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EC kicks off SIR 2.0 in 9 States and 3 U.T.s



The Election Commission on Tuesday launched the second phase of the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in nine States and three Union Territories, covering around 51 crore voters, with booth level officers distributing enumeration forms to electors. The exercise, however, drew sharp opposition from several parties. A clean and updated electoral roll ensures equal voting opportunity and builds public confidence in the electoral process. By updating and verifying voter data, it reduces the chances of impersonation and fraudulent voting.

The 12 States and Union Territories where the SIR is being conducted are the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Among these, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, and Puducherry will go to the polls in 2026. The first phase of the SIR exercise was carried out in Bihar earlier this year, following which over 68 lakh names were deleted from the electoral rolls. The clean-up exercise is a step towards ensuring greater transparency on the electoral rolls. Every elector will receive a unique form, it said. During the enumeration phase, which will continue till December 4, more than 5.3 lakh BLOs will visit houses at least thrice for the distribution and collection of forms. Apart from the BLOs, 7.64 lakh booth-level agents (BLAs) appointed by political parties, 10,448 electoral registration officers and assistant EROs, and 321 DEOs have been pressed into action to conduct the SIR exercise in a smooth, orderly, and voter friendly manner, a senior official said.



Grandmasters' getaway: India's vacation capital Goa turns into chess arena as it hosts the Chess World Cup. The FIDE president says the country's emergence is a boost for the sport, and hopes to take the game of 64 squares to schools; feels Gukesh becoming World champion has inspired youngsters to dream big.



India's triumphant Women's ODI World Cup squad will be felicitated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Wednesday evening. However, unlike the men's team, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is unlikely to organise a victory parade for Harmanpreet's Hurricanes. This felicitation mirrors the one held for the men's T20I squad in July 2024, soon after Rohit Sharma's team lifted the T20 World Cup in Barbados. The men's squad had met the Prime Minister before proceeding to Mumbai for a grand victory parade along Marine Drive promenade in Mumbai.



STATE

Gold coins from the Vijayanagara-era unearthed in T.N.

- A cache of 103 punch-marked gold coins, believed to date back to the Vijayanagara empire, was recently discovered in an earthen pot by workers excavating near a Chola-era Shiva temple in Kovilur hamlet, Tamil Nadu.
- The excavation was part of the restoration of the ancient temple, conducted by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments department, indicating the importance of heritage conservation activities in uncovering historical artifacts.
- The coins were found at the sanctum sanctorum of the Chola-era temple, about 10 km from Jamunamarathur atop the Jawadhu Hills, Tiruvannamalai, highlighting this region as archaeologically significant.
- The coins were subsequently collected by authorities, who plan to assess their heritage value and deposit them in the district treasury, ensuring the preservation and official documentation of the artifacts.
- Archaeologists from Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department (TNSAD) will further assess the coins' historical context and authenticity, underlining the role of state institutions in archaeological research.
- Preliminary details suggest that the coins are around 600 years old and originate from the Vijayanagara era, famous for its wealth, temple architecture, and use of gold in currency and religious offerings.
- The coins are of different sizes and shapes, generally small with an average diameter of about five millimetres, which is characteristic of temple offerings and period currency.
- Traditional minting practices meant gold coins were used primarily for religious offerings, while other metals like copper were more common for daily transactions due to their durability.
- Iconography on the coins reportedly includes images such as the emblem of a pig, an animal, and depictions associated with Vijayanagara rulers, which are important for historical and dynastic identification.
- Vijayanagara coins are typically circular, while Sangam-era coins often have a square shape—an observation crucial for historical classification.
- The find is significant for understanding religious, economic, and political history, as temple hoards often serve as evidence of patronage, prosperity, and craftsmanship during the Vijayanagara period.
- This discovery provides a fresh and tangible glimpse into the wealth, religious life, and circulation patterns of gold in South India during the Vijayanagara period, enriching our understanding of Tamil Nadu's cultural heritage.

Delhi sixth most polluted city in India in October

- Delhi was ranked as the sixth most polluted city in India in October, with a mean PM2.5 concentration of 107 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, according to the Monthly Ambient Air Quality Snapshot by CREA.
- The most polluted city in the country was Dharuhera, Haryana, with an alarming mean PM2.5 level of 123 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, followed closely by Rohtak (120 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), Ghaziabad (114 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), Noida (112 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), and Ballabgarh (109 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), indicating that NCR cities dominate the list of worst air quality.
- Delhi's pollution levels were said to be three times higher than their September average (36 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), showing a sharp seasonal spike, despite stubble burning contributing less than 6% to PM2.5 levels, highlighting that urban sources are the main problem.
- The concentration of PM2.5 in Delhi and surrounding NCR cities far exceeded the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) limit of 40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, pointing to widespread violations of air quality norms across the region.
- Other NCR cities in the top 10 polluted list include Bhiwadi (97 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), Greater Noida (94 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), Hapur (92 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), and Gurgaon (92 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), underscoring the regional nature of the crisis.
- CREA's analysis found a general worsening of air quality, especially in the Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP) region, in October, with fewer cities qualifying as 'Good' or 'Satisfactory' compared to September, and more cities slipping into the 'Poor' and 'Very Poor' categories.
- Major non-NCR metros like Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Bengaluru reported monthly averages within the NAAQS limit, signaling stark urban-regional disparities in air pollution.
- Shillong in Meghalaya was the cleanest city in October, with a mean PM2.5 level of just 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, and the 10 cleanest cities also included several from the southern and northeastern states, Sikkim, and Chhattisgarh.
- CREA experts note that the winter and festive season did not alone cause pollution, but rather only magnified persistently high baseline pollution due to year-round emission sources.
- This highlights the urgent need for round-the-year emission control strategies, not just short-term responses to severe pollution episodes, as reactive seasonal approaches have not produced lasting improvements.
- Analysis by CREA revealed that while Delhi did experience a slight improvement in overall AQI compared to September, it still slipped into the 'Very Poor' category frequently, reflecting the city's chronic air quality issues.
- The overall findings point to the NCR as a persistent pollution hotspot, while also emphasizing episodic spikes due to poor regulatory enforcement and lack of sustained policy interventions.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1.The Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy (LT-LEDS) was launched by India in which of the below summit?

- (a) COP21 Paris Climate Conference**
- (b) COP26 Glasgow Conference**
- (c) COP27 Sharm el-Sheikh Conference**
- (d) COP22 Marrakech Conference**

2.The Quito Adjustment is related to which of the following convention/protocol

- (a) Montreal Protocol**
- (b) Kyoto Protocol**
- (c) Nagoya Protocol**
- (d) Vienna Convention**

3.Which of the following is correct regarding Micro forests ?

- (a) Small-scale forests are grown in urban areas to promote biodiversity.**
- (b) Traditional forests with minimal tree coverage.**
- (c) Artificial forests created through genetic engineering.**
- (d) Miniature trees grown in bonsai gardens.**

4.Which of the following conventions is related to the elimination or restriction on the production and use of persistent organic pollutants?

- (a) Basel Convention**
- (b) Stockholm Convention**
- (c) Rotterdam Convention**
- (d) Vienna Convention**

DETAILED ANSWER KEY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE CHRONICLE PAGE

As Umngot water turns muddy, residents blame road project

- The Umngot river in Meghalaya, famous for its crystal-clear waters and vital to tourism and the local economy, has become murky and opaque this year, raising alarm in the region.
- The river is central to key tourist attractions like Dawki and Shnongpdeng, usually attracting many visitors, but this season's loss of clarity has concerned local communities and businesses.
- While Umngot water typically turns muddy during the monsoon, it is usually clear by October; this year, even during peak tourist season, the water remains turbid, which locals attribute to construction-related activities.
- Residents and political leaders blame the ongoing Shillong-Dawki road upgrade by the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. (NHIDCL), citing dumping of soil and construction debris into the river system, especially near Umtyngar and Dawki.
- Ricky Syngkon, Shillong MP from Voice of the People Party (VPP), has officially written to the Union Transport Minister and Union Environment Minister seeking intervention to stop river pollution caused by the road project.
- Meghalaya cabinet minister Lahkmen Rymbui has acknowledged local concerns, while the State Pollution Control Board has initiated project monitoring to address the issue.
- Deputy CM Prestone Tynsong said the NHIDCL has been instructed to act against the contamination; recent inspections found large amounts of excavated soil and debris dumped along road alignments without proper containment, heightening fears of water pollution and ecological harm.
- The details of NHIDCL's current work: the upgrade of an 81-km highway from Shillong to Dawki, with a major construction phase involving a bridge over the river. The bridge is 400 meters long and 10 meters above the river, and the official quoted says work is at a critical stage, with efforts underway to follow all safety and containment protocols.
- NHIDCL has been asked to prepare and submit a report on whether the construction has indeed caused the discoloration and loss of clarity in Umngot river water, as suspected by locals and officials.
- The episode highlights challenges in balancing infrastructure development with ecological preservation, as well as the importance of enforcing environmental safeguards and stakeholder monitoring in sensitive locations.

India-Israel ties defined by trust, says Jaishankar

- This highlights the context of growing regional tensions, especially the ongoing ceasefire situation in Gaza, against which Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar visited India for talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.
- Jaishankar described India-Israel ties as built on a "high degree of trust" and "reliability," emphasizing the importance of counter-terror cooperation, which he called "essential" for both countries.
- Gideon Sa'ar stated that Indo-Israeli partnership has proven resilient and meaningful, weathering tests and adversity, and has matured into a reliable relationship grounded in strategic convergence.
- Both sides discussed confronting the "mutual threat of terror," and resolved to work for a global approach of "zero tolerance towards terrorism in all its forms and manifestations," calling for wider international efforts on this front.
- The two ministers signed an agreement on boosting diplomatic training, specifically between India's Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service and Israel's Foreign Ministry, indicating expanded institutional cooperation.
- Business and economic ties were highlighted as areas of recent growth, with India's advancements in railways, road infrastructure, renewable energy, and health cited as areas where Israeli expertise is both welcome and mutually beneficial.
- Israel is expected to undergo a boom in infrastructure and construction, with India being seen as a partner with relevant expertise, offering business opportunities for both nations.
- Jaishankar reiterated India's support for a peaceful resolution to the Gaza conflict, referencing the peace formula proposed at the October 13 Sharm-el-Sheikh summit and expressing hope for a durable and lasting solution.
- This implies that, beyond security, the India-Israel relationship is expanding into economic, technological, and capacity-building domains, reflecting a comprehensive and future-oriented partnership.

Stop wildlife imports to India until proper checks in place: CITES report

- The CITES Secretariat has recommended halting imports of critically endangered wildlife species into India until there are robust mechanisms to ensure proper documentation and verification, amid concerns over wild-caught animals being falsely declared as captive-bred.
- The issue came to light through a verification mission that examined the import practices of Indian entities like Vantara's GZRRC and the Radha Krishna Temple Elephant Welfare Trust (RKTEWT), highlighting risks related to illegal harvest and misreporting of animal origins.
- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is a key treaty regulating global wildlife trade, and India is a member with obligations to prevent illegal or mismanaged trade in endangered species.
- The CITES mission to India in September 2024 reviewed the procedures and records of animal imports for compliance, and its 14-page report raised questions over the genuineness of sources and purposes of recent imports.
- The report flagged loopholes in India's current systems, especially regarding wild animals—such as apes, antelopes, chimps, and snow leopards—being imported as "captive bred" without adequate verification, enforcement, or scientific scrutiny.
- Specific problems include insufficient tracking of animal provenance, the risk of laundering wild-caught specimens as captive-bred, and questionable paperwork in at least forty recent imports from multiple countries including the Czech Republic, Togo, Germany, Congo, and more.
- The mission found that both Vantara and RKTEWT did not intentionally import illegally acquired animals, but the risk of unintentional illegality remains high due to systemic gaps and lack of a rigorous audit trail.
- Some critical imports involved complex multi-country routes (for instance, animals shipped from Togo via Belgium and Germany, later reaching India), taxing the authorities' ability to independently verify whether exporting countries' controls are sound.
- Notably, some invoices and transfer documents contradicted claims made by Indian importers, and in multiple instances, Indian authorities could not "verify to the satisfaction of the Secretariat" that the animals were truly captive-bred.
- The report also referenced other African and Asian countries (such as Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Syria, and Turkey) experiencing similar trade and documentation problems, making this a broader global issue for CITES.
- Key recommendations include a temporary halt to all wildlife imports into India, stricter cross-verification of supply chains and breeder credentials, and a pause until legal and scientific safeguards are properly implemented and documented.
- CITES Standing Committee will hold a session in November to review India's progress, with the expectation that India will submit a comprehensive report on improvements and actions taken to address these concerns.

EXPLAINED

How BRICS is challenging SWIFT?

- Over the past decade, BRICS has taken strategic steps to reduce dependence on the dollar-dominated international financial system, especially after the 2014 Fortaleza Summit, which promoted independent financial institutions among developing countries.
- After Western sanctions on Russia post-Crimea, BRICS decided to explore using national currencies for settlement, culminating in discussions about enhancing currency cooperation, swap arrangements, and direct investment from 2017 onwards.
- The key policy move was the establishment of the BRICS Payments Task Force and the coming together of leaders at the 2024 Kazan Summit to push for strengthening payment networks using local currencies—a vision embodied by the BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative and the development bank.
- The BRICS Pay initiative is a concrete attempt to reduce exposure to the Western-dominated SWIFT network. It is already being used by over 11,000 banks and financial institutions worldwide, underscoring the group's ambition for financial sovereignty.
- This shift was given symbolic value by discussions about launching a BRICS banknote, drawing attention to the bloc's serious intent of moving beyond the dollar, especially in the context of sanctions faced by Russia and other member countries.
- Russia showcased the BRICS Pay prototype in Moscow in October 2024, a key technological milestone. The group aims for member interoperability, leveraging systems like Russia's SPFS, China's CIPS, India's UPI, and Brazil's Pix, to build resilience, reliability, and reach within a more limited geographic and political bloc.
- Despite enthusiasm (especially from Russia), success depends on full acceptance of these systems inside BRICS as well as global interoperability. While China's RMB is increasingly included in international baskets, acceptance of India's UPI is still limited outside the country.
- This also highlights potential friction: each member's ambition to advance their own payment systems could slow BRICS-wide integration. Political challenges and interest misalignments were highlighted as ongoing hurdles.
- In 2017, dialogue began on currency cooperation, with proposals for currency swaps and local currency settlement aimed at reducing dependency on the dollar and Western financial systems.
- The move is driven primarily by the desire to bypass Western sanctions and foster greater financial autonomy. The cross-border payment network, which was prototyped in Russia and discussed widely at BRICS gatherings, remains a work in progress, yet is a focal point for future collaboration among member states.
- The success will depend on overcoming individual ambitions, achieving interoperability, and building necessary infrastructure, but offers optimism that political will and increased technical efforts could speed up progress.



INTERNATIONAL

Raids on Internet scam hubs in Myanmar spark recruitment rush for fraudsters

- Recent police raids targeted major Internet scam hubs in Myanmar, such as the notorious KK Park compound, resulting in around 1,500 people fleeing and seeking new employment opportunities, many in the region's black market fraud industry.
- The crackdown forced scam operators and other workers to escape across the border into Thailand or seek roles in other illegal enterprises, highlighting the porous nature of Myanmar's loosely governed border regions.
- KK Park and similar scam compounds had grown by exploiting victims through elaborate romance and crypto frauds, while also trafficking workers for attractive salaries, with many ending up in bonded labor or forced scam work.
- Security experts noted a trend of "recruitment booms" after enforcement actions, with scam centers quickly restaffing after being hit by police or military raids.
- According to a UN report, scams and crypto frauds across Southeast and East Asia generated losses of up to \$77 billion in 2023, reflecting a vast and persistent industry.
- Analysts say raids are often limited, sometimes appearing staged or choreographed, meant more to demonstrate action than to disrupt scam profits or trafficking networks.
- A noticeable exodus occurred after the raids, but with scammer demand remaining strong, many workers have simply been "sold" or re-employed elsewhere, some fetching up to \$70,000 if headhunted for human trafficking-linked skills.
- Distinguishing actual scam victims from willing participants remains difficult, as some may be trafficked involuntarily while others join for lucrative salaries.
- Rights advocates claim that those truly responsible—bosses of scam compounds and criminal networks—are rarely arrested or prosecuted, with their assets seized but new operations often quickly re-emerging elsewhere in the region.
- After the KK Park crackdown, armed groups and authorities clashed over seized properties and cash, while hundreds of Chinese, Filipino, and other nationals tried to flee under pressure, some trafficked further, others repatriated.
- Without coordinated international action against the networks running such operations, labor exploitation, and crypto frauds, the crisis will persist with only limited disruption caused by periodic raids.

How Bill Gates is reshaping discourse on climate action?

- Bill Gates, Microsoft's founder and an influential voice on climate solutions, recently argued for prioritizing adaptation (coping with climate change's impacts) over mitigation (emission cuts) in global climate strategies, triggering a shift in the ongoing debate.
- Gates questioned the traditional "doomsday" framing of climate risks and argued that current focus on renewables and emissions targets (like the 1.5 or 2-degree Celsius scenarios) is unrealistic; he contends cutting emissions won't alone solve the crisis rapidly enough and adaptation, especially for developing countries, should be central.
- In his memo, Gates stated that adaptation strategies like infrastructure upgrades and tech innovations for resilience can shield vulnerable populations more effectively and deliver tangible benefits even as mitigation efforts continue.
- Data cited points out that global emissions are still rising and most major economies—including China—are far off their Paris targets; thus, the sole focus on emission reduction is described as "disconnected from harsh realities".
- The memo recognizes the value of the three pillars (climate, health, prosperity) mentioned in the Paris Agreement, but stresses an urgent need for pragmatic, on-the-ground problem-solving, especially in the resource-constrained Global South.
- Gates' approach is echoed in some aspects of India's own climate policy—India has emphasized adaptation, loss and damage financing, and climate justice for some time, regarding the 1.5-degree goal as unrealistic in light of available resources and development needs.
- Critically, the memo, and supporting analysis, warn that emission cuts and mitigation are politically difficult and slow to achieve, and that delaying needed adaptation leaves developing countries more vulnerable to climate risks.
- Gates' intervention has received both praise and criticism; supporters see it as pragmatic and inclusive of developing country concerns, while critics say it risks shifting attention from the urgent need to decarbonize global energy systems.
- This highlights Gates' ability to catalyze the global climate debate, drawing parallels with his previous interventions in global health, and notes that his influence could help steer new policy priorities—if adaptation is given parity with mitigation.
- The rationale for Gates' position is that immediate, practical climate adaptation in infrastructure and agriculture brings direct improvement to vulnerable populations and can be managed alongside longer-term emission reduction targets.

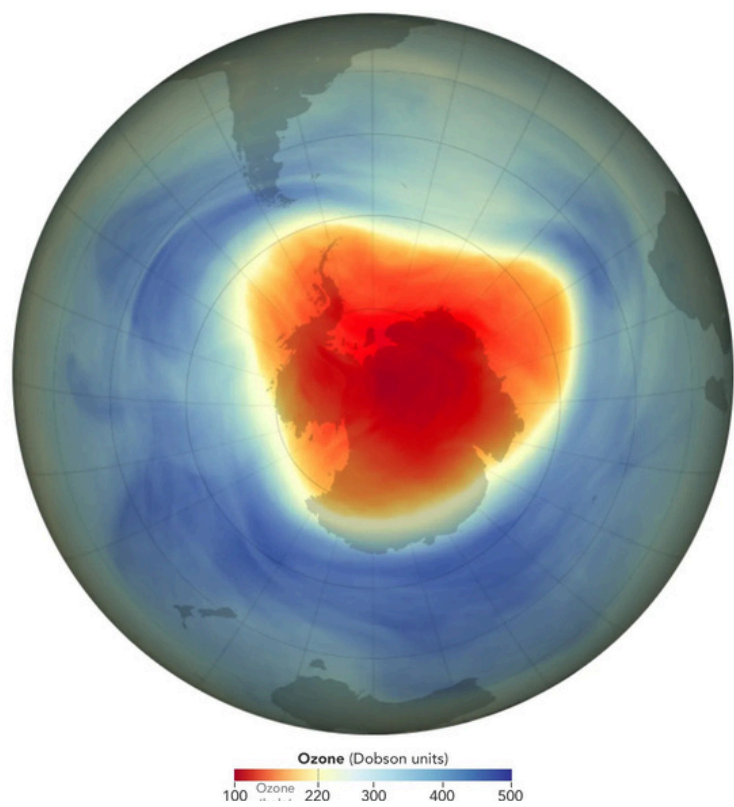
Prelims Corner: Explanations

Q1. Ans c

Under the terms of the Paris Agreement, the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and Long-Term Low Emissions Development Strategy (LT-LEDS) are determined by the countries themselves and communicated to the UNFCCC. In keeping with this, India submitted its updated NDCs on 26 August 2022 and its long-term low-carbon development strategy on 14 November 2022 during COP27 Sharm el Sheikh Conference. These documents lay out India's vision and approaches toward reaching net zero by 2070, which are expected to evolve as necessary over time. As per LT-LEDS, India's vision of low-carbon development is based on the need to ensure India's high energy needs for development, including poverty eradication, achieving Sustainable Development Goals and economic growth. Further, it is necessary that the plan for the country's energy security is based both on the expansion of non-fossil fuel sources for power generation and the rational utilization of fossil fuel resources.

Q2. Ans a

In 2018, the Quito Adjustment is the adjustment made to the Montreal Protocol. It aims high to avoid 1°C of future warming. In this, the decision to strengthen enforcement mechanisms of this accord in response to an unexpected rise in global emissions of the banned chemical trichlorofluoromethane or CFC-11 was adopted. Practical arrangements were made to implement the Kigali Amendment by approving technologies for destruction of substances controlled under the Protocol & adopting new data reporting requirements.



Q3. Ans a

A micro forest is a dense, tiny forest with high biodiversity. The technique is a form of Afforestation or planting a forest where there wasn't one before. This is different than reforestation, which restores an existing forest. Microforests are planted densely and become hotspots for insects and small animals. Forest patches improve health, cool cities more effectively than ornamental vegetation in urban areas, and remove pollutants. Urban forests also have other benefits, including creating a buffer against disasters like tsunamis or hurricanes.



Q4. Ans b

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants was adopted at a Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Stockholm, Sweden and entered into force on 17 May 2004; Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) are organic chemical substances, that is, they are carbon-based. POPs are highly toxic, and exposure can occur through diet, environmental exposure, or accidents. They negatively affect humans, plant and animal species and natural ecosystems both in close proximity and at significant distances away from the original source of the discharge. Among others, the provisions of the Convention require each party to Prohibit and/or eliminate the production and use, as well as the import and export, of the intentionally produced POPs that are listed in Annex A to the Convention (Article 3).

Case Study:



51 Matches & 1862 Runs: The Inspiring Life of India's First Deaf & Mute Cricketer

He was barely five when he started playing cricket at Pune's Deccan Gymkhana and by 18, he was playing domestic first-class cricket championship, aka the Ranji trophy. Leaping ahead in his cricketing career, this young boy was leaving spectators and players spellbound. Known for his hard hitting batting and quick fielding, he went on to play 51 first class matches scoring a total of 1,862 runs. Such is the story of Yashwant Prabhakar alias Baba Sidhaye, who is reportedly India's first hearing and speech impaired cricketer. His cricketing career lasted between 1949 and 1966. Even after retirement he continued to associate with his favourite sport by coaching the new and upcoming players, both abled and disabled. His immense contribution to the cricketing world inspired several generations of cricketers. Though he never made it to the Indian team for international matches, he did play against teams like Australia, New Zealand and West Indies as part of state and division teams. He was also selected for the prestigious Duleep Trophy multiple times from the West and North Zone.

Dick Cheney, shadowy architect of death and endless wars, dies at 84



Dick Cheney, who became one of the most powerful Vice Presidents in United States history as George W. Bush's number two during 9/11 and catastrophic wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, died on Monday. Cheney is widely seen as one of the driving forces behind the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 following the September 11, 2001 attacks by al-Qaeda on New York and Washington. A hate-figure to many on the left, he made a remarkable pivot toward the end of his life when he opposed Donald Trump's ultimately successful campaign to return to the White House in 2024. Cheney forged an unusually muscular job in the traditionally inconsequential role and was seen by many as a major power behind the throne.



A diver retrieves a cage containing mussels used as bioindicators to monitor microplastic and chemical pollution during a mission in the Saronic Gulf, Greece. A bioindicator is an organism that senses and responds to its environmental conditions, based on which scientists can infer them indirectly.