

## Ex UP CM Mayawati's birthday is a festive day for the Bahujan community Mayawati is our guiding light: BSP State Coordinator Chandrasekhar Mudiraj

“(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 16):- A grand public meeting was organized by the BSP party in Bhongir district center on the occasion of the "Jan Kalyan Diwas" program, under the chairmanship of District President Gandhamalla Lingaswamy. State Coordinator Chandrasekhar Mudiraj, who attended the program as the chief guest, said that the birthday of BSP leader and former UP Chief Minister Kumari Mayawati is a festive day for the Bahujan community, and that Mayawati is their guiding light. He said that after becoming Chief Minister, Behan Ji (Mayawati) distributed 7 lakh acres of land with title deeds within 3 months. He mentioned schemes like Shaadi Mubarak, 27% reservation in ration distribution for BCs, vehicles for girls, establishing a hospital in the name of Kanshi Ram, creating districts named after great personalities, a 2000-acre inspirational site like that of Ashoka, Gautam Buddha University, excellent

road transport, and maintaining law and order, ensuring no attacks on the people of UP. He said that during her government, criminals were put in jail and a strict administration was provided. “He said that if the BSP forms the government in Telangana, they will implement the constitution, provide free education and healthcare, and eradicate unemployment. “He urged people to elect BSP in the municipal elections, promising to develop the towns. State General Secretary Manchala Srikanth, State General Secretary Prabhudas, Zonal In-charges Dayakar Maurya, Boddur Kiran, Kathula Kanshiram, Koneti Sujatha, the district in-charges of Bhongir, Secunderabad, Nalgonda, and Suryapet, Nalgonda District President Ravulapati Ravishankar, Erra Rambabu, Secunderabad District President Bandari Srinivas, constituency in-charges, constituency presidents, mandal presidents, leaders, activists, well-wishers, and others participated in this program.



## Representation submitted to the MRO to provide 42 percent reservations for BCs in the municipal elections: BC Students' Association State Convener Pallagorla Modiramdev



“(Mandava Srisailam... Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District Bureau... Indian Chronicle... January 16):- BC Students' Association State Convener Pallagorla Modiramdev and Edla Mahalingam submitted a representation to Chityal MRO Vijay Madam, requesting that the municipal elections be held with legally protected 42% reservations for BCs. “They stated that the government should implement the Kamareddy BC Declaration as promised in its election manifesto and then proceed with the elections. “They demanded a constitutional amendment to provide a permanent solution to educational, employment, and local body and municipal reservations based on population. They said that the fact that BCs have not crossed even 14% in political representation in this state shows how politically backward they are. They added that Article 243-D6 of the Constitution gives the state government the constitutional authority to increase BC reservations in local bodies, therefore, a law should be enacted in the assembly, a government order should be issued, and elections should be held immediately. This is because the population data is available, a law has been passed in the assembly, and the Supreme Court lifted the 50% ceiling when it provided 10% reservations for upper castes. Moreover, in the Indira Sawhney case, the Supreme Court ruled that the 50% ceiling can be exceeded if empirical data is available. Considering all these aspects, there is a high chance of winning the case. According to the law and the constitution, there are no legal or constitutional obstacles, therefore the case will ultimately be won in the Supreme Court. This is because there are no legal, statutory, or constitutional impediments to increasing reservations, and the case is strong. Caste-wise calculations have been done to increase reservations. A law has been passed in the Assembly. This case is constitutionally strong. According to Article 243-D-6 of the Constitution, the state government has the power to determine BC reservations. A Government Order (GO) should be issued based on this. “During the Mandal Commission case, a nine-judge bench ruled that if population data is available, reservations can be increased accordingly. Therefore, the government was urged to go to the elections with 42 percent political reservations for BCs. BC Students' Association State Convener Pallagolla Modiramdev, BC Youth Association Joint District Convener Edla Mahalingam, Manil, Rajaram, and others participated in this meeting.



# Veerabhadra Rath Yatra Celebrated with Grandeur at Vangara Prabhakar Rao, P.V.'s Son Leads Procession



“Vangara, January 16: “The century-old Veerabhadra Rath Yatra, a revered spiritual and cultural tradition of Vangara village, was celebrated on Wednesday with great devotion, colour, and community participation. The grand procession was led by P.V. Prabhakar Rao, third son of former Prime Minister Bharat Ratna Sri.P.V. Narasimha Rao along with P.V.Sharath babu, P.V.Madan Mohan

Jithender Rao Thanugula President, TYJF continuing a legacy deeply rooted in faith and family history. “The Rath Yatra, which proceeds from Vangara to the historic Kothakonda Veerabhadra Swamy Temple, is believed to have begun nearly a hundred years ago. Local tradition traces its origin to around 1925, when Rathnamma, widow of late P.V. Ranga Rao, fervently prayed to Lord Veerabhadra Swamy for a male heir to carry forward the Pamulaparthi family lineage, as she was childless and had lost her husband at a young age. It is widely believed that her prayers were answered when her neighbours, P.V. Seetharama Rao and Rukminamma, agreed to give their eldest son, P.V. Narasimha Rao, in adoption. The adoption was formally solemnised around 1930, following which Narasimha Rao legally became the son of P.V. Ranga Rao and Rathnamma. In a further strengthening of family bonds, Rathnamma later arranged the marriage of Narasimha Rao with Satyamma, one of her close relatives. “Overwhelmed with gratitude, Rathnamma is believed to have instituted the tradition of sending the ceremonial Rath to Kothakonda as a mark of thanksgiving to Lord Veerabhadra Swamy. Since then, the Rath Yatra has remained an enduring symbol of devotion, fulfilment of faith, and continuity of tradition. “This year’s procession was marked by vibrant cultural performances, including spirited Shiva Shakti dances by members of the Yadava community, rhythmic Dappu and Dolak beats, and a visually stunning Kolatam performed by women of the village. The atmosphere resonated with the chiming of temple bells, devotional chants, and ritual offerings of jaggery and rice. “With a gathering of over 2,000 devotees, the Rath Yatra commenced amid festive fervour, transforming the village into a sea of devotion and celebration, coinciding with the Sankranti festivities. “After Rathnamma’s passing, the responsibility of conducting the Rath Yatra was taken up by P.V. Narasimha Rao, who unfailingly observed the ritual despite his demanding roles as Union Minister and later as Prime Minister. Subsequently, the tradition was carried forward briefly by P.V. Rajeshwar Rao and his family. For the past six to seven years, the sacred responsibility has been diligently upheld by P.V. Prabhakar Rao. “The Yatra saw the participation of several members of the P.V. family, including P.V. Sharath Babu and P.V. Madan Mohan, with guidance and coordination provided by P.V. Manohar Rao from Hyderabad. “The event was smoothly and enthusiastically organised by Mondaiah, Venkat Reddy, Satish Reddy, Laxmikanth Rao, and Vishnu Vardhan, with active support from the P.V. Global Foundation, which has been sponsoring the Rath Yatra for several years. Marked by unity, devotion, and cultural splendour, the Veerabhadra Rath Yatra once again stood as a powerful testament to Vangara’s living heritage—drawing men, women, and children alike into a shared celebration of faith, history, and tradition.

## Grand Sankranti Celebrations under the Leadership of TRS Leader Gudi Madhusudan Reddy



“KISHORE VADDEPALLI, Uppal, January 16 (Indian Chronicle): “Grand Sankranti celebrations were held under the leadership of senior BRS leader Gudi Madhusudan Reddy, along with his party colleagues. On the occasion of the Sankranti festival, they conveyed their wishes, encouraging everyone to celebrate the festival joyfully by flying kites and sharing happiness with one another. “As part of the celebrations, kites were flown, spreading festive cheer. On this occasion, the leaders advised people to ensure the safety of children and to protect birds while flying kites. They emphasized completely avoiding the use of Chinese manja



and recommended using only safe kite strings. They called upon everyone to celebrate the festival together in a spirit of friendship and enthusiasm, wishing that the kite festival brings joy, peace, and happiness into everyone’s lives. “Several village elders and BRS senior leaders participated in the program, including Dr. Chandrasekhar Reddy, Gourayya, Palle Narsing Rao, Erelli Ravinder Reddy, Mukkala Ramakrishna Mudiraj, Sanigaram Tirumalesh, Kolani Santosh Reddy, Photola Raju, Rajaluri Ramakrishna, Govardhan Reddy, Kanuri Prabhakar, and others.



# TS UTF Extends Rs 6 Lakh Financial Assistance to Deceased Teacher's Family



““Bhukya Ranjith Naik, Bhadradi Kothagudem District Bureau, January 16, Indian Chronicle: “The Telangana United Teachers’ Federation (TS UTF), Bhadradi Kothagudem district unit, extended financial assistance of ₹6 lakh to the family of late Guguloth Laxman, a teacher who recently passed away due to a heart attack.”“The cheque was handed over under the aegis of TS UTF as part of its Family Welfare Society initiative. TS UTF State Vice-President Chava Durga Bhavani participated in the programme as the chief guest. Addressing the gathering, she said that TS UTF has so far extended solidarity contributions of over ₹3 crore to the families of deceased Family Welfare Society members across the state.”“She stated that the Telangana United Teachers’ Federation, as a socially responsible organisation, has been implementing this welfare scheme with utmost transparency. Launched with the slogan “One for all and all for one,” the scheme has successfully completed two-and-a-half years. She explained that the immediate financial assistance of ₹6 lakh has been a great relief to the families of teachers who die unexpectedly, especially until government benefits are released.”“Chava Durga Bhavani pointed out that government financial benefits to the families of teachers who die in service or retire often get delayed. She demanded that the government immediately announce PRC-2023 with a favourable fitment, release



the pending five Dearness Allowances (DAs), and clear all pending teachers’ bills by crediting them directly to their bank accounts.”“She further urged the government to clear retirement benefits without delay and release long-pending dues related to GPF, TSGLI and GIS, which have been pending for the last two years. She also called for strengthening government schools on par with private institutions by ensuring adequate teachers and infrastructure.”“The TS UTF leader demanded suitable modifications to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in line with present-day requirements and sought exemption from TET for teachers appointed prior to 2010.”“District Educational Officer of Tekulapalli Mandal A. Jagan, TS UTF State Secretary B. Raju, District President B. Murali Mohan, District General Secretary Mallampati Venkateshwarlu, District Vice-Presidents V. Varalakshmi and M. Rajayya, District Treasurer S. Venkateshwarlu, FWS Joint Secretary N. Krishna, district secretaries Hathiram, P. Jayaraju, M. Padmarani, S.K. Pasha and D. Tavurya, State Committee Member B. Kishore Singh, mandal leaders D. Hari and T. Laxman, Yellandu mandal leaders E. Rambabu and K. Venkateshwarlu, FWF Convener B. Ramachander, district social media members B. Mangilal, A. Veeranna, Gundala mandal leaders Roop Singh and others were present

## The municipal reservation announcement tomorrow..!

**District Collector Prateek Jain has directed party representatives to attend the meeting regarding municipal ward reservations, scheduled for January 17, 2026**

““Vikarabad, Tandur (Indian Chronicle, 16, January)““The Telangana Municipal Reservations announcement is scheduled for tomorrow, Saturday, January 17, 2026. Vikarabad District Collector Prateek Jain has announced that all party presidents and secretaries are required to attend a meeting at the Collector’s Office to discuss the municipal ward reservations.”“The reservations will be made in accordance with Section 7 of the Telangana Municipalities Act, 2019, and will be based on the population of SC, ST, BC, and women in each ward.”“Meeting Details:“Date: January 17, 2026 (Saturday)“Time: 11:30 AM“Venue: Collectorate Conference Hall““All party representatives are urged to attend to



ensure a smooth reservation process for the upcoming municipal elections in 2026.



## Jupally reviews CM’s Nirmal tour arrangements

State Prohibition and Excise Minister and District In-Charge Minister Jupally Krishna Rao has directed officials to make strict, comprehensive and foolproof arrangements for the public meeting of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, scheduled to be held on the 16th of this month at the NTR Mini Stadium in Nirmal town. In view of the Chief Minister’s proposed district tour, Minister Jupally Krishna Rao, Government Advisor Sudarshan Reddy, Khanapur MLA and Nirmal DCC President Vedum Bojju Patel, along with District Collector Abhilash Abhinav, inspected the ongoing arrangements at the NTR Mini Stadium on Wednesday. The inspection focused on stage preparation, seating, security arrangements, parking, crowd management, drinking water, sanitation and other essential facilities.

During the visit, District Collector Abhilash Abhinav briefed the Minister in detail about the preparations being undertaken by various departments. He informed that coordinated efforts were underway to ensure smooth conduct of the event and adequate facilities for the expected large gathering. Expressing dissatisfaction over any possibility of lapses, Minister Jupally Krishna Rao instructed officials to take strong measures to ensure that there were no shortcomings in the conduct of the meeting.



# Telangana assembly speaker announces verdict on two more MLAs

In a significant development in the party defection case, two additional MLAs have been granted relief by Speaker Gaddam Prasad. The Speaker delivered a decisive verdict regarding MLAs Kale Yadaiah and Pocharam Srinivas Reddy, asserting that there was no substantial evidence to suggest they had changed political parties. As a result, both MLAs are being officially recognised as members of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), leading to the dismissal of the petitions filed against them.

This latest ruling follows the Speaker's previous dismissal of disqualification petitions concerning five other MLAs. Speaker Prasad noted that there was insufficient evidence to merit disqualification, stating that the petitioners failed to prove that MLAs Tellam Venkat Rao, Bandla Krishnamohan Reddy, Gudem Mahipal Reddy, Prakash Goud, and Arikepudi Gandhi had defected from the BRS.

A total of seven MLAs have now successfully argued before the Speaker that they remain loyal to



the BRS. They clarified that any meetings with the Chief Minister were solely for development discussions and confirmed they had not affiliated themselves with another party. Pleased with their explanations, the Speaker dismissed the petitions put forth by the BRS against these MLAs.



## Bhim Army demands Rs 50 lakh for Dr Lavanya who died by suicide

BhimArmy leaders have demanded stringent action and immediate relief for the family of Dr Lavanya, a house surgeon who died by suicide after allegedly being deceived and harassed in the name of love.

Dr Lavanya belonged to a poor Dalit family from Jallapuram village in Manavapadu mandal of Jogulamba Gadwal district and was working as a House Surgeon at Siddipet Government Medical College and Hospital. According to Bhim Army leaders, she was mentally distressed after being allegedly cheated and subjected to caste-based discrimination by Pranay Teja, which ultimately led her to take the extreme step.

On Tuesday, Bhim Army Mahabubnagar district in-charge Macharla Prakash visited Jallapuram village and met the bereaved family at their residence to offer condolences. Speaking on the occasion, he demanded that the state government immediately provide Rs 50 lakh compensation, three acres of agricultural land, and a house to Dr. Lavanya's family. Macharla Prakash strongly condemned the incident and alleged that Pranay Teja was responsible for Dr Lavanya's death, accusing him of exploiting her under the pretext of love and later discriminating against her on caste grounds. He demanded capital punishment for the accused and called for a thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation by the police.

He also criticized local public representatives for failing to visit and console the victim's family, calling it unjust and insensitive. During the visit, Macharla Prakash facilitated a phone conversation between the victim's family and Nagar Kurnool Member of Parliament Dr Mallu Ravi, urging him to intervene and ensure immediate compensation and support for the family.

The Bhim Army reiterated its demand that the government take all necessary steps to ensure justice for Dr. Lavanya and provide comprehensive support to her family.



## Tight security for CM's Khammam visit on Jan 18

District In-charge Collector P Sreeja on Tuesday directed officials to make foolproof arrangements for Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's visit to the district on January 18. Sreeja, along with Khammam Police Commissioner Sunil Dutt and other officials inspected the proposed venue and reviewed the arrangements for the Chief Minister's programme.

## Telangana Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar Confident of Congress Victory in Municipal Elections



Telangana Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar has expressed his confidence that the Congress party will secure a majority in the upcoming municipal elections, asserting that the state is being developed in accordance with planned initiatives.

During a visit to the Sri Gidde Perumandla Swamy temple in Karimnagar, where he offered special prayers, the minister later addressed the media and took aim at the ruling Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government.

Prabhakar accused the BRS of failing to provide housing for the state's citizens during their tenure. He highlighted the achievements of the Congress-led government, despite financial constraints, including the establishment of Indira Amma houses, the issuance of ration cards, provision of free bus travel for women, and the launch of Indira Amma canteens.

The minister further alleged that the central government is attempting to undermine the rural employment guarantee scheme. He assured that action would be taken in accordance with the law against individuals who insult women officers.

## Poll pitch heats up in Mancherial as BRS holds high-profile meet

The Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) stepped up its preparations for the upcoming Mancherial Corporation elections with a large-scale meeting of key party leaders and workers held on Wednesday at the residence of former MLA Nadipelli Divakar Rao in Mancherial.

Addressing the gathering, BRS leader Nadipelli Vijit Kumar directed party workers to work with a single-minded focus on securing victory in the corporation elections. He urged leaders at all levels to intensify grassroots mobilisation and strengthen public outreach to ensure a decisive mandate for the party.

Nadipelli Divakar Rao expressed strong confidence that candidates who receive the BRS ticket are certain to win. He called upon every party worker to take personal responsibility for the success of the party and work relentlessly at the booth level.



Referring to the recent Panchayat elections, Divakar Rao said that the people had already shown their faith in BRS-supported candidates. He added that with the same spirit, the citizens of Mancherial are ready to vote for the party's "Car" symbol in the corporation elections.



# View From India | New year, new uncertainties for Indian diplomacy

Best wishes for a happy and peaceful new year to all readers of The View From India — the only newsletter that provides a comprehensive look of the issues that matter in foreign policy from an Indian perspective, and keeps you informed of the most important developments in Indian diplomacy every week. As we head into the new year, do let us know what you'd like to see more of in The View From India in 2024 and share your feedback with us at [socmed1@thehindu.co.in](mailto:socmed1@thehindu.co.in). We would love to hear from you. What lies in store for Indian diplomacy in 2024? The Narendra Modi government is heading into the new year, and the upcoming general elections set for this summer ahead of a possible third term, high on confidence after recent electoral victories. As far as India's diplomacy is concerned, however, it is electoral uncertainties in many countries — and navigating a world in flux while protecting Indian interests — that is likely to remain a top priority in 2024. As The Hindu's Suhasini Haidar writes, domestic policies abroad, rather than geopolitical events, could be a major factor in foreign policy in 2024, given that more than a fourth of the world, in terms of population and number of countries, will go to vote during the year: India's neighbourhood will see the impact of elections as early as the first few weeks of 2024, with polls in Bangladesh scheduled for January 7, the second round of general election in Bhutan on January 9 and an election in Pakistan scheduled for February 8. The election in Bangladesh appears to be heading in the direction of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, which will be a boost for Delhi-Dhaka ties, given PM Hasina's close ties with India. In Bhutan, outgoing Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tshering has already been ousted in the first round of elections, and the contest is now between former Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay's People's Democratic Party (PDP) and former top-bureaucrat Pema Chewang's new Bhutan Tendrel Party (BTP). While both will be inclined favourably towards India, Delhi will watch the new Bhutanese government's moves with China most closely, as it picks up the boundary delimitation agreement signed with Beijing in September.

Pakistan's election, like Bangladesh's, appears one-sided at present, with former PM Imran Khan and most of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's top leadership in prison, even though they remain popular. The likely winner, three-time PM Nawaz Sharif, has already made it clear that he intends to improve ties with Pakistan's neighbours, especially India. Sri Lanka, still grappling with economic issues but on a more stable wicket due to support from India, is due to hold parliamentary and presidential elections in 2024. Domestic electoral considerations will also cast a shadow on major diplomatic events. With U.S. election season set to enter into full swing and India's polls set for April or May, Delhi faces a narrow window to host the Quad summit, likely in February, after U.S. President Joe Biden's visit and the Quad meet set earlier for January were called off. Beyond the

neighbourhood and the U.S., there are many other electoral uncertainties both in the West and the Global South in the coming year, as Haidar explains. You can read her analysis [here](#). Eyes of much of the world will certainly be on the U.S. in particular as campaign season heats up in coming months. Varghese K. George, in this Explainer, looks at how the poll year is shaping up for both India and the U.S., what are the fundamental questions that the two democracies are grappling with, the visible trends, and the likely impact on bilateral relations. Also making news last week: In the first major breakthrough in the case against eight former Indian naval personnel sentenced to death in Qatar, the Court of Appeals in Doha has commuted their sentences, the Ministry of External Affairs confirmed on December 28. Hailing India and Russia relations as "very steady" and "very strong", External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said during a visit to Moscow that he was "confident" that the annual India-Russia leadership summit, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin have skipped for two years, will be held in 2024, even as Mr. Putin extended an invitation to PM Modi to visit. **Top 5:** Here's what we are reading this week. From the Israel-Hamas war and stalemate in Ukraine to new threats to



global shipping and a continuing freeze in ties with China, Rajiv Bhatia analyses the major trends and challenges for Indian diplomacy in 2024. With less than a year left for the 2024 U.S. presidential election, America cannot ignore the standing of Donald Trump, its 45th President, and the most polarising figure in its electoral politics, writes Narayan Lakshman. Stanly Johny writes on the global fallout of two warfronts in Ukraine and Gaza and how

India, the West and the Global South are navigating them. Dinakar Peri explains the threat to global shipping following the sharp rise in missile and drone attacks on commercial shipping by Houthi rebels in Yemen. Is right-wing populism seeing a resurgence across the world? Irfan Nooruddin and Rahul Mukherji discuss this question in a conversation moderated by Radhika Santhanam. You can also listen to their conversation [here](#).

## Reigniting the flame of India-Korea defence cooperation

In the intricate tapestry of global geopolitics, defence collaboration emerges as a foundational imperative, crucial for the preservation of international peace and stability. The recent diplomatic overture during the visit of General Manoj Pande, Chief of the Army Staff of India, in November 2023, to the Republic of Korea, signifies a critical juncture in the trajectory of India-Korea defence relations. While this visit fortified diplomatic ties, it also unveiled the challenges, necessitating meticulous consideration. This prompts an exploration of the challenges faced by India and Korea in enhancing their defence cooperation, along with an examination of opportunities for mutual growth.

Despite recent high-level engagements, a challenge that persists is the absence of a shared vision for a new comprehensive defence framework, one that can provide a robust structure under which both nations can operate and align their policies to construct a novel and sustainable emerging regional order. The imperative for India and Korea is to transcend the confines of bilateral cooperation, and embrace a paradigm shift that cultivates a more profound understanding of their roles in the swiftly evolving global scenario.

A hurdle lies in the resistance on the Korean government side to reassess India's role in the region. It is incumbent

upon Korea to comprehend that India is not merely the largest consumer of defence products. Rather, it stands as a regional power capable of substantial contributions to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. A departure from Cold War mentalities, where the Korean government perceived India as standing in the opposite Soviet bloc, is imperative for Korea to forge a deeper, more meaningful partnership with India. This paradigm shift in Korean government strategic thinking is indispensable for any meaningful engagement between the two nations. Further, the prevailing over-emphasis by the Indian government side on weapons acquisition and technology transfer from Korea, while undeniably pivotal, has tended to overshadow broader strategic considerations. Similarly, the unwavering focus of the Korean defence establishment on profit-driven weapons sales to India, devoid of strategic considerations, may prove shortsighted in the face of fast-changing geopolitical dynamics. Powerful arms lobbies in India and Korea pose a potential roadblock, emphasising the necessity to prioritise long-term strategic goals over short-term gains. The emerging coalition of North Korea, China, and Russia poses a new serious challenge to collaborative efforts between the two nations. Divergent stances may arise, necessitating a nuanced appraisal of each party's stra-

tegic imperatives.

The high-level interactions of Gen. Pande with the top Korean military leadership and his engagements with the leadership of top Korean defence institutions, such as the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) and the Agency of Defence Development (ADD), are anticipated to further unite the defence communities of both countries. Explore technological collaborations

Leveraging their technological capabilities, India and South Korea are aiming to collaborate in developing advanced defence systems and equipment. Given their shared understanding of the pivotal role technology will play in future conflicts, the scope for cooperation in this sector is limitless. Such synergy can lead to a mutually beneficial defence technology and industry partnership, propelling both countries to the forefront of innovation and self-reliance. In an era where defence against space warfare, information warfare, and cybersecurity is paramount, both nations can further explore opportunities for cooperation. Given Korea's status as an advanced high-tech digital superpower, vast opportunities exist in the development of robust security measures in these areas to effectively counter emerging threats in the digital domain, ensuring the security of critical infrastructure and information.



# AI-driven transformation to augment 50% of Asia-Pacific workforce by 2026

New Delhi: Artificial intelligence (AI) will create an organisational cultural shift and new technology frames will augment 50 per cent of Asia-Pacific workforce by mid-2026, slowly reshaping the enterprise toward more technology usage, enhancing performance. According to an IDC report, as AI and GenAI technologies continue to take the centre-stage in today's digital economy, they not only augment organisations' productivity, automate repetitive tasks but also redefine roles, thus compelling a shift in workforce skills requirements.

This transformation will reshape organisations towards higher technology usage with greater human-machine collaboration, which will generate demand for strategic and value-added roles which are not able to be fulfilled by AI and GenAI. Parallel to these advancements is a substantial surge in technology buyers' investments in AI and GenAI driven enterprise software applications to transform their business operations, said the report. "At the outset, from 2024 to 2025, Asia's top 2,000 organizations will focus on changing internal perception and receptivity towards human-machine collaboration," said Estelle Quek, Senior Research Manager, Software Applications and Channels Strategies, IDC Asia/Pacific. By 2026, they will progress to integrate data and enterprise applications seamlessly, and evolve to run as autonomous organisations by 2028. GenAI/AI will close 15 per cent of enterprise talent shortage gaps by 2026, but the practice and usage of GenAI/AI will create a surplus of talent across all lines of business by 2027, the report mentioned. By early 2025, 60 per cent Asia-Pacific organisations still on legacy systems will need to modernise their applications immediately to survive and adapt to the digital world already surpassing them.

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## Game On: A look at best video games of 2026



2023 stands out as the best year for video games in recent history, offering players a wide array of great games across genres, providing numerous reasons to celebrate. However, despite the accolades and successes, these games may achieve, their creators may not reap the benefits. This year has witnessed over 7,000 job losses across the gaming sector, a number expected to climb as studios and developers grapple with financial constraints. The irony of financial uncertainty amid a prosperous year in game sales is poignantly highlighted by the CEO of Larian Studios, creators of the acclaimed 'Baldur's Gate 3', expressing helplessness as he notes that almost nobody remains from the original team meetings. It's crucial to develop sustainable practices in game development, ensuring both financial stability and environmental responsibility. Equally important is safeguarding decentralised paths of game creation to maintain a diverse and multifaceted industry. Now, to celebrate some of the finest games we had the joy of playing.

1. Category 1: The best all-round gaming experience

'Baldur's Gate 3', hands down, seals this award. In a year where novel experiences were few and far between, 'BG3's strength lies in its ability to not just offer a playable D&D experience and a wonderfully refined RPG but to millions to experience the magic of what was once limited to very few. As a game, 'BG3' offers a wide variety of characters, classes, enemies, and challenges. A must play. Honorable mention: Hogwarts Legacy

2. Category II: The craziest a game can get

This one is a really difficult category to decide a winner for. How does one choose between the venomised combinations of duel Spidermen in 'Spiderman 2' and the wonderful crafting abilities in 'Tears of the Kingdom'? The number of hours spent on both the games were far too many to count. One was the best to play on a weekend and the other in transit on a flight. However, 'Tears of the Kingdom' slightly

edges it because of what the game's makers could achieve on an ancient Tegra X1 and the Switch. Play both if you can, you won't be disappointed.

3. Category III: A game where we lose heart while not saving the world

Three fantastic indie games make the list here: 'Tchia, Venba, and Thirsty Suitors'. Each amazingly colourful, filled with radical possibilities, and offering us moments to cherish both emotionally and nostalgically. 'Tchia' and its magical archipelago, 'Venba' and its delightful idylls, Puttu rockets, or Biryani, and 'Thirsty Suitors' with Jala, basketball, and skating. All the three games are winners in their own regard. But yes, 'Venba' wins for its poignant story on the fear of standing out and its delectable music.

4. Category IV: The one where I dropped my controller admiring on-screen beauty

Two Ubisoft games make the cut for this — 'Crew Motofest and Avatar: The Frontiers of Pandora'. I struggle to pick between the paradise that is Hawaii and the night sky of Pandora — one is heaven on earth and the other ethereal and otherworldly. One breaks the map of the island down into racetracks and picturesque 'Forza'-like sequences with its own twist, while the other tells us not just a tale of freedom but one that celebrates Na'vi culture. 'The Crew' must win, though, for its longer replayability and a wonderful collection of cars. Here's to hoping for great games in 2024 but hopefully in much more merrier spirits.

## Geographic biases exist in ChatGPT, reveal researchers

New York: Researchers have discovered limitations in ChatGPT's capacity to provide location-specific information about environmental justice issues. Their findings, published in the journal *Telematics and Informatics*, suggest the potential for geographic biases existing in current generative artificial intelligence (AI) models. "As a geographer and geospatial data scientist, generative AI is a tool with powerful potential," said Assistant Professor Junghwan Kim of the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech. "At the same time, we need to investigate the limitations of the technology to ensure that future developers recognize the possibilities of biases. That was the driving motivation of this research," Kim added. Utilising a list of the 3,108 counties in the contiguous United States, the re-

search group asked the ChatGPT interface to answer a prompt asking about the environmental justice issues in each county. The researchers selected environmental justice as a topic to expand the range of questions typically used to test the performance of generative AI tools. Asking questions by county allowed the researchers to measure ChatGPT responses against sociodemographic considerations such as population density and median household income. ChatGPT was able to provide location-specific information about environmental justice issues for just 515 of the 3018 counties entered, or 17 per cent. With generative AI emerging as a new gateway tool for gaining information, the testing of potential biases in modeling outputs is an important part of improving programs such as ChatGPT.



# How is the U.K. cracking down on immigration? | Explained

The story so far: The government of the U.K. recently proposed new immigration rules to cut the net flow of immigration to the country, primarily by tightening visa requirements across several categories of workers seeking to move to the U.K. from abroad. Immigration policy has always been a key policy plank for the government headed by the Conservative Party, and there has been concern that in recent years the number of those immigrating to the U.K. compared to those emigrating abroad has risen sharply.

Why is the United Kingdom tweaking its immigration rules?

According to the U.K.'s Office for National Statistics (ONS), net migration into the U.K. touched a record high of 7,45,000 in 2022, with reports suggesting that the number of work permits issued to foreign technology professionals in particular rose from 39,899 in 2021 to 52,686 in 2022, marking a five-year high. Specifically, it was the category of web design and development that saw the largest percentage increase with 76% more work permits issued during this period. Of the 11,80,000 people who entered the U.K. during the year ending June 2023, with the intention to stay for at least one year, the greatest majority of migrants — 9,68,000 — came from outside the EU. According to the ONS, students comprised the largest cohort of non-EU migrants, both in 2023 and 2022. However, the proportion of workers arriving to take on roles in healthcare, to make up for the severe staff shortage in the NHS and social care, have also been rising steadily. The nations that sent the most migrants to the U.K. from outside of the EU were, in order, India (which sent 2,53,000 people), Nigeria (1,41,000), China (89,000), Pakistan (55,000) and Ukraine (35,000). Of these individuals, a total of 39% entered the U.K. for the purpose of pursuing studies, 33% to work, and 9% for humanitarian reasons, according to the ONS. U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office has said that migration was "far too high" and putting "unsustainable pressure on communities and councils", a sentiment echoed by Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer, who said that "shockingly high" inward migration was a sign of the "failure not just of immigration, but also of asylum and of the economy".

What are the proposed new regulations?

The new visa regulations propose to clamp down on the dependents of students arriving in the U.K. as well as other categories of foreign nationals with family ties in the country. Skilled workers seeking visas will be impacted by an increase in the minimum salary requirement. At the moment this salary requirement is the highest, of either £26,200 per year or £10.75 per hour or whatever is defined as the "going rate" for the job in question. From early 2024, this is expected to rise to £38,700 per year. Health and social care workers, who comprise nearly 50% of work visa migrants, will reportedly be exempt from the increase,

suggesting that the maximum impact will be on middle-skilled jobs including those working in the hospitality industry. Families of U.K. citizens too could be impacted — an aspect of the changes that has provoked the sharpest protests. For example, the minimum income necessary for U.K. citizens seeking to bring over a family member who is a foreign citizen will rise from £18,600 to £38,700 a year — and such a move would have impacted approximately 70,000 people who sought such visas during the year ending June 2023. Other changes include a ban on immigrant care workers bringing family members with them, a review of student visas for graduates to prevent "abuse" of the system including a ban on students switching to work visas before completing their studies, and an increase in the immigration health surcharge paid to the NHS by annual fee visa holders, from £624 to £1,035.

What is the broader impact of the proposed changes? Following a sharp backlash from immigration advocacy groups, the U.K. government has already walked back



its proposal to raise minimum salary requirements for U.K. citizens to bring in non-U.K. family members, reducing the threshold amount from £38,700 to £29,000, "with further increases at unspecified dates thereafter." Meanwhile, acting on fears that

the new rules could lead to family separations across the border, advocacy groups such as Reunite Families, are said to be exploring legal avenues to challenge the proposed new immigration rules which amount to being "punished for falling in love".

## NASA flies drones to test autonomous flight capabilities of air taxis

Washington: Researchers at NASA's Langley Research Center in Virginia have successfully flown multiple drones to test autonomous flight capabilities of air taxis. The drones were flown beyond visual line of sight with no visual observer for its air taxi. The drones successfully flew around obstacles and each other during takeoff, along a planned route, and upon landing, all autonomously without a pilot controlling the flight. This test marks an important step towards advancing self-flying capabilities for air taxis.

"Flying the vehicles beyond visual line of sight, where neither the vehicle nor the airspace is monitored using direct human observation, demonstrates years of research into automation and safety systems, and required specific approval from the Federal Aviation Administration and NASA to complete," said Lou Glaab, branch head for the aeronautics systems engineering branch at NASA Langley, in a statement. It is safer and more cost-effective to test self-flying technology meant for larger, passenger-carrying air taxis on smaller drones to observe how they avoid each other and other obstacles. NASA also is testing elements of automation technology using helicopters. These stand-in aircraft help NASA mature the autonomy well before self-flying air taxis are integrated into the skies.

Building upon past tests, the team successfully performed multiple flights us-

ing purchased ALTA 8 Uncrewed Aircraft Systems, also known as drones, with no visual observer and flew the drones beyond visual line of sight, referred to as "NOVO-BVLOS" flights.

The software loaded onto the small drones performed airspace communications, flight path management, avoidance with other vehicles, and more skills needed to operate in a busy airspace. This is imperative for what is envisioned with Advanced Air Mobility (AAM), where drones and air taxis will be operating at the same time on a routine basis. NASA will transfer the new technology created during this project to the public to ensure industry manufacturers can access the software while designing their vehicles. "NASA's ability to transfer these technologies will significantly benefit the industry," said Jake Schaefer, flight operations lead for the project.

"By conducting flight tests within the national airspace, in close proximity to airports and an urban environment, we are able to test technologies and procedures in a controlled but relevant environment for future AAM vehicles," Schaefer said. One of these technologies was ICAROURS,

which stands for NASA's Integrated Configurable Architecture for Reliable Operations of Unmanned Systems. This software provides an autonomous detect-and-avoid function and is part of the overall system to maintain "well clear" from other air traffic. Another technology used was NASA's Safe2Ditch system, which allows the vehicle to observe the ground below and make an autonomous decision on the



safest place to land in the event of an in-flight emergency. NASA's AAM mission has multiple projects contributing to various research areas. This project, called the High Density Vertiplex, was specifically focused on testing and evaluating where these future vehicles will take off and land at high frequency, called vertiports, or vertiplexes, for multiple vertiports near each other, and the technology advancements needed to make this successful.



# Dharavi revamp in turmoil | Explained

The story so far: On December 16, wielding flags and banners bearing slogans like "Remove Adani, Save Dharavi", thousands of protesters led by Opposition parties in Maharashtra marched towards billionaire Gautam Adani's Mumbai office to express their dissent against the ₹23,000 crore Dharavi Redevelopment Project. Dharavi, Asia's largest slum cluster, and the third largest in the world, is home to nearly 58,000 families who migrated to India's financial capital from across the subcontinent over decades. It stands on a 300-hectare slice of prime land in the heart of the city overlooking the Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC), India's premium business district.

What is the Dharavi Redevelopment Project?

For almost two decades, the Maharashtra government has been struggling to find a 'perfect' bidder, who can take up the challenge of rebuilding a 'city within a city' by relocating all the slum-dwellers and their businesses till the redevelopment is finished. In 1999, the BJP-Sena government first proposed to redevelop Dharavi. Later in 2004, the Congress government led by the late Vilasrao Deshmukh formed the Dharavi Redevelopment Authority under the Slum Redevelopment Authority (SRA) intending to make Mumbai, a slum-free city. However, the project never got off the ground due to various reasons. According to SRA, 48.35% of Mumbai's population lives in slums which occupy about 24% of the city's area. Over several years, global tenders were floated in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2016, 2018 and 2022. The number of applicants varied significantly, ranging from 101 in 2007 to none in some instances.

Finally, in November of last year, Adani Properties Private Limited successfully secured the 259-hectare redevelopment project through competitive bidding. The conglomerate quoted ₹5,069 crore for the project, while the DLF Group submitted a bid of 2,025 crore. The redevelopment plan is an integrated development approach of the residential, commercial, and industrial with a floor space index of over 4.

What is the new controversy?

In November 2018, the State government under the leadership of the then Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis approved a new model for redeveloping the slum. Although a Dubai-based consortium - Seclink Technologies Corporation - successfully bid against Adani in January 2019, the tender was not awarded due to the decision to incorporate 47.5 acres of Railway land into the redevelopment project. In October 2020, the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, led by Uddhav Thackeray, annulled the tender, citing plans to issue new tenders soon. The MVA government stated that one reason for cancelling the tender was the delay by the Centre in transferring the critical railway land necessary for the project. After the Eknath Shinde government came to power, Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and Deputy Chief Minister Mr. Fadnavis, on October 18 last, signed a 'definitive agreement' for handing over Railway land in Dadar for the project. The Seclink Technologies Corporation launched a legal battle alleging the State government im-

properly cancelled an original 2018 tender for the slum redevelopment and favoured Adani Group in giving the new contract. Even Mr. Thackeray and several Opposition leaders accused the government of giving undue favours to Adani Group in allotting and executing the slum overhaul contract. In November, the Congress alleged that the BJP government is "benefitting" Adani Group by relaxing norms for the Dharavi redevelopment project with the party's general secretary (communication) Jairam Ramesh alleging that the Maharashtra Urban Development Department, which had originally expressed its reservations about relaxing the rules, "has been compelled to issue a notification that removes the provision of indexation in Dharavi's real estate Transferable Development Rights (TDR), and made it mandatory for all Mumbai builders to buy the first 40% of their TDRs from Adani".

What happened on December 16?

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Mr. Thackeray led a march with thousands of demonstrators from the slum to Mr. Adani's office alleging that the government is favouring the conglomerate and cited suspicious decisions, including TDR sale clause benefitting Adani Group significantly. The decision to lead a march was announced on December 5. Expressing concern over the future of the residents, the former Chief Minister said: "Enough information is available about the Dharavi redevelopment project which raises suspicion about whether the government is trying to benefit Adani at the cost of Dharavi residents." Mr. Thackeray said that he is not against development and advocated his stance that he is not 'pro-builder', the reason for the downfall of his government in June last year. "Now one can understand who financed the toppling of my government. With the Shiv Sena around, the BJP could not help its friends; so my party was broken and its symbol was stolen," he said while addressing the protesters. He alleged that the redevelopment project involves TDR irregularities worth over ₹100 crore. He said that there is a need for fair treatment during redevelopment and the government should give 500 sq.ft houses for Dharavi residents, including police personnel, conservancy workers, and mill workers, and also a financial centre in the area. He also suggested that the redevelopment should be carried out by the government.

The government aimed to offer 300 sq.ft houses for free to residents with evidence of their slum structure's existence before January 1, 2000. For those who established residency in Dharavi between 2000 and 2011, the houses were made available at a designated price. The Dharavi assembly constituency is represented by Mumbai Congress President Varsha Gaikwad.

What is BJP and Adani Group's stance?

Mumbai BJP president Ashish Shelar said the tender as well as TDR details of the project were finalised by the Thackeray government, which was in power between November 2019 and June 2022. "The conditions of the tender for the development of Dharavi and the tender itself were both prepared when Mr. Thackeray was the Chief



The Dharavi Redevelopment Project, an initiative to rebuild Asia's largest slum, has sparked heated controversies and political clashes, primarily due to allegations of favouritism towards the Adani Group, the winning bidder for the project; Opposition parties cited irregularities in tender processes, raising concerns about transparency

Minister," he said. The official spokesperson of the project from Adani Group, too, claimed that the tender conditions were finalised during the tenure of the MVA government. "Conditions, including the obligations and incentives, which were known to all the bidders, have not been changed for the awardee post the tendering process. Hence, it is wrong to claim that any special benefits have been given to the awardee," they said in a statement. "It is unfortunate that a concerted effort is being made to disseminate misinformation about certain aspects of the project. It is reiterated that all eligible tenement holders will be provided with a key-to-key solution, which means they will move into their new homes in Dharavi itself," the statement said. As per the tender conditions, even ineligible tenement holders will be provided accommodation under the Rental Housing Policy. The tender provisions also ensure that eligible residential tenements will receive 17% more area than other SRA projects in Mumbai. Further, the generation and usage of TDR are as per the tender conditions and fully compliant with the relevant laws. "Moreover, the resettlement of Dharavikars is not affected by TDR," it said. Also, the TDR from the project will be managed and monitored transparently through a specially created portal by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) and the Maharashtra government. "The State government has entered into a 99-year lease agreement with the Indian Railways, and then it will be subleased on 30 years + 30 years basis like any other government land in Mumbai to the housing societies. There is no change in this policy for the Dharavi Redevelopment Project," it further said. The spokesperson

said that the project assumes added significance because many earlier attempts have failed to deliver. "It is against this backdrop that the Adani Group has taken up the challenge and the responsibility of transforming Dharavi with all the above facilities."

What is the current status of the project?

In September, the DRP and Adani Properties formed a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) called the Dharavi Redevelopment Project Pvt Ltd (DRPPL). The developer holds 80% equity in SPV and the State government will hold the remaining 20%. The chairman/chairperson of the SPV will be appointed by the government, and the managing director will be appointed by the Adani Group. Both positions are still vacant. Upon assuming responsibility, the team's initial objective will be to formulate the master plan for the redevelopment and conduct a survey. The deadline for submitting the master plan is set at 150 days. This plan will provide comprehensive information about the designated areas for rehabilitation buildings and free sale buildings, along with the positioning of public amenities such as schools, hospitals, gardens, and playgrounds. The masterplan and survey reports will be submitted to the government which will take a final call.

When will the project be finished? The Maharashtra government is highly optimistic about completing the entire process of rehabilitation and redevelopment in seven years starting next year. However, the developer stated that the period is 'insufficient' and sought at least 10-12 years for the entire process to be completed, a source said.