is the health of our children. Despite progress, a third of our children are too short for their age. Expertise and solutions are available within the government and outside. It is hard to see how Bharat can be Viksit without addressing the problem now. For both problems, the states and the Centre must work together. This will be a memorable legacy of a government in its third term.

Food inflation is eating into the incomes of the working class. Price rises are markedly high for vegetables, fruits and proteins. The paradox is that, despite these price signals, we continue to devote resources to produce too much of cereals. Our supply chains are not up to the task — a fact that has been recognised for over two decades. The government must mobilise and empower its agricultural research system to address such important issues of post-harvest management. The government's Situation Assessment Survey (of 2018/19) shows that farm households that produce much of India's non-grain crops are smaller, less educated and more likely to be SC/ST than the growers of grain crops. With investment (including FDI), this unsung part of the economy will show the way forward for the larger growers still heavily invested in cereals. In rained agricul-

ture, small and marginal farmers use a variety of livelihood strategies — crop agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries, wage labour and migration. A broad perspective would look not just at crop productivity but also small irrigation projects, flexible assistance in animal husbandry and policies friendly to seasonal migrants. Investing in agricultural productivity will boost consumption demand — the factor that is constraining private investment and growth. But agricultural incomes are less than 50 per cent of rural incomes (Nabard Financial Inclusion Survey, 2020/21). And for individual households, the importance of agricultural income declines with land ownership. Therefore, the government must think of not only agriculture but also education, health and connectivity in rural areas. These benefits reach widely unlike output and input subsidies. Coordination across government ministries is necessary for effective action; but this can follow only if policy goals take an integrated view. A positive development has been the resumption of official data flows — especially the long-postponed consumption surveys. But we still await the population census. That's outside the domain of the FM. However, it's the bedrock on which all policies rest.

Outward foreign direct investment rises by 17% to \$37.68 billion in 2024

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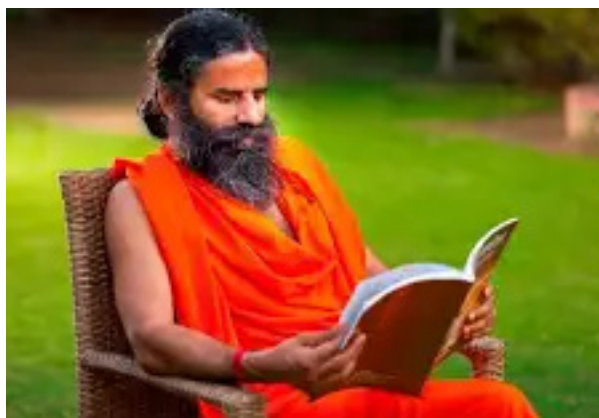
dollar, Outward foreign direct investment, business news, Indian Express 2023, total overseas direct investment stood at \$32.29 billion, according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data. In a sign that Indian companies are keen on expanding their global footprints, outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) by domestic firms has seen a jump of nearly 17 per cent to \$37.68 billion in 2024. In 2023, total overseas direct investment stood at \$32.29 billion, according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data.

"This is a positive sign that Indian companies are also going global. They are not just eyeing domestic investments but also looking at other territories. In a way, they are diversifying their growth models," said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist, Bank of Baroda. Overseas direct investment means acquisition of any unlisted equity capital or subscription as a part of the memorandum of association of a foreign entity, or investment in 10 per cent or more of the paid-up equity capital of a listed foreign entity, or investment with control where investment is less than 10 per cent of the paid-up equity capital of a listed foreign entity. OFDI has three components — equity, loans and guarantee issued. In the last calendar year, overseas FDI by local companies in the form of equity stood at \$12.69 billion, a rise of 40 per cent over the \$9.08 billion invested in 2023. Under the loan category, OFDI by Indian companies was \$8.7 billion in 2024, compared to \$4.76 billion in the previous calendar year. The guarantee issued by domestic firms declined to \$16.29 billion in 2024, as against \$18.44 billion in 2023.

The sectors where Indian companies invest in overseas markets include hotels, construction, manufacturing, agriculture, mining and services. The countries that have seen total financial commitment by way of ODI are Singapore, US, UK, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Malaysia, among others. "The fact that Indian companies are investing in their own subsidiaries indicates that they are expanding outside. This also shows that local companies that have joint ventures are collaborating more with companies in overseas territories," Sabnavis added.

Overseas investments in joint ventures (JV) and wholly owned subsidiaries (WOS) have been recognised as important avenues for promoting global business by Indian entrepreneurs.

Baba Ramdev on early mornings, meditation, and a sattvic diet for inner peace: 'We neither cheat others nor ourselves'



Baba Ramdev, a prominent advocate of yoga and holistic wellness, recently opened up about his disciplined routine that blends physical activity, mental clarity, and spiritual focus. Speaking to Curly Tales, the 59-year-old yoga guru highlighted the importance of starting the day early at 3 am, meditating, and adhering to a sattvic diet. His approach, he says, is designed to promote overall well-being and vitality. When asked what he does first thing in the morning, he said, "I say my morning prayers by worshipping dharti mata (mother earth) and our gurus and rishis (sages). Then I drink warm water, which clears my stomach in a minute or two. Soon after, I bathe, and then I meditate for an hour."

When asked if he ever has a cheat day when it comes to food, Baba Ramdev said, "We neither cheat others nor ourselves." He then discussed the food shown in the video, mentioning that he begins with fresh fruits and follows it with Sattvic vegetables, which he describes as "very healthy." He also shared the yoga asanas everyone must do: "People should definitely do kapalbhati and anulom vilom." Baba Ramdev's routine reflects his preference for simplicity with a focus on good health. Sharath Arora, chief yoga instructor and founder at Himalayan Iyengar Yoga Centre, Dharamkot, Himachal Pradesh, helps understand the benefits of these practices.

Benefits of practicing an hour of meditation in the morning Arora tells indianexpress.com, "Meditating for an hour each morning is a cornerstone of Baba Ramdev's routine, and its benefits are both ancient and scientifically validated. Meditation helps regulate the autonomic nervous system, reducing stress responses and enhancing relaxation. Over time, regular meditation can lower cortisol levels, improve heart rate variability, and enhance focus and emotional resilience." From a mental health perspective,

Arora says, consistent meditation practices increase activity in the prefrontal cortex, associated with decision-making and emotional regulation. "Physical benefits include reduced blood pressure, improved digestion, and enhanced immunity. Research from JAMA Internal Medicine highlights that meditation can significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and insomnia," he states.

Anulom Vilom (Alternate Nostril Breathing) balances the autonomic nervous system by harmonizing the sympathetic and parasympathetic responses. Anulom Vilom (Alternate Nostril Breathing) balances the autonomic nervous system by harmonizing the sympathetic and parasympathetic responses. Arora mentions that a sattvic diet, rooted in Ayurvedic traditions, emphasises fresh, simple, and wholesome foods that are easy to digest and nourish the body and mind. The diet consists primarily of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and dairy products like milk or ghee. To transition gradually to a sattvic diet, Arora recommends reducing processed and fried foods while increasing the intake of whole grains and vegetables. Replace caffeinated beverages with herbal teas or warm water with lemon to detoxify the body. Incorporate ghee and spices like turmeric and cumin into your meals, not only for added nutrition but also for flavour. "Ensure that your meals are freshly cooked and consumed mindfully, which will help enhance digestion. Adopting a sattvic diet doesn't have to be overwhelming; making these gradual changes will help make the transition more sustainable in the long run," he adds.

Benefits of practices like Kapalbhati and Anulom Vilom Kapalbhati (Skull-Shining Breath) involves rapid, forceful exhalations that detoxify the lungs and improve respiratory function. Arora explains, "A study published in The International Journal of Yoga highlights its effectiveness in increasing oxygen saturation, enhancing lung capacity, and improving focus. It also stimulates the abdominal organs, aiding digestion and metabolism, making it relevant for sedentary modern lifestyles." Anulom Vilom (Alternate Nostril Breathing) balances the autonomic nervous system by harmonizing the sympathetic and parasympathetic responses. "Research from Frontiers in Psychology demonstrates its ability to reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and enhance cognitive function. Regular practice helps improve sleep quality, making it highly beneficial for individuals experiencing modern-day stress and insomnia," shares Arora. However, he suggests consulting with a healthcare professional before starting any new routines to ensure they are safe and appropriate for your individual needs, as everyone's health circumstances may vary.

Why is Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 special?

As the banks of the sacred confluence of Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati at Prayagraj host the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, millions of devotees and spiritual seekers are set to take a holy dip or 'shahi snan' in the river.

The Maha Kumbh is not just a religious gathering but a convergence of faith, culture, and history. What makes the 2025 edition of this grand mela even more remarkable is its rare celestial alignment, which occurs once in 144 years. This means 12 cycles of 12 different Kumbh melas were completed before this Maha Kumbh Mela came around. Dr Pallavi Jambhale, Associate Professor and In-Charge Director at K. J. Somaiya Institute of Dharma Studies, explains, "The Maha Kumbh in 2025 is particularly special because it aligns with celestial configurations that occur once in 144 years, making it an extraordinary event for devotees and spiritual seekers."

The Kumbh Mela, celebrated every three years in rotation among four sacred sites — Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik—is deeply tied to celestial configurations, particularly the movements of the Sun, Moon, and Jupiter. However, the Maha Kumbh, held exclusively at Prayagraj every 12 years, is considered a more significant spiritual event.

Maha Kumbh, Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, Maha Kumbh river ganga, Yogi Adityanath, Yogi Adityanath kumbh, Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, Maha Kumbh travel guide, Maha Kumbh 2025, Digital Maha Kumbh, Google navigation Kumbh Mela, cameras Kumbh Mela, Chatbot Kumbh Sahayak, Uttar Pradesh government Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at the Maha Kumbh venue in Prayagraj on Thursday. In 2025, the Maha Kumbh's importance is magnified by the confluence of rare planetary alignments. According to Professor Jambhale, Diana Eck, in her explora-



tion of Kumbh Mela, connects its significance to the myth of amrita (nectar of immortality) and the cosmic battle between gods and demons. She emphasises how the celestial alignments during Maha Kumbh are seen as a divine moment for spiritual renewal and liberation. In his writings, Mark Tully describes Kumbh Mela as "a cultural phenomenon," underscoring its power to unite people from diverse traditions and backgrounds. It is not merely a religious event but also a living heritage that showcases India's cultural and spiritual diversity.

At its heart, the Maha Kumbh revolves around the ritual of snan (bathing) in the sacred waters, believed to cleanse sins and pave the path to liberation. Devotees believe participating in the Maha Kumbh during this cosmic alignment brings them closer to moksha, the ultimate liberation. The Maha Kumbh Mela in 2025 is poised to attract an estimated 45 crore devotees from across the globe, making it one of the largest gatherings in human history. The event offers a unique opportunity for pilgrims to immerse themselves in centuries-old rituals, listen to discourses by revered saints, and experience the vibrant spiritual ethos of India.

What happens to the body when you begin your day with fermented foods for 2 weeks straight?

From Anushka Sharma to Shahid Kapoor, Bollywood celebrities seem to love having idlis for breakfast. Besides being gut-friendly, these spongy cakes also support the immune system. Their secret? They are fermented! Curious to find out how fermented food benefit us when consumed during breakfast for a couple weeks straight, indianexpress.com spoke to a health expert.

Deepalakshmi, registered dietitian at The Cleft and Craniofacial Centre and Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital, Chennai revealed that fermented foods are a rich source of probiotics that improve gut health by enhancing digestion, boosting nutrient absorption, and strengthening immunity. When consumed for 2 weeks straight for breakfast every morning, she shared that they may also reduce inflammation and support mental health through the gut-brain connection. Health benefits Deepalakshmi shared that fermented foods not only enhance the diversity of gut microbiota, which plays a crucial role in digestion and nutrient absorption, but regular consumption can lead to better bowel movements, reduced bloating, and a strengthened immune system. Additionally, the anti-inflammatory properties of fermented foods may help improve overall health, while their influence on the gut-brain connection can positively impact mood and mental well-being.

While fermented foods provide numerous health benefits, Deepalakshmi added that they can pose certain risks if not consumed mindfully. "Many fermented foods, such as miso and sauerkraut, are high in sodium, which can contribute to elevated blood pressure if consumed in excess. People new to probiotics might experience digestive discomfort, including bloating or gas, as their gut adjusts," she mentioned. Additionally, allergies or intolerances, particularly to dairy-based options like yogurt, can be a concern.



The dietitian also added that improper fermentation processes can lead to contamination and foodborne illnesses, making it essential to choose high-quality or homemade fermented foods prepared under safe conditions. Moderation and proper preparation are key to minimising these risks.

What kinds of fermented foods can you include in breakfast?

For breakfast, fermented foods offer a range of nutritious and versatile options. Yoghurt or kefir, rich in probiotics, can be paired with fruits, nuts, or seeds for a wholesome start to the day. Traditional choices like idli or dosa, made from fermented rice and lentils, are both delicious and gut-friendly. Miso soup provides a savory twist and is an excellent addition for boosting gut health. Fermented pickles or sauerkraut can add a tangy flavor when used sparingly as toppings, while sourdough bread serves as a nutritious base for avocado toast or egg sandwiches.

Kartik Aaryan on breaking records with Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3 and his journey from Gwalior to Mumbai



Kartik, it has been your year. That amazing transformation for Chandu Champion, so much love for Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3. And then you got an engineering degree too. So what was the reaction at home to your degree?

I think my mom and dad were more excited than me. But this has been a crazy year for me. I have really enjoyed working in Chandu Champion and then Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3. The characters in both films were poles apart. These are defining moments in my filmography. And then, of course, getting a degree. I am from DY Patil College in Navi Mumbai. Going as a guest to my college and receiving my degree in front of the students, it all came full circle.

You came to Mumbai to study engineering but your dream was always Bollywood. So, how many auditions and how many rejections did you face?

Countless. For two to three years, I was giving auditions, listening to rejections. Eventually, I got to know about the audition for what became my first film—Pyaar Ka PUNCHNA (2011). I am so lucky that my first opportunity was that film.

How did you deal with rejections and pick yourself up the next day and go for another audition?

I got used to it. I became shameless. After a point, you become numb. But you have to show up. You need a little self-belief. When everyone is doubting you, I think you are the only one who can actually save yourself from that doubt. Even after the biggest rejection, I used to think, what can be worse than this? And I used to feel I would only be going up from here. I have always believed in manifestation. I used to write what I wanted. Everything was written in my notebook. I think somewhere down the line everything started happening.

Let's jump right into the year you have had—Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3. One of my favourite cinematic moments of the year is your extremely empathetic portrayal as the transgender prince at a time of hyper-masculine heroes. We see you dancing to Mere Dholna, which is amazing. It was the emotional quotient of the film and there was also a twist. Nobody expects it. The version of my Dholna which was sung by Sonu Nigam has become a rage. People have connected with it, with their lives, their childhood, their struggles. That climax gave the film a lot of gravitas. That moment was new for me too. I was dancing for the first time.

What's your take on box-office numbers? How important are they?

They are very important. I mean this is a business module. You are putting in money and you want profits for

everyone associated with the film, not just for actors but also for producers and directors, distributors, and exhibitors. Only if your film makes money can you put money in your next film.

Tell us about your journey in Bollywood. You talked about taking auditions but there would have been insiders who would have got a dream launch without giving any audition. So, did you feel that disparity? And does the playing field level at any point?

No, it doesn't level. But it's been so many years in the industry that it doesn't matter. I can't say everyone gets equal opportunities. I too have felt like maybe I should have gotten the opportunity rather than someone who is from the (film) families. So, it happens but it's not their fault. But I think it is wrong when you compare two actors and their journeys because the journey of an outsider is very different from that of an insider.

Also Read | Kartik Aaryan on the 'magical' Mere Dholna sequence from Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3: 'I knew it wouldn't be caricaturish...' Moving on to your personal life, you have a very impressive car collection. You have a McLaren GT, you have a BMW 5 Series, a Lamborghini Urus, a Mini Cooper and sports bikes. When do you get the time to drive?

After midnight. I love cars. The Lamborghini Urus is my favourite.

And does your mom allow you to drive sports bikes?

She said no, so I stopped buying bikes. As a celebrity every moment of your life is there before the world. Does that make you vulnerable? I am also asking this in context of the attack on Saif Ali Khan in his home. It is scary and sad. It puts everyone in a vulnerable state. We are not able to hide from the paps, they know where we are going, what we are doing. It's a little extreme but they (paps) are doing this for a living and it is a symbiotic relationship between paps, media, actors. So, there is no solution for this yet. But I hope that it doesn't compromise the safety of people.

What's on your agenda for 2025-26?

Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri, that's the next one. It is being produced by Namah Pictures and Dhama Productions. I am also doing a film with Anurag Basu sir.

Oh! What should I say about this? I think this is a love-hate relationship. This photo represents that. This is the moment when we signed our first film (Dostana 2). In 2021, reports claimed Kartik and Karan had a bitter fallout, leading to the actor's exit from the film. Now I am doing a film with him (Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri). We are working together again and, I hope, he and I will complete it this time (laughs).

This photo is the one which gave me Pyaar Ka PUNCHNA. This was the only solo photo I had. It felt like a portfolio to me. It was taken at home. I had other photos which were with my friends. In auditions, they would ask for photos or videos and I had these group photos only so I would crop them—someone's hand would be there, someone's head. This was a solo photo and because of this one, I was called for the Pyaar Ka PUNCHNA audition. Kartik Aaryan with Shah Rukh Khan. I remember this was at a party where I met Shah Rukh sir. I had met him earlier too but this was the first time that I got a photo taken with him. This was my fanboy moment. When I first came to Mumbai from Gwalior, I went to Bandra and stood outside Mannat like many others. It was a Sunday and he (Shah Rukh Khan) came out and waved. I felt so lucky that I had seen him on my first visit. There was a huge crowd and soon there was a lathi-charge. I ran away and got saved. I remember all this vividly.

Bigg Boss 18 finalist Avinash Mishra on his negative image: 'I have no regrets'

Actor Avinash Mishra bagged the fourth spot on Bigg Boss 18's grand finale, with actors Karanveer Mehra, Vivian Dsena, and influencer Rajat Dalal as the top 3 finalists. While his journey has been dramatic, he seems to be taking back a lot of good memories from the show. In an exclusive interview with SCREEN, Avinash Mishra shared his learnings from the show and tackling the negative image that has been formed. Stating he has no regrets, Avinash said, "I have no regrets of whatever I have done on the show because that's a part of it. Sometimes you do positive things and sometimes unintentionally you do negative things so I've done both in the show and I always got the feedback on weekends. I've worked on it, implemented all those things throughout the journey, and got great lessons."

Commenting on his negative image, Avinash added, "Everybody has a lot of shades in their personality and one acts according to the situation. Fortunately or unfortunately, I have had to deal with a lot of situations inside the house, so you have seen all the sides of me and I also take it in a very fun way. I'm sure you must have loved absolutely every character of mine." Avinash also opened up about the 'womaniser' claim against him. "That hurt a lot because all the stupid allegations. I will not justify anything right now



because all those justifications were done during the weekend episodes and throughout the journey." Avinash also spoke about his friendship with Eisha Singh. He said, "Let me answer this because if I say anything again, it will be like, 'Okay it's his words, he's a villain he will just say those things but he'll do whatever he wants' so let me answer this. I don't think I should say anything about it."

Salman Khan accepts Aamir Khan vowed to never work with him after Andaz Apna Apna: 'Iske saath life mein kabhi kaam nahi karunga'

While fans missed the much-anticipated reunion of Salman Khan and Akshay Kumar during the Bigg Boss 18 Grand Finale, they were treated to a nostalgic moment when Aamir Khan appeared on the show alongside his son Junaid Khan and his Loveyapa co-star Khushi Kapoor. During their interaction, Salman recalled a surprising past incident where Aamir vowed never to work with him again.

Aamir shared that years later, he stumbled upon an old video of Salman praising him for his performance in Andaz Apna Apna. "I had never seen that video before, and I watched it now after 30 years. He (Salman) praised me with so much love in the clip," Aamir revealed. Touched by the discovery, Aamir said he felt emotional and even shared the old clip with Salman. However, Salman recollected a contradictory memory tied to the same period. "I have seen that interview where he (Aamir) complained that I used to come late on set," Salman said. He continued, "Aamir had said, 'We never got along. Last day pe chhuthka, iske saath toh main life mein kabhi kaam nahi karunga. (Finally, it's over. I'll never work with him again).'" Acknowledging the incident, Aamir admitted, "That was my feeling at the time, but now my feelings have changed. With time, I have grown to appreciate who Salman is. It just took me some time to



understand." Salman then explained the root cause of their tiff, saying, "The thing was, Aamir was doing one film while I was juggling 15 films. Aamir would reach the set at 7 a.m., but I'd arrive later after wrapping up the shoot for another film."

Kangana Ranaut addresses feud with Sonu Sood, answers if she will work again with Swara Bhasker: 'Uske communism ideas set pe bhi chalte thay'



The disagreement between Kangana Ranaut and Sonu Sood began when the latter quit Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi after Kangana took over the film's directorial reins from Krish Jagarlamudi midway through the shoot. Following Sonu's exit, Kangana accused him of being unwilling to work under a female director. Sonu refrained from addressing her accusations directly, dismissing them as her "nadaani" (silliness).

In a recent interaction, Kangana revisited the fallout and said it's not necessary to be friends with everyone. Speaking on Shubhankar Mishra's YouTube podcast, Kangana remarked, "It's not important that we become friends with everyone we meet. You only make so many friends. Those who are upset with me should stay upset with me."

Previously, Sonu had admitted that he and Kangana were no longer on speaking terms. Reflecting on the situation, he had said, "People can say whatever they want, but I will never say anything against them. I might feel upset thinking, 'This person was a good friend and said such

things'. I feel that it's her foolishness, she is not a bad person. But sometimes, when you write or say things, you don't actually think it through." He added, "No, we have never even spoken to each other after Manikarnika." During her conversation on the podcast, Kangana was asked if she could work with people whose ideologies differ from hers. She responded confidently, "Of course. What type of question is this? So many actors I have worked with come from different ideologies." She elaborated, "Even if I don't like a person, I can work with them because I am not the authority on that person's character. I can't pass judgment on them."

When asked specifically if she could collaborate again with her Tanu Weds Manu co-star Swara Bhasker, Kangana affirmed, "Of course we can work together. Back then, too, her ideology was different." She went on to add, "Woh hamesha communism aur socialism ko leke uske ideas set pe bhi chalte the (She would talk about communism and socialism on set too). I have never formed a perception about an actor or any person based on their interviews. This privilege is with leftists, not with us."

Abhishek Bachchan on parenting daughter Aaradhya, says his approach is different from Amitabh-Jaya: 'They aren't dependent on parents'

The father of 13-year-old Aaradhya, Abhishek Bachchan recently reflected on his approach to parenting while also sharing his thoughts on the evolving mindset of the younger generation. Actor Abhishek Bachchan with his wife Aishwarya Rai, their daughter Aaradhya, and his parents Amitabh and Jaya Bachchan.

While the adage goes, "learning begins at home," actor Abhishek Bachchan believes parents may not always be the most effective teachers, as their emotions inevitably influence their actions and reactions. In a recent interview, the father of 13-year-old Aaradhya Bachchan reflected on his approach to parenting while also sharing his thoughts on the evolving mindset of the younger generation.

"I don't know if parents are the best teachers; I'm on the fence on that. I think our emotions come in the way. Our desire for our children to get it right and succeed and not hurt themselves comes in the way. Our emotions towards them may colour our judgment. I think a parent should lead and teach by example. Whatever I've learned and imbibed from my parents is by seeing the way they conduct themselves, not necessarily by what they told me I should be doing," he said during a chat with CNBC-TV18.

"They've thankfully given me the freedom to make my own decisions. But, even now, if I'm ever stuck, I sit back and think, 'What would my dad have done (in this situation)?' How would he approach this scene? Or my mom for that matter. Resilience is a necessity for every human being. Life's not easy; it's going to throw everything at you. It's survival of the fittest; that's the law of nature. You have to learn to be resilient and hold on to your dream and fight for it because the world is not going to give it to you easily," he emphasised, underscoring the importance of holding on to one's dreams with dignity and strong principles. When asked



how his parenting style differs with Aaradhya, he remarked, "I think they will show you the way ahead. The one thing I've real realised with the younger generations is that they're very different. To start with, they have no sense of hierarchy like we did. In the case of our generation, if your parents said something, you just listened to it. The younger generation is far more inquisitive. They want to know why; they're not just going to do something because their parents have said it. Just because you're older, doesn't mean that you have all the right answers. Today, they have Google; they don't need to go to their parents to ask questions," Abhishek observed, noting that children primarily turn to their parents for love. "The younger generations are not dependent on their parents. We went to our elders for their wisdom and experience. Today's kids have it in the palm of their hands. So, they need a justification for doing something and I think that's wonderful. With Aaradhya, I had a bit of a soft landing because I saw my niece and nephew (Navya Naveli Nanda and Agastya Nanda) grow up. So, I knew what to expect with Aaradhya. They are, by no means, rude. It's just that we have to tilt our perspectives a bit," he added.

Avinash Mishra evicted, becomes the fourth finalist to exit Salman Khan's show

After a roller-coaster journey on Bigg Boss 18, TV actor Avinash Mishra was evicted in fourth place. His time on the show was filled with twists and turns, as he presented himself in various shades, at times appearing selfish and manipulative. Despite this, he played the game strategically and on his own terms. Before Avinash, Chum Darang and Eisha Singh were evicted from the show.

In the beginning, Avinash's persona on the show seemed reminiscent of past contestants, but he eventually revealed a more playful side. His impersonations of fellow housemates quickly became a fan favourite, adding a fun element to the show. Many viewers felt Avinash kept giving auditions for being the next big villain through the show. From not giving contestants food for a few days to portraying his insecurity towards housemates, Avinash went wrong in the game at various points.



While his clashes with Chaahat Pandey and Kashish Kapoor earned him the womaniser tag, there were many moments when he proved to be a thorough gentleman. Earlier in a conversation with SCREEN, Avinash Mishra had shared his take on comparisons. He

had said, "It is human psychology. People do compare, but everyone on this planet is different. They have their thoughts. People will see a very different personality. Next year, people will compare me with someone else who will be on the show. People have not seen the real Avinash. They will see how I react, and I am sure it will have a positive impact." After Avinash, Eisha, and Chum, Karanveer Mehra, Vivian Dsena, and Rajat Dalal emerged as the top three finalists competing for the Bigg Boss trophy.

Double Olympic medallist Neeraj Chopra marries tennis player Himani Mor



Days after he said that it wasn't necessary to make any public declarations before he decided to marry, India's greatest living Olympian Neeraj Chopra announced his wedding to tennis player Himani Mor in an intimate ceremony.

In a short post on his social media pages, Neeraj shared pictures from the ceremony held in Himachal Pradesh on January 16. "Grateful for every blessing that brought us to this moment together. Bound by love, happily ever after," Neeraj wrote. Neeraj's paternal uncle Bhim Chopra told The Indian Express that the marriage was arranged by both families. "The wedding took place on January 16 in Himachal Pradesh. Both the families were present during the wedding, which was arranged by the two families," Bhim said. He added that Neeraj and Himani wanted to keep the details of the ceremony private. "It's a new journey for Neeraj and Himani. We cannot share details of the ceremony since Neeraj and Himani's families want it to be that way. Neeraj and Himani are currently out of the country. The whole Chopra family is delighted."

It is understood that even some of Neeraj's fellow athletes got to know only through his social media posts. That's how Neeraj wanted it, going by his recent comments on this matter. In an interview with Lallantop News recently, Neeraj hinted at maintaining privacy after he was asked about his marriage plans. "Personal life is such a thing that

it depends on an individual how much he wants to show the world," the double Olympic and World Championship medallist said. "Shadi bhi honi ho toh zaroori thodi na hai ki sabhi ko batake honi hai (It's not necessary to announce the marriage to the whole world). Whenever it has to happen, the family will decide. That's when it'll happen."

Bhim said that the bride's family hails from Sonipat, Haryana. In fact, Himani's alma mater is the same as India's top-ranked tennis player Sumit Nagal. Like Nagal, Himani, too, played tennis and, as per the All India Tennis Association website, her highest national ranking was 42 in singles and 27 in doubles.

After completing a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Physical Education, Himani moved to the USA where she studied at the Southeastern Louisiana University. Apart from working as a part-time volunteer assistant tennis coach at Franklin Pierce University, Himani — a graduate assistant at Amherst College — manages the women's tennis programme at her college where, as per available information, she oversees training, scheduling, recruitment and budgets. For Neeraj, this is the off-season after a strenuous 2024 when he won his second Olympic medal while battling a long-standing injury. He was training in South Africa under his new coach, world record holder Jan Zeleny, for the new season and will have the World Championships as a major target.

This is why Rishabh Pant the white-ball batsman fares poorly as compared to Test version

GNS News Agency, Jan 25

Rishabh Pant's all-format status may have suffered a dent last week when he was not named in India's T20I squad for the five-match series against England. Initially understood to have been rested after a gruelling 10-Test course across four months, Pant's availability for a Ranji Trophy fixture for Delhi has now suggested otherwise.

Within 43 Test appearances, Pant's legacy as India's most prolific wicketkeeper-bat has already entered an indisputable territory. The mighty bluffs, the reverse ramps, the sweeps: conventional, reverse and the one-hander, heaves and whatnot! Coupled with an immensely sturdy vertical bat protecting his pads and wicket, Pant's unusual shot-making range has stamped an X-factor status in the longest format.

In this same timeline, his white-ball self has curiously driven to a strange crossroads. It is uncertain if Pant will remain the first-choice wicket-keeper for the ODIs and the Champions Trophy with KL Rahul in contention. Pant's 50-over record is middling at best after 31 matches — 871 runs at 33.5. Despite his long lay-off from regular 50-over cricket, Pant was named the second keeper in the Champions Trophy squad unveiled on Saturday, pipping the likes of Sanju Samson and Ishan Kishan. Rishabh Pant India India's Rishabh Pant plays a shot just before he is caught by Bangladesh's Tanzim Hasan during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup cricket match between India and Bangladesh at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda, Saturday, June 22, 2024. (AP Photo/Lynne Sladky) Samson has no 50-over exploits after his last outing for India in December 2023. He belted a hundred in South Africa before Pant returned to the radar in mid-2024. Kishan, who filled in for Pant in the 2023 ODI World Cup, has endured a slump in the ongoing domestic season. Pant's left-handedness continues to be a point of discussion and difference, but runs haven't flown off his blade as smoothly as in Tests, leaving India and himself with a unique conundrum. Identity crisis Pant's uncommon batting matrix has dominated in Tests where he has sped to 2948 runs in 75 innings. His 73 sixes have vaulted him to the fourth spot among Indian Test batsmen, only behind Virinder Sehwag (90), Rohit Sharma (88) and MS Dhoni (78). His methods aren't flawless but they thrive in the traditionally defensive Test match-setting. A supremely efficient defence masks Pant from being dismissed bowled or lbw as often as his contemporaries, falling only 11 times combined in that fashion. Pant batting across formats "He's (Pant) got one of the best defences in world cricket. Defence has become a challenging aspect, he has the best defence with a soft hand. I will change my name if someone can show me Pant getting out while defending 10 times," spin legend and Pant's long-time teammate R Ashwin had recently remarked.

While he has been dismissed on 15 occasions with a front-foot defence in Tests, the blocking characteristics have largely held the glue to his game in all forms. But when the red-ball basher swaps the whites for the India blues, his attacking efficacies slump by a staggering margin. It is impossible to evaluate Pant by ordinary metrics. On his day, he can be the one waging a lone battle in ODIs too, as he did with his solitary century — an unbeaten 125 chasing 260 against England in 2022 when the rest of the top-order was nipped in Manchester. The Delhi batter's control in the longer formats is nearly the same while his boundary-yielding traits are identical in Tests, ODIs and T20Is. His control percentage (measure of shots middled) read 82.4% in Tests and 82.3% in ODIs. Pant's boundary scoring percentages vary negligibly across formats, between 58 and 60 per cent. Yet his attacking postures yield intriguingly contrasting results. Pant has attacked 32.5 percent of deliveries he has faced in Test cricket to aggregate 2306 runs, making up nearly



80 percent of his career. Besides the 73 maximums, Pant's attacking shots in Tests have comprised 166 aerial/uppitch strokes as per Cricket-21 data. While 80 of these strokes have evaded the fielders, Pant's proclivity to leave fate to chance completes the other hefty half. An aerial shot has produced his catch 55 times, but more importantly, Pant's sheer fortune has also handed him 31 reprieves. Interestingly, Pant has been dropped (16) more times than he has been caught (12) outside the 30-yard circle. While he majorly 'gets away' with the slogs, the sparsity of an outfield Test catch may evoke the "stupid, stupid, stupid" feeling for some experts and the viewing public.

Pant carries the same energies into the T20I and ODI set-ups, but the concoction of risks and luck works differently here. Pant's T20I numbers never took off despite playing in the comforts of a settled slot at No. 4 or 5. Among active cricketers who have played at least 40 innings at No. 4-5, Pant is the only batter to hold a strike rate below 130 while representing a top-8 T20I team. Expansive fields in the middle overs and death in white-ball cricket have not suited Pant's attacking template. It hinders a few of his go-to shots, failing to execute them with the same effect they exude in Tests. Rishabh Pant Rishabh Pant dives to take catch. (File)

The slog remains one of his most diverging shots in red-ball cricket, bringing up 105 runs at the cost of nine dismissals in 53 balls — middling only 16 (30.2%) of these deliveries. The pull has yielded him 317 Test runs for four dismissals, at a superior control rate of 77%. However, Pant's slogs have cast his downfall four times in 19 deliveries in ODIs, with a poor 26.9% control rate. The pull has also ousted him on four occasions while adding 118 runs and controlling over 70% of the strokes. Concerns around his aerial shots bear a protracted spurt in T20Is, where he needs them like oxygen. The slog, slog sweep and reverse sweep have resulted in 16 of Pant's dismissals for only 130 runs. The southpaw falters by a telling margin in execution, middling only 29 of the 93 deliveries. Even his favoured pull shot has marked his dismissal every 13 instances in T20Is. Rishabh Pant chart Where Rishabh Pant gets caught in all three formats.

Pant's catch-maps in ODIs and T20Is reflect the struggles. Of his 18 caught dismissals in ODIs, 11 have been found outside the 30-yard circle; seven on the on-side between deep square leg and long-on. Excluding sixes, Pant has played 34 aerial shots crossing the inner ring, and unlike Tests, he has never been dropped in ODIs past the circle! When dealing with a higher rate of uppitch strokes in T20Is, Pant has only been dropped twice in the deep in front of the wicket and caught 18 times — exposing the chinks when he activates 'slog mode'. With left-handed batters and wicket-keeping options fronting up more abundantly for India, the 27-year-old's white-ball quiver demands an immediate reset. Pant cannot do away with the thrills and frills. But a workaroud to smash the white-ball sharper and longer, past the catching men he rarely chances upon in Tests, is fast becoming a matter of survival at the top.

Smuggled away from poverty in Ivory Coast, tireless Amad Diallo is living his big football dream at Manchester United, via Italy

GNS News Agency, Jan 25

In 2017, Italy's undercover agents arrested a couple from Ivory Coast in Parma. They were allegedly part of a human trafficking ring that sold the European football dream and smuggled children to Italy from West Africa. The couple had two boys in their mid-teens staying with them, Amad and Hamed, both bearing the surname Traore. The couple claimed they were their children, though DNA tests turned up negative. Subsequently, they said they had adopted the children from their close cousins, "to save them from poverty." Hamed and Amad—it was proved that they were not blood relatives, forget brothers, either—were from Adjame, a densely-populated suburb of Abidjan with the highest crime rate in the country. The Italian authorities did not deport the teenagers home because the investigators contended that "children were aware of it and had a reasonable life with their fake parents." They were playing in a local club—Boca Barco—affiliated with Boca Juniors of Argentina. The court, though, slapped a fine of €48,000 on them in 2021. Soon after Amad dropped "Traore" from his name too.

By that time, their footballing careers had already taken flight. Hamed was on Sassuolo's payrolls while Amad was bedding into his life in Manchester after United had purchased him from Atalanta for roughly €40 million. That the smuggled boys were living their footballing dream in itself was a triumph—and an anomaly in that most of the trafficked barely reach the gates of a football club, but are sold to drug or arms cartels, or simply pushed into streets or seas en route. According to Culture Foot Solidaire, a charity that's dealing with trafficking, an estimated 15,000 teenagers are illegally snuck into Europe from West Africa under the false pretence of football riches. Not even a third reach Europe. Not even a third of those that reach Europe become a footballer, forget an elite one at that.

Manchester United's Amad Diallo reacts at the end of the English Premier League soccer match against Liverpool at the Anfield stadium in Liverpool, England. (AP) Manchester United's Amad Diallo reacts at the end of the English Premier League soccer match against Liverpool at the Anfield stadium in Liverpool, England. (AP)

Amad, though, is vaulting into the upper echelons of English football. The 12-minute hat-trick against Southampton on Wednesday was the latest vindication of his virtues that have blossomed under new manager Ruben Amorim. Though the feat came against the bottom-placed club in the league, it came when his team was trailing, facing an embarrassment, in the last stretch of a manic game. He had scored other important goals—the winner against Manchester City at the Etihad, the equaliser against Liverpool in Anfield, and the winner against Liverpool in last season's FA Cup. So much so that he has swiftly become the most important player in the still-nascent Amorim era. A bench-warmer in the Ten Hag tenure, wherein he served two loan spells too, he has all the attributes Amorim demands from his forward. Amad is quick, robust, skilful, and most of all never tires. Amorim wants his players to "run like mad dogs." Amad embodies that spirit like no other colleague of his, without compromising on his control. He keeps running all the time, doesn't complain if he is not supplied the ball, he casually runs back. He chases lost causes—the goal against City was a classic instance. All his teammates had given up the ball, assuming City would clear the ball in their own half. But Amad pursued, controlled



the ball before goalkeeper Ederson did, showed the poise with a glorious first touch that took the ball away from the keeper and then hammered a shot from an acute angle, with such devastating pace and precision that it flew beyond Josko Gvardiol's sliding studs. So was the hat-trick goal when he snatched the ball from under the defender's nose.

Manchester United's Amad Diallo celebrates scoring their fourth goal Manchester United's Amad Diallo celebrates scoring their fourth goal. The 22-year-old might not possess the strapping musculature of most modern-day wingers (Amad is 5ft 8 inches). He is a throwback in that sense, rapid, nimble and with a knack of ghosting through the legs of defenders, slipping past them before they realise they had been hoodwinked, with boundless energy and rubbery elasticity. Amorim would praise his traits: "Good physicality is not the size but he can run, and that is a key point in that position. So you try to choose players that you can put in that position and then the technical characteristics are perfect for him."

Apart from heart and fight, he brings another valuable dimension to his club—a left-footed right winger, though as the hat-trick showed he can score off either foot. So when he receives the ball, because he is left-footed, he gets the space to cut inside. Amorim thinks he has the game to play in different roles and in different systems too. Ten Hag has deployed him on the left wing, Amorim as a wingback, wide forward and as a No 10. "He's very good playing in that position (No 10) but also playing between the lines because he has good control and he seems faster with the ball than without the ball. So it's something that he has and he is capable of playing in both positions. And he can play in different systems. In the future, we will play in a different system, maybe. So it's that kind of player that we need in the team," Amorim observed. Amad Diallo Manchester United's Amad Diallo celebrates after scoring his side's first goal during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester United and Southampton at the Old Trafford stadium in Manchester, England. The caretaker manager and a United legend Ruud van Nistelrooy raved about his commitment during practice sessions. "Every day after training he comes to me and wants to do extra finishing, extra crossing, 'How can I improve my heading?'" Van Nistelrooy said. "He's constantly focused on learning and getting better, living in a professional way and he's very motivated to get the best out of his career." Little wonder that he has blossomed in a progressive environment, seen his wages double, and contract extended. "It's just the start, and I have to improve a lot," Amad would say after the hat-trick. But it has been some journey though.

Tata Steel Chess standings: Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa joint leaders

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Gukesh Dommaraju poses with trophy during a procession held to honor him on becoming the World youngest chess champion in Chennai, India, Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2024. (AP Photo) Gukesh Dommaraju poses with trophy during a procession held to honor him on becoming the World youngest chess champion in Chennai, India, World Champion Gukesh Dommaraju, Vincent Keymer, Fabiano Caruana, Nodirbek Abdusattorov, and Praggnanandhaa Rameshbabu are joint leaders of the Tata Steel Chess standings after the second round in Wijk aan Zee. Gukesh is still unbeaten after becoming the youngest world champion in history last month in Singapore. After defeating Anish Giri in the opening round, the 18-year-old held Vladimir Fedoseev to a draw on Sunday in round 2 to stay unbeaten into his reign as the 18th world champion of the sport.

Gukesh was not at his best in the whole game. But he did defend resolutely to grind out a draw with black pieces against Vladimir Fedoseev, who had defeated Magnus Carlsen in the Chess Olympiad. World no. 2 Fabiano Caruana picked up his first win of 2024, after he defeated Jordan van Foreest. Meanwhile, Praggnanandhaa defeated Pentala Harikrishna to join Gukesh at top of the points



table. Another India in the fray, Arjun Erigaisi was also held to a draw by Anish Giri. Arjun put the Dutchman under significant pressure on the board but failed to clinch the win and had to settle for a draw after 51 moves. Arjun had lost to the veteran Pentala Harikrishna in the opening round. Leon Luke Mendonca, the lowest rated Indian player in the Masters field suffered another loss as Uzbekistan's Nodirbek Abdusattorov defeated him. In the Challengers section, GM Vaishali Rameshbabu drew with Lu Miaoyi while IM Divya Dethmukh drew against Thai Dai Van Nguyen.

Coach Irwansyah: 'Want PV Sindhu to play with much more speed and power, believe she can improve though she's 29'

PV Sindhu has seen a fair share of rotation when it comes to who sits behind her on the coaching chair over the years. So much so that, just at the India Open this week in New Delhi, there were at least two of her former coaches present. South Korea's Kim Ji Hyun, who along with the OG in Pullela Gopichand, guided Sindhu to the World Championships gold. And Mulyo Handoyo, the Indonesian who oversaw a brief period of success with India's singles players around 2017.

But all eyes were on Irwansyah, the latest arrival in Sindhu's corner. The Indonesian had overseen the rise of Anthony Ginting and Jonatan Christie among others in his role as the men's singles coach in his home country but has now made a switch to women's singles on his arrival to India. While he would be working with a group of women's singles players in Bengaluru, the prime focus would be to bring Sindhu back up from a tough 2024 season. And in her run to the quarterfinals at the India Open where she lost a thriller against Gregoria Mariska Tunjung, Sindhu

showed promising signs in terms of movement and variations in attack. "My goal when I came to India was of course to get Sindhu and the others I work with to achieve a very high level," Irwansyah said in Delhi. "I do believe, and Sindhu also, does that she can do it. Of course, we have only been together for less than one week. But I want to change her game, she already can do it. Of course, it will take time. Give us some time. In this match also she can play the way I want her to." Sindhu said before the tournament that the fire was still burning bright for her as she targets major tour events like All England and Worlds. And Irwansyah's focus would be to get Sindhu to play her signature attacking game. "I don't want to slow down her play. I want her to play with much more speed and power. She is an attacking player. She needs to be more powerful and aggressive."

Having worked in the men's singles discipline, Irwansyah is hoping to bring some of those elements into his coaching. "