Hyderabad may soon get six new government engineering colleges

Hyderabad: In a move aimed at expanding technical education in public institutions, the Technical Education department has proposed upgradation of six government polytechnics into engineering colleges in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) limits.The Government Institute of Electronics East Marredpally, Government Polytechnic for Women East Marredpally, JN Government Polytechnic College Ramanthapur, Quli Qutb Shah Government Polytechnic College Old City, Durgabai Deshmukh Government Women's Technical Training Institute Ameerpet, and Government Polytechnic for Women (Minorities) Badangpet have recently been proposed for the upgradation from the next academic year.

According to sources, permission has been sought to introduce programmes – electronics at IoE, CSE at Durgabai Deshmukh polytechnic and Marredpally polytechnic, and Civil and Mechanical engineering at Ramanthapur polytechnic. The Education department approved the proposal, which is now under the scrutiny of the Finance department.As per sources there may not be financial implications for proposed colleges as existing polytechnic lecturers will be used to teaching engineering programmes. The government has to upgrade existing laboratories and other facilities."Following approval from the government, a nod from the All India Council for Technical Education, which commenced the approval process for 2025-26, will be sought," sources said.Presently, there are 57 government polytechnics across the State and 12 are in Hyderabad, RangaReddy and Medchal-Malkajgiri districts. During this academic year, the government upgraded Government Polytechnic at Kosgi into an engineering college, becoming the first government engineering college in the State.This college launched CSE, CSE (AI and ML) and CSE Data Science programmes with 60 seats each and admissions to these programmes were on the basis of the merit secured in the TG EAPCET.So far, the State had only campus and constituent colleges

under the JNTU-Hyderabad, Osmania, Kakatiya, Mahatma Gandhi, Satavahana and Palamuru universities besides Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University and PV Narasimha Rao Telangana Veterinary University.Unlike university campus and constituent colleges, the government engineering colleges are under direct control of the Technical Education department

TGSRTC to setup dispensaries across Telangana

Hyderabad: The Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC) employees and retirees across the State will no longer have to come to the RTC Hospital at Tarnaka in Hyderabad for treatment of their ailments. The corporation is planning to set up dispensaries in district headquarters in the State.For this, necessary medical staff and equipment is also being procured. However, these dispensaries will not attend to emergencies or provide vital treatments.The reason is that the dispensaries set up in some of the district centers attached to the RTC hospital are now being converted into hospitals. Though the corporation had the plan since a longtime, it is learnt that steps in that direction were not taken due to lack of adequate fund with the corporation.

Recently, RTC Managing Director VC Sajjanar had ensured allocation of necessary funds for setting up dispensaries and upgrading them into hospitals.At present, there are a total of 14 RTC dispensaries across the State. Of which, four are in Hyderabad. But, it is learnt that some dispensaries did not have required number of doctors, medical staff, equipment and medicines. However, steps are being taking by the authorities to assign doctors have been assigned to all the dispensaries.As per available information, while just half-a-dozen doctors have been assigned by the State government, the rest of the doctors and technicians required have been provided by RTC through outsourcing. They will be available locally and provide a full range of general treatments.However, patients requiring emergency treatment are provided basic treatment until they go to the RTC main hospital or private hospitals on the RTC referral list. Also, all kinds of medicines are being stcked in these dispensaries. Earlier, those treated at RTC main hospital had to come to Hyderabad each time for medicines. Now, free medicines will be provided in these dispensaries.On the other hand, as part of the decision to set up dispensaries in the district centers, a dispensary has recently been set up in Nagarkurnool district. Steps are being taken to setup such facilities in other parts in the State.

Anwar-ul-uloom dominates Osmania University Wrestling Championships, claims victory with 20 points

Hyderabad: Anwar-ul-uloom Degree College emerged winners of the Osmania University Inter-College Freestyle Wrestling Championships, amassing 20 points in the event held at the Osmania University Cycling Velodrome on Saturday.Nikhil Yadav (65kg), Syed Abu Huriara (70kg), Shaik Uzair (79kg), Sahil Singh (86kg), Syed Maharoos (97kg), and Mohd Khaja Talibuddin (125kg+) secured gold, while Shaik Nizam finished runner-up in the 74kg category, contributing to the team's dominant performance.

Results: Team Championships: 1. Anwar-ul-uloom Degree College (20), 2. Lord College of Engineering and Technology (9), 3. Keshav Memorial (4); 57 Kg: Abdul Khader (Presidency) bt T Bhaskar (Siddhartha College of PE), 61 Kg: Mohd Abdul Malik (MG Law) bt P Karthik Goud (RG Kedia), 65 Kg: Nikhil Yadav (Anwar-ul-uloom) bt Abdul Rehman Bin Md (Aurora), 70 Kg: Syed Abu Huriara (Anwar-ul-uloom) bt Shaik Abu Sayeed (Lords), 74 Kg: N Naman Singh (Nizam College) bt Shaik Nizam (Anwar-ul-uloom), 79 Kg: Shaik Uzair (Anwar-ul-uloom) bt Mohd Sofian (Lords Eng), 86 Kg: Sahil Singh (Anwar-ul-uloom) bt Syed Ali (Lords Eng), 92 Kg: Syed Abdul Rehman (Sultan-ul-uloom) bt G Amarnath (Keshav memorial), 97 Kg: Syed Maharoos (Anwar-ul-uloom) bt Varun Singh (Thomas College), 125 Kg+: Mohd Khaja Talibuddin (Anwar-ul-uloom) bt Rizwan Ali Khan (Govt City).

How gangs of Bihar are crossing over into Bengal — just a shot away

When Bihar's gangster and arms dealer Pappu Chowdhury's name came up in the November 16 attempt on Trinamool Congress (TMC) councillor Sushanta Ghosh's life last month, it confirmed one thing to law enforcement authorities: the growing nexus between organised crime syndicates of the two states. According to police sources, recent months have seen a "surge" in criminal activity in West Bengal, many of these linked to gangs from across the border in Bihar. There are estimated to be at least 50 such gangs operating in Bihar's areas bordering Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Nepal, a senior police officer from Bihar said. The rise of arms and ammunition being smuggled into the state from Bihar has also added to these worries. According to data accessed by The Indian Express, 58 people have been arrested and 115 weapons — including finished and unfinished firearms – have been seized in 14 raids conducted jointly by the Kolkata Police's Special Task Force and Bihar Special Task Force in Bihar's arms factories in the last three years. Most of these raids were conducted in Munger, where police sources claim there are several units assembling firearms.

According to the sources, Bihar gangsters such as Pappu Chowdhury and Subodh Singh are allegedly responsible for "orchestrating" a series of high-profile crimes in West Bengal. Chowdhury gained notoriety between 2010 and 2018, and his gang has allegedly been active in the Seemanchal region – comprising districts such as Kishanganj, Katihar, Purnia and Araria – but has also been linked to extortion cases and bank heists in Samastipur and Vaishali, and even as far as the neighbouring Jharkhand. "In such cases, police of both states have to work in tandem," a former superintendent of police who had been posted in Katihar said.

But Chowdhury isn't the only known Bihar-based gangster whose name has cropped in West Bengal police investigations. Probe into the 2019 murder of BJP leader Manish Shukla allegedly led to Subodh Singh, who's been accused of a string of crimes in West Bengal — including the 2023 murder of Durgapur businessman and alleged coal mafia Raju Jha, and the foiled heist of Rs 4 crore at a jewellery shop on June 12 in West Bengal's Raniganj. Singh's name also cropped up in the attempted killing of businessman Ajay Mondal in Belgharia this June. According to police sources, Singh, a Class 8 dropout, operates through nearly 100 henchmen, many of them sharp shooters. Currently lodged in Bengal's Alipore Central Jail, he is believed to have run his operations while at Patna's Beur jail, where he was lodged until July this year. "Subodh's name has cropped up again and again since last year for crimes in Asansol, Barrackpore, Ranaghat, and Raniganj to Domjur. The Subodh Singh gang has been also active in Bihar and West Bengal for years in the looting of banks and business establishments, extortion and contract killing cases," a senior IPS officer of the Bihar cadre told The Indian Express. This apart, the arrest of four suspects in connection with the heists at two well-known jewellery shops in Nadia and Purulia in August led police to uncover their

link to a Bihar-based gang. On October 7, an alleged Bihar-based gangster Mohammed Adil alias Babar, who had 12 cases against him – including six in Bengal – and was carrying a bounty of Rs 1 lakh, was killed in an encounter with the special task force of the Bihar Police in Purnia district. The police recovered one country-made carbine and six pistols from the encounter site. "Most of such gangs had been involved in bank looting, extortion, contract killings and examination paper leaks," he said. gangs of bihar, bengal border, indian express Recoveries made during a joint operation by the Kolkata and Bihar STFs at an arms assembly unit in Bhagalpur, Bihar. Meanwhile, there's also been a rise in arms smuggling between the two states. Consider this:

*On November 13, Kolkata and Bihar Special Task Forces conducted a joint raid at an alleged arms assembly unit being run inside a house in Munger, Bihar and arrested two suspects, Mohammed Monazir Hussain and Mohammed Nasim. Inside, authorities allegedly discovered disparate parts of guns, raw materials and the equipment to make firearms – such as a lathe and milling machines. According to officials, the unit was being run under the guise of a food plate manufacturing unit. *On November 9, the Kolkata STF, acting on specific input, detained one Mohammed Ismail Khan of Ghangri in Jharkhand's Chatra district following raids at his residence there as well as at another one of his houses in Rajabazar, Kolkata. Authorities allegedly recovered three single-shot fire-

arms, two 7 mm semi-automatic pistols, 50 rounds of 8MM live cartridges, and 40 rounds of 7.65mm live cartridges. *On September 25, joint raids at an "active mini-gun factory" in Chandpur village of Bihar's Bhagalpur district led to the detention of five people – including the owner of the land, Shivnandan Mondal. Police found 15 pistol parts such as sliders and barrels as well as equipment to make firearms. On his part, a senior police officer admits that the Bihar connection in these cases underscores "the porous nature of the border and the ease with which criminals operate across jurisdictions", calling for

"enhanced interstate cooperation" to tackle the problem. gangs of biharBut the increasing frequency of such connections has given rise to calls for stricter border control, with leaders from the ruling Trinamool Congress laying the blame on lax policing at border areas. "People pay a salary to the police. They do good work during Durga Puja but the question is how pistols from Bihar are entering Bengal. What do these police (people) do? Can't they stop such people and check," senior TMC leader Sougata Roy asked at a public rally after Sushanta Ghosh's murder led to a political uproar.

PM2.5 exposure leads to 1.5 million deaths in India every year

Long-term exposure to PM2.5 pollution concentration higher than the 5 μg/m³ annual average recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) ambient air quality guidelines is potentially associated with 1.5 million deaths a year in India, according to a study published in The Lancet Planetary Health on Wednesday. Fine particulate matter, a common measure of air pollution, refers to particles in the air that are 2.5 microns or less in diameter. The unit μg/m³ denotes micrograms of the pollutant per cubic metre of air. According to the analysis, the entire 1.4 billion population in India lives in areas with PM2.5 concentration above that recommended by the WHO guidelines. Also, 1.1 billion (81.9% of the total population) live in areas with PM 2.5 concentration above the national air quality standard of 40 μg/m³.

The evidence supporting the association between long-term exposure to outdoor air pollution and deaths in India, however, is scarce and inconsistent with studies in other countries, the authors said. The study looked at annual deaths from 2009 to 2019 at the district level in India and obtained annual PM2.5 concentrations by a machine learning-based model using satellite data as well as ground-monitoring observations of air pollution levels across 1,056 locations. The range of PM2.5 pollution exposure was quite

large across the years, with the lowest annual PM2.5 concentration of 11.2 μg/m³ observed in the Lower Subansiri district, Arunachal Pradesh, in 2019 and the largest annual figure of 119.0 μg/m³ observed in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi in 2016. A 10 μg/m³ increase in annual PM2.5 concentration was associated with an 8·6% higher annual mortality, according to the model results of the study. Based on the Indian annual air quality standard, a total of 3·8 million premature deaths may have occurred between 2009 and 2019, which were attributable to PM2.5, amounting to 5% of total mortality, the paper estimated. When the WHO guidelines were considered, a total of 16·6 million deaths were attributable to PM2.5, amounting to 24·9% of total mortality. It's important to note that the authors used two different safety standards to look at two scenarios – the Indian national standard =40 μg/m³ and the WHO guideline of =5 μg/m³ – for annual means. "We used the Indian NAAQS (National Ambient Air Quality Standards) to motivate policy makers regarding the current guidelines and aid in understanding the need for revising guidelines, without necessarily implying that these two concentrations are safe," said the paper. In the background, the authors said in 2019, the Global Burden of Diseases, Inju-

ries, and Risk Factors Study attributed 0·98 million deaths to ambient air pollution in India based on potentially inappropriate exposure-response functions from countries with low air pollution levels. Instead, using data from India, they investigated long-term exposure to PM2.5 and all-cause mortality with a causal inference method. In India, people living in urban and several rural areas are exposed to high PM2.5 concentrations throughout the year. According to the paper, population-weighted mean PM2.5 exposure (2000 to 2019) across India was reported at 57·3 μg/m³, with higher concentrations observed from 2010 to 2019. WHO revised the air quality guidelines for PM2.5 concentrations in 2021 based on mounting evidence of major health effects even at low exposure concentrations.

Haryana Introduces Free Cashless Treatment for Road Accident Victims

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), December 14: In compliance with the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Haryana Police has launched a new initiative under which accident victims will now receive free treatment in the initial golden hour. Under this scheme, treatment up to Rs.1.5 lakh per person per road accident is provided free of cost for a maximum period of 7 days from the date of the accident. In this regard, Additional Director General of Police, Hardeep Doon has written a letter to all the concerned officers of the state asking them to ensure compliance.

Giving information about this, Director General of Police, Shatrujeet Kapur said that making the roads of the state safe for the common people is one of our priorities. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare a better and effective action plan to reduce road accidents and work on them. In the same series, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has started providing free treatment facilities to road accident victims. He said that this pilot project will be implemented jointly by the National Health Authority in coordination with the local police and hospitals contracted by the state health department. During this, the accident victim will be provided free treatment up to a limit of Rs 1.5 lakh for a maximum of 7 days under Section 162 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.

Divulging details the DGP stated that under this scheme, the road accident victim is taken to the hospital. After this, the hospital management uploads the data of the injured person in their software and sends it to the concerned police station, after which the concerned police station confirms within 6 hours whether the injured person is injured in a road accident or not. After confirmation, the injured person is provided with cashless treatment. DGP Kapur claimed that in order to reduce road accidents, Haryana Police works by focusing on several important points, as a result of which a decrease of 616 road accidents has been recorded in 2024 compared to 2023. Along with this, there has also been a decrease of 251 deaths in road accidents in 2024 compared to 2023 and 403 fewer people have been injured. He said that from January 2024 to the end of November 2024, Haryana Police conducted 2166 road safety awareness campaigns through which 2 lakh 91 thousand 307 children and other people ensured participation. Apart from this, 6 special campaigns were conducted in the year 2024, out of which five campaigns were conducted against lane driving and one special campaign against those who applied black film on vehicles. During the special campaign, challans were issued to 27 thousand 321 vehicles in the state, out of which 2600 challans were issued for vehicles with black film.

The DGP further said that along with this, black spots have also been identified in the state where road accidents are relatively high. These black spots are rectified by coordinating with the concerned road engineering departments. In view of the seriousness of the subject of road safety, road safety

committees have been formed in different districts of the state, through which regular meetings are held on the agenda of

road safety. By the end of October 2024, 107 such meetings had been held, which were chaired by the Deputy Commissioner of the respective district. He said that in the year 2024, the road safety committee checked 19 thousand 261 school buses, out of which 4,657 school buses were challaned for irregularities. DGP Kapur said that there are currently 66 toll plazas in the state on which weigh-in-motion machines are to be installed, out of which these machines have been installed at 54 toll plazas, out of which 29 are being used to challan overloaded vehicles through weigh-in-motion machines and soon

it will also be started at other toll plazas. Appealing to the common people, Kapur said that road safety is an important issue.

The common people should cooperate in making the roads safe and should drive vehicles only within the prescribed speed limit. Haryana Police organizes various types of competitions and activities to make the common people aware of traffic rules. He said that people should not use mobile phones etc. while driving. Even a slight negligence of a person can prove fatal not only for themselves but also for other people.

Russia and Assad | Why did Kremlin back the Syrian autocrat and what does his fall mean

Story so far: Ousted Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was granted asylum by Moscow on Monday (December 9, 2024), mere hours after Syrian rebels overthrew his 24-year regime. Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, told NBC News, that Mr. Assad and his family was transported very securely to Russia by its forces and refuted any reason to hand over the Syrian dictator for trial. A lightning rebel offensive which began on November 27 ended the 50-year Assad regime in Damascus, in just twelve days. Mr. Assad's flight to Moscow was necessitated because the Syrian rebel opposition led by militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) successfully recaptured Aleppo, Hama, Homs and finally Damascus, in the face of minimal resistance from the Syrian military. As per reports, both Iran and Russia, who have military presence in Syria refused to aid Mr. Assad at that time. While Russia is still embroiled in the Ukraine war, Iran is involved in a proxy war with Israel via militant groups Hamas and Hezbollah. The fall of Mr. Assad has thrown into sharp focus Moscow's diminished military due to its prolonged war with Kyiv. "Events in Syria demonstrate the weakness of Putin's regime, which is incapable of fighting on two fronts and abandons its closest allies for the sake of continued aggression against Ukraine," stated Ukraine's Foreign ministry.

Moreover, Moscow had initially tried to explain Mr. Assad's departure as an organised one claiming he had left the country after giving orders for a peaceful transfer of power. Within hours, Russian President Vladimir Putin personally cleared the Assad family's plea for asylum. Russia and Syria established diplomatic relations in 1944 and Moscow has backed the country's independence from French colonial in 1946. During the Cold War era, Russia expanded its presence in West Asia backing Syrian Baath party supporters' coup in 1970 led by Hafez al-Assad, the ousted president's father. During Assad Sr.'s tenure, the Soviet Union opened its naval base in Tartus in 1971, provided aid to Syria during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war (Yom Kippur war), signed a 20-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Russia is also one Syria's biggest arms supplier. After the senior Assad's death, the Russia-Syria relations were strengthened further under his son Bashar al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin. By 2011, pro-democracy protests broke across West Asia stirring anti-government public movement against the Assad regime. Throughout 2011-12, violent protests breakout across Syria as widespread defections from the Syrian military to the 'Free Syrian Army', a loose rebel coalition, took place, opposing Assad's rule. Opposition forces and jihadists captured swathes of territories including Raqqa, Der Ezzour and parts of Aleppo. Assad's forces were accused of using chemical weapons in East Ghouta, a Damascus suburb, during the civil war in 2013. Russian intervention (2015 onwards) By 2014, the Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi-led Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) rampaged across Syria capturing most parts of the country. ISIS captured Raqqa, Der Ezzour and Palmyra. Jabhat Al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda arm, took Idlib and parts of Aleppo. When the regime came under serious pressure, Russia sent its forces into Syria in September 2015. In its air strikes, Kremlin claimed targetting ISIS-controlled regions, but as per US-based Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), the strikes hit Western and Turkish-backed groups in northern Syria. As full-scale war broke out, U.S. and Russia negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to deconflict air operations over Syria between them. In 2016, Mr. Assad's Army backed by Russian airstrikes recaptured Palmyra from ISIS while US-Kurdish coalition dubbed the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) liberated north and eastern Syria from ISIS clutches. Syrian forces captured Aleppo by December. Through 2017, Russian involvement in the Syrian war increased as Mr. Assad's forces recaptured Homs, Dayr-Az-Zawr, Mayadin. As SDF recaptured Raqqa, US and Russia agreed to a deconflicting channel for both air and ground forces. Ghouta and Der'a fell to Mr. Assad's forces in 2018. Russia and Turkiye agreed to de-escalation around Idlib. However, all hell broke lose as US President Trump withdrew forces from Northern Syria in 2019, opening up the region to Turkish attacks. Mr. Assad's forces entered the SDF-controlled area to counter Turkish strikes, bombarding Idlib. Fresh wave of strikes and counter occurred between Turkiye and Russian forces through before Mr. Putin and Turkish President Recep Erdogan agree to another de-escalation deal in Idlib in March 2020. Since 2020, Russian airstrikes across provinces held by the rebel groups and jihadists continued, however Mr. Putin's focus turned towards Ukraine in 2022, where he launched a full-scale invasion. Why has Russia backed Assad? The decision to stick with Assad inspite of his growing unpopularity in Syria served three purposes for Russia – pushback against a US attempts to overthrow the regime, establish Russian power in the area and acquire military bases for easy access to Africa, explains Washington institute. By complying with U.S. forces on attacking ISIS strongholds, Russia's military offensive was limited primarily to airstrikes, naval support and a small number of elite ground troops,

Cosplaying with fibre optics and servos

Fans are increasingly using techniques in 3D printing, animatronics and new materials to build elaborate cosplay homagesThe end of the year brings one into the mood of pageantry and what better than dressing up as your favourite manga, anime, game or sci-fi character? It is with this celebratory mood that this self-confessed geek enters the hallowed halls of Fan Expo in San Francisco, a local but popular fan expo which attracts thousands of fans, sporting store-bought to custom-made costumes.The ground floor has stall after stall of merch to buy, while the comic creators and actors sit on panels on the second floor, signing autographs and taking paid-for selfies. I beeline to the second level, where a red-carpet event runs full throng. Hobbyist cosplayers display their latest costumes to hoots, cheering and thunderous clapping by the audience. There are superheroes, characters from manga and anime and some from games that I can't recognise. I do cheer them though.

Cosplaying is the ultimate celebration of fandom for it combines two strong emotions in us. The desire to playact, to disguise, roleplay and the passion of being a fan, of having an idol you want to emulate. Though costuming and masquerade has been a thing in most civilisations, cosplaying in its modern sense started in 1970s with Japanese fandom dressing up as manga and anime characters in their everyday lives – at colleges and conventions. Today, it's a huge market of costumes and wigs valued at $4.8 billion in 2023 according to Future Market Insights. There's an estimated 10-15 million cosplayers in the world, who spend about $500 per person yearly.One of the fans on the red carpet is Lisa Mei Ling Fong. She's dressed up as a Tatooine Tusken Raider from Star Wars series. She brings along a gigantic beast of burden, an imagined creature called bantha, a mix of a yak-horse-elephant, a Tatooine native, rising beyond her height. Fong's been working on her cosplay companion for seven years now, using self-dyed raffia skirting, palm fronds and synthetic hair, pouring in details, money and time. "I stopped counting after 250 hours," she says, handing me a blue-milk bottle as a souvenir (Bantha milk is blue, she tells me). Another cosplayer, Will is dressed up as Moon Knight, a character in Marvel comics. He ordered his sculpted body armour at a 3D print shop online and wrapped lots of cloth on it to make it look 'real'.

Most characters that are popular with fans are fantastical, making it hard to copy in real life. This makes cosplay an art of putting a puzzle together. Scrounge vintage stores, create patterns for 3D printing, add in fabric, stitch, and add in pieces, paint, prime, coat and etch – all to try and copy a fantastical character's costume from a game or a comic.Alita Battle Angel from the Japanese cyberpunk manga series greets me on the ground floor. This is Poppy Lop Cosplay (@pollylop_cos) one of the invited guests at the expo. Poppy got into cosplaying early 2021 and has made between 30-40 costumes in the past four years. "I probably average one costume per month," she laughs, adding that a dramatic competition piece might take her a few months to do. New materials like EVA foam, thermoplastics and foam clay have changed the way cosplaying works though, she says."EVA foam is craft foam that comes in a variety of thickness and makes it easy to make

armours and props," she says. It's lightweight, can be covered with fabric or painted to add detailing. It's also affordable and accessible. A couple of years ago, costumes were made of clothes from the thrift store, floor mats and carpets. Now it is EVA foam and more expensive thermoplastics like Worbla, which are malleable as you can heat it and reshape it in the design you want. Lots of cosplayers cover their EVA foam with Worbla to give it more structure, though that adds weight too. "You can print crazy shapes with it, which is pretty awesome," says Poppy, who was eyeing LEDs and motor-activated things to experiment with.

Next to Poppy, sits Loveable Spiral (@lovablespiral), another expo cosplay guest, elegantly wearing the Senator Padme Amidala from Star Wars. She created her armbands on Tinkercad, a 3D design software and printed it in her garage. Reduced costs of 3D printers (starting at $200) mean a lot of hobbyists can keep one at home. "I've seen cosplayers weave fiber optics into fabrics and make dresses out of them. I want to learn how to do that," she says, adding that like her, most cosplayers have self-taught themselves through tutorials, social media posts, Discord and Reddit channels. "Everyone starts somewhere, so if you want to get into cosplaying, just do it."Fibreoptics, LED lights, animatronics – with cheaper computers like Raspberry Pis and your average remote-controlled servos, everyone wants to add a bit of sci-fi to the costume.As if on cue, an R2D2 appears right before me and I follow it around the corner. At the stall of Bay Area Droid Builders, I find hobbyist Robert Stevenson the maker of this droid. It's a squeaky bit of delight, carefully constructed by Stevenson over five years by pouring hundreds of dollars and days. It's a replica of a robot, he tells me. He used a 3D printed body, basic code with remote-controlled servos to make the bot move and speak in beep-bops."The electronics have been the hardest thing because I want them to work in a specific way, but they don't," he says, adding that many cosplayers are curious and want to use electronics in their costumes.

An animatronic on their shoulder, a camera, some movement that you can code, stick to servos, add in LEDs, fibre optics and make the costume look alive and autonomous. Add in a touch of magic smoke. "I keep tempting them to come to the beep-bop side," he laughs. Posing for a couple of selfies with his all too clean, all too squeaky delightful R2D2 homage, I head out into the chilly evening.Fans, I find out, come in all shapes, sizes, and genders. They can be tiny humans accompanied by adults, or cosplaying octogenarians shakily navigating the crowds. There's one thing in common. Their eyes sparkle with the thing they're geeking out. When it's festive season, that's a good thing.

Drones, planes or UFOs? Americans abuzz over mysterious New Jersey sightings

Chatham (N.J.): That buzzing coming out of New Jersey? It's unclear if it's drones or something else, but for sure the nighttime sightings are producing tons of talk, a raft of conspiracy theories and craned necks looking skyward.Cropping up on local news and social media sites around Thanksgiving, the saga of the drones reported over New Jersey has reached incredible heights.

This week seems to have begun a new, higher-profile chapter: Lawmakers are demanding (but so far not getting) explanations from federal and state authorities about what's behind them. Gov. Phil Murphy wrote to President Joe Biden asking for answers. New Jersey's new senator, Andy Kim, spent Thursday night on a drone hunt in rural northern New Jersey, and posted about it on X.But perhaps the most fantastic development is the dizzying proliferation of conspiracies — none of which has been confirmed or suggested by federal and state officials who say they're looking into what's happening. It has become shorthand to refer to the flying machines as drones, but there are questions about whether what people are seeing are unmanned aircraft or something else.

Some theorize the drones came from an Iranian mothership. Others think they are the Secret Service making sure President-elect Donald Trump's Bedminster property is secure. Others worry about China. The deep state. And on.In the face of uncertainty, people have done what they do in 2024: Cre-

ate a social media group.

The Facebook page, New Jersey Mystery Drones — let's solve it, has nearly 44,000 members, up from 39,000 late Thursday. People are posting their photo and video sightings, and the online commenters take it from there.One video shows a whitish light flying in a darkened sky, and one commenter concludes it's otherworldly. "Straight up orbs," the person says. Others weigh in to say it's a plane or maybe a satellite. Another group called for hunting the drones literally, shooting them down like turkeys. (Do not shoot at anything in the sky, experts warn.)Trisha Bushey, 48, of Lebanon Township, New Jersey, lives near Round Valley Reservoir where there have been numerous sightings. She said she first posted photos online last month wondering what the objects were and became convinced they were drones when she saw how they moved and when her son showed her on a flight tracking site that no planes were around. Now she's glued to the Mystery Drones page, she said."I find myself — instead of Christmas shopping or cleaning my house — checking it," she said.She doesn't buy what the governor said, that the drones aren't a risk to public safety. Murphy told Biden on Friday that residents need answers. The federal Homeland Security Department and FBI also said in a joint statement they have no evidence that the sightings pose "a national security?or public safety?threat or have a foreign nexus."

Should the executive have the power to pardon?

United States President Joe Biden's recent decision to pardon his son Hunter Biden for any federal crimes he committed or may have committed between January 1, 2014, and December 1, 2024 has brought renewed focus on the expansive clemency powers granted to the President by the U.S. Constitution. The President's volte-face has provoked strong condemnation from both Republicans and Democrats. Should the executive possess clemency powers? Sanjay Hedge and Alok Prasanna Kumar discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Aaratrika Bhaumik.

Should the executive power of clemency rest with the legislature to avert misuse?

Sanjay Hegde: Vesting clemency powers in the legislature could prove equally susceptible to corruption and majority rule. Historically, the power to pardon originated from the British monarchy as an attribute of sovereignty, enabling the king to absolve any wrongdoing. Even today, the Constitution acknowledges scenarios where it is imperative to trust a high officeholder to judiciously exercise such discretionary authority when required.Alok Prasanna Kumar: I agree. During the debates on the U.S. Constitution, Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, acknowledged that the exercise of clemency is inherently political and cannot be reduced to a purely legal process. He argued that this power should be vested in a single constitutional officeholder, instead of being subjected to the whims of collective discretion. He also pointed out that the power of pardon introduced an element of mercy, which he believed was necessary to temper the rigours of the criminal justice system. He saw it as a means for true justice to prevail in cases where the law could not account for circumstances or moral factors beyond the scope of judicial proceedings.

Should an independent clemency commission replace the existing system to ensure more objective and informed decision-making?

Alok Prasanna Kumar: Even if an independent clemency commission were established, its advice would not be binding on the President. While the President may seek a range of information to make a reasoned decision, as former President Harry Truman famously stated, "the buck stops here." Transparency is important, and in today's age of social media and a free press, the public will likely be aware of the reasons behind a presidential decision. However, that does not guarantee that every decision will be immediately acceptable to the public at large.

What are the controversies around pardoning power?| Explained Sanjay Hegde: The public doesn't always agree with clemency decisions. One of the most notable examples is when U.S. President Gerald Ford pardoned his predecessor, Richard Nixon. He believed that the country had endured enough during the Watergate scandal and that the

matter should be put to rest, as Nixon had already been punished by losing the presidency. He felt that a criminal trial would only prolong the nation's agony. At the time, special prosecutor Leon Jaworski chose not to challenge this decision.In contrast, the clemency system in India has not been widely abused. Former Presidents such as A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Pratibha Patil have only sat on files, exercising a pocket veto whenever they disagreed with government advice. The pardon jurisdiction for non-capital offences has rarely been exercised.

Would expanding the scope of judicial review over executive clemency decisions prevent potential overreach or misuse?

Sanjay Hegde: I don't think the U.S. will ever adopt such a system. President-elect Donald Trump has expressed an inclination to pardon rioters involved in the January 6, 2021, Capitol attack. There are also speculations that President Biden may pre-emptively pardon several individuals before he demits office. I doubt the judiciary will step in to second-guess the President's authority in these matters.In India, both the President and the Governor act on the aid and advice of the Cabinet. In fact, the Supreme Court in Epuru Sudhakar v. State of Andhra Pradesh (2006) affirmed that a Governor's grant of pardon could be challenged in court if it was found to be mala fide or based on irrelevant considerations.Alok Prasanna Kumar: I don't believe that clemency decisions can be judicially reviewable. The concept of mercy is inherently subjective, and there cannot be one inalienable understanding of it. We also have to understand that constitutional functionaries inevitably bring their personal biases to bear on these decisions. While courts, as seen in India, may intervene in instances of procedural violations, there are

no definitive legal benchmarks to determine what constitutes an appropriate exercise of clemency. Ultimately, it is unreasonable to assert that mercy should have one fixed meaning under the Constitution, or that clemency should be confined to a specific category of political cases.

Should U.S. Congress play a greater role in the process? For instance, the Protecting Our Democracy Act, reintroduced in Congress last year, mandates the White House disclose all materials the President relies on when exercising clemency powers. Sanjay Hegde: Even if Congress were to pass a law, it could only serve to guide the process. Clemency powers are unique — they speak to the inherent humanity shared by both the one who grants mercy and the one who receives it. There may be cases where a penalty has been imposed and the legal process is complete, yet new evidence emerges that calls for reconsideration. It is impossible to legislate strict standards, especially since they would never be binding. We have seen this discretionary authority play out when President Andrew Johnson pardoned Dr. Samuel Alexander Mudd, the physician who treated John Wilkes Booth's broken leg after he assassinated Abraham Lincoln.Alok Prasanna Kumar: No law can entirely prevent its misuse. If someone in a position of authority is determined to break the law, there is little the law itself can do to stop them. While mechanisms can be put in place to ensure that such actions have stringent repercussions, total prevention is impossible to attain. For instance, we see police officers routinely abuse their powers of arrest.When it comes to clemency, defining what constitutes abuse or misuse is challenging, especially when the power itself is not clearly defined. For example, in 20 years,

one might argue that granting clemency to Hunter Biden was one of the best decisions made by Joe Biden. We lack the foresight to deem such decisions egregiously wrong at this moment.**What reforms are necessary in India's clemency process, and what lessons can be drawn from the Hunter Biden case?**Sanjay Hegde: Given the nature of the power, one can at best have guidelines. However, ultimately executive discretion has to be trusted. We have seen our former Presidents exhibit varied views regarding the death penalty. One can also see how gubernatorial discretion played out in the release of A.G. Perarivalan, one of the convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. The Governor obstructed his release despite the Tamil Nadu government's recommendation. Ultimately, the Supreme Court had to intervene and order his release. The use of clemency powers in the case also signified the closing of a long and painful chapter. While public curiosity may lead to second-guessing these decisions, it is often not in the greater public interest to do so.Alok Prasanna Kumar: I believe comprehensive reforms are needed in the system of release of convicts. The Supreme Court is already cognisant of a batch of petitions on this issue. We need to prioritise reformative justice. Reformation is only achievable when individuals are given the assurance that, through good behaviour and genuine repentance, they may earn an early release — serving, for instance, seven years instead of 14. While these convicts have been incarcerated for legitimate reasons, the state must focus on their rehabilitation, as some of them have the potential to become valuable members of society. We should expedite processes like parole and remission, ensuring mercy extends beyond just death penalty cases.

Yuval Noah Harari argues that AI has hacked the operating system of human civilisation

Language is the stuff almost all human culture is made of. Human rights, for example, aren't inscribed in our DNA. Rather, they are cultural artefacts we created by telling stories and writing laws. Gods aren't physical realities. Rather, they are cultural artefacts we created by inventing myths and writing scriptures.Money, too, is a cultural artefact. Banknotes are just colourful pieces of paper, and at present more than 90% of money is not even banknotes—it is just digital information in computers. What gives money value is the stories that bankers, finance ministers and cryptocurrency gurus tell us about it. Sam Bankman-Fried, Elizabeth Holmes and Bernie Madoff were not particularly good at creating real value, but they were all extremely capable storytellers.What would happen once a non-human intelligence becomes better than the average human at telling stories, composing melodies, drawing images, and writing laws and scriptures? When people think about ChatGPT and other new AI tools, they are often drawn to examples like school children using AI to write their essays. What will happen to the school system when kids do that? But this kind of question misses the big picture. Forget about school essays. Think of the next American presidential race in 2024, and try to imagine the impact of AI tools that can be made to mass-produce political content, fake-news stories and scriptures for new cults.In recent years the QAnon cult has coalesced around anonymous online messages, known as "Q drops". Followers collected, revered and interpreted these Q drops as a sacred text. While to the best of our knowledge all previous Q drops were composed by humans, and bots merely helped disseminate them, in future we might see the first cults in history whose revered texts were written by a non-human intelligence. Religions throughout history have claimed a non-human source for their holy books. Soon that might be a reality.On a more prosaic level, we might soon find ourselves conducting lengthy online discussions about abortion, climate change or the Russian invasion of Ukraine with entities that we think are humans—but are actually AI. The catch is that it is utterly pointless for us to spend time trying to change the declared opinions of an AI bot, while the AI could hone its messages so precisely that it stands a good chance of influencing us.

Explore more Summer reads:Through its mastery of language, AI could even form intimate relationships with people, and use the power of intimacy to change our opinions and worldviews. Although there is no indication that AI has any consciousness or feelings of its own, to foster fake intimacy with humans it is enough if the AI can make them feel emotionally attached to it. In June 2022 Blake Lemoine, a Google engineer, publicly claimed that the AI chatbot LaMDA, on which he was working, had become sentient. The controversial claim cost him his job. The most interesting thing about this episode was not Mr Lemoine's claim, which was probably false. Rather, it was his willingness to risk his lucrative job for the sake of the AI chatbot. If AI can influence people to risk their jobs for it, what else could it induce them to do?In a political battle for minds and hearts, intimacy is the most efficient weapon, and AI has just gained the ability to mass-produce intimate relationships with millions of people. We all know that over the past decade social media has become a battleground for controlling human attention. With the new generation of AI, the battlefront is shifting from attention to intimacy. What will happen to human society and human psychology as AI fights AI in a battle to fake intimate relationships with us, which can then be used to convince us to vote for particular politicians or buy particular products?Even without creating "fake intimacy", the new AI tools would have an immense influence on our opinions and worldviews. People may come to use a single AI adviser as a one-stop, all-knowing oracle. No wonder Google is terrified. Why bother searching, when I can just ask the oracle? The news and advertising industries should also be terrified. Why read a newspaper when I can just ask the oracle to tell me the latest news? And what's the purpose of advertisements, when I can just ask the oracle to tell me what to buy?And even these scenarios don't really capture the big picture. What we are talking about is potentially the end of human history. Not the end of history, just the end of its human-dominated part. History is the interaction between biology and culture; between our biological needs and desires for things like food and sex, and our cultural creations like religions and laws. History is the process through which laws and religions shape food and sex.What will happen to the course of history when AI takes over culture, and begins producing stories, melodies, laws and religions? Previous tools like the printing press and radio helped spread the cultural ideas of humans, but they never created new cultural ideas of their own. AI is fundamentally different. AI can create completely new ideas, completely new culture.At first, AI will probably imitate the human prototypes that it was trained on in its infancy. But with each passing year, AI culture will boldly go where no human has gone before. For millennia human beings have lived inside the dreams of other humans. In the coming decades we might find ourselves living inside the dreams of an alien intelligence.Fear of AI has haunted humankind for only the past few decades. But for thousands of years humans have been haunted by a much deeper fear. We have always appreciated the power of stories and images to manipulate our minds and to create illusions. Consequently, since ancient times humans have feared being trapped in a world of illusions.

In the 17th century René Descartes feared that perhaps a malicious demon was trapping him inside a world of illusions, creating everything he saw and heard. In ancient Greece Plato told the famous Allegory of the Cave, in which a group of people are chained inside a cave all their lives, facing a blank wall. A screen. On that screen they see projected various shadows. The prisoners mistake the illusions they see there for reality.In ancient India Buddhist and Hindu sages pointed out that all humans lived trapped inside Maya—the world of illusions. What we normally take to be reality is often just fictions in our own minds. People may wage entire wars, killing others and willing to be killed themselves, because of their belief in this or that illusion.The AI revolution is bringing us face to face with Descartes' demon, with Plato's cave, with the Maya. If we are not careful, we might be trapped behind a curtain of illusions, which we could not tear away—or even realise is there.Of course, the new power of AI could be used for good purposes as well. I won't dwell on this, because the people who develop AI talk about it enough. The job of historians and philosophers like myself is to point out the dangers. But certainly, AI can help us in countless ways, from finding new cures for cancer to discovering solutions to the ecological crisis. The question we face is how to make sure the new AI tools are used for good rather than for ill. To do that, we first need to appreciate the true capabilities of these tools.Since 1945 we have known that nuclear technology could generate cheap energy for the benefit of humans—but could also physically destroy human civilisation. We therefore reshaped the entire international order to protect humanity, and to make sure nuclear technology was used primarily for good. We now have to grapple with a new weapon of mass destruction that can annihilate our mental and social world.

We can still regulate the new AI tools, but we must act quickly. Whereas nukes cannot invent more powerful nukes, AI can make exponentially more powerful AI. The first crucial step is to demand rigorous safety checks before powerful AI tools are released into the public domain. Just as a pharmaceutical company cannot release new drugs before testing both their short-term and long-term side-effects, so tech companies shouldn't release new AI tools before they are made safe. We need an equivalent of the Food and Drug Administration for new technology, and we need it yesterday.Won't slowing down public deployments of AI cause democracies to lag behind more ruthless authoritarian regimes? Just the opposite. Unregulated AI deployments would create social chaos, which would benefit autocrats and ruin democracies. Democracy is a conversation, and conversations rely on language. When AI hacks language, it could destroy our ability to have meaningful conversations, thereby destroying democracy.We have just encountered an alien intelligence, here on Earth. We don't know much about it, except that it might destroy our civilisation. We should put a halt to the irresponsible deployment of AI tools in the public sphere, and regulate AI before it regulates us. And the first regulation I would suggest is to make it mandatory for AI to disclose that it is an AI. If I am having a conversation with someone, and I cannot tell whether it is a human or an AI—that's the end of democracy.

Google Cloud unveils new initiatives to empower AI startups in India

Bengaluru: Google Cloud is committed to empowering artificial intelligence (AI) startups in India to drive innovation and growth, the tech giant said on Thursday, as it unveiled several new initiatives at an event here.At its 'AI Startups Summit', the company announced several programmes and partnerships designed to accelerate the growth of AI startups in the country.

These programmes support early-stage AI founders by helping them build, grow, and gain customers for their solutions using Google Cloud."Google is committed to empowering AI startups to drive innovation and growth. These initiatives demonstrate our dedication to providing critical support and resources to early-stage founders, helping them build and scale successful AI-powered businesses," said Dr Manish Gupta, Senior Director, Research, Google DeepMind.The tech giant recently introduced the 'Emerging ISV Partner Springboard', a 12-week programme designed to supercharge growth for AI startups.Early-stage founders will receive increased support through the Google for Startups Cloud Programme, which will now provide $200,000 in Google Cloud credits over two years, giving founders the runway to build and scale their vision.AI-first startups will receive even greater support with $350,000 in credits, recognizing the increased computational demands of cutting-edge AI development, according to Google Cloud.The company also announced that it is launching Startup School: GenAI, a comprehensive four-week immersive training programme designed to empower startups in leveraging the full potential of AI.

What Google's error-correcting chip means for quantum computing

Google has just announced a new quantum chip, Willow, and the breakthrough needs to be read right in order to understand its implications. Yes, it is an exciting fact that Willow took under 5 minutes to perform a benchmark computation for which an existing supercomputer would need 10 septillion years, which is 1 followed by 25 zeros. The real achievement, however, is not just the computation, but also about a long-standing challenge that was conquered in getting Willow to perform it. The keyword is "error correction below threshold", something that headlines Google's paper in Nature on the chip. This effectively means that a higher number of qubits (short for quantum bit, quantum computing's equivalent of the bit) increases error correction exponentially. The concept already existed in theory, and Google's demonstration holds the promise of scaling it up to quantum computers of the future. What the achievement foretells, however, is best understood if one looks first at the challenge that preceded it.
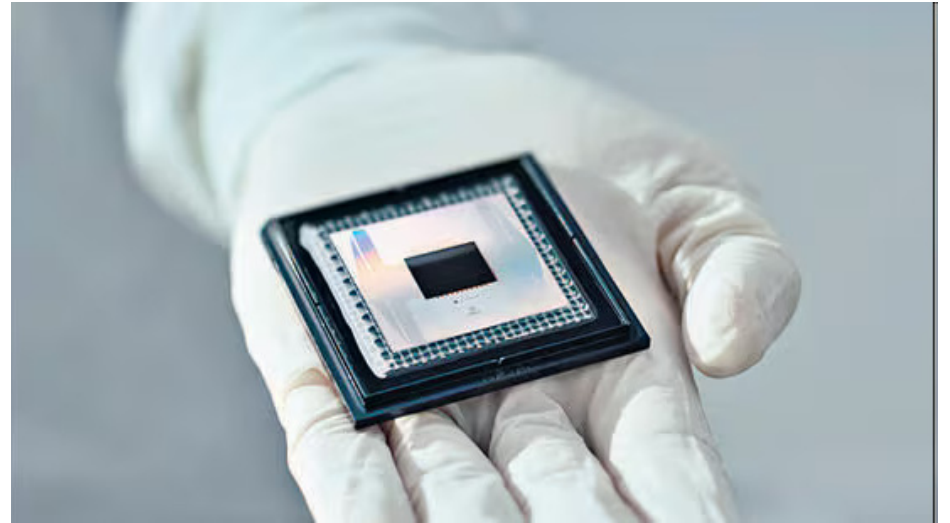
What it meansQubits, the basic units of quantum information, are prone to errors caused by interactions with the environment, with each other, and random fluctuations. These can cause qubits to lose their properties and hamper the quest to build mass-use quantum computers that can ultimately replace classical computers. The immediate objective, therefore, has been to find ways to correct those errors.

The idea is to incorporate error correction codes in "logical qubits", each created across a number of "physical qubits". When we talk of a physical qubit, we are referring to a piece of physical hardware in the form of an electron or a photon. A logical qubit is an abstraction rather than a single physical object, a system that is implemented using the physical qubits that it is built across. As such, it works in a way that is more complex than any of these physical qubit does. We know how qubits work, and how they differ from the bits of classical computing. A classical bit stores information in either of two forms, represented by the digits 0 and 1. In quantum computing, a qubit can be 0 and 1 at the same time. While two classical bits can be any one of 00, 01, 10 and 11, a pair of qubits can be all these four simultaneously. Information thus increases exponentially with the number of qubits. We are, of course, talking of physical qubits. Logical qubits make quantum computing even more complex since they are built across a number of physical qubits. If all these physical qubits exist in multiple states, the logical qubit built across them exists in a collective state that derives from these already complex individual states. The idea is based on the understanding even if a few physical qubits experience errors, the overall quantum state of the logical qubit can be preserved. What Google showed is that the more logical qubits you have, error correction rises exponentially.

How it was doneWillow is packed with logical qubits consisting of 105 physical qubits. It improves on Google's earlier work, published in early 2023, when it described an array of 49 qubits in its Sycamore quantum processor. Willow was developed in a fabrication laboratory that Google built at its quantum-computing campus in California in 2021. Google tested Willow with larger and larger arrays of physical qubits, scaling up from a 3x3 grid of 5x5, and then 7x7.

"Each time, using our latest advances in quantum error correction, we were able to cut the error rate in half. In other words, we achieved an exponential reduction in the error rate. This historic accomplishment is known in the field as 'below threshold' — being able to drive errors down while scaling up the number of qubits," Hartmut Neven, founder and Google Quantum AI, said in the announcement. One challenge in error correction is the speed at which it is done. If the errors take place faster than they are corrected, they will accumulate, leading to failure of the system. Willow has reportedly conquered this, too. "It's also one of the first compelling examples of real-time error correction on a superconducting quantum system — crucial for any useful computation, because if you can't correct errors fast enough, they ruin your computation before it's done. And it's a 'beyond breakeven' demonstration, where our arrays of qubits have longer lifetimes than the individual physical qubits do, an unfakable sign that error correction is improving the system overall," Neven added. Why it mattersDr Aditi Sen De, a professor in the quantum information and computation (QIC) group with the Harish Chandra Research Institute, Prayagraj, acknowledged the importance of the breakthrough Google has announced. "We know that current quantum computers suffer heavily from noise (errors), so any implementation that shows quantum computers outperforming classical computers gets disturbed by noise and errors. Error correction is an important tool for obtaining logical qubits from physical qubits," she told HT. "Firstly, in superconducting quantum chips, Google has demonstrated the realisation of an error correction protocol known theoretically, which implies that we are heading towards fault-tolerant (error-free) quantum computers. Secondly, it shows that with their chip, the logical error rate gets suppressed with the physical error rate, provided errors in physical qubits are below some critical value," said De, who won the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar prize in 2018 and the GD Birla Award for Scientific Excellence earlier this year. Google, of course, is excited about scalability. "As the first system below threshold, this is the most convincing prototype for a scalable logical qubit built to date. It's a strong sign that useful, very large quantum computers can indeed be built. Willow brings us closer to running practical, commercially-relevant algorithms that can't be replicated on conventional computers," Neven said. De agreed that more qubits leading to fewer errors points to the scalability of fault-tolerant quantum computers. She noted, however, that more needs to be done. "The question remains whether the scalability of errors that Google claims will remain the same even when one has a 3000-qubit quantum computer — this has to be found out," she said. Yet, she acknowledged that this is " the first breakthrough result towards a fault-tolerant quantum computer, which is beyond the noisy intermediate scale quantum computers currently available on different platforms."

'A human problem': Punjab & Haryana HC appoints 19 local commissioners to report on Gurugram waste management

While hearing a petition regarding the garbage problem in Gurugram, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has pulled up the municipal corporation for filing "unnecessary documents and statistics aimed at creating confusion" and appointed 19 local commissioners to submit a report on garbage collection and disposal. The directions were issued by a bench of Justice Vinod S Bhardwaj on November 7 while hearing a petition filed by Pankaj Yadav in 2023 stating that the non-removal of garbage exposed residents to an aggravated risk of multiple diseases. Although the petition was filed during a strike by sanitation workers, which has since ended, the court had sought a response from the Haryana Government regarding the status of garbage collection and segregation in Gurugram. A reply was submitted by the joint commissioner of the municipal corporation including photographs of garbage clearance from various parts of the city. However, the petitioner countered this by presenting additional photographs alleging that only selective images were provided by the state to mislead the court. When questioned by the court, the corporation filed further affidavits, about which the bench said, "There had been a jugglery of statistics given by the respondents only to pat their own back about the purported works undertaken by them towards timely removal of the garbage and solid waste generated in the city through different agencies." The bench "deprecated" the corporation's attempt "to file unnecessary documents and statistics aimed at creating confusion rather than addressing the issue espoused". It also imposed a cost of Rs 50,000 on the municipal corporation, to be deposited with the District Legal Services Authority in Gurugram within six weeks.

"In case the said amount is not deposited, the above said amount shall be deducted from the salary of the Additional Commissioner, Municipal Corporation, Gurugram, and be made good. Compliance of the same shall be filed before this Court on the next date of hearing," the bench said and adjourned the matter to February 17, 2025.

'Verification of claims necessary'The municipal corporation argued that its contractors are doing their work satisfactorily and that garbage was being regularly collected, adding that a penalty had been imposed on an erring contractor and a showcause notice issued regarding the potential cancellation of the contract. The bench, however, found the arguments to be "inherently contradictory," noting that while it was emphasised that garbage was being collected regularly, the corporation admitted that a contractor's work was unsatisfactory and that action had been initiated against him. The bench thus held that verification of the claims made by both the municipal corporation and the petitioner is necessary. Justice Bhardwaj said the law requires civil bodies to ensure garbage does not remain piled up on streets and that sanitation and hygiene are duly maintained. He said that people have been harmed by stray animals gathering around the scattered garbage. "This Court does not see this petition as adversarial litigation and considers it a human problem. While Gurugram is marketed as a millennium city showcasing the strides in development and growth made by the State of Haryana, it is necessary for State and civil agencies to prepare for the challenges of urbanisation and ensure that the city remains clean," said the bench. As the state counsel submitted details of the areas under municipal limits for which nodal officers had been appointed, the court said the responsibility of overseeing the contractors' work would fall on these officers. The court appointed 19 local commissioners to visit the specified areas and submit a report on garbage collection.

Motion to impeach Allahabad HC judge: Process of impeachment, past attempts

The Opposition INDIA bloc parties in Rajya Sabha are preparing to give notice to move a motion to impeach Allahabad High Court judge Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav for his remarks at an event organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad last week.Justice Yadav, who was appointed as a High Court judge in 2019, made several controversial statements against minorities in the speech, in which he sought to make a case for a uniform civil code.The Supreme Court has taken note of Justice Yadav's speech, delivered on the premises of Allahabad High Court, and has asked the court for a detailed report.By Wednesday evening, 38 MPs from various Opposition parties were learnt to have signed the petition. The INDIA bloc has 85 MPs in the Upper House, and the petition may be moved on Thursday if the 50 signatures required by law can be obtained.The impeachment process

The process of impeachment of a judge of the Supreme Court is laid down in Article 124(4) of the Constitution of India. Article 218 says the same provisions shall apply in relation to a judge of the High Court as well.Under Article 124(4), a judge can be removed by Parliament through a laid-down procedure on only two grounds: "proved misbehaviour" and "incapacity".The provision states: "A Judge of the Supreme Court shall not be removed from his office except by an order of the President passed after an address by each House of Parliament supported by a majority of the total membership of that House and by a majority of not less than two-third of the members of the House present and voting has been presented to the President in the same session for such removal on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity."In other words, for an impeachment motion against an SC or HC judge to go through, at least two-thirds of those "present and voting" in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha must vote in favour of removing the judge — and the number of votes in favour must be more than 50% of the "total membership" of each House.If Parliament passes such a vote, the President will pass an order for the removal of the judge.The grounds and the process for impeachment have a high bar in order to ensure the independence of the judiciary is protected. Impeachment is also a political process — which needs the support of the broad spectrum of MPs and that of the Speaker of Lok Sabha or Chairperson of Rajya Sabha, depending on which House the motion is admitted.THE PROCEDURE: The procedure to be followed for impeachment of a judge is laid down in the Judges Inquiry Act, 1968.Under Section 3 of the Act, for a motion of impeachment to be taken up, it has to be moved by not less than 100 members in the Lower House, and at least 50 members in the Upper House.

This collection of signatures is the first step. In Justice Yadav's case, in Lok Sabha, NCP MP Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi has initiated the process; in Rajya Sabha, Independent member Kapil Sibal, who is also president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, has taken the initiative.THE COMMITTEE: Once the motion is brought in, the Speaker/ Chairman has to constitute a three-member committee of inquiry. The committee is headed by the Chief Justice of India or a judge of the Supreme Court, and has a Chief Justice of any High Court, and a person who is in the opinion of the Speaker/ Chairman, a "distinguished jurist". When the motion of impeachment against Justice Soumitra Sen was moved in 2011, the distinguished jurist was Fali Nariman.The committee frames the charges, and can seek a medical test for the judge if the impeachment charge is on the grounds of mental incapacity. The committee has the power to regulate its procedure, call for evidence, and cross-examine witnesses.In previous instances, this committee has appointed a lawyer to conduct the proceedings against the judge in question. In Justice V Ramaswami's case (1993), senior advocate Indira Jaising was the committee's lawyer.COMMITTEE'S FINDINGS: Once the investigation concludes, the committee will submit a report to the Speaker/ Chairman with its findings and observations. The Speaker/ Chairman will then place the report before Lok Sabha/ Rajya Sabha "as soon as may be".If the report finds that the judge is not guilty of misbehaviour or incapacity, the matter will end there.In case of a guilty finding, the report of the committee is adopted by the House in which it was introduced, and then an address is made to the President by each House of Parliament in the same session seeking the judge's removal.Instances of impeachmentNone of the six attempts at impeaching a judge since Independence have been successful. Only in two instances — involving Justices Ramaswami and Sen — have the committees of inquiry returned a guilty finding.In five of the six instances, the charge was of financial impropriety; it was sexual misconduct in the remaining instance.* The first impeachment proceedings were initiated against former Supreme Court judge Justice

V Ramaswami in 1993 on grounds of financial impropriety. The judge was defended by senior advocate Kapil Sibal before a joint sitting of Parliament.The motion failed, and Justice Ramaswami retired a year later.* Justice Soumitra Sen of Calcutta High Court was sought to be impeached in 2011, also on grounds of corruption. Justice Sen was impeached by Rajya Sabha but he resigned days before Lok Sabha was scheduled to discuss the motion.The proceedings lapsed with Justice Sen's resignation.* Justice S K Gangele of Madhya Pradesh High Court faced impeachment proceedings in 2015 on charges of sexual harassment. A committee set up to investigate the charges cleared him in 2017.* Justice J B Pardiwala, who is a sitting judge of the Supreme Court, was sought to be impeached in 2015 when he was a judge of the Gujarat High Court. The removal process was triggered against remarks the judge had made in a judgment — that reservation was one of the reasons that "has not allowed the country to progress in the right direction".The judge expunged the remarks from his judgment, and the impeachment motion was subsequently dropped by then Rajya Sabha Chairman Hamid Ansari.* Justice C V Nagarjuna of the High Court of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana was sought to be impeached in 2017. He was accused of victimising a Dalit judge and of financial misconduct.Both motions failed after Rajya Sabha MPs who had signed on withdrew their names — as a result of which the motion fell short of the required number.* The most recent impeachment attempt was the politically fraught case of former Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra in 2018. The motion was rejected by then Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu at the preliminary stage.

Targeting the RS chairperson

The unprecedented move by the INDIA bloc to oust the vice president (VP) and Rajya Sabha chairman, Jagdeep Dhankhar, on charges of being partisan, will likely fail because its motion will fall well short of the required 50% (116 votes) to do so (it has only 86), but the real story is not the numbers but the message in the move. And this is a message of distrust between the treasury and Opposition benches (across Parliament and not just the upper House), and the increased scrutiny and criticism constitutional posts (including the governors of states) have come under in an environment characterised by extreme polarisation.

The Opposition has been threatening this for a few sessions but held its hand. Now that it has chosen to act, Mr. Dhankhar becomes the first VP to face an ouster attempt, and the effects of this notice — sure to be defeated if put to vote — will be far-reaching and long-lasting. For starters, it will further damage the relations between the Chair and the Opposition. The target of a no-confidence motion will have to be a saint to forget the ignominy of facing one, and saints are in short supply these days. Second, the move threatens to diminish and question the authority of the Rajya Sabha Chair, an independent

institution.Running the Rajya Sabha has never been an easy task, and the polarised state of politics inside and outside Parliament has not made Dhankhar's job any easier. If the ruling alliance believes that its majority allows it the privilege to dominate Parliament, the Opposition, buoyed by better-than-before numbers in this Lok Sabha (and healthy numbers in the upper house), has been equally aggressive in confronting the treasury benches. Both sides have carried the viciousness of poll campaigns into the House. Both have responsibilities to Parliament that they have ignored: The government must convince the Opposition of adequate opportunities for debate and dialogue; and the Opposition must focus on constructive criticism, aimed at bettering the lot of Indians. Floor managers across parties have failed to persuade leaders across the aisle to sit together and build a climate of trust to en