

Revenue collections continue to dip in Telangana

Hyderabad: Telangana is facing a significant dip in revenue collections, with receipts for the current fiscal year lagging behind last year's collections. By the end of September, total revenue receipts stood at Rs 90,844.45 crore, marking a decline from Rs 99,775.12 crore collected during the same period in the previous year. This constitutes only 41.06 per cent of the annual target of Rs 2,21,242.23 crore, compared to 46.07 per cent achieved last year during the same timeframe. As per the latest report released by the Comptroller and Auditor General, tax revenue of Telangana remains a major contributor at Rs 82,135.38 crore, 49.96 per cent of the budget estimates for current fiscal, marginally lower than last year's 50.74 per cent. While Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections stood at Rs 29,526.14 crore (50.39 per cent of the target), this was a slight dip from 51.84 per cent last year. Sales tax collections showed improvement at 55.59 per cent, up from 43.88 per cent.

A sharp dip was observed in excise duties, which recorded 42.63 per cent of the target, a significant drop from last year's 68.88 per cent. In terms of Stamps and Reg-

istrations, there has been a marginal increase from Rs 8,227.86 crore i.e. 44.47 per cent of annual targets till September last year to Rs 8,359.97 crore which is 45.86 per cent for the same period this year.

The State's Share of union Taxes turned out to be a major saviour for the State with Rs 10,159.63 crore which is 55.26 per cent of the budget estimates. Last year, the State's Share in Union Taxes stood at Rs 7,139.84 crore. Non-tax revenues plummeted to just 13.66 per cent of the target, a steep drop from 81.36 per cent during the corresponding period last year. The Grants-in-Aid from the Central government stood at Rs 3,899.74 crore which is 18 per cent of the target, a notable rise compared to 9.3 per cent last year but still far from meeting expectations. During the period, overall capital receipts have increased especially with borrowings standing at Rs 35,120.91 crore compared to Rs 33,378.34 crore borrowed by September last year. On the expenditure side, revenue expenditure accounted for Rs 1,06,048.40 crore (48 per cent of the budgeted Rs 2,20,944.81 crore), consistent with last year's 48.35 per cent. However, capital expenditure showed a decline, reaching only



53.01 per cent of the target compared to 69.8 per cent last year. In numbers, the capital expenditure which largely comprises expenditure on infrastructure and development projects was Rs 17,750.89 crore during this fiscal, compared to a whopping Rs 26,195 crore spent till September last year. The drop

in revenue collections and capital expenditure coupled with a sharp rise in borrowings, pose a challenge for the State government in fiscal management. Economists suggest the State may need to reassess its revenue generation strategies and prioritise essential expenditures to maintain fiscal stability.

Soon students can shorten or extend UG programme duration



Hyderabad: Students will soon be able to shorten or extend duration of the undergraduation depending on the programme with the University Grants Commission (UGC) on Thursday rolling out new programmes – accelerated degree programme (ADP) and extended degree programme (EDP). These programmes are

in addition to the existing three and four-year UG programmes with standard duration. The ADP, which follows the same curriculum content and total credits prescribed for standard duration, will enable students to shorten their course duration by one or two semesters by allowing them earn additional credits per semester starting second or third semester.

In a three-year undergraduate programme, students can reduce the duration by a maximum of one semester. For example, students can earn the total credits needed for a three-year undergraduate programme in five semesters. Similarly, in a four-year undergraduate programme, students can shorten course duration by one semester or a maximum of two semesters, i.e., total credits required for a four-year undergraduate programme can be secured in six or seven semesters. On the other hand, students of three-year or four-year undergraduate programmes opting for the EDP are allowed to extend course duration up to a maximum of two semesters. The programme that follows the same curriculum content and total credits prescribed for a standard course duration allows students

to earn fewer credits every semester than those required. Students can choose ADP or EDP either at the end of the first or second semester but not beyond that. The UGC has also issued standard operating procedure, guiding higher education institutions (HEIs) in the academic content, credits, assessment methods and degree awarding while implementing accelerated and extended degrees.

"Under ADP and EDP, students earn the same total credits as in the standard-duration programme. The HEIs will establish committees to evaluate students' eligibility for these programmes. These degrees will be equivalent to standard duration degrees for all employment and academic purposes," said Prof. M Jagadesh Kumar, Chairman UGC.

Man sentenced to 3 years for attempted rape, harassment of minor

Hyderabad: A local court on Friday sentenced a man to three years rigorous imprisonment in the case of harassment and attempt to rape of a minor girl reported in LB

Nagar in 2016. The court also imposed a fine of Rs 6,000 on him. The convict B Anjaneyulu (27), a construction worker from NTR Nagar in LB Nagar, stalked the girl and harassed her.

What is the controversy around the Sambhal mosque?

State police personnel deployed outside the Shahi Jama Masjid following religious violence in Sambhal on November 25, 2024. Muslim protesters clashed with police November 24 with at least two people killed in riots sparked by a survey investigating if a 17th-century mosque was built on a Hindu temple. State police personnel deployed outside the Shahi Jama Masjid following religious violence in Sambhal on November 25, 2024. Muslim protesters clashed with police November 24 with at least two people killed in riots sparked by a survey investigating if a 17th-century mosque was built on a Hindu temple. A petition was filed by Hari Shanker Jain and others in the court of the civil judge of the district and sessions court, Sambhal on November 19. The petitioners alleged that the 16th Century Jama Masjid in Sambhal was built at the site of an ancient Hari Har Mandir. The claim was similar to those made in the case of Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi and Eidgah Masjid Mathura in Uttar Pradesh and Kamal-Maula Masjid in Dhar in Madhya Pradesh. Mr. Jain is the petitioner in the Varanasi, Mathura and Dhar cases too. The Sambhal mosque is a protected national monument.

How were the surveys carried out?

After a hearing on the same day, the civil judge ordered a photographic and videographic survey of the mosque and asked for its report to be presented before it on November 29. The mosque's intezamia committee was not consulted by the court. Following the order, a survey team including the court-appointed advocate commissioner, Ramesh Raghav, arrived at the mosque post-Maghrib or sunset prayers. The survey was carried out peacefully in the presence of the Superintendent of Police, members of the mosque committee and Sambhal's district magistrate. However, a second survey carried out on November 24 led to large scale violence. Conducted in the morning, the survey team was preceded by a local mahant (priest), one of the petitioners, and followed by some members chanting Jai Shri Ram slogans. A police party accompanied the surveyors. A large number of protestors gathered near the mosque. It soon resulted in stone pelting from the crowd. The police allegedly resorted to opening fire in which five men, including two teenagers, died. The police denied the allegation, arguing it used lathi-charge and teargas to control the crowd. The local MLA, Ziaur Rehman Barq in turn rubbished the police claims, arguing the dead included unarmed persons who had gone out for their daily chores. The residents also alleged the police had ransacked their homes.

What is the mosque's history?

Unlike Ayodhya or Varanasi, the Sambhal dispute cropped up only this year. For centuries, people of different communities have lived peacefully here. The Jama Masjid in Sambhal is one of the three mosques built by Mughal Emperor Babur during his reign between 1526 and 1530; the other two being the mosque in Panipat and the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya which was demolished in 1992. The Sambhal mosque was built by Babur's general Mir Hindu Beg around 1528. The mosque, as noted historian Howard Crane wrote in an essay titled, 'The Patronage of Babur and the Origins of Mughal Architecture' is "located on a hill at

the center of Sambhal. It consists of a sanctuary formed of a large, square mihrab hall with battered walls, covered by a dome on squinches, and flanked by arches on north and south." The mosque is built with stone masonry covered with plaster. Its façade is similar to the mosque in Budaun and quite removed from the latter Mughal monuments which were built largely of red sandstone. The mosque was repaired twice during the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan in the 17th Century. While most historians attribute this mosque to Babur's general Hindu Beg, some believe the mosque is actually a Tughlaq-era monument and the Mughal founder merely added certain features to its architecture. The Hindu tradition, however, holds that the mosque incorporates parts of an ancient Vishnu temple. They believe the tenth avatar of Vishnu, Kalki, will descend here in Sambhal.

What is the Places of Worship Act?

The Sambhal dispute has once again cast fresh spotlight on the Places of Worship Act 1991 under which the religious character of all places of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947, has to be maintained. The only exception was the then ongoing dispute around the Babri Masjid-Ramjanambhoomi. The Act was aimed at shutting out the possibilities of any further contestations around places of worship. It states, "An Act to prohibit conversion of any place of worship and



to provide maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the 15th day of August, 1947, and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto." The Act's Section 3 leaves no room for debate by clearly barring the conversion in full or part of a place of any religious denomination into a place of worship of a different religious denomination.

What are the challenges to the Act?

The petition filed in Sambhal seeks to change the basic character of the place of worship, in contravention of the 1991 Act.

The petitioners quote the oral observation of Justice D.Y. Chandrachud who is reported to have said in 2022 that the "ascertainment of a religious character of a place, as a procedural instrument, may not necessarily fall foul of the provisions" of the Act. Incidentally, four petitions have challenged the Places of Worship Act in the Supreme Court. The courts have admitted petitions seeking to alter the religious character of the places of worship in Varanasi, Mathura, Dhar, and now Sambhal even as the Supreme Court is yet to decide on the challenges to the Places of Worship Act itself.

A Mizoram lifeline for 4 Myanmar Army rebels

At around 2pm on Monday, four men entered India secretly after a two-day journey — first on foot and later in a van — from Myanmar's Hakha province to Zohkhawthar, a village in Mizoram along the Indo-Myanmar border. Sometime last week, the four enlisted Myanmar army men had donated their weapons to the civilian rebel forces, thrown off their uniforms, and deserted the military. Thara Soe(26), Soe Aung(30), Thiha Kyaw(26) and Tin Ko Ko Kwin(30) are not the first Myanmar soldiers to enter India along the border in Mizoram. But the case of these four men is different from the nearly 800 Myanmar soldiers who entered India at different times over the last year and surrendered at the police stations here. Unlike the four, the others were not deserters, but used the porous Indo-Myanmar border to flee to India for safety after being surrounded by rebel forces. They were later sent back to Myanmar from the international border in Moreh(Manipur).

These four men claim they have voluntarily deserted the army and now want to live in India until the civil war ends in Myanmar. The four, who checked in to a refugee camp in Champhai, Mizoram on Monday evening, spoke to HT, sharing details of their escape from Myanmar. "We were posted in Hakha where fighting is intense now. This is one of the places where the army and People's Defence Forces are still trying to take control of the town. Last month, 15 soldiers were killed. We are from the same batch and enlisted in the army last year. Joining military for men between 18 and 35 is mandatory. We lasted four months," Khant Thara Soe said.

While it costs nearly 1,200,000 Myanmar Kyat(nearly ₹50,000) to book a van

from Hakha to the Indian border village, the four did not have to pay a penny. "We were rewarded for donating our weapons and voluntarily leaving the army. The PDF are helping Myanmarese refugees enter India by arranging vans and even motorcycles. While the men are advised to stay back and join the civilian rebel forces, they help the women enter India," the second soldier, Thiha Kyaw said. The civil war in Myanmar is raging in different parts of the country; the four said they were witnesses to the battles fought between army and rebel forces in the areas surrounding Hakha, Falam, and Thantlang. The men said they have survived death twice in the past two weeks.

"Three days before we fled Myanmar, one of our colleagues, a 24-year-old, died in a gunfight with the rebel forces. We were patrolling a stretch between Hakha and Thantlang. We were in the same team and were forced to fight against the people's forces. The people's forces outnumbered us that day. Our colleague, who too had joined the army because he had no option lost his life. He was shot dead in the fight. We escaped," Soe Aung(30) said. A week before this incident, Aung survived a mine attack. "Mines have been dug by both army and rebel forces in the outskirts of the city. Both groups are trying to take control of different areas in Hakha. It is an important city. While I survived the attack, two of my colleagues were injured. Our seniors left us to fend for ourselves. After completing seven months' training, we were in the army for four months and were troubled by such incidents," Aung added. The men said in places such as Hakha and Thantlang, there is a bombing

almost every two days, by the junta. "The town of Thantlang is flattened. We have served there and saw the horrors of the war. It is like a ghost town. It has been flattened by aerial bombing. People have fled to different parts of the country and even Mizoram. We only wish the fighting ends soon and people can return to their homes," Khant Thara Soe said. Soe confirmed that in response to military junta's aerial bombing, the civilian rebel forces are using drones loaded with explosives to target military bases. During their seven-month training, the four men were taught ways to detect drone carrying bombs and how to deflect them. "Before leaving Myanmar, we shared all the learnings with our people. They can use it to fight the military junta. We shared all details of the army's position at the places we were posted, and the deployment strength on the ground that we were aware of before coming to India," added Soe. The four added that the rebels asked the four if they wished to fight for them. "We asked for time because we have seen a lot of blood in the last three months," Thiha Kyaw said, adding that their priority is to bring their families to India. "All of us have left our families back home. There was no option of resigning. We would have been jailed for even asking to leave the army. For now, we are safe and will return only when the fighting in Myanmar is over. This is just temporary," he added. The four men will now live in the relief camp with over 900 other refugees from Myanmar. Over the last three years, after the 2021 military coup, around 30,000 Myanmar nationals have entered India and are living in Mizoram. But most agencies working on the ground say the actual number is twice or thrice that.

New BharatBenz Torqshift tipper range wins bulk order for mining

Daimler India Commercial Vehicles (DICV), the wholly-owned subsidiary of Daimler Truck AG ("Daimler Truck"), today announced the market launch of the BharatBenz heavy-duty truck (HDT) range equipped with the globally-proven 12-speed Automated Manual Transmission (AMT) by bagging the first order of 80 units 3532CM mining tippers to a single customer. BharatBenz, known for its highly capable construction and mining heavy-duty range, strengthened its product portfolio by adding 'Torqshift' to the mix. Named as 'Torqshift' for the BharatBenz range, the 12-speed Automated Manual Transmission (AMT) has earned its stripes globally in hundreds of thousands of Mercedes-Benz trucks. Known for making driving easy, the transmission will be available in the latest BharatBenz models including the 4032T, 5532TS, 5532T, 2832CM, and the flagship model 3532CM.

Mr. Sreeram Venkateswaran, President and Chief Business Officer commented, "Heavy-duty Construction and Mining (CM) trucks are one of our strengths and we have considerable presence in this space. With the new 12-speed AMT in our CM portfolio, the customers will see a significant benefit in productivity improvement in their operations and notable savings as the overall fleet efficiency will go up. The deliveries for the

3532CM BharatBenz Torqshift trucks have started and vehicles are already being deployed in operations. We will offer AMT in Tractor Trailers (TT) as well, which will not only enhance the productivity of the vehicles, but play a critical role in improving road safety as well. This is a segment we foresee growing steadily and with road infrastructure rapidly shaping up, BharatBenz Torqshift range will add a lot of value to our long-haul logistics customers. Our AMT technology, adapted from Mercedes-Benz trucks, delivers consistently on the total cost of ownership equation. It is ideally engineered to suit Indian conditions to offer incredible value through our Mining Tippers, Surface Tippers and Tractor Trailers." BharatBenz Torqshift range offers superior driving comfort with its smooth, jerk-free gear shifting and significantly faster shift times, which greatly enhances the vehicle's drivability. Integration of the shift lever into the steering column not only improves the ergonomics within the cabin but also contributes to better isolation of noise and heat, ensuring a more comfortable drive.

Mr. Pradeep Kumar Thimmaiyan, President and Chief Technology Officer, Daimler India Commercial Vehicles said, "The 12-speed AMT is a big triumph for us at India Product Engineering as we achieved



our goal to introduce this transmission in our BharatBenz portfolio after meticulous planning and adaptive engineering, ensuring minimal cost of development. A global technology like the Mercedes-Benz AMT, seamlessly integrated in our BharatBenz Torqshift range of trucks, keeps in mind our customers' needs in the market. This technology is designed to reduce driving stress

and to ensure a faster turnaround with significantly higher fuel efficiency. Torqshift is engineered to minimize maintenance, significantly improving the total cost of ownership for our customers. This aligns perfectly with our intent to deliver not only well-engineered and safe products, but also ones that add tremendous value to our customers' businesses."



A seminar "How to crack civil services in the first attempt, UPSC Master class" was organised at Geethanjali college of Engineering and Technology, Keesara in collaboration with 21st Century IAS Academy, Vings Media and G5 Media group.

P.Krishna Pradeep, Chairman of 21st Century IAS Academy, addressed the students with an inspiring example of the power and responsibility associated with civil services. He referred to a recent agitation by farmers from 60 villages in the Nirmal district against an ethanol factory. He highlighted how a lady IPS officer Janaki Sharmila, le-

veraging her authority and decision-making powers derived through the UPSC, was able to resolve the issue effectively. This, he stated, exemplifies the influence civil servants can wield to maintain order and address societal challenges and also said he was happy sharing that this lady IPS is a student of 21st century academy.

Dr Bhavani Shankar, chief mentor of 21st century IAS academy while addressing the students, highlighted the importance of leading a reputable life in society. He emphasized that preparing for the UPSC Civil Services Examination is one pathway to

achieving this goal, as securing a position in civil services provides an opportunity to serve the nation. During his address, Dr. Shankar presented a detailed PPT, showcasing the types of questions typically asked in the UPSC examination.

Dr. Prasanna Kumar, Registrar of college advised students to pay attention to the seminar and take up the important notes. As part of the seminar at the Civil Aspirants Club was officially launched, and its poster was unveiled by Dr. Prasanna Kumar, Registrar of Geethanjali College, Krishna Pradeep, Chairman of 21st Century IAS Academy, and other distinguished dignitaries.

Chairman G.Ravinder Reddy, Principal Dr Uday Kumar, Mr Naveen Ram, Administrative Officer

Ms Manjula, Head Career guidance, Giri Prakash, Director of G5 and Vings media group and other faculty were present.

Burglars steal cash, liquor in daring midnight heist



Hyderabad: Unidentified burglars broke into a wine shop in Shamshabad on the city outskirts and decamped with cash and liquor in the wee hours of Friday. On Thursday night, the cashier had closed the account and kept some cash in the counter for the next day's business. According to the police, the offenders broke into the shop post-midnight by drilling a hole in the wall using hand tools and drilling machinery and broke open the lock of the cash draw. They took the cash and also picked up some liquor bottles from the racks. The staff who opened the wine shop in the morning found the wall damaged and cash and liquor bottles from the shop missing. On receiving information, the Shamshabad Rural police reached the spot and took up investigation.

JSW MG Motor Introduces Premium Range of Anti-Pollution Car Solutions

JSW MG Motor has today introduced a range of vehicle accessories aimed at helping customers tackle rising air pollution while maintaining vehicle performance and enhancing passenger comfort. With the introduction of the pollution free accessories, the brand is offering its customers to embrace the season with added comfort and convenience. These accessories are available at JSW MG Motor India dealerships, providing practical solutions for a protected and more comfortable driving experience in these challenging environmental conditions, ensuring a protected and hassle-free driving experience.

MG Accessories for a Pollution-Free Drive includes:

1. Air Purifier

The MG Air Purifier combines efficiency and convenience to transform your car cabin. Its powerful 3-stage filtration system effectively eliminates a comprehensive range of pollutants, including PM2.5 particles, formaldehyde, benzene, and smoke, ensuring every journey is accompanied by clean, healthy air for you and your loved ones. It is available at INR 3229 that comes with its compact design and user-friendly one-click operation featuring three adjustable speed settings, this essential accessory exemplifies MG's commitment to customers well-being, making it an invaluable addition for any MG owner prioritizing their well-being.

2. Air Humidifier – MRP: 1439

Experience optimal driving comfort with this sophisticated in-cabin humidifier that masterfully regulates moisture levels while combating air pollution. By effectively maintaining balanced humidity levels and reducing atmospheric dryness, it creates an ideal environment that enhances both respiratory comfort and overall driving pleasure. Its thoughtfully designed sleek and portable form factor seamlessly integrates into your vehicle's interior, delivering practical functionality while maintaining a refined aesthetic that complements your car's ambiance.

3. Chrome Cleaning Kit – MRP: 469

The MG Chrome cleaning kit stands as an essential detailing solution, expertly formulated to revitalize and restore the brilliance of your vehicle's chrome accents. Its powerful cleaning action effortlessly removes accumulated dirt, stubborn grime, and minor oxidation, ensuring your MG maintains its premium appearance with gleaming chrome finishes that catch every eye.

4. Car Care DIY Range : Keep your MG looking pristine while protecting it from environmental wear and tear with our all-in-one Car Care DIY range. This 18-product collection is tailored for effortless maintenance, offering specialized solutions for every car care need, from cleaning and polishing to protection and conditioning. DIY Products and Prices

- Car Wash Shampoo (100ml): 99
- Hi-Shine Wax – Exterior (150gm): 599
- Vinyl & Leather Shine (110ml): 190
- Leather Kleen & Conditioner (500ml): 299
- Waterless Wash Dry Kleen (500ml): 199
- Anti-Bacterial Interior Foam (450ml):



399

- Microfiber XL: 110
- Rat Shield (100ml): 199
- 3-in-1 Shiner (450ml) – Tyre, Vinyl, Seat: 399
- Tar & Bug Remover (125ml): 199
- Silencer Coating (250ml): 599
- Rain Repellent (200ml): 199
- Anti-Fog (250ml): 149
- Swirl Glaze (125ml): 149
- Hard Water Stain Remover (500ml):

199

- Xtreme Cut (100gm): 399
- Spray Wax (500ml): 499
- Engine Shield (400ml): 499
- 4. Wireless Air Inflator – MRP: 4369

The MG Wireless Air Inflator helps to maintain the roadside tire with its compact and portable design, offering drivers a reliable solution for unexpected tire pressure issues. This device delivers quick and efficient tire inflation, providing invaluable peace of mind during emergencies and eliminating

the stress of flat tires during your journeys. Elevate your MG ownership experience by exploring these essential accessories at your nearest MG dealership, where our expert staff awaits to provide personalized recommendations tailored to your needs. For added convenience, browse and purchase from our complete range of genuine accessories through the MG E-Shop platform. Make your drive safer and more comfortable with MG's thoughtfully curated collection of premium accessories! e-Shop: <https://mymg.co.in/eshop>

Ranjit Kumar Duguntla Honored with Prestigious Karmaveer Chakra Award

Ranjit Kumar Duguntla, Co-Founder and Director of Operations at Swatantrata Center, has been awarded the esteemed Karmaveer Chakra Award, recognizing his remarkable contributions as a social entrepreneur and activist. The accolade was presented during the Rex Conclave held in New Delhi. Alongside this honor, Ranjit was awarded the I-Rex Global Youth Fellowship (I-RKGYF 2024-2025), a collaboration between The Campus Affiliated, the United Nations (UN), and the International Organization of NGOs (ICONGO). Ranjit Kumar Duguntla's Contributions: Hailing from Huzurnagar, Suryapet district, Ranjit Kumar Duguntla has committed over 17 years to empowering youth and facilitating societal change. Through his work with the Swatantrata Center, Youth Parliament Programs, India's Future Foundation, and Youth for Better India, he has spearheaded numerous training camps and awareness initiatives. His notable achievements include: Advocating for the Citizen Charter Bill: As part of the anti-



corruption movement led by Anna Hazare, Ranjit played a pivotal role in implementing the Citizen Charter Bill in Telugu states, which mandates government offices to operate with transparency and provide efficient services to citizens. Organizing Youth Parliaments: Ranjit created platforms that united civil society members and activists to dis-

cuss pertinent policy issues and present actionable suggestions to the central government. Global Representation: He has represented Indian institutions at over 20 international conferences across three continents, engaging in critical discussions on social reforms, political systems, education, and economic development.

Story of the 500-year-old Sambhal mosque: Competing histories, mythology, and legal fights

That the Jami Masjid in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal district — which is now at the centre of a row over a court-mandated survey — was built in 1526 by an official of Babur seems to be beyond doubt. Much else about the mosque is unclear, lost among strands of mythology, history, and legal documents. On November 29, five days after the survey of the mosque led to violence that killed four people, the Supreme Court asked the petitioners to approach the High Court over the matter and directed the trial court to not take any action until the case is heard.

The Supreme Court was hearing a plea by the management committee of the mosque challenging an order of the Civil Judge (Senior Division) allowing the survey of the mosque which the Hindu side claims was built by destroying a Hindu temple. The Hindu parties had claimed in the Sambhal court that a "Shri Hari Har temple made by Lord Vishwakarma Himself" originally stood at the site and that it was demolished to build the mosque. They cited a prevalent belief that Kalki, the 10th avatar of Lord Vishnu, will appear in Sambhal in kaliyug (the current era of the world, according to Hindu mythology). The current case is not the mosque's first brush with a legal dispute. A title suit by the Hindu side was filed over it in a Moradabad court and an appeal in the Allahabad High Court in 1878, but was dismissed by then Chief Justice Sir Robert Stuart. Documents from that case, available in Urdu and seen by The Indian Express, say that the Hindu side's plea was rejected because they could not prove the Muslims had not been using the site uninterrupted for 12 years [the grounds of adverse possession], that no parikrama path for circumambulation of the idol seems to exist inside the mosque, and that the witnesses from the Hindu side appeared to be of poor quality who had never seen the mosque from inside. The story of the mosque

The Sambhal mosque is known to be the oldest surviving Mughal mosque in the country, and is a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The history of the mosque is tied to the history of Sambhal. According to the district's website, "During 5th century BC, Sambhal was home to the Panchal rulers and was subsequently a part of king Ashoka's empire." Under the Muslim sultanate, Sambhal was a part of Qutb-ud-din Aibak's empire, the Tughlaq empire and an important centre under the Lodis. Sambhal came under the Mughals after Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the Battle of Panipat in 1526. The Sambhal mosque was built the same year by Hindu Beg, an official under Babur. Only three mosques built during Babur's reign survived into modern times — the Jami Masjid in Sambhal, the Kabuli Bagh mosque in Panipat (1527-28 AD), and the Babri Masjid of Ayodhya (1529), which was demolished by kar sevaks in 1992. In his research paper Patronage of Zahir al-Din Babur [published in Bulletin of the Asia Institute in 1987], American historian Howard Crane says that while Babur's memoirs do not mention the Sambhal mosque, they do "state that a certain Hindu Beg Qücin, who had accompanied him from Kâbul, had been posted to Sambhal in 1515-16 and again in 1528-29".

It is Hindu Beg who built the Jami Masjid, according to an inscription at the mosque.

"Built a year before Babur's Kabuli Bagh mosque in Panipat, the Sambhal mosque is the first extant Mughal building in India. The complex is entered through a gate on the east that opens to a large walled courtyard. The prayer chamber, like the one of the Panipat mosque, is rectangular with a large square central bay. Its entrance is set into a high pishtaq, recalling those of Sharqi mosques at Jaunpur. The chamber is flanked on either side by three-bayed double-aisled side wings. A single dome surmounts the central bay, and a small flattish dome surmounts each bay of the side wings. The mosque's pishtaq and other features resembling fifteenth-century Sharqi structures in nearby Jaunpur suggest a reliance on local artisans and designers." Asher goes on to state that "even though the Sambhal mosque was renovated at least twice in the seventeenth century, enough of its original state remains to show that the plan and general appearance anticipate Babur's Panipat mosque commenced the following year". She writes that the mosque at Sambhal was the "largest one constructed in the Delhi region since Timur's sack of that city in 1398. This mosque is situated high on a hill and dominates the city for a considerable distance".

The Hindu claims of a temple existing at the site stem from the belief that features of a temple can still be traced in the mosque building, and that rubble from a temple seems to have been used in building it. These "features" include a chain hanging from the mosque's dome, which they believe once held a bell, the columns of the mosque resembling a temple's, and a path for 'parikrama' existing inside the mosque. Many of these have been enumerated in an ASI report from 1874-76 by ACL Carlleyle, First Assistant of the ASI, titled 'Tours in the Central Doab and Gorakhpur'. Carlleyle writes, "The principal building in Sambhal is the Jami Masjid, which the Hindus claim originally to have been the temple of Hari Mandir". He then states that the inscription mentioning Babur — which, he points out, gets the emperor's name wrong — is believed by the Hindus to be "a forgery of late date". "The walls of the central square Hindu temple would appear to have been built with large bricks cased with stone, but the plaster with which the Muhammadans have coated the walls conceals the material of which they are made; and I can only say that, on examining several spots where the plaster was broken, I found that in some places stone was exposed. I believe that the Muhammadans stripped off most of the stone, especially such as bore traces of Hinduism, and made a pavement of the stones, turning the sculptures downwards... Underneath the outer steps of the outer court I dug out some fragments of sculpture in reddish sandstone, one of which was the upper portion of a fluted pillar." Sir Alexander Cunningham, who was then the director general of ASI, however, disagreed with Carlleyle, adding a note to the report that reads, "The inscription in the masjid, which the Hindus denounce as being forged, appears to me to be quite genuine."

Hafizur Rehman Salahi, a resident of Sambhal who was earlier a researcher with



the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), told The Indian Express, "Hindu Beg seems to have repaired an existing mosque instead of building a new one, as the Jami Masjid has features of Pathan architecture more than Mughal architecture." The mosque having pre-Mughal features has been noted by historians too. Austrian historian Ebba Koch, in her book 'Mughal Architecture: An Outline of its History and Development', writes, "Although he [Babur] is celebrated as a founder of gardens, it is his mosques in Sambhal (1526), Ayodhya and Panipat (both 1528-29) that remain as chief monuments from his brief reign. They attempt to do justice to a large scale by borrowing inadequate forms of the decaying Sultanate architecture."

Meenakshi Jain, Delhi-based historian of colonial and medieval India, told The Indian Express that evidence did suggest the existence of a temple at the site of the mosque. "The use of temple material was evident in two rosettes on stone steps leading to the eastern gateway, the chain for hanging the temple bell, and a passage at the back for performance of parikrama by devotees, among other tell-tale pieces of evidence," said Jain. She also said Babur seems to have chosen the three locations of his mosques with great consideration. "Panipat was the site of his victory, but Ayodhya and Sambhal were of significance

to Hindus, which he was well aware of. That the Mughals knew about Sambhal's significance for Hindus can be made out from Abul Fazl's Ain-e-Akbari, in which he showed awareness of Sambhal as the place where the last avatar of Vishnu would be born. He doesn't mention the destruction of the temple by Babur and the construction of a mosque. "However, other historians have dismissed the claims of a temple. American historian Crane, who says that the mosque is built of stone masonry covered with plaster, writes, "Hindu tradition asserts that the mosque occupies the site of and incorporates parts of a celebrated Vishnu temple called the Hari-Mandir, but the appearance of the Jami Masjid in no way supports this assertion." Historian Sohail Hashmi said ascribing religion to architecture can lead to misleading conclusions. "If people live and build side by side, their heritages and styles are bound to influence each other. The whole concept of 'Islamic architecture' or any religious architecture is misguided. Domes come from pre-Christian Romans, the arch from Sumerians. Mosques in Kashmir and China or older mosques in Kerala don't have minars. The presence or absence of a particular type of architectural feature does not decide the religious character of a structure. What is important in the case of Sambhal is there is no history of a simmering dispute at the site."

Adani Group stocks extend rally for third straight day; Adani Green jumps 15%

New Delhi: Shares of all 11 listed Adani Group firms rallied in morning trade on Friday, with Adani Green Energy surging nearly 15 per cent. The stock of Adani Green Energy jumped 14.64 per cent, Adani Energy Solutions zoomed 13.54 per cent, Adani Total Gas climbed 7.33 per cent, Adani Power surged 4.90 per cent and NDTV soared 4.54 per cent on the BSE.

Shares of Ambuja Cements went up by 2.90 per cent, Sanghi Industries (2.44 per cent), Adani Ports (2.25 per cent), Adani Wilmar (2.24 per cent), Adani Enterprises (2.11 per cent) and ACC (1.34 per cent). The BSE benchmark Sensex traded 688.31 points higher at 79,732.05 and the NSE Nifty jumped 192.65 points to 24,106.80.

Abu Dhabi's International Holding Company (IHC), one of the largest sovereign funds that manages assets close to \$100 billion, has reaffirmed its support to the Adani Group, saying its outlook on investments in the group remains unchanged despite the US indictment of the conglomerate's founder chairman Gautam Adani.

"Our partnership with the Adani Group reflects our confidence in their contributions to the green energy and sustainability sectors," IHC, one of Adani group's key foreign investors, said in a statement. "As with all our investments, our team continues to evaluate relevant information and developments. At this time, our outlook on these investments remains unchanged."

'India is getting old before getting rich'

Srinivas Goli, Associate Professor, Dept of Fertility and Social Demography at the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, on why India is ageing, incentivising childbirth and caring for the elderly. The session was moderated by Nikhila Henry, Assistant Editor. India is a large country with a lot of demographic diversity and not all of it is ageing. The south Indian states now have a dependency ratio (ratio of those in the dependent ages of 0-14 and 65+ to those in the productive age of 15-64) of around 18 or 19 — for Kerala it is almost 20 — so the South is, indeed, ageing. A few states in the North too, such as Punjab and Himachal Pradesh — and in the East, West Bengal — have some of the lowest fertility rates. All these states are now sharing a higher ageing burden.

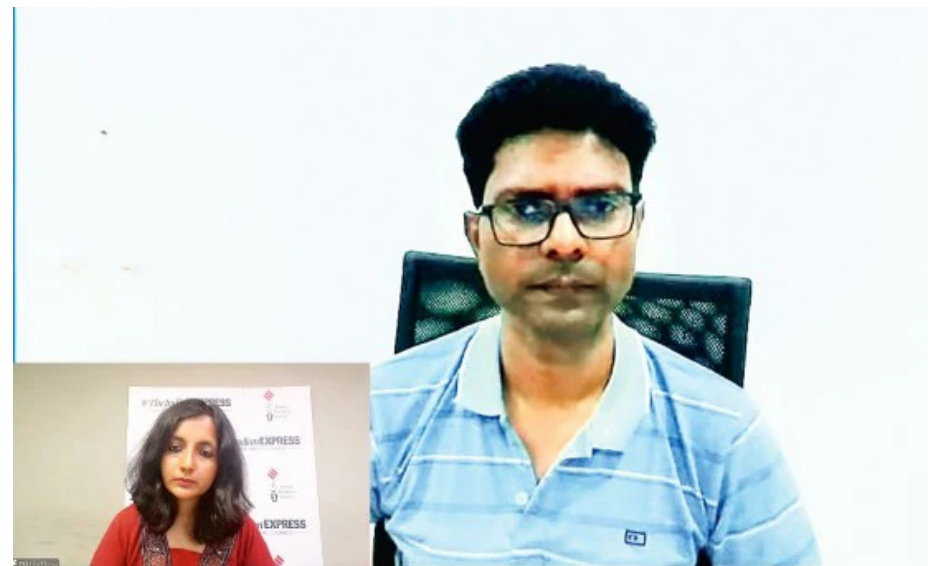
There are also states where fertility rates are slightly above the replacement level fertility. But it differs for urban and rural areas. In urban areas, almost all states are either below or around replacement-level fertility. But if you combine urban and rural fertility, then states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have moderately high fertility. The composition of a population changes due to three fundamental demographic components: fertility, mortality and migration. Fertility is the major component — the main reason for the change in the older population is the decline in fertility. When you have declining fertility, the ageing population rises because the proportion of the child population declines in the overall population. Also, when life expectancy goes up, it increases the share of the older population. Migration plays an important role but we don't have very good data on migration in recent times. Also, India is ageing fast. To take an example, the doubling of the share of the older population from 7 per cent to 14 per cent took 120 years in France and 80 years in Sweden. But that doubling from 7 per cent to 14 per cent took only 28 years in India. In some Indian states, this process is even faster. Some south Indian states are doubling their older population in less than 20 years. Overall, fertility decline in India is much ahead of the socio-economic transition, especially in the south Indian states. Our fertility is declining much faster and at lower socio-economic standards. So, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of Andhra Pradesh is 1.5, which is the same as Sweden but the per capita income of Sweden is 22 times that of Andhra Pradesh. There are similar differences in education, living standards and so on. This is a concern and we need to deal with it. Kerala is the first state in the country to have reached the replacement level fertility. But it is still between 1.6 and 1.8, whereas other states are going below 1.5. States with better gender norms can stabilise at 1.6 or 1.8.

When the old age dependency ratio crosses the child dependency ratio, it means there is a larger older population depending on the adult population. When the child dependency ratio goes below 30, that is, fewer than 30 children are dependent on 100 working-age people, and the older dependency ratio is less than 15, you get a window of opportunity — there is a bigger working age population and smaller dependent population. There is more production and savings. This is the period where you actually reap the economic dividend out of the demographic bonus or opportunity that you get. India entered this phase in 2005. In 2015, the ratio became strong and it will last up to 2061 but will remain more effective until 2045.

Faster ageing is the problem and soon some states will go out of this window-of-opportunity period. We are ageing before reaping the full demographic dividend. I generally say that India is getting old before getting rich. There is much more potential available to reap.

On our preparedness to age. When the demographic transition is ahead of the socio-economic transition, you are yet to get rid of the burden of maternal, child health care and communicable diseases. Then suddenly there is an onset of non-communicable diseases and a burden of curative and palliative care. Also, most elderly people are involved in informal sectors, so there is no social security support for them. So now we are trying our best to cope with the problem. Many policies have been introduced but there is a bigger challenge ahead. We need to manage our limited finances to handle this situation. India completed its fertility transition in just 45 years from its onset in the mid-70s to 2020, when it reached replacement-level fertility. Among the major countries, only China was faster. In their case, the socio-economic transition came first, and then the fertility transition. So they were in a much better position in terms of their economic environment and technological and medical care system. We are better placed than Western countries in one important aspect: our family system is much better and stronger, and a lot of the older population is still living with their children. The family is the primary caregiver and family ties in India are much stronger than, say, what we have seen in Europe. With increasing urbanisation, more and more young people are migrating to cities in search of work, so a ruralisation of ageing is taking place. There's more feminisation because everywhere, the life expectancy of women is higher by about five years on average. In India, female life expectancy increased more than that of men in the early 1990s. Since then, there has been a slow increase in the elderly female population compared to the elderly male population. There are more females in the 60-plus population than males. But in the urban areas, greater nuclearisation of families is happening. Compared to the West, our social ties are strong but still, the physical distance is increasing. Another important problem that we need to pay attention to is growing widowhood. Elderly women in families need greater prioritisation. On urbanisation and ageing

If you look at any country, it is very difficult to stop urbanisation or modernisation. With greater urbanisation, the cost of living rises and parents do not want to have more children and take on higher costs of education, healthcare, housing and so on. Research in the West has shown that increasing rents lead to a fall in both marriage and fertility rates. The age of marriage in certain populations is increasing because of unemployment. People are waiting longer to get settled before going for marriage and children. More women are now educated and they want to go into the labour market without bearing the cost of child-bearing. People are looking for greater self-actualisation, having a decent life, more time for self, higher self-esteem and more happiness in life. So it's not just financial needs, people are looking for something more as well. When those kinds of changes happen, we call it the second demographic transition. The full onset has not yet happened in India because we are still in the later stages of the first demographic transition. However, in the future, if



all this happens, fertility rates may go down further. There is one more factor. As the strong preference for sons goes down, we may see a lowering of the fertility rate, like it happened in South Korea, where the TFR is just 0.8, among the lowest in the world. On whether incentives can help

As several experts have said, recuperation of fertility through pro-natalist policies (incentivisation of births) is very difficult. In the UK, there was a very slight increase after the implementation of pro-natalist policies but there isn't any example in the world where incentivising childbearing or going for marriage has reversed the fertility transition. Japan has initiated AI-based efforts to match couples and encourage them to get married and European countries have offered pro-

natalist incentives but we have not seen a significant reversal in fertility. Evidence from some recent papers suggests that if you improve gender equality — that is, if more men are ready to share household chores and the burden at the household level, it would reduce some of the motherhood penalty and give some confidence to women. But again, more and more women are thinking of self-actualisation. Coercion is not an option, either to lower or to raise fertility. Fertility is a choice as is marriage.

Pro-natalist policies may not see that kind of success because now people are more empowered. They have greater agency as well as greater autonomy. These are decisions taken based on the socio-economic and cultural environment people live in.

Internationalisation of UPI progressing rapidly: RBI

New Delhi: The internationalisation of the unified payments interface (UPI) is progressing rapidly, as India emerges as a world leader in leveraging digital technologies for transformative change, according to a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report. The UPI hit a milestone of 16.6 billion transactions in a month in October, with improvements in its capabilities like successful instant debit reversals at 86 per cent (77 per cent in the same month last year).

"India's UPI, an open-ended system that powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application of any participating bank, is propelling inter-bank peer-to-peer and person-to-merchant transactions seamlessly," said RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra in the report. According to Patra, innovations in the digital credit landscape such as Account Aggregators, OCEN, and financial services on ONDC have also contributed to productivity gains. As of March 2024, ONDC operates in over 720 cities, with orders at 49.72 million. The Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) addresses the credit gap of MSMEs estimated at around Rs 52.2 trillion by connecting them with banks, and clients, with a reduction in funding costs up to 2.5 percentage points. "The value of invoices financed through TReDS have surged more than 23 times. As of October 2024, around 5,000 active FinTechs are involved in pro-

viding various financial and technical solutions to businesses, including MSMEs, helping businesses better manage their operations and improve supply chain finance," wrote Patra.

Around 40 per cent of the rural population and 78 per cent in the 20-30 years age group in the overall population use internet in India, with approximately one-third of households engaging in online purchases of consumables and services, one-fourth in buying of consumer durables, and nearly one-tenth in food purchases. The rising importance of embedded financing is reflected in its share in FinTech funding, which has grown from two per cent in 2020 to nine per cent in 2024, wrote Patra. Taking these developments into account, a summary measure of digitalisation for India has been constructed by using a dynamic factor model (DFM).

"The index has been rising, reflecting the ongoing digital revolution. The spread of digitalisation has spurred research on assessing the effects of digitalisation on the economy and the transmission of monetary policy," said Patra. India is uniquely positioned to unlock new growth avenues and optimise existing ones with its digital public infrastructure (DPI), a vibrant information technology (IT) sector and a burgeoning youth population, including one of the largest AI talent bases, noted the RBI Deputy Governor.

Dismantling of climate talks

The COP29 climate meeting in Baku ended in disappointment last week. On the main issue of finance, developed countries agreed to mobilise only \$300 billion for the developing nations every year, a three-times increase over their current mandate of \$100 billion but way short of at least \$1 trillion that all assessments said was required. Even this nominal scale-up — the needs already run in trillions of dollars — is not supposed to happen immediately but only from 2035. This is not the first time that the annual climate conference has produced a disappointing outcome. Each one of them in the last 15 years has delivered much below expectations. As a result, the discussions and outcomes of these summits have been almost completely delinked from the requirements of meeting the temperature targets mentioned in the 2015 Paris Agreement. While science says that the world needs to cut its emissions by at least 43% by 2030 from 2019 levels, all assessments of current actions estimate that global emissions, even in the best-case scenarios, would be barely 2% down by that time. The underwhelming deal on climate finance reached in Baku might just be the beginning of the unravelling of the climate talks.

Inherently unstable is not a surprise that the current international arrangement on climate change has turned out to be this ineffective. It is the only major multilateral system which is completely aligned against the rich and powerful nations. Usually, the rules of any international forum reflect the prevailing power balance, and are mostly in favour of the powerful, as they are the ones who decide on the rules. The climate change architecture, as represented by the 1994 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), goes completely against this norm. In this system, the rich and the powerful — a group of about 40 including the United States and most of Europe — are the main culprits for causing climate change, and the rules are stacked heavily against them. They have been made solely responsible for cutting their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and also for providing money and technologies to the developing countries to help them fight climate change.

These responsibilities were fixed largely in line with the “polluter pays” principle. Since the developed countries were mainly responsible for emitting GHGs over the last 150 years, it was only fitting that they be asked to take responsibility for cleaning it up. However, equity and fairness are rarely the main drivers of international relations. How this climate structure was allowed to be built up, with the rich and developed countries fully participating in the process, is an interesting and intriguing question that has not yet been settled definitively. It was not before the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the precursor to the Paris Agreement, was finalised that the developed world realised that this system could hurt their interests and disrupt the prevailing global power balance. The Kyoto Protocol took forward the principles enshrined in the UNFCCC and assigned specific targets to each of the developed nations in accordance with their “guilt”. The targets were to be fulfilled in a specific time frame, failing which they could be penalised. It is probably the only instance of such an inherently unstable multilateral system which is so completely at odds with the global power structure being created. Dismantling begins

The efforts to dismantle the system



began immediately after the Kyoto Protocol came into effect in 2005 after the requisite number of ratifications. Although the US played a key role in finalising the Kyoto Protocol, the country never ratified it. The idea was to tear down the structure brick by brick, not in one go. The crucial differentiation between the developed and developing countries in the assignment of climate responsibilities was repeatedly targeted. This was done to ensure that the failure to meet targets could not be blamed only on the developed nations and instead be shared with everyone. The first attempt to replace the Kyoto Protocol with a new agreement was made in Copenhagen in 2009 but it failed. Developed countries worked for another six years and succeeded in Paris. But even while it was in force, till 2020, Kyoto Protocol targets were completely ignored by all the developed countries. Many of them walked out of the Kyoto Protocol. The Paris Agreement made fundamental changes to the way climate responsibilities were structured till then. Emission cuts were not the sole responsibility of the developed countries any longer. Everyone had to “contribute” though in a “nationally-determined” manner. There were no assigned targets for developed countries, their emission cuts also had to be “nationally-determined”, meaning decided by themselves. Emission cuts inadequate

As a result, emission cuts have been nowhere close to what is required. The European Union is expected to cut its emissions by around 60% from 2019 levels by 2030 but that is about it. Donald Trump is the favourite whipping boy on climate change issue, but even without him the US has been the biggest laggard. Despite the much-touted Inflation Reduction Act, brought in by Joe Biden administration, the US is only aiming for a 50-52% cut by 2030 from 2005 levels, which translates to about 45% from 2019 levels. If the world as a whole has to reduce its emissions by 43% by 2030 from 2019 levels, equity and fairness demand that the US and EU should have been aiming for about 80-90% reductions. The sharp distinction between developed and developing countries on emission cuts was broken by the Paris Agreement. But developed countries were still solely responsible for mobilising finance and transfer of clean energy technologies. These are also getting targeted. Dilution of finance responsibility The developed countries argue that the scale of finance requirements has increased manifold, and many other countries have grown rich in the last

two decades, so they must also be asked to contribute to climate finance. The first attempt to expand the contributor base happened in Paris itself but did not succeed. In Baku this year, expansion of contributor base was one of the core issues being discussed as part of the finance negotiations, and some criteria for roping in more countries were suggested. But the developing countries managed to thwart it again. Essentially, China, which was a target of the expansion effort, put its foot down. In the bargain, the developed countries limited the quantum of climate finance to be raised by them — \$300 billion and no more. The dismantling of the

international climate structure has been a continuous process. The dilutions on emissions cuts and finance are just two examples. Erosion has been across the board, leading to a steady decline in trust of the developing countries. But it is still the only multilateral forum where tiny countries like Tuvalu or Marshall Islands have a voice, and an influential one at that. These countries also benefit from some climate money flowing to them. It is not enough but better than nothing at all. The climate talks would possibly continue to have some limited utility for some more time, but its effectiveness as a global forum to fight climate change is severely diminished.

An experience unworthy of the franchise

This year has been a year of experimentation within the real-time strategy genre, with game makers exploring new takes, from the unremarkable Elder Scrolls: Castles to the highly impressive Heroes of History. Joining this lineup is Age of Empires Mobile, developed by TiMi Studio, the team behind Call of Duty Mobile.

With TiMi promising a 4X experience aimed at introducing younger generations to the charm of the iconic franchise, fans had high expectations. Unfortunately, the result is a mishmash of game modes, offering little more than a glorified city builder that is weighed down by an endless stream of microtransactions. The heart and soul of Age of Empires (AoE) is unmistakably absent.

The game begins with the tale of a holy sword that must be charged, following Princess Josephine on her quest to establish an empire. Right from the opening sequence, the game abandons the classic AoE controls in favor of a dated city-builder system, reminiscent of Clash of Clans. As you summon heroes and construct buildings to raise an army, it becomes evident that the game leaves no room for strategy, tactics, variety, or even basic army formations. Across the many game modes on offer, originality is scarce — you’re either engaged in auto-battles or playing as Princess Josephine in combat sequences reminiscent of the classic Demon Star.

While it’s hard to justify playing a real-time strategy game that requires no actual strategy, it’s equally important to acknowl-



edge that the game does offer several game modes. Unfortunately, none of them are enjoyable or worth your time. In this scattered approach, what remains is an over-cluttered UI/menu system that provides little to no guidance on how to navigate or play the game effectively. Even after six hours of gameplay, I was still unsure what each button on the screen corresponded to in terms of in-game elements. The game’s Alliance system, however, stood out as it allowed players to overcome challenges collectively. Like many of the new RTS mobile games, AoE Mobile also leans heavily on the use of legendary heroes from history. During my time with the game, I unlocked Joan of Arc, which initially sparked a sense of nostalgia from playing her campaign in AoE II. Later, I unlocked Cleopatra and Darius the Great. When you compare AoE mobile with something like Heroes of History you realize how little has gone into making this game work. Lastly, the game is also let down by poor optimization. I found the game struggled on my Pixel Pro and at times even failed to register my inputs forcing me to wait for updates to fix the issue. However, over a month since launch the problems persist.

A man with a limp and a sweatshirt left behind: How police zeroed in on man who 'killed on trains'

The murder scene provided the first clue. A black-and-white sweatshirt and a backpack lay near the body of a 19-year-old girl, metres away from a railway station in Valsad district of Gujarat, on November 14. As police rummaged through the backpack, its contents – more than one set of clothes, and a mobile charger, among other things – led them to conclude that the suspect was a visitor to the town and had probably taken the train to get there. Over the next five days, the Gujarat Police scoured footage from at least 5,000 CCTV cameras at railway stations across four states, before finally zeroing in on their man: Rahul Karamveer Jat, 30, alias Bholu, who, police say, has confessed to five murders in October-November – four of these on moving trains, in coaches reserved for the differently abled, and one, of the 19-year-old Valsad victim, near the railway station. According to the police, Rahul, who is originally from Rohtak in Haryana, used to work as a waiter at a hotel 10 km from the railway station. That day, he had arrived from Mumbai to the town to collect his pending salary from the hotel and was on his way back when he spotted the girl near the railway station. She was heading home from her tuition centre and the railway station fell on the way. Police say he stalked the girl for up to 100 metres from the railway station and, as they reached a desolate spot, dragged her into a mango orchard nearby, raped and killed her. Police say that in his confessions to them, he said that after raping the girl a couple of times, he went back to the railway station, bought himself a bottle of a fruit drink and a bag of milk, drank both and allegedly again went back to rape the girl. But by then, her family members, alerted by her absence and who had been tracking her entire path from the tuition centre to her home, had arrived at the murder spot. Police say Rahul hid in the bushes and watched as the distraught family discovered the body and carried it away on a motorbike. Police say he left in a hurry, leaving behind his sweatshirt and the backpack. He then allegedly took the local train to the next station, from here he was to travel to Mumbai. The investigation

Valsad district police chief Karanraj Vaghela said that after they discovered Rahul's backpack and his black-and-white sweatshirt, they began retracing his footsteps. "The bag had three jerseys and two half pants. We suspected that the accused may have come from the railway station," he said.

Since the railway station is without CCTV cameras, the police looked at footage from the cameras at the next station. That's when they spotted a man wearing the same black-and-white sweatshirt, a scarf around his neck, and carrying the same black bag. He walked with a limp and was seen boarding a train headed to Bandra in Mumbai. Police then set up 10 teams headed by inspectors who coordinated with the police chiefs in four districts. "On checking the CCTV footage, we got to know that he had come to Vapi station in Valsad on a train from Mumbai. We checked footage from every station between Vapi and Mumbai Central and finally spotted him on the CCTV at Dadar station (in Mumbai)," Vaghela said. Meanwhile, police teams in Gujarat's Navsari and Surat districts mapped his photograph with jail records, but found no pris-

oner matching his description. They then checked the national database of prisoners and finally struck a match – Rahul, a resident of Mokhra Khaas village in Haryana's Rohtak district, had been released from Jodhpur jail in Rajasthan in May this year. Inspector Parkash Chand, Station House Officer of Bahaukbarpur police station under whose jurisdiction Rahul's Rohtak village falls, told The Indian Express, "Rahul has 11 FIRs against him in various parts of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Mathura and Rajasthan. We got his contact from his family and put his number under surveillance." Meanwhile, the Gujarat Police, which had been coordinating with the railway police across stations in Mumbai, discovered that Rahul had travelled to Shirdi in Maharashtra and Machilipatnam in Andhra Pradesh before reaching Mumbai. The accused

Rahul, who lost his father a few years ago, was allegedly disowned by his mother and brother. Valsad police chief Vaghela said, "As a child, Rahul was afflicted with polio in the left leg. We have reports that he was bullied by his fellow students. While he was in Class 5, he stole a bicycle. He was also fascinated by trucks but later, as a young man, he wasn't allowed to drive trucks because of his disability. So he started stealing them. Since 2018, 13 cases of truck theft have been registered against him across police stations in UP, Haryana, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan." According to the dossier maintained by the Haryana Police, Rahul was first arrested in Mathura (UP) in August 2015 for stealing a truck from Rohtak's Kalanaur. Police say Rahul stole another truck 10 months later, this time from Narnaul, about 120 km from Rohtak, on June 13, 2016. By June 14, 2016, he was in Fatehabad's Bhuna, where he rammed the stolen truck into the wall of a godown. Rahul's dossier reveals a pattern — bail after bail from court, peppered with stints in jail. A seemingly remorseless Rahul would go on to steal four more trucks across Haryana between 2019 and 2022. Between stealing trucks, on January 23, 2021, a case under the Arms Act was registered against him in Bihariganj of Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur for possessing illegal firearms. He was arrested with another illegal weapon in Vrindavan, Mathura, a few months later. On February 15, 2024, Rahul was booked on charges of robbery in the FIR registered by GRP, Jodhpur, Rajasthan at police station Metra Road. The other murders Police say that after his arrest on November 24, Rahul confessed to killing four people – two before the November 14 murder of the teenager in Valsad and two after.

The first of these was October 20. The Andhra Pradesh Police had registered a rape-cum-murder case after the Guntkal Gutti railway station discovered the body of a middle-aged woman. Rahul had allegedly zeroed in on the woman, who was travelling from Pune to Kanyakumari in a coach reserved for the disabled, and strangled her to death, before robbing her. Five days later, on October 25, the Karnataka Police recovered the body of a resident of Dakshina Kannada district. The victim was travelling on a train from Bengaluru to Murdeshwar in the state when Rahul allegedly robbed and murdered him. In this case too, the victim was travelling in a coach reserved for the specially



abled. Then, five days after he killed the girl in Valsad, on November 19, the cleaning staff at Howrah station car shed discovered a body lying on a berth in the coach reserved for the differently abled. The body, covered with a blanket and with multiple stab wounds, was identified as that of a percussionist from Howrah who was returning from Katihar in Bihar, where he had attended a musical programme. Rahul allegedly confessed to attacking the victim and stealing his belongings, including Rs 10,000 in cash and his cell phone. The last murder that Rahul confessed to was of a woman, a resident of Sandur in Karnataka, whose body was discovered by

the Secunderabad railway police on November 24. She, too, had been strangled to death in a coach for the differently abled. Hours later, on November 24, back in Valsad, police chief Vaghela got a tip-off: a hawker at the Bandra railway station had spotted Rahul boarding the Bandra-Bhuj train. The RPF officials at Bandra alerted the Gujarat police, who waited at Vapi station. As the train pulled in, police arrested him. Police say they recovered three mobile phones from Rahul – one of the Valsad victim and the other of the percussionist. Police arrested him under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections related to murder and rape, besides other charges.

444th bird in Telangana sighted at Bheemuni Padam waterfalls



Sangareddy: Yet another new bird species was added to the rich avifaunal diversity of Telangana as the bird watchers sighted a Scaly Thrush for the first time in the State. Scaly Thrush is a winter migrant bird from the Himalayas and North Eastern States where it breeds. The bird's sighting is also said to be the first in South India. However, the bird watchers were still checking the data to officially confirm it. Seasoned birder Sriram Reddy, who was on a two-day trip to the Bheemuni Padam waterfalls located in the Guduru reserve forest in Mahabubabad district, sighted the bird. Some six months ago, the bird watchers also sighted Pied Thrush near Bheemuni Padam

waterfalls. It was the second sighting of the Pied Thrush, recorded for the first time at Umamaheshwaram in November 2022 by wildlife photographer Chadramouli. Sriram Reddy and Field Director Guduru division Chandrashekhar were the first to sight Scaly Thrush. Reddy said that it was a passage bird to Telangana. Since these birds would travel down south during winter to avoid harsh weather in the Himalayas, they would take a brief halt here. Explaining how he sighted the rare bird, the wildlife photographer said that he found something moving in the foliage under Bamboo trees when he sighted the Thrush. Immediately, he said he had noticed some differences with the Thrush family birds he sighted earlier in Telangana.