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Bhavtegh, Ganemat fire their way to skeet gold

The former handles the poor visibility better than the other shooters and beats qualification topper Fatehbir in the final; the latter betters Chhina by four birds on her way to the title

SHOOTING

Kamesh Srinivasan
NEW DELHI

World University Championship gold medallist Bhavtegh Singh Gill established himself yet again as the shooter to beat in skeet, as he won the gold medal by beating Air India international pilot Fatehbir Singh Shergill 54-51 in the final on a cold and gloomy morning at the Dr. Karni Singh Range, Tughlakabad, on Tuesday.

Bhavtegh handled the poor visibility better than everyone else, and thus was able to beat the qualification topper Fatehbir (123).

Commendable

It was a commendable progress from a score of 112, his previous best in the nationals for Fatehbir who had trained for the last six months to shoot his best.

"It was hard to sight the flash birds in my first final. I was so happy to shoot a perfect 50 in the last two rounds yesterday.

"Today was hard, but am happy to fight well and get the silver with such little experience in such a strong field," said Fatehbir, who will command his next flight to Toronto after Christmas.

Olympian Mairaj Ahmad Khan beat another Olympian Angad Vir Singh Bajwa to the bronze medal, while joint qualification topper Munek Battula finished sixth.

Top three: Fatehbir, champion Bhavtegh and Mairaj, the men's skeet medallists. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

On top: Ganemat, who won the women's skeet gold. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

In women's skeet, Ganemat Sekhon beat Asees Chhina by four birds to take the gold.

"Every competition is important, and am happy with the effort," said a beaming Ganemat.

Olympian and qualification topper Raiza Dhillon (122) settled for the bronze, ahead of Vanshika Tiwari, Shivani Raikwar and Yashasvi Rathore.

Good recovery

Raiza recovered well to shoot the junior gold with a six-point margin over Vanshika Tiwari, while Yashasvi Rathore won the bronze, ahead of Shivani Raikwar, Agrima Kanwar and Risham Guron.

There was a bit of an anti-climax for Bhavtegh in the afternoon, as he was beaten 6-5 in the shoot-off after being tied on 52 for the gold against Ishaan Singh Libra in the junior men's final.

Munek Battula did justice to his efforts by clinching the bronze, ahead of Zorawar Singh Bedi, Atul Singh Rajawat and Harmehar Singh Lally.

The results: Skeet: Men: 1. Bhavtegh Singh Gill 54 (122); 2. Fatehbir Singh Shergill 51 (123); 3. Mairaj Ahmad Khan 43 (121)

Junior men: 1. Ishaan Singh Libra 52(6) 118; 2. Bhavtegh Singh Gill 52(5) 122; 3. Munek Battula 41 (123).

Women: 1. Ganemat Sekhon 50 (118); 2. Asees Chhina 46 (112); 3. Raiza Dhillon 37 (122).

Junior women: 1. Raiza Dhillon 53 (122); 2. Vanshika Tiwari 47 (114); 3. Yashsvi Rahtore 37 (114).

Rooppur nuclear project is for well-being of people of Bangladesh: Russia's Rosatom

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

Russian nuclear major Rosatom on Tuesday said the Bangladesh anti-graft commission's remarks are "an attempt to discredit" the Rooppur nuclear power project. The project also led to a tripartite agreement among Bangladesh, Russia and India which was signed in March 2018.

In a statement issued to the media, Rosatom reiterated that the $12.65 billion Rooppur project is transparent and that it is ready to defend the case in a court of law. The unusual disturbance in Dhaka-Moscow relations coincided with deepening engagement between Bangladesh and the U.S. On Tuesday, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan spoke with Bangladesh Chief Adviser Prof. Mohammad Yunus and "reiterated the United States' support" for the "challenges" facing Bangladesh.

U.S. NSA Sullivan assures Yunus of support to deal with 'challenges' facing Bangladesh

The statement from Rosatom came a day after the Anti-Corruption Commission of Bangladesh came out with a statement alleging that deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her family members including her niece Tulip Siddiq, an MP in the U.K,, laundered around $900 million to offshore outfits in Malaysia. The commission stated that it has discovered around $5 billion "irregularities" in the Rooppur nuclear power project that has been in the works since 2011.

Rosatom described the anti-corruption outfit of Bangladesh as "provocative" and said, "We consider false statements in the media as an attempt to discredit the Rooppur NPP project, which is being implemented to solve the country's energy supply problems."

Now is the time to excoriate inflation: RBI Bulletin article

Senior central bank officials expect growth to rebound in second half of 2024-25, link demand dip to slower corporate wage rise and flags dipping nominal GDP as 'emerging headwind'

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

Weighing in on India's slowing growth and high inflation conundrum, senior Reserve Bank of India (RBI) officials asserted in an article on Tuesday that the "time to act is now to excoriate inflation and revive investment strongly", even as they believed the growth trajectory is poised to lift in the second half of the year.

Attributing the July-September quarter 5.4% GDP growth blip to domestic drivers of private consumption and fixed investment, the central bank's officials led by Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra, said high frequency indicators (HFIs) for the current third quarter (Q3) of 2024-25 signal the economy is recovering from the slowdown in momentum thanks to strong festival activity and a sustained upswing in rural demand.

In an article on the State of the Economy published in the December edition of the RBI Bulletin, the officials said that GDP growth is likely to recover to 6.8% and 6.5% in Q3 and Q4, respectively, and noted that growth will improve to 6.7% in 2025-26, with the headline inflation expected to average 3.8% next financial year. The recovery they expect in coming months would be driven 'mainly by resilient domestic private consumption demand', the article said.

Positive vibes: GDP growth is likely to recover to 6.8% and 6.5% in Q3 and Q4, respectively, RBI officials indicated on Tuesday. REUTERS

On the inflation front, the RBI officials said that the decline in retail inflation to 5.5% in November from 6.2% in October was linked to easing food prices, "high frequency food price data for December so far (up to 19th) showed a fall in rice prices, while wheat and atta prices continued to firm up". Edible oil prices also continued exhibiting upside pressures, onion and tomato prices fell, while potato prices remained range bound, the officials mentioned.

'Inflation shocks'

Moreover, input costs across the manufacturing and services sectors hardened in November, compelling producers to raise prices at the fastest pace in 11 and 12 years, respectively, they noted.

"The erosion of purchasing power due to repeated inflation shocks and persisting price pressures is starkly reflected in weakening sales growth of listed non-financial non-government corporations. Their outlook on demand conditions also remains subdued as no let-up in the incidence of price shocks seems to be in sight; they will increasingly be inclined to pass on input costs to selling prices. Consequently, there is no robust capacity creation by investing in fixed assets," the article said, arguing that firms are churning existing capacity to meet the 'inflation-dented consumer demand', resulting in lacklustre private investment.

Arguing that the slowdown in consumer demand seems to be associated with slower corporate wage growth, they said that the slowing rate of nominal GDP is also emerging as a headwind that could hinder fiscal spending, including on capex, to achieve budgetary deficit and debt targets.

"If inflation is allowed to run unchecked, it can undermine the prospects of the real economy, especially industry and exports. The time to act is now to excoriate inflation and revive investment strongly, especially as the usual winter easing of food price is setting in and the prospects of private consumption and exports accelerating are getting brighter," they underlined.

While the global economy would enter 2025 with resilience as disinflation and monetary policy pivots gain traction, supported by recovering real incomes, steady labour markets, and a gradual revival in global trade, the article warned that ongoing geopolitical tensions, concerns over growing protectionism and a large public debt overhang would have adverse implications for emerging market economies (EMEs).

The currencies and equities of EMEs would remain vulnerable to the sharp bouts of declines seen in 2024 in a highly uncertain environment for trade and capital flows, they concluded.

Why are activists opposing EC's election rule amendment?

How has the Election Commission defended its decision to limit access to election documents?

Sreeparna Chakrabarty

The story so far:

The Centre on December 20 amended the Conduct of Election Rules to restrict access for the public to a section of poll documents. This was done by the Union Law Ministry following a recommendation from the Election Commission (EC). While the EC said the amendment aims to restrict access to electronic data, the Opposition and transparency activists have been up in arms, branding it as an attack on the right to information and electoral freedom.

What is the Conduct of Election Rules?

The Conduct of Election Rules,1961, is a set of rules which provide for provisions on how to conduct the elections as per the Representation of People Act.

What is the amendment?

This amendment was brought into effect through a notification issued by the Ministry of Law and Justice on December 20. Rule 93(2)(a) of the 1961 Conduct of Election Rules had earlier stated that "all other papers relating to the election shall be open to public inspection" but after the amendment, it reads, "all other papers as specified in these rules relating to the election shall be open to public inspection."

Why has the amendment been brought in now?

The move comes after a recent direction to the EC by the Punjab and Haryana High Court to share all documents related to the Haryana Assembly election, including treating CCTV footage also as permissible under Rule 93(2) of the Conduct of Election Rules, to petitioner Mahmoud Pracha.

According to a senior official of the EC, "The rule mentioned election papers. The election papers and documents does not specifically refer to electronic records. In order to remove this ambiguity and considering the serious issue of violation of secrecy of vote and potential misuse of CCTV footage of inside the polling station using artificial intelligence by a single person, the rule has been amended. The EC argues that sharing of CCTV footage may have serious repercussions, especially in sensitive areas where secrecy is important. All election papers and documents are otherwise available for public inspection."

Why are the transparency activists protesting?

According to transparency activist Anjali Bharadwaj, Rule 93 is akin to the Right to Information Act as far as elections are concerned and, any change hurts the citizen's right to know about the process.

Venkatesh Nayak, Director Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative explained further that "upon initial examination, the amendment appears to be aimed at restricting citizen-voters' right to access a large number of documents created during Parliamentary and State Assembly elections many of which are not specifically mentioned in the Conduct of Election Rules, instead, they are mentioned in the handbooks and manuals published by the Election Commission from time to time".

He said that given the controversy about voter turnout in recent Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, access to the Presiding Officers' diaries which contain detailed data about voter turnout and the number of tokens they distribute to voters who are in the queue at the hour scheduled for closing of polling are not mentioned specifically in the Conduct of Election Rules. "The amendment seeks to prevent access to such documents and many other reports and returns that are filed by various election officials".

What does the Opposition say?

The Congress claimed that a change in rules regarding the conduct of elections vindicated their assertions regarding the rapidly eroding integrity of the electoral process managed by the EC.

The Congress moved the Supreme Court against the amendments on Tuesday.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has said it was part of a "systematic conspiracy to destroy the institutional integrity of the EC", while the Samajwadi Party and the Left parties accused the EC of "undermining multi-party democracy" by taking "unilateral" decisions without consulting all political parties.

THE GIST

- The Centre amended the Conduct of Election Rules on December 20 to restrict public access to certain election-related documents, following a recommendation from the Election Commission.
- The amendment has sparked controversy, with the Opposition and transparency activists accusing the EC of undermining transparency, the right to information, and electoral freedom.

What is quantum computing?

What are qubits and how do they work in quantum computing? How does a quantum computer solve problems faster than classical computers in specific tasks? Which challenges remain in building practical and scalable quantum computers?

EXPLAINER

Tejasri Gururaj

The story so far:

Quantum computers are the talk of computer town. Their potential to solve complex problems much faster than classical computers is an intriguing proposition that stands to transform several industries. A quantum computer is based on the principles of quantum mechanics, an area of physics that deals with the smallest particles in the universe. In 1982, Richard Feynman proposed the idea of developing a computer that could simulate both quantum and classical physics but researchers realised classical computers, the computers of today, would struggle with the complexity of quantum systems. Thus the idea of a quantum computer was born.

What are the basics of quantum computing?

Classical computers work on the principles of classical physics. Their fundamental computing unit is the bit. Each bit represents one piece of information with two possible values, 0 or 1. It's possible to represent all types of information as a combination of 0s and 1s using the binary system.

Quantum computers rely on quantum bits, or qubits, to perform computations. Unlike classical bits, qubits can exist in the states 0, 1 or in a state that's partly 0 and partly 1. 'State' refers to all the possible values the qubit can have.

The ability of qubits to be in two states is known as superposition. It's one of two fundamental principles that animate quantum computers. Imagine a spinning coin: while it's spinning, it can be both heads or tails, and it isn't until the coin collapses that you can see which it is. A qubit is like a spinning coin that holds both values simultaneously.

When a qubit is measured, it collapses to one of the values, 0 or 1. This means

Breaking boundaries: In 2019, IBM unveiled the world's first circuit-based commercial quantum computer, Q System One. IBM RESEARCH

information, a qubit can hold two. Because of this, quantum computers can perform multiple computations simultaneously, with the measurement revealing one of the possible outcomes of the computations.

The second fundamental principle upon which quantum computers are based is called entanglement. This phenomenon allows qubits to be intrinsically linked no matter how far apart they physically are. Measuring the state of one of the qubits will immediately yield information about the state of the other. Say you have a pair of gloves. Each glove is put in a separate box and sent to different locations, and you don't know which box has which. But once a box is opened to reveal the left glove, you instantly know the other box has the right glove.

The instantaneous correlation between qubits speeds up computations that would take far longer with classical computers.

Superposition and entanglement are exclusive to quantum mechanics and central to the potential that quantum computers have to offer.

How far have quantum computers

Quantum computers are technologically superior but this doesn't automatically mean they will be better than classical computers at all tasks. Over the years, experts have developed specific tasks that prove quantum computers are capable of greater feats.

In 1994, Bell Labs computer scientist Peter Shor created the Shor's algorithm. It could find the factors of large numbers in moments rather than the millions of years required by classical computers. This has major implications for data security. Current methods to secure data involve locking the data and hiding the key in the solution of a difficult mathematical problem.

Large-number factorisation is one such problem and classical computers require enormous amounts of resources to solve it. But using Shor's algorithm, a quantum computer could quickly get the key and open the locks.

The state of quantum computing has come a long way since. In 2019, for example, IBM unveiled the world's first circuit-based commercial quantum computer, Q System One. Circuit-based designs are believed to be the most versatile for general quantum-computing applications. Q System One uses circuits manipulate qubits, analogous to how classical computers use logic gates.

In the same year, researchers at Google reported in a paper in *Nature* that their 53-qubit 'Sycamore' processor had achieved quantum supremacy: when it can solve a problem that would take classical computers an unreasonable amount of time. The paper claimed Sycamore completed a task in 200 seconds that would have taken a supercomputer 10,000 years.

Earlier this month, Google unveiled a quantum chip called Willow, purportedly the world's first quantum processor in which error-corrected qubits improve as they scale. Quantum states are easily prone to errors due to interactions with the environment, so quantum computers need error correction to hold information long enough to perform useful calculations with them.

Willow, Google has said, can finish a standard test in five minutes whereas the same calculation could take today's best supercomputers 10 trillion trillion years.

What are the present limitations?

The advancements are flying thick and fast but there are still many significant challenges to overcome before quantum computers can become commonplace.

The chief concern is that building quantum computers remains expensive and complex. Keeping many qubits stable is also difficult because of error rates and decoherence (when a qubit loses superposition because of noise from its surroundings). The problems for which we really need quantum computers – like discovering new drugs or cracking mysteries in astronomy – also require millions of qubits.

All said, their potential to be useful is clear. This is why India launched the National Quantum Mission in 2023. The government has set aside ₹6,000 crore for the mission to be spent over eight years, among other things to develop quantum computers.

Tejasri Gururaj is a freelance science writer and journalist with a master's degree in

THE GIST

- Quantum computers rely on two key principles of quantum mechanics: superposition, where qubits can exist in multiple states, and entanglement, where qubits are linked, allowing them to share information instantly.
- Key milestones include Shor's algorithm, Google's Sycamore achieving quantum supremacy, and recent advancements such as the quantum chip Willow improving error correction.
- High costs, keeping qubits stable, and the need for large-scale qubits remain significant challenges, but initiatives like India's National Quantum Mission signal strong efforts to unlock their potential.

India got 14.3% of global remittances in 2024, its highest ever

China secured only 5.3% of global remittances in 2024, its lowest share in at least two decades

DATA POINT

Vignesh Radhakrishnan

In 2024, India received an estimated $129.1 billion worth of remittances, the highest ever for a country in any year. Moreover, India's share in global remittances was 14.3% this year, the highest such share since the turn of the millennium for any country. The conclusions are based on a blog article published last week by the World Bank.

Remittances refer to the money that individuals working abroad send back to support their families in their home country. They are often a crucial source of income for households in developing countries and can contribute significantly to the economy of the recipient country.

Following India, Mexico and China received the largest remittances in 2024. **Chart 1** shows the top 10 receivers of remittances in $ million in 2024. The Philippines, France, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Guatemala, and Germany are the other countries on the list.

While China was third on the list, past years' numbers provide interesting insights. **Chart 2** shows the share of global remittances for the top 10 countries mentioned in Chart 1 in the 2000-2024 period. China's share of remittances grew from less than 1% in the early 2000s to over 10% by the late 2000s and early 2010s, matching India's numbers, before gradually declining to below 10% in the late 2010s. From 2020, the share declined rapidly reaching a two-decade low of 5.3% in 2024. According to the World Bank, China's rising economic prosperity and an ageing population slowed the pace of emigration of less-skilled people, which contributed to this decline.

India's share has remained above the 10% mark for most of the years since 2000, with few exceptions. In fact, in the post-pandemic years, there has been a rapid increase in its share. India's share in global remittances was twice the share of Mexico's in 2024 (7.5%); Mexico was a distant second.

Though India leads in absolute remittance inflows, in some economies, remittances play a more critical role in funding current account deficits and fiscal shortfalls. To better understand this, **Chart 3** depicts estimated remittances in 2024 as a share of a country's GDP. Each circle is a country. The farther the circle is to the right, the higher the remittance in 2024 as a share of GDP. The bigger the circle, the higher the remittance in 2024 in absolute figures.

In Nepal, remittances formed over 25% of the GDP in 2024. In Tajikistan, Nicaragua, Lebanon, Samoa, Honduras, and Tonga, the share of remittances in 2024 formed over 25% of their respectives GDPs. In India, remittances formed 3.3% of the GDP this year.

For many low-and middle-income countries, remittances act as a major source of income. In 2024, these countries received $685 billion as remittances, the highest ever in a year. According to the blog, remittances to these countries have consistently outpaced other types of external financial flows.

In recent years, remittances have even surpassed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in low-and middle-income countries put together. FDIs are investments by a foreign country to control or run a business in another country. Remittances are also much higher than the official development assistance (ODA) received by these countries. ODA is the aid from rich countries to help poorer ones develop, often through grants or cheap loans. **Chart 4** compares remittances, FDI, and ODA received by low-and middle-income countries between 2000 and 2024. Over the past decade, remittances increased by 57% while FDI declined by 41% in low-and middle-income nations, the blog notes.

India and China's diverging paths

The data for the charts were sourced from a blog article published by the World Bank on December 18 and authored by Dilip Ratha, Sonia Plaza and Eung Ju Kim

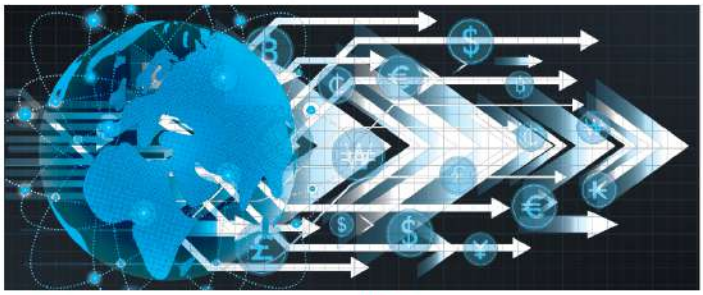


Chart 1: The chart shows the top 10 receivers of remittances in $ million in 2024 (estimated)

Remittances refer to the money that individuals working abroad send back to support their families in their home country

Chart 2: The share of global remittances for the top 10 countries mentioned in Chart 1 in the 2000-2024 period

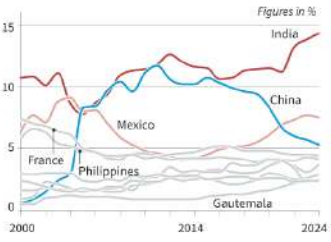


Chart 3: The chart depicts estimated remittances in 2024 as a share of a country's GDP

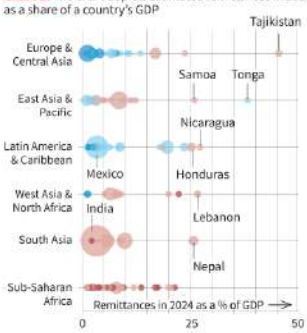
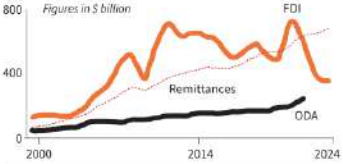


Chart 4: Chart compares remittances, FDI, and ODA received by low-and middle-income countries



FDIs are investments by a foreign country to control or run a business in another country.
ODA is the aid from rich countries to help poorer ones develop, often through grants or cheap loans

Vocal on growth, silent on inflation

In November, a Cabinet Minister reportedly stated at a press conference that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) should focus on growth and not be concerned with food price inflation. Though the Minister clarified that he was speaking in his personal capacity, it is not in the spirit of things that once the central bank has been given a mandate to target an inflation index that includes the price of food, a member of the executive advises it in any way, leave alone exhorts it to target something else. The comment perhaps reflects some nervousness, on behalf of the government, about the performance of the economy. This would not be unfounded. The media has made references to declining consumption expenditure in the economy, though it is not evident in the national income statistics, available up to 2022-23. But there have been reports of the slow growth of sales of companies in the fast-moving-consumer-goods (FMCG) segment during the current financial year. This is a fairly reliable source of information on consumption growth. There is, however, a more overarching reason why the government would be concerned about growth in the economy, which is based on a longer view.

Pulapre Balakrishnan

Honorary Visiting Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram

Not a comforting story

We now have national income data for a decade since 2014, enabling a broad evaluation of economic performance during the tenure of the Modi government. First, at the aggregate level, the average annual growth of the economy is lower since 2016-17. The decline is substantial too. At 7.1% for the period 2004-05 to 2015-16 and 5.2% for the period 2016-17 to 2023-24, it amounts to 27%. National income data for the sectors is less up to date but extends enough to make a confident assessment, and it would be as follows. Of the 11 sectors at the initial level of disaggregation, only one, namely 'Real Estate', shows a higher growth rate since 2014. Interestingly, for all of the policy focus on manufacturing, this sector actually slowed after 2014. Having grown at well over 7% per annum from 2006-07 to 2014-15, its growth slowed to just over 5% afterwards. This extent of decline in the rate of growth of manufacturing across successive growth phases is by far the highest since Independence while the percentage increase in the rate of growth of the real estate sector since 2014 is not the highest, having been exceeded in the 1980s. This would not be a comforting story for any government that takes pride in its growth performance.

While the government is vocal on growth, it remains silent on inflation. This is telling, as the October print for inflation shows that it breached the 6% mark, the upper tolerance level granted to the RBI, while food-price inflation breached the 10% mark. There is an assumption, commonly held by a section of the economics profession that was voiced by the Minister when he encouraged the RBI to ignore food price inflation. It is that the price of food is volatile, and its fluctuations cancel themselves out over time.

The problem facing India's economy is not the lack of growth; the problem lies in its inequitable distribution across the population, partly induced by food price inflation

A structural problem

This, however, has been proven to be wrong, at least in India. Food inflation rose in 2019-20 and has remained elevated since. That it rose before the COVID-19 pandemic and has persisted even as growth has recovered gives us an idea of why the assumption is wrong. Recent inflation in India is not related to some temporary supply-chain disruptions, as, for instance, in the United States, where it has declined considerably post pandemic even as growth has recovered. Inflation in India is a structural problem reflecting the type of growth it is experiencing, one in which agricultural production is not expanding at the rate at which the demand for its products is rising. Further, and relevant in the context, food price inflation triggers a wage price spiral in the rest of the economy, which can continue for a while even if food prices decline.

The implication for welfare of the inflation we are currently experiencing is obvious. High inflation, especially of food products, adversely affects the well-being of those whose income does not keep pace with the inflation. The growth impact is less obvious, but surely is there. As household budgets are stretched to accommodate the higher cost of food, the demand for other goods and services must grow less fast. Non-agricultural output and employment growth now slows down. A mechanism of this kind is likely to have played a role in lowering the rate of growth of manufacturing production in recent years. From the data in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's 'National Accounts Statistics 2024', we can see a correlation between the rise in food price inflation from 2019-20 onwards and manufacturing growth since, with the annual rate of change of the latter actually negative in two out of the five years since. So, while the Minister is right to suggest that the RBI's capacity to rein in food inflation is weak, he is wrong to suggest that food price inflation need not be controlled. If food price inflation were to be taken out of the RBI's brief without an alternative proposal for its control, India would be left bereft of an anti-inflation policy. Uncontrolled inflation can throw sand in the wheels of growth itself.

Presently, the problem facing India's economy is not the lack of growth. The provisional estimate for GDP growth in 2023-24 (over 8%) is quite high by historical standards. The problem lies in its inequitable distribution across the population, partly induced by food price inflation. The Minister's observation should induce the government to re-focus current economic policy from growth to inflation.

Damning silence

U.S. court ruling gives fresh cause to reopen India's stalled Pegasus probe

A U.S. court's decision holding an Israeli company liable for surreptitiously installing Pegasus, a spyware suite, on the phones of targeted individuals through WhatsApp, has brought the focus back on the Centre's questionable inaction when such surveillance allegations surfaced in India in 2021. The U.S. District Court for Northern District of California ruled that NSO Group Technologies violated both federal and State laws against computer fraud and abuse. WhatsApp sued the NSO Group in October 2019, alleging that its system was used by the Israeli company to plant malware on approximately 1,400 mobile phones and devices for surveilling their users. In a summary judgment, the court agreed with WhatsApp that its application had been reverse-engineered or 'decompiled' to create a modified version called 'WhatsApp Installation Server' or WIS. In the backdrop of this ruling, the question that arises in India is about the fate of reports submitted by a court-appointed expert committee in 2022 to the Supreme Court of India. The then Chief Justice of India (CJI), N.V. Ramana, had read out a few paragraphs from the report of the panel's overseeing judge, Justice (retired) R.V. Raveendran. The report said the Technical Committee found no conclusive evidence on the presence of Pegasus, but there was some kind of malware in five out of the 29 phones examined. The reports are yet to be made public.

Even if there was no effective hearing or follow-up action, what cannot be forgotten is that CJI Ramana had observed in open court that the government did not cooperate with the committee's investigation. It was conduct typical of the Modi regime, which has repeatedly demonstrated that silence, denial and obfuscation form its stock responses whenever allegations emerge. It showed no interest in probing disclosures that the phones of journalists, activists, doctors and court staff were targets of spyware. It made a strange claim that the country had such ironclad laws that illegal surveillance was not possible. It adopted the untenable position that acknowledging that its agencies possessed any particular software would jeopardise national security. All this, despite admitting in Parliament that it was aware of some users being targeted by Pegasus through WhatsApp. It did not respond to credible reports that Pegasus may have been used to plant evidence on computers to frame dissidents. In the light of a judicial decision, albeit an overseas one, that the NSO Group is liable for the use of its spyware by its clients, solely government entities, the time has come for sealed reports to be opened and deeper probes begun. The government should come clean on whether it possesses surveillance software. Otherwise, citizens will be rendered even more vulnerable to illegal surveillance.

Hide and seek

Transparency is key in maintaining the credibility of the election process

The Election Commission of India (ECI)'s explanation on December 24 in response to the Congress party's charges regarding voter turnout data in the recent Assembly elections is unlikely to allay growing concerns regarding the integrity of the election process. It was on December 20, on the recommendations of the ECI, that the Centre had amended the Conduct of Election Rules to restrict public access to poll documents except for those that are specifically mentioned in them. The ECI has also said it does not want to share CCTV footage of the booth, citing privacy and security reasons. This change in the rules happened after the Punjab and Haryana High Court directed the ECI to share all documents related to the Haryana Assembly elections, including CCTV footage, to a private citizen. The court ruled that this was permissible under 93(2) of the Rules which allowed public access to all "papers" which were not specifically barred. The amended rule now says that only those "papers" that are specified in it are open to public inspection. For an institution that is so central to the functioning of democracy, and yet facing an unprecedented challenge to its credibility, less secrecy and more transparency must be the way forward. Sadly, the ECI is falling short on this count, and damaging its own credibility.

Allegations of electronic tampering of voting machines are misplaced and misguided but concerns regarding the conduct of elections – police high-handedness, partisanship of local administration, and voter suppression through various means – are valid. They require a thorough and impartial investigation. Of particular concern is the dramatic rise in voter turnout in the final figures, compared to what was announced at the end of polling time, noticed in recent elections. The ECI may well be right in saying that voters who are in queue at the closing hour get recorded only in the final figures. But the easiest and perhaps the most credible way to establish this claim is to allow wide inspection of the relevant video footage. The ECI has explained that the candidates have access to all documents, papers and records and nothing has been amended in the rules in this regard. It remains unclear how its officials will deal with requests from candidates for records including video footage while the public will face a default denial in most cases. The privacy and security arguments are weak if candidates can access records anyway. In effect, the change in rules does not solve any problem that the ECI says it does, other than time and effort. And it has raised more questions about the ECI's intentions.

An India-China reset needs bold and new thinking

Sudheendra Kulkarni

served as a close aide to the late Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in the Prime Minister's Office

The hallmark of mature leaders is to resolve disputes peacefully and not let them escalate into conflicts. Even when a historically inherited dispute triggers a conflict, they make every effort to ensure that it is diffused through dialogue and does not balloon into a bigger conflict. On this test of maturity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and China's President Xi Jinping have fared admirably. The military standoff between the two countries, triggered by the violent confrontation in the Galwan Valley in June 2020, has ended because of the political authority they lent to a disengagement agreement that was reached after a series of patient talks between the military and diplomatic teams of the two countries.

Shun hostility, pursue cooperation

Now, the two leaders are called upon to show the same wisdom and responsibility to address a bigger challenge. Will they make a strategic determination to move India-China relations uninterruptedly in the direction of comprehensive and mutually beneficial cooperation? Or will they allow the accumulated deposit of mutual distrust to drag the ties in the opposite direction of minimal cooperation and increased rivalry? Pursuit of the second option surely has the danger of sparking future military clashes, especially since the inherited boundary dispute is still not settled. Any new clash, small or big, will wreck peace and tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control, which is a precondition for bilateral cooperation to flourish. At a time when the world has entered an era of growing geopolitical turbulence and uncertainty, India-China hostility will add to the load of global woes. On the other hand, cooperation will not only bring immense mutual gains but also make the world a better and safer place. This is the strategic choice Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi will have to make.

Making the right choice requires bold new thinking in New Delhi and Beijing. But this is not possible unless both make an honest effort to remove mutual apprehension that one is acting against the other's core interests. Specifically, China must do three things. One, it must demonstrably convince India that it poses no threat to its national security, now or in the future – on its own or in alliance with its "all-weather friend" Pakistan. Beijing's equivocation to condemn Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in Kashmir and elsewhere in India has made common Indians view China as an unfriendly nation. Second, China must not act in a manner that makes India suspect that it seeks to contain India's rise in Asia and on the global scene. As evidence, it should forcefully advocate the inclusion of India, now the world's most populous nation, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. Third, Beijing must respect India as an equal pole in a multipolar Asia and a multipolar world, knowing that India will never accept a subordinate position *vis-à-vis* any country in the world, including China.

Cynical practitioners of 'realpolitik' who argue that idealism has no place in diplomacy, should not be allowed to hijack the India-China discourse

On its part, India too must do three things. First, India must not be guided by the misleading notion of "power asymmetry" between the two countries, and, hence, join hands with the United States to augment its own strength (through confrontational initiatives such as the Quad) in dealing with the "China threat". The Quad (India, Japan, Australia and the U.S.) has made China think that New Delhi has joined Washington's "Contain China" strategy. Second, India must not deviate from its "One China" policy by appearing to support Taiwan's independence or to play the "Tibet" card. Third, it does not behove a great and independent nation such as India to allow the West's anti-China narratives to shape the Indian media's and academia's – hence our people's – thinking about its neighbour. In this writer's frequent visits to China, he has seen far less anti-India feelings among Chinese people than is the case vice versa. This is because Indian TV channels and newspapers (with some exceptions) indulge in constant anti-China propaganda. India's ruling party and the government do nothing to stop this. The Chinese media, even though it is controlled by the communist party, rarely does so.

There is nothing in the millennia-old history of the two civilisations that predestines India and China to become adversaries and rivals, much less enemies. Rather, the profound wisdom of their civilisations requires the world's two most populous nations in the world to serve certain higher ideals of humanity – peace, inclusive global development that prioritises eradication of poverty everywhere, democratic global governance, saving the planet from the climate crisis, and cultural-spiritual rejuvenation of the entire human race. We should not allow cynical practitioners of "realpolitik" on both sides, who argue that idealism has no place in the conduct of diplomacy, to hijack the India-China discourse.

Trust-building ideas

Now is the time for the world's second largest and soon-to-be third largest economies to become partners in domestic development. With the U.S. under Trump 2.0 threatening to hike tariffs on Chinese imports, India's large and fast-expanding market offers a growth opportunity to China's slowing economy. Similarly, China with its formidable strengths in infrastructure modernisation, green energy, electric vehicles and several other breakthrough technologies provides greater opportunities than any other country for the realisation of India's aspiration to become a 'Viksit Bharat' (developed nation).

India and China are Global South countries. As such, their cooperation can greatly help other developing countries and, especially, underdeveloped countries, in Asia, Africa and Latin America. If India and China enhance convergence in their foreign policies, they can bring greater stability, predictability and fairness to global governance, which is now becoming increasingly ineffectual. For example, should not the two countries work together to end the Russia-Ukraine war and for peace in West Asia? And why not, closer home, in strife-torn areas of Myanmar? Be it Myanmar or India's own disturbed State of Manipur, a common problem is the lack of opportunities for employment and upward mobility for the youth. Hence, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor, languishing on paper for nearly two decades, can bring prosperity to India's north-eastern States, besides adding strength to India's Act East policy.

The more immediate problems

All these trust-building ideas are what can be called high-hanging fruits. A lot of time, hard work and careful nurturing is needed before they can be harvested. There are, however, five low-hanging fruits ready for picking. First, direct flights, suspended after the outbreak of COVID-19, must be restarted. Second, the Indian government should begin issuing visas to Chinese businesspeople, engineers, technicians, and also to scholars and tourists eager to visit India. Last year, China issued visas to over 2,00,000 Indians; in contrast, India issued less than 10,000 visas to Chinese nationals. Three, New Delhi and Beijing should reverse their decisions that led to the exit of Chinese journalists from India and Indian journalists from China. Fourth, the Indian government had banned dozens of Chinese apps, including WeChat, in the wake of the Galwan Valley clash. The ban should be lifted. Fifth, the two countries should quickly make big moves on trade and investment. China can easily reduce the huge deficit in the bilateral trade by importing more from India. As rightly suggested by India's Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran, another way to manage this trade imbalance is by getting more foreign direct investment from China. Today, almost every big Indian business house is hungry for joint ventures, technology tie-ups and third-country export collaborations with Chinese companies.

Let 2025 be a breakthrough year for India-China cooperation. A telling demonstration of this could be an official visit by Mr. Xi to India or Mr. Modi's visit to China early next year.

QUESTION CORNER

The universe's speed limit

Q: How do we know the speed of light?
A: After centuries of developing improved instruments to measure everything in the physical world with increasing precision, scientists have agreed to define the speed of light as precisely 299,792,458 m/s. Their agreement redefines their yardstick, in this case the metre, in terms of the speed of light rather than the other way around.

Before that, calculations of the speed of light were conventionally based on how long it took a pulse of light to cover a known distance. Because the speed of light is so great, it had to be a very great distance, and comparatively accurate measurements had to await the development of sensitive modern instruments.

The first practical estimate was made in 1676 by Ole Roemer, a Danish astronomer then working at the Royal Observatory in Paris. Roemer noticed when studying the eclipses of Jupiter's moons that the intervals between the disappearance of some of the moons behind the planet varied with distances between Jupiter and the earth. He reasoned that the velocity of light was responsible for an apparent delay in the eclipse when Jupiter was more distant from the earth. He calculated the speed of light to be around 225,300 km/s.

Roemer did not know the precise distance to Jupiter, so his estimate was considerably different from modern figures of around 299,792 km/s, give or take a few billionths of a second. These estimates are made with a laser beam and an atomic clock.

Modern estimates of the speed of light are made with a laser beam and an atomic clock. THOMAS KINTO

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

Why do we lose muscle mass with age? Scientists find one factor

In November, researchers from the University of California Los Angeles and the University of Alberta, Canada, reported in the journal *Genome Research* that deletion mutations and aberrant expression of mitochondrial DNA correlated with biological aging in humans and in rodents

D.P. Kasbekar

As we age, we lose bits of our genome in tissues such as the skeletal muscle and the brain. These losses, called deletion mutations, gradually erode the function of a cell component called the mitochondrion.

Muscle cells lacking a sufficient number of functional mitochondria to support their contractile function die and this causes a loss of muscle mass.

Gaining a better understanding of the process that causes deletion mutations might help us to prevent or at least delay it.

The overwhelmingly large fraction of our genome (DNA) resides in the cell's nucleus. The rest, a mere five-millionth of the nuclear genome, is located in the mitochondrion. The age-related deletion mutations accumulate in the mitochondrial genome (mtDNA).

On November 27, researchers from the University of California Los Angeles and the University of Alberta, Canada, reported in the journal *Genome Research* that – together with the deletions – many mitochondrial genes also became aberrantly expressed. Both deletion mutations and aberrant expression of mtDNA correlated with biological aging in humans and in rodents.

So although mtDNA represents only a small fraction of our genome, its deletion mutations appear to be a major trigger of the decrepitude that comes with old age.

The cause of the mutations that erode mitochondrial functions, eventually leading to muscle loss, has been unclear. SERENA REPICE LENTINI

What are mitochondria?

Mitochondria are the powerhouses of the cell. They are where most synthesis of the compound adenosine triphosphate (ATP) happens. ATP is the energy source for all functions of a cell.

mtDNA encodes only a small subset of proteins required for mitochondrial function. Many more mitochondrial proteins are encoded by the nuclear genome, and enter the mitochondria after they are made in the part of the cell lying outside the mitochondrion and the nucleus (i.e. the cytoplasm).

Mitochondria are the descendants of free-living bacteria that our early single-celled ancestors then absorbed. Since then, many of the bacteria's genes have been transferred to the nuclear genome, leaving behind only a minor rump in the mtDNA. Today, mitochondria can't survive independently of their host cell.

Individuals inherit their mitochondria only via the mother's egg. As far as mitochondria are concerned, males are a dead-end, as they are not passed on by sperm cells to the baby. Each one of us shares mtDNA with only a subset of our maternal relatives, for example with the children of our mother's sister but not with those of our mother's brother.

By contrast, the nuclear genome comprises two copies of each of our 23 chromosomes, numbered 1 to 23. One chromosome of each pair came to us via our mother's egg and the other via our father's sperm. In turn we transmit only one chromosome of each pair to the sperm or eggs made by us. The fusion of a sperm and an egg creates a zygote, a cell with two copies of each chromosome. This cell then divides to generate all the other cells in the baby's body.

In other words, nuclear and mitochondrial genomes have different ancestries.

DNA, mRNA, and the gene

Each chromosome contains a single long DNA molecule. The molecule has two strands. Each strand is a sequence of four compounds, called bases, and the strands are held together by bonds between pairs of these compounds. These pairings are collectively called base-pairs.

The 23 chromosomes together have 3.2 billion base-pairs. This nuclear genome encodes about 20,000 genes that contain instructions to make proteins, plus another 15,000-20,000 genes that don't encode for proteins. In contrast, our mtDNA is a mere 16,569 base-pairs long, and has a circular shape. It encodes 13 protein-coding genes and 24 non-coding genes. Most cells, however, contain multiple mitochondria and each mitochondrion contains multiple copies of the mtDNA molecule. Hence the mtDNA can make up 1% or so of a cell's total DNA.

Given that mtDNA deletion mutations and chimeric mRNA are useful predictors of age, they can help develop ways to delay age-related decline in mtDNA quality

A gene is a segment of a DNA molecule, typically a few thousand base-pairs long. When a gene is expressed, the cell arranges for the sequence of bases on the DNA to be transcribed to a sequence of bases in a new molecule called messenger RNA (mRNA). The mRNA moves from the nucleus into the cytoplasm, where the cell 'reads' it to make new proteins.

For want of a nail, a muscle was lost

Any of the many mtDNA molecules can suffer deletion mutations. A deletion mutation is when one to few thousands of base-pairs become deleted from a gene. The mtDNA that bears deletion mutations is thus smaller in size, and as a result these molecules slowly outcompete non-mutated mtDNA when the cell makes copies of them during reproduction, and ultimately displace them from the mitochondria.

When the number of completely intact mtDNA molecules becomes too low to help the cell make mitochondrial proteins, the mitochondrion stops producing ATP. If the number of functioning mitochondria, i.e. those producing ATP, also becomes too low, the muscle cell is unable to properly contract and dies. This underlies the loss of muscle mass.

Deletion mutations also bring sequences of two different mtDNA genes into contact with each other to create novel chimeric genes. When these genes are expressed, the effects can interfere with the normal mRNA the cell has made from residual intact mtDNA. Thus, deletion mutations can affect the expression of normal mtDNA and thus also indirectly speed up mitochondrial loss.

The researchers compared mRNA of skeletal muscle biopsies from individuals younger than 30 years with those older than 65 years. They found that the older individuals showed a two-fold increase in chimeric mitochondrial mRNA. The chimeric mtRNAs were indeed products of the mtDNA deletion events.

Given that mtDNA deletion mutations and chimeric mRNA are useful predictors of biological age, they can help researchers develop new ways to delay age-related decline in mtDNA quality. Aside from when teenagers enter a liquor store, no one wants their biological age to outpace their chronological age.

(D.P. Kasbekar is a retired scientist. (kasbekardp@yahoo.co.in)

THE GIST

- Mitochondria are the powerhouses of the cell. They are where most synthesis of the compound adenosine triphosphate happens. ATP is the energy source for all functions of a cell
- Mitochondria is inherited only via the mother's egg. As far as mitochondria are concerned, males are a dead-end, as they are not passed on by sperm. Each one of us shares mtDNA with only a subset of our maternal relatives
- When the number of intact mtDNA molecules becomes too low, it stops producing ATP. If the number of functioning mitochondria becomes too low, the muscle cell dies. This underlies the loss of muscle mass

Government must not ape private sector's insecure gig work conditions, says SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has said in a judgment that the government, one of the largest employers in the country, must not emulate the "precarious employment arrangements" seen in the private sector with the rise of the gig economy.

"In the private sector, the rise of the gig economy has led to an increase in precarious employment arrangements, often characterised by lack of benefits, job security and fair treatment. Such practices have been criticised for exploiting workers and undermining labour standards. Government institutions, entrusted with upholding the principles of fairness and justice, bear an even greater responsibility to avoid such exploitative employment practices," a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and P.B. Varale said in a recent decision.

Exploitation and misuse of "temporary" contractual staff by public sector entities not only mirrors the detrimental trends observed in a gig economy but also sparks a concern, Justice Nath, who wrote the judgment, cautioned.

'Regularise staff'

The December 20 judgment was based on appeals filed by cleaning and gardening staff employed at the Central Water Commission. They were not regularised. The Central Administrative Tribunal and the Delhi High Court agreed they were only part-time workers not appointed against sanctioned posts and had not completed the full-time service to satisfy the criteria for regularisation. Besides, the two fora held that regularisation cannot be sought as a matter of right.

The top court set aside their termination from work and ordered their immediate regularisation.

Justice Nath said courts ought to look beyond "surface labels" and consider the realities of employment: continuous, long-term service, indispensable duties, and absence of any illegalities in their appointments.

The court said that India was one of the founding members of the International Labour Organisation, which has consistently advocated for employment stability and the fair treatment of workers, particularly in contexts in which job discontinuation could exacerbate long-term unemployment.

President Murmu names Ajay Bhalla Manipur Governor

Former Union Minister General V. K. Singh (retd) appointed Mizoram Governor, while Kerala Governor Arif Khan will take up the post in Bihar

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Former Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla has been appointed Governor of Manipur in the latest gubernatorial appointments and reshuffle by President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday across five States.

The appointments include former Union Minister General V. K. Singh (retd) as Governor of Mizoram, and Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan being made Governor of Bihar.

The President has accepted the resignation of Odisha Governor Raghubar Das.

The appointment to the Manipur Raj Bhavan is significant as the State has witnessed ethnic strife resulting in violence between the Meitei community and Kuki tribes since May 2023. Anusuiya Uikey was the last full-time Governor of the State and since July this year, Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya was holding additional charge.

New roles: Gen. V.K. Singh (retd) and Ajay Kumar Bhalla.

Said to be close to Home Minister Amit Shah, Mr. Bhalla steered some of the key legislation such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 and the three new criminal laws during his tenure as the Home Secretary. A 1984-batch IAS officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre, he retired on August 22.

New Kerala governor

The change of Governor in Kerala is another politically significant move.

Mr. Khan had been having regular run-ins with the Left Front government in the State.

So, while he has been shifted to Bihar, the incumbent Bihar Governor, Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar, has been named the new Governor of Kerala.

The incumbent Governor of Mizoram, Hari Babu Kambhampati, has been appointed Governor of Odisha.

A former chief of the Indian Army, Gen. Singh successfully contested the Lok Sabha polls twice (2014 and 2019) from the Ghaziabad seat in Uttar Pradesh on BJP ticket and was part of the Union Council of Ministers.

The party, however, did not offer him ticket in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

'Human contact threatens endangered lion-tailed macaque'

Mini Muringatheri
THRISSUR

Human-wildlife interaction is a growing concern in areas where roads and plantations continue to encroach on natural habitats. A recent study warns of a growing threat to the critically endangered lion-tailed macaque, endemic to the Western Ghats due to increasing human interaction.

"The genus Macaca, known for its adaptability to human-altered environments, often engages with humans, a behaviour that, while seemingly beneficial, poses serious risks to both them and people," says a study conducted by Sheheer T.A. and Peroth Balakrishnan, researchers from the Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) and Mewa Singh from the University of Mysore.

The study published in the journal *Primate Conservation* reveal that increased food provisioning and habituation to human activity are jeopardising the survival of lion-tailed macaque.

A lion-tailed macaque sitting on a motorcycle.

Eight key locations

The researchers surveyed the roads crossing through the lion-tailed macaque habitats across eight key locations along the Western Ghats: the Anamalai Hills, Nelliyampathy, Nilambur Ghats, Sholayar, Gavi, Sabarimala, Vallimalai Hills and Agumbe.

"Nearly 25% of the macaque population in these areas engage in interactions with humans. This includes accepting food from tourists, raiding waste, and entering human settlements. The lion-tailed macaque, with only about 4,200 individuals remaining, faces severe risks due to food provisioning, which leads to malnutrition, disease, and dependence on unnatural food sources and increased vulnerability to road accidents and aggression from humans," says Dr. Balakrishnan, co-author of the paper and Head of the Department of Wildlife Biology, KFRI.

Specific hotspots such as Valparai, Nelliyampathy, and Sabarimala have seen rising macaque interactions. Valparai, in particular, has a decades-long record of human-macaque interaction, with over 180 macaques regularly engaging with humans.

"Unlike most regions where interactions between lion-tailed macaques and humans are recent, the Puthuthottam population in the Valparai Hills offers a unique, decades-long record of such interactions. Initially, these macaques avoided human food even when accessible, but habitat disruptions and increased tourism have drastically altered their behaviour. Provisioning by tourists has led to dependence on human food, shifting their foraging habits and creating conflicts," said Professor Singh.

The lion-tailed macaque is classified as endangered on the IUCN Red List and protected under Appendix I of CITES. Its population faces threats from habitat loss, fragmentation, and human encroachment.

The long-term consequences of increased human interaction include increased exposure to zoonotic diseases and diet-related illnesses; behavioural changes such as reduced foraging in natural habitats; increased reliance on human-provided food and population decline through rise in injuries, road accidents, and stress-induced mortality, according to the study.

Congress moves SC over change in Election Rules

Amendment restricting public access to CCTV camera footage from polling booths and video recordings of candidates comes after HC order to release materials from Haryana Assembly polls

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday challenged the amendments made to the Conduct of Election Rules of 1961 that restricted citizens' right to access certain election-related records.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh moved the top court against the change in the poll rules, which reduces public access to CCTV camera footage from polling booths and video recordings of candidates.

The amendment was made to sub-rule (2) of Rule 93 of the 1961 Rules, which had previously allowed the public to examine papers related to elections without any exception.

The amendment, notified on December 20 by the Union Law and Justice Ministry, had restricted access to only certain election records specifically mentioned in the Rules.

Officials have reportedly justified the move, saying it was to protect the poll process from false narratives through misuse or doctoring of electronic records.

However, the amendment came shortly after a Punjab and Haryana High Court direction to the Election Commission to provide an advocate records pertaining to the recent Haryana Assembly election. The advocate had filed a petition seeking videography, CCTV footage, and copies of Forms 17-C Parts I and II from the Assembly election.

"The Election Commission, a Constitutional body, charged with the conduct of free and fair elections cannot be allowed to unilaterally, and without public consultation, amend such a vital law in such a brazen manner. This is especially true when that amendment does away with public access to essential information that makes the electoral process more transparent and accountable. The integrity of the electoral process is fast eroding. Hopefully the Supreme Court will help restore it," Mr. Ramesh posted on social media platform X.

HIDE AND SEEK
» PAGE 8

Access limited

Amendment to the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 limits public access to certain election-related records

- While there was unrestricted access to election-related records earlier, it is now **restricted**. CCTV footage and video recordings are no longer freely available
- While the government has said that the amendment protects the process from **false narratives** or misuse of electronic records, there are concerns that it reduces **transparency** and **accountability** in the electoral process

EC rejects Cong. claims on polls as 'misleading'

NEW DELHI
The Election Commission has rejected as "factually incorrect and misleading" the Congress's claims of "arbitrary deletion" and "subsequent addition" in electoral rolls and ruled out discrepancies in voter turnout data in Maharashtra Assembly election. » PAGE 5