



NEW THREAT
Bioterrorism a serious concern: Jaishankar
NEWS » PAGE 4

DELHI POLLUTION
Why blame farmers alone, asks top court
NEWS » PAGE 6





CORRUPTION CASE
Bangladesh court finds Hasina, niece guilty
WORLD » PAGE 14

WAR CLOUDS
Maduro's failings do not justify U.S. intervention
Trump must step back from his Venezuela plan
EDITORIAL » PAGE 8



DELHI BLAST CASE
NIA searches houses of 3 arrested men in J&K
NEWS » PAGE 4

INSIDE



SIR duty: SC takes note of 'coercing' anganwadi staff

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Monday took note of a plea that alleged that anganwadi workers are being forced to work as Booth Level Officers for the special intensive revision of electoral rolls under the threat of imprisonment and removal from their employment rolls in Tamil Nadu. » **PAGE 2**



Army to purchase more Heron UAVs from the Israelis

TEL AVIV
To enhance their unmanned capabilities in the wake of Operation Sindoor, the Indian armed forces have signed up for more satellite-linked Heron Mk II Unmanned Aerial Vehicles under emergency procurement, sources in the Israeli defence industry said. » **PAGE 4**

Parts of India are likely to get more 'cold wave' days

NEW DELHI
There will be more than the usual number of "cold wave" days over Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, eastern Uttar Pradesh, northern Madhya Pradesh, western Maharashtra, and Arunachal Pradesh, the India Meteorological Department said on Monday. When the minimum temperature of a station is 10 degrees celsius, it is considered a "cold wave" day. » **PAGE 6**

SC tasks CBI to tackle 'digital arrests'

Court says every type of cyberscam that defrauds the public needs to be probed

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday tasked the Central Bureau of Investigation with cracking down on 'digital arrest' scammers and their associates, giving the agency a "free hand" to launch an anti-corruption probe into bankers involved in the opening of mule accounts linked to cybercrimes.

A Bench of the Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi found "enough was enough", and held that 'digital arrest' scams required the immediate attention of the CBI.

A note provided by the Centre in the court showed that ₹3,000 crore had already been scammed by fraudsters from victims, mostly drawn from the elderly population, through 'digital arrests'.

"There is no second opinion that every type of cyber scam defrauding victims, especially senior

citizens, is required to be investigated. The CBI shall investigate first the digital arrest scams. Other types of cyber scams [fraudulent investments, promise of part-time jobs] can come in the second and third stages," the court observed in the order.

The court directly ordering the CBI, overriding state consent, to conduct a pan-India probe and hunt down scammers is an extraordinary step. It cannot order the CBI, except when compelled by exceptional circumstances.

Directive to States
Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Punjab, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Jharkhand, and Tripura have been directed to accord consent to the CBI under Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act to investigate 'digital arrest' cases under the Information Technology Act, 2000 in their

Court directly ordering CBI, overriding state consent, is an extraordinary step

Tough action

The Supreme Court has asked the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to crack down on 'digital arrest' scammers

THREE CATEGORIES OF CYBER SCAMS IDENTIFIED BY SC

- **Digital arrests:** Victims are made to believe government authorities are entitled to their hard-earned money, and they are subjected to coercive acts of extortion
- **Investment scams:** Victims are lured by attractive investment schemes to deposit large amounts, but eventually are duped of the money. The fraudsters continue to coin different terminologies to dupe victims. In some of the cases, the money is sought in the name of 'advance tax'
- **Part-time jobs:** Victims are paid for 'free tasks' like positive reviews or watching YouTube. They are later made to pay huge amounts for 'premium tasks'



jurisdictions.

The court directed the CBI to identify police officers from different States, and domain experts, to aid the investigation. "We want the CBI to undertake a comprehensive investigation on identified cybercrimes on a pan-India basis," Chief Justice Kant observed.

Considering the magnitude of the 'digital arrest'

scams and widespread tentacles of the fraudsters, the Supreme Court directed the CBI to coordinate with the Interpol to identify cybercrime havens abroad. The court impleaded and issued notice to the Reserve Bank of India to respond on the use of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to trace 'layering' or the moving of the proceeds of crime

through multiple bank accounts to escape detection.

Invoking the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules of 2021, the apex court directed online intermediaries to cooperate with the CBI, and provide the agency assistance with regard to data in connection with investigation into 'digital arrest' cases.

States and Union Territories have to ensure the establishment and operationalisation of regional cybercrime coordination centres to compile data on cybercrimes, and for initiating preventive measures against the offence, the court directed. They should be linked to the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), which is designed to provide an ecosystem for law enforcement agencies to deal with cybercrime in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

The court said telecom

operators had been careless in issuing SIM cards.

"The records before this court show an alarming, negligent and irresponsible approach of the telecom service operators in issuing SIM cards, particularly multiple SIMs, in the same name," Chief Justice Kant noted.

The Telecom Department was ordered to submit a proposal for the consideration of the top court, which would be eventually complied with by telecom service operators to prevent the misuse of SIMs.

The court's *amicus curiae* in the case, advocate N.S. Nappinal, classified cyber frauds into three main categories – digital arrest, fraudulent investments, and the promise of part-time jobs.

All these frauds are meant to defraud innocent victims, particularly senior citizens, of their hard-earned money. Whatever the category, they need to be stopped, the CJI stressed.

Smartphone makers told to preinstall Sanchar Sathi

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) on Monday ordered smartphone manufacturers to pre-install the Sanchar Sathi app on new devices sold from March 2026, and to make sure "that [the app's] functionalities are not disabled or restricted". *The Hindu* has viewed a copy of the directions.

The Sanchar Saathi app will be used to "verify authenticity of IMEIs used in mobile devices", the order said.

It is unclear if the app will have access to the IMEI number of devices it is pre-installed on, or if users will have to input the hardware identifier on their own.

The app, can be used to report scam calls, identify SIM cards registered under a person's name, and remotely disable phones if they are stolen.

FULL REPORT ON
» **PAGE 6**

Chennai drenched



Cyclone impact: Chennai and its surrounding districts continued to receive a steady downpour on Monday, caused by the remnants of the now-weakened Cyclone Ditwah. The rain led to waterlogging and traffic congestion in many parts of Tamil Nadu's capital. R. RAGU

ED issues notice to Kerala CM in masala bond probe

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has slapped a show-cause notice on Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in connection with alleged Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) violations linked to the masala bond issued by the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board.

Former Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac and KIIIFB Chief Executive Officer K.M. Abraham have also received ED notices.

The ED said it issued the notices on November 12 for the contravention of FEMA



Pinarayi Vijayan

provisions and master direction of the Reserve Bank of India "by the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board and its authorities" amounting to ₹466.91 crore.

According to the notices, the charge is that ₹466.91 crore – which is

part of the funds raised through rupee-denominated bonds (masala bonds) – was used to purchase land. This action was "specifically prohibited" and was in contravention of the RBI master direction dated June 1, 2018, the ED said.

The KIIIFB, a body corporate developed by the Kerala government for mobilising funds for infrastructure development, had floated 'masala bond' in the London Stock Exchange and the Singapore stock exchange to raise funds to the tune of ₹2,672.8 crore under external commercial borrowing.

Growth in industrial activity slips to 14-month low of 0.4%

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

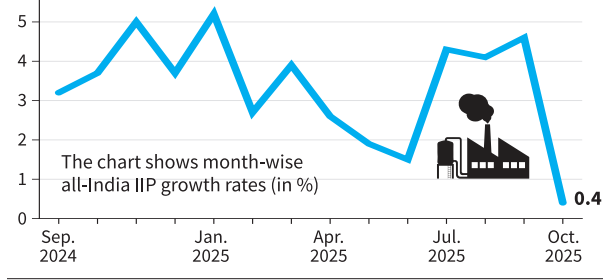
Growth in industrial activity slowed to a 14-month low of 0.4% in October 2025, pulled down by contractions in the electricity and consumer non-durables sector, as well as relatively slow growth in the manufacturing sector.

Data on the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation showed that growth in the index was last lower than the latest figures in August 2024, when it had come in at 0%.

The electricity sector contracted 6.9% in October 2025, compared with a growth of 2% in October last year. The consumer

A steep fall

Growth in industrial activity slowed to 0.4% in October 2025. This is the lowest in 14 months. Industrial activity was pulled down by contractions in the electricity and consumer non-durables sectors



non-durables sector contracted 4.4% compared with a growth of 2.8% over the same period.

"Consumer goods registered negative growth, and the inventory factor would have played out," Madan Sabnavis, chief economist

at the Bank of Baroda said.

"It was -0.5% for durables and -4.4% for non-durables. This would need to be monitored for the next two months where traction in a positive direction should be seen," Mr. Sabnavis added.

Centre moves Bills to raise pan masala cess, increase excise duties on tobacco products

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Monday introduced a Bill in Parliament seeking to raise the excise duty on tobacco products, and another legislation targeting the manufacture of pan masala.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman tabled the two Bills – The Health Security se National Security Cess Bill, 2025 and the Central Excise (Amendment) Bill, 2025 – amid Opposition sloganeering.

The Bills are aimed at replacing the revenue from the Goods and Services Tax (GST) compensation cess on tobacco products, which will be discontinued soon. The Health Security se National Security Cess

proposes to augment funding for health and national security through levy of cess on "machines installed, or other processes undertaken in the manufacture of pan masala".

The GST compensation cess was introduced in 2017 during the launch of the GST system. The proceeds were to be used to compensate States for any losses they faced due to the implementation of GST for a period of five years. During the COVID-19 pandemic years of 2020-21 and 2021-22, the proceeds from this cess fell short of the compensation requirement, leading to the Centre borrowing money to compensate the States.

The compensation cess on tobacco products is to



Nirmala Sitharaman

be discontinued once the government pays back interest on these loans. According to sources in the Finance Ministry, this repayment will be completed in the next few months.

However, with the removal of this cess, the ef

Amid uproar, Lok Sabha passes Manipur GST Bill

NEW DELHI
The Lok Sabha, on the first day of the Winter Session on Monday, passed a Bill to replace an Ordinance which implemented reforms in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in Manipur, amid disruptions and protests by the Opposition parties. » **PAGE 5**

fective tax rate on and revenues from tobacco products would fall significantly. To overcome this shortfall in revenue, the Central Excise (Amendment) Bill has been introduced "in order to give the government, the fiscal

space to increase the rate of Central excise duty on tobacco and tobacco products so as to protect tax incidence".

The Health Security se National Security Cess Bill seeks to "augment the resources for meeting expenditure on national security and for public health" by levying a cess on the "machines installed, or other processes undertaken in the manufacture of pan masala". The Bill also allows for the imposition of this cess on "other goods which may be notified".

"It provides for taxable persons to self-declare all machines or processes for each factory or premises, and the cess would be calculated in the aggregate for each location," it added.

INBRIEF



BJP leader Prem Kumar all set to become Bihar Speaker

Senior BJP leader Prem Kumar is set to become the new Speaker of the Bihar Legislative Assembly as he filed his nomination papers on Monday, the opening day of the 18th Assembly. Mr. Kumar, a nine-term MLA from the Gaya Town constituency and a former Minister in several Nitish Kumar governments, is expected to get elected unopposed since no other candidate has filed nomination papers for the post. The name of the new Speaker will be announced on Tuesday. The newly elected MLAs, barring six, were administered the oath of office in the 243-member Bihar Assembly on Monday.

Punjab floods not due to poor reservoir management: Centre

The Union Jal Shakti Ministry on Monday denied that poor reservoir management at major dams such as Bhakra and Pong had worsened the recent floods in Punjab, asserting that the deluge was driven by exceptionally high inflows caused by extensive rainfall in the catchment areas. In a written reply to the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Jal Shakti Raj Bhushan Choudhary said the inflows at Pong and Bhakra in 2025 touched 3,49,522 cusecs and 1,90,603 cusecs respectively, prompting regulated releases of dam water in accordance with rule curves, dam safety norms and the limited carrying capacity of the Sutlej and Beas rivers downstream.

Nothing in Assam ST report that can offend anyone, says Himanta

Press Trust of India
GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday asserted that the Group of Ministers' (GoM) report on granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six communities of the State does not contain anything that could "offend" any section. He claimed that those protesting against it have not properly read the report.

The report, with the recommendations of the GoM on the demand for ST status by Ahom, Chutia, Moran, Matak, Koch-Rajbongshi and Tea Tribes (adivasis) communities, was laid in the Assembly on Saturday, the last day of the Winter Session.

"There is nothing in the report that can offend anyone. It ensures that all



Himanta Biswa Sarma

communities and sub-communities move forward," Mr. Sarma told reporters on sidelines of a programme in Nagaon district.

Asked about students from the Bodoland University storming the Assembly hall of the BTC Secretariat in Kokrajhar on Saturday, and vandalising property during a protest against the State Cabinet's approval of the report, the CM said, "It was laid in the Assembly around 7 p.m., and the protest was held at 3 p.m. It means that the demonstra-

tion took place before the tabling of the report."

If there is any "difficulty in reading and understanding" the report, there may be some doubt in a few people's minds, he had said at a press briefing after a Cabinet meeting.

'GoM to explain report' "But, if it is read carefully, there will not be any doubt. The Cabinet decided that the three Ministers of the GoM - Ranaj Pegu, Keshab Mahanta and Pijush Hazarika - will invite CCTOA representatives for a discussion and explain the report in front of them to alleviate any misunderstanding," Mr. Sarma said.

The Coordination Committee of Tribal Organisations of Assam (CCTOA) has been spearheading the agitation against the GoM report.

'Stalked, doxxed': Internet turning into a nightmare for Delhi women

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

Every time she looked at her incessantly buzzing phone, Nafisa (name changed), 23, a college student in Delhi, found either a graphic rape threat, an Islamophobic slur, or hundreds of missed calls from unknown numbers. "They said they knew where I live. I even stopped going out to the balcony," she recalled.

The phone calls and text messages started after she said something that "some men did not like" on her Instagram handle, a screenshot of which was shared widely along with her phone number and photos. "There were groups of men which would specifically target Muslim women, and I became their prey. They circulated my phone number and photos with captions like 'call her for a good time'. I received 800-1,000 calls a day," she said. Still reeling from the



An event organised by NGOs to highlight technology-facilitated gender-based violence, in New Delhi on November 25. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

trauma two years later, Ms. Nafisa is not alone in her struggle. From cyber stalking, doxxing (circulating private information), morphed images to rape threats and slurs, women in Delhi, particularly those from marginalised communities, said that the Internet is becoming a scarier place by the day.

The concerning trend, however, is not reflected in national data.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data released recently for 2023

recorded only 36 cyber crimes against women, of which 28 were linked to publishing or transmission of sexually explicit material, and eight were in the category of other women-centric cyber crimes, including blackmail, defamation, morphing and fake profiles.

Few cases reported

For the same year, Delhi surpassed all other metropolitan cities in terms of overall crimes against women, with 13,366 cases.

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

The first day of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly's Winter Session began on Monday with a war of words between the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Opposition Congress over the cough syrup tragedy that killed many children in the State over the past few months.

The four-day-long session began with members paying their condolences to various people, including film actor and former Lok Sabha MP Dharmendra, former Union Minister Shripakash Jaiswal, and the victims of the explosion near Delhi's Red Fort.

However, the condolence session turned into an heated exchange between both the sides when Leader of Opposition (LoP)



Congress MLAs protesting in Bhopal on Monday over deaths of children due to adulterated cough syrup. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Umang Singhar brought up the recent cough syrup tragedy that killed 26 children in Chhindwara and nearby districts and slammed the government for not including them in the condolence list.

"It is surprising that the government didn't address the deaths, didn't express sympathy and didn't mention them. Has the govern-

ment lost its humanity?" Mr. Singhar said in the House, while also slamming the government over the deaths of two children after they were bitten by rats at Indore's State-run MY Hospital.

Mr. Singhar demanded increased compensation for the victims families.

His remarks, however, drew criticism from Cabi-

SC to take up case on 'coercing' anganwadi workers into SIR duty

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday took note of a plea that anganwadi workers are being pushed into Booth Level Officer (BLO) work for the special intensive revision (SIR) of poll rolls in Tamil Nadu under the threat of imprisonment and loss of jobs.

Appearing before a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, for Tamilaga Vетtri Kazhagam (TVK), said anganwadi workers were under "severe pressure" to attain "targets" in the distribution of enumeration forms for the SIR.

Threat of imprisonment

He said the anganwadi staff thrust into the SIR work were threatened with three months' imprisonment under Section 32 of the Representation of the People Act of 1950 for the breach of official duty in connection with the preparation, etc, of electoral rolls if their targets were not met. They would also lose their jobs.

Chief Justice Kant said the issue would be taken up separately when the batch of petitions challenging the Tamil Nadu SIR came up for hearing later

Senior advocate says anganwadi workers under severe pressure to attain targets in the distribution of enumeration forms

during the week.

"There have already been 21 instances of BLOs taking their own lives," the senior counsel submitted

"You are saying anganwadi workers should not be employed in the SIR exercise..." Chief Justice Kant said.

Mr. Sankaranarayanan said the issue was more human than legal. He however informed the court that the enumeration phase has been extended from December 4 to December 11.

The plea in the Supreme Court follows a complaint filed by a Mumbai-based advocate in the National Human Rights Commission against the "inhuman workload and coercive pressure" imposed on BLOs during the second phase of the SIR, resulting in multiple cardiac arrests, collapses and deaths. Deaths of BLOs have been reported in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Student found dead at KIIT varsity hostel in Bhubaneswar

The Hindu Bureau
BHUBANESWAR

An engineering student was found dead in his hostel room at city-based KIIT University, where two students from Nepal had ended their lives earlier this year for different reasons.

According to Commissionerate of Police for Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, the deceased has been identified as Rahul Yadav (18) from Raipur in Chhattisgarh. He was in the first year of computer science course.

He was found dead in his hostel room on the campus on Sunday. Based on information from KIMS Hospital, a case of unnatural death has been filed.

(Those in distress can contact Tele MANAS at 14416 to seek help)

Punjab Roadways stir continues, release of detained staff sought

Press Trust of India
HOSHIAHPUR/PATIALA

Contractual workers of Punjab's State-run road transport corporation resumed their protest on Monday, a day after they called off their strike after a meeting with the Transport Minister.

They are now demanding the release of the arrested and detained employees and reinstatement of those suspended and dismissed.

The State-wide protests by the workers began on November 28 against the opening of tenders under the kilometre-based bus scheme, which they claimed was a backdoor attempt to allow private players to operate on government-notified routes, threatening thousands of jobs.

Under the scheme, priv-

ate operators lease buses to the transport department and are paid a fixed rate per kilometre.

On Sunday, when the protest entered its third day, after a six-hour meeting with the Punjab Transport Minister Laljit Singh Bhullar in Tarn Taran district, the employees agreed to call off their strike, the State government had said.

'173 in police custody'

However, in a late-night development, the union representatives said their protests would continue until those employees who are in police custody are released.

They also demanded the reinstatement of suspended and dismissed employees. Contract workers' union leader Resham Singh Gill said 173 employees are in police custody.

Armed forces to procure additional Heron Mk II UAVs

Lok Sabha passes Manipur GST Bill amid disruptions over SIR

The Bill replaces an Ordinance which implemented reforms in Goods and Services Tax in Manipur; statutory resolution moved by Revolutionary Socialist Party member N.K. Premachandran disapproving the Bill was rejected by a voice vote

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha, on the first day of the Winter Session on Monday, passed a Bill to replace an Ordinance which implemented reforms in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in Manipur. There were frequent disruptions as the Opposition insisted on a debate on the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls under way in nine States and three Union Territories. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the Manipur Goods and Services Tax (Second Amendment) Bill, 2025 in the afternoon, after one round of disruption. The Bill was passed



Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi and other leaders on the first day of the Winter Session in the Lok Sabha on Monday. PTI

post-lunch after a brief discussion, and a statutory resolution moved by Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) member N.K. Premachandran disapproving the Bill was rejected by a voice vote as Opposition members were protesting in the Well of the House. As soon as the House assembled on Monday, Speaker Om Birla began proceedings by paying respects to former members who passed away recently. Mr. Birla then congratulated the women's teams

for winning the ICC World Cup 2025 and the T20 Cricket World Cup for the Blind; the women's kabaddi team that won the World Cup; and the athletes representing India at the Deaflympics. But as soon as the Question Hour was taken up, Opposition members started shouting slogans pressing for a discussion on the SIR. Mr. Birla tried running the House for about 20 minutes before adjourning until noon. When the House reassembled, Ms. Sitharaman introduced three Bills, including one to levy excise duty on tobacco and tobacco products and another to impose a new cess on the manufacture of pan masala, apart from tabling supplementary demands for grants for 2025-2026. The House functioned for about 12 minutes before it was adjourned until 2 p.m. When the House met at 2 p.m., Telugu Desam Party (TDP) member Krishna Prasad Tenneti, who was in the Chair, called Mr. Premachandran to speak on the resolution, but the RSP member told the presiding officer that the House was not in order. The Chair then called BJP member Shashank Mani, who spoke in favour of the Bill. The Bill was then passed by a voice vote amid vociferous protests by Opposition parties, who trooped into the Well of the House. Following this, the House was adjourned for the day.



Rajya Sabha Chairman C. P. Radhakrishnan conducting proceedings in the House during the Winter Session on Monday. PTI

Radhakrishnan urged to be impartial as he chairs first RS session

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Vice-President and Rajya Sabha Chairman C.P. Radhakrishnan received rich tributes across party lines as he presided over his first session on Monday. Opposition leaders urged him to remain impartial and maintain a balance between the two sides. The otherwise cordial debate saw a flashpoint when Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge referred to the "unexpected and sudden exit" of Mr. Radhakrishnan's predecessor, Jagdeep Dhankhar, triggering loud protests from the Treasury Benches. Replying to the felicitations, Mr. Radhakrishnan said his humble journey from Tiruppur, the knitwear capital, to New Delhi, the national capital, showed the remarkable power of democracy. "This rise makes me more conscious of the duties and responsibilities of the Chair," he said. "Let us commit ourselves to ensuring that our actions inside this House reflect the aspirations of every farmer, every worker, every street vendor, every woman and youth, and the poorest of the poor

who look at Parliament with a lot of hopes," the Vice-President added. Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised Mr. Radhakrishnan's journey from a modest farming background to a key constitutional post as a reflection of the strength of Indian democracy. He described the Chairman's life as one of "unwavering dedication to social service". Mr. Kharge said, "The Chairman belongs as much to the Opposition as to the government." He expressed regret that the House could not bid farewell to the outgoing Chairman. Treasury Benches immediately rose in protest. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju interjected to say that such references were unnecessary. **Declining sittings** Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien wished Mr. Radhakrishnan good health and urged him to safeguard federalism. He flagged concerns over declining sittings of Parliament and reduced opportunities for discussion. "Between 2009 and 2016, 110 discussions were allowed. In the last 8 years, it's down to 36 discussions..." he said.

Opposition demands SIR discussion, walks out

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Opposition walked out of the Rajya Sabha on Monday, the first day of the Winter Session, demanding that the Union government announce a discussion on electoral reforms. Though Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said the Centre was not averse to holding a discussion and sought time, the Opposition members said their demand was urgent, as about two dozen booth-level officers (BLO) had died by suicide after the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls began in several States. Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien raised the issue first. He asked the government to initiate a discussion immediately. He said Mr. Rijiju had told an all-party meeting that he would "come back" to the Opposition leader on the demand for a discussion on the electoral reforms. At this point, Mr. Radhakrishnan sought Mr. Rijiju's response. "Nobody is undermining any matter which was brought forth by the Opposition party in the all-party meeting or Business Advisory Committee meeting. What I am saying is, it is under the consideration of the government," Mr. Rijiju said. "... If you set a condition that it has to be taken up today itself, then it becomes difficult, because you have to give certain space," he added. Mr. Kharge supported Mr. O'Brien and said all Opposition floor leaders had met at his chamber on Monday and taken a decision to raise the issue of SIR in one voice.

Parliament is a place for delivery, not drama: PM

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Parliament is not a place for drama but for delivery, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday ahead of the start of the Winter Session of Parliament. "For some time now, our Parliament is being used either as a warm-up arena for elections or as an outlet for frustration after defeat," Mr. Modi said, targeting the Opposition. Addressing presspersons outside Parliament, he said the session must not become a stage for political theatrics but a platform for constructive and result-driven debate. Mr. Modi offered to give the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing the media on the first day of Parliament Winter Session on Monday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Opposition tips to bring "positivity into politics". "We need to work with a sense of responsibility," he said. The Monsoon Session was virtually washed out over the Opposition's protests on the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar. The Opposition has threatened to stall the Winter Session over the SIR exercise in nine States and three Union Territories if it is not discussed in Parliament. Referring to the drubbing received by the Opposition parties in the Bihar

Assembly election, Mr. Modi said they were perturbed by the electoral loss and unable to digest failure. **'Fulfil responsibility'** "Defeat should not be the ground to create disruption. Victory should not convert into arrogance either," he said. The record turnout witnessed in the Bihar election was the biggest strength of democracy, he said, adding that the Opposition too should fulfil its responsibility and "come out of its depression after loss in elections". "The game the Opposition has been playing for the last 10 years is no longer acceptable to the people," he said. "They should change their strategy - I am ready to give them a few tips," he said, urging all parties to recognise the purpose of Parliament and "come out of the frustration of defeat". "There are one or two parties that are unable to accept their defeat. From the statements I heard yesterday, it seems that the loss has deeply troubled them," he said. Opportunities should be given to the new generation of MPs, he said. "The House should benefit from their experiences, and through this House, the nation should also gain from their fresh perspective," the Prime Minister said.

Priyanka responds to Modi, stresses raising issues of public importance is not 'drama'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Responding to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's claim that the Opposition protests in Parliament were mere drama, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Monday said the real "drama" was in the government's refusal to allow discussions on issues of public importance. "What is Parliament for? Speaking about and raising issues is not drama. Drama is the refusal to allow discussion and the absence of



democratic debate on matters of public concern," she told presspersons outside Parliament. "We have spoken about air pollution. Why are we

not allowed to discuss these issues?" she added. Her brother and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, declined to comment when reporters asked him to respond to the Prime Minister. **'Shameful situation'** "The Prime Minister says, 'enjoy the weather'. What weather should the people of Delhi enjoy? At least take a peek outside to see what is happening in the country," Ms. Vadra said. She termed the air quality issue

in Delhi shameful and said everyone must come together to take strong steps to tackle the problem and save the health of children, the elderly, and those already suffering from respiratory issues. "I really feel that this situation is shameful. This is the capital city of our country. I feel that we should set aside party affiliations and, in alliance with administrative, political, civil society, and judicial elements, take some strong steps," the Congress leader said.

Opposition divided over strategy to take up SIR row in Parliament, decides to play by ear

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

At a meeting of Opposition parties on Monday morning, there was a variance in views over continuing the protests against the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. The decision was taken only for the floor strategy on Monday and Tuesday, according to sources. The Opposition would take a call based on the government's response to their demand for a debate on "electoral reforms", under

Parties decide to hold protests on Monday and Tuesday and take a fresh call on Wednesday

which they hoped to flag the "anomalies" and "malpractices" in the SIR. The Trinamool Congress, which skipped the meeting, remains insistent on keeping the focus on the SIR in this session. The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, spoke at

length about how the SIR was being "misused" by the ruling party. The Opposition, he said, was not given the final electoral rolls in time for scrutiny. The SIR contributed to the National Democratic Alliance's victory in Bihar, Mr. Gandhi told the gathering. Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Ram Gopal Yadav alleged that the names of minority voters were being systematically weeded out in the SIR in Uttar Pradesh and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was himself monitoring the exercise.

A few parties opined it would not be wise to hold a continuous protest on the SIR. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's (DMK) Parliamentary Party leader Kanimozhi held the view that other subjects needed attention too. **Wednesday meeting** In the end, it was decided that protests would continue on Monday and Tuesday, and a fresh call would be taken for the rest of the week at a meeting on Wednesday, based on the government's response.

Finance Minister says LIC investments in Adani Group as per established SOPs

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said her Ministry does not issue advisory or directions to Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) regarding its investment decisions, and emphasised that the investments that the state-owned insurer made in Adani Group were as per established standard operating procedures (SOPs). India's largest insurer has, over the years, made investment decisions across companies based on fundamentals and detailed due diligence. Following due diligence as per



established SOPs, it has bought shares across half a dozen listed companies of Adani Group, whose book value stands at Rs 38,658.85 crore and invested another Rs 9,625.77 crore in debt instruments of the conglomerate. "The Ministry of Finance

does not issue any advisory/direction to LIC in connection with matters related to investment of LIC fund," she said in a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha. The investment decisions of the state-owned insurer, she said, are taken by "LIC alone following strict due diligence, risk assessment and fiduciary compliance". Such decisions are governed by the provisions of the Insurance Act, 1938, as well as regulations issued by Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India, Reserve Bank of India and Securities and Exchange Board of India from time to time, she said.

EPFO disposes of 99% of applications for higher pension, Minister tells LS

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The retirement fund body EPFO has disposed of nearly 99% of the applications, seeking higher contributions for getting higher pension under the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) 1995, Parliament was informed on Monday. Minister of State for Labour and Employment Shobha Karandlaje stated in a written reply to Lok Sabha that the EPFO has taken action to implement the directions issued in the Supreme Court Judgment on November 4, 2022 in a time-bound manner. An online facility was provided, and a total 17.49 lakh applications for validation of joint options



Pro-rata basis for calculation of pension is provided in Para 12 of the Employees' Pension Scheme and is equitable

FO have been disposed of, she also stated. As per her reply, a total of 4,27,308 demand letters have been issued, out of which 34,060 cases have been found ineligible later, mainly due to non-remittance of demand amount. Around 2,33,303 applicants have deposited the demand amount/consent, out of which, 96,274 continue in service and 1,37,029

have retired. Out of these retired applicants, PPOs (pension payment orders) have been issued to a total of around 1,24,457 applicants while 12,572 PPOs are under finalisation, she informed the House. She told the House that Pro-rata basis for calculation of pension is provided in Para 12 of the Employees' Pension Scheme and is equitable, treating both categories of pensioners i.e. pensioners under wage ceiling and those with higher wages on an equal footing and the Supreme Court also did not find the same ultra-vires. The EPS, 1995 is a 'Defined Contribution-Defined Benefit' Social Security Scheme.

Newly elected NC leaders take oath as RS MPs

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Three recently elected MPs from Jammu and Kashmir on Monday took oath as members of the Upper House. National Conference leaders - Chowdry Mohammad Ramzan, Sajjad Ahmed Kichloo and party treasurer Gurwinder Singh Oberoi - took oath at the start of the Winter Session of Parliament. After the oath, the three leaders exchanged pleasantries with Chairman C.P. Radhakrishnan and greeted other leaders present in the House. Last month, the NC won three Rajya Sabha seats in Jammu and Kashmir.

The science, technology, and pitfalls of using nuclear power in space

As the human presence in space expands, energy will become critical; while nuclear devices are forbidden, treaties are silent on nuclear propulsion for peaceful purposes; the Liability Convention addresses damage by space objects, but is not clear about accidents involving nuclear reactors

Shrawani Shagun

The US recently announced plans under its Lunar Fission Surface Power Project to deploy a small nuclear reactor on the moon by the early 2030s. It could be the first attempt to establish a permanent nuclear power source beyond earth orbit, signalling the start of a new era in space.

While solar energy can power some simple moon-based activities, it's constrained by the two-week-long lunar nights and the scarcity of sunlight at the poles. For a sustained moon and Mars presence, humans' energy independence thus becomes a critical enabler. This is also why the U.S.'s lunar nuclear programme is notable.

Promise of nuclear power

In conversations on this topic on the earth, nuclear power often features as an alternative that is compact, dense, and reliable.

Devices called radioisotope thermoelectric generators (RTGs) have powered the Voyager spacecrafts' odyssey through the solar system. They convert heat released by the slow decay of plutonium-238 nuclei into electricity, and are immune to dust and darkness. But RTGs only produce a few hundred watts of electric power, enough for instruments but insufficient for human habitats or industrial operations.

Compact fission reactors are the next leap. About the size of a shipping container, these reactors can generate tens to hundreds of kilowatts, and can power life support, laboratories, and manufacturing units.

The next leap on the demand side will be industrial operations like in-situ resource utilisation, which can convert Martian water ice into rocket fuel and oxygen, which need over 1 MW of continuous power. Sunlight alone can't reliably supply this magnitude beyond the earth's orbit. This is where nuclear power reactors are attractive.

On Mars, reactors buried beneath the regolith could take advantage of the natural shielding to protect equipment and inhabitants from cosmic radiation while producing large amounts of energy. The idea of deploying such reactors on the moon itself is lucrative, where they can help maintain warm habitats for explorers, process ice for water and rocket fuel, and recharge batteries for surface mobility vehicles.

Incremental advances in nuclear power have enabled new technologies that were once confined to science fiction. Beyond RTGs, there is now nuclear thermal propulsion, where a propellant is heated by nuclear decay and expelled from nozzles. The DRACO programme in the U.S. will test this technology in lunar orbit by 2026.

If it works, the trips to Mars could become several months shorter, slashing crew exposure to galactic cosmic rays. In nuclear electric propulsion, reactor-generated electricity ionises a propellant, offering years of efficient thrust for deep-space probes and cargo missions.

Legal vacuum

The international framework for nuclear power in space is based on the 1992



An artist's illustration of a future Artemis Base Camp operated by NASA. NASA

United Nations Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space (UNGA Resolution 47/68). These Principles impose several procedural and safety obligations on launching states for systems used to generate electricity.

Three Principles in particular are relevant. No. 3 mandates nuclear power sources to be designed and built to prevent the release of radioactive materials in both normal and emergency conditions. No. 4 requires rigorous pre-launch safety analyses to make sure the probability of accidental release is acceptably low. No. 7 further aligns with existing space treaties by requiring prompt and clear emergency notification to any potentially affected state in the event of a malfunction or reentry involving radioactive materials.

However, this framework is limited. The Principles address only RTGs and fission reactors intended for electricity generation, and not nuclear thermal/electric propulsion systems. And while they call for safety assessments, they don't establish binding technical standards for reactor design, operational limits, and end-of-life disposal.

Crucially, as a General Assembly resolution, the Principles are non-binding, meaning they offer guidance but no enforcement mechanism. This leaves significant governance gaps. Among other possibilities, states can begin testing compact fission and propulsion reactors capable of operating far beyond the earth orbit without being compelled to address safety.

Beyond those Principles, the Outer Space Treaty, the Liability Convention, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty together only offer partial coverage. For instance, even if they are all considered together, there are no binding protocols to prevent radioactive contamination of celestial bodies or to govern reactors jettisoned at the end of a mission.

On Mars, reactors buried beneath the regolith could take advantage of the natural shielding to protect inhabitants from cosmic radiation. The idea of deploying such reactors on the moon is lucrative, where they can keep habitats warm, process ice for water and rocket fuel, and recharge batteries for surface mobility vehicles

Without such protocols, nuclear contamination could irreversibly alter pristine extraterrestrial environments long before humankind fully understands them. The tension between safety and international access is also paramount. As the European Space Agency's special advisor for political affairs Kai-Uwe Schrogl has noted: "Establishing 'safety zones' around nuclear power plants on celestial bodies must not lead to national appropriation or the restriction of freedom of use for other actors."

Responsible race

As the human presence in the solar system expands, energy will become critical and energy sources will become strategic.

For now, while the Outer Space Treaty forbids countries from placing weapons of mass destruction in earth orbit, it's silent on nuclear propulsion for peaceful purposes.

The Liability Convention addresses damage caused by space objects but isn't clear about accidents involving nuclear reactors in cis-lunar space or beyond.

For these reasons, we need to update the legal framework posthaste to match countries' technological capabilities or risk accidents that could have long-lasting consequences across state boundaries.

In fact, if such an accident does occur, the promising nuclear dawn will quickly devolve into a nuclear twilight, if not a second Cold War.

India's moment

India itself stands at a strategic inflection point. An alliance of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Department of Atomic Energy could be powerful. A domestically developed space reactor could power lunar operations in permanently shadowed craters, enable continuous in-situ resource utilisation on Mars, and overall demonstrate India's leadership in deep-space innovation.

But both in India and around the world, a responsible nuclear future needs to begin with reform. The UN's 1992 Principles should be updated to explicitly include propulsion reactors, establish safety benchmarks, and define end-of-life disposal standards. The UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space needs to adopt binding environmental protocols to govern safe launches, preventing contamination, and disposing of nuclear systems.

To this end a multilateral oversight mechanism modelled on the International Atomic Energy Agency could certify designs, verify compliance, and enhance transparency.

This said, technology alone can't secure our future. Without a coherent legal and ethical framework, efforts to expand nuclear technologies in space could give way to conflict.

India in particular can help by championing safe nuclear practices, and do for space energy what it once did for non-aligned diplomacy: shape norms for a multipolar era by balancing ambition with restraint.

(Shrawani Shagun is a researcher focusing on environmental sustainability and space governance. shrawani.shagun@gmail.com)



The brain rewires itself to keep up with cognitive development. These changes happen at ages nine, 32, 66, and 83. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Our brains have five phases of life, research suggests

Priyali Prakash

The human brain undergoes four major turning points at specific ages, dividing our lifespan into five epochs of development, according to a new study led by scientists at the University of Cambridge in the UK. It was published in *Nature Communications* on November 25.

The scientists used diffusion imaging, a type of MRI, to show that the brain rewires itself to keep up with our cognitive development. These changes reportedly happened at ages around nine, 32, 66, and 83 years. The results suggest the brain's complex network doesn't develop linearly over time but instead does so in distinct phases related to these ages.

The researchers analysed data from 3,802 individuals aged 0 to 90 years. In epoch 1, aged 0-9 years, the cohort had 733 people. Based on studying them, the researchers reported that in the first few years, the brain develops rapidly. Both grey and white matter of the central nervous system increase and the brain forms new synapses while pruning others.

Researchers also said this turning point happens around the same time as the onset of puberty, which begins around 8-13 years for girls and 9-14 years for boys. Thus the body also undergoes changes in hormone levels alongside neurological ones – a time in which the body also experiences a higher risk of developing mental health disorders, per the researchers.

In Epoch 2, from 9 to 32 years, the volume and integrity of white matter, which helps transmit nerve signals and makes up most of the brain, grow. According to the study, the 32-year mark is the most significant turning point for the brain in this epoch. Until then, the brain focuses on developing large-scale, integrated neural networks.

The penultimate epoch lasts from 66 to 83 years. The 66-year mark doesn't invoke any major shifts, although studies have found that the brain takes significant steps towards deterioration

The researchers also said cultural, historical, and social factors – rather than just biology – influence the transition from adolescence to adulthood and that while adolescence begins with puberty, its exact end is more vague. The findings also indicated that adolescence technically extends to around 32 years.

In the third epoch 3, from 32 to 66 years – the longest – the study noted that changes in this period are slower as the brain focuses on stability. The team found segregation and compartmentalisation to be the major themes for this epoch as brains settled into adulthood, transitioning from the rapid development observed in the previous epochs.

These changes occur around the same time that intelligence and personality measures plateau.

The penultimate epoch lasts from 66 to 83 years. The 66-year mark doesn't invoke any major structural shifts although previous studies have found that the brain takes significant steps towards deterioration in this time. This is because the integrity of white matter begins to drop – consistent with what scientists already know about ageing and age-related degeneration.

The fifth and final epoch lasts from 83 years on. Because this part of the study included only 93 people, the team couldn't reliably confirm how age related to neural changes in this epoch. However, the researchers did note a declining trend in how age and brain structure are related over the previous epochs, which could explain why the trend intensifies in this last epoch.

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

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

The natural artists called minerals

Yasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

Name the optical effect where the colours on a surface appear to shift as you change the angle at which you look at them. Examples of such surfaces include oil films on water and peacock feathers. The colours are the result of structural features rather than the presence of certain pigments.

QUESTION 2

A gemstone called moonstone is famous for its soft milky glow that seems to float just beneath its surface when light moves across it. What do gemologists call this gentle, billowing light in certain feldspar gemstones? Its name comes from a mineral first found in the Adula Alps in Switzerland.



A feldspar mineral from Labrador in Canada is known to show brilliant flashes of blue, green, and gold colours that appear and vanish depending on how you tilt the stone. The flashes are caused by light reflected between thin internal layers. What's this phenomenon called?

QUESTION 4

Some gemstones show a famous "play of colours" created by small flashes and patches of light, often over a milky background because light scatters and diffracts from closely packed silica spheres inside. What is this optical effect, seen especially in opal, called?

QUESTION 5

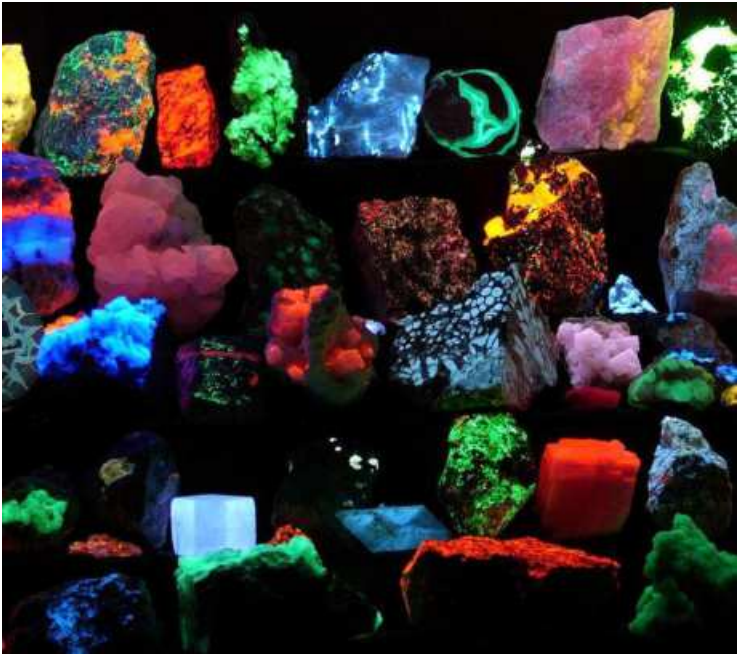
Car paints, some plastics, and natural nacre — all display a smooth, silky sheen that seems to change subtly as

they move. This is due to an effect called X: it's the same principle as in the answer to Q1, except most of the reflected light is white. Name X.

Answers to November 20 quiz:

1. Einstein's equations linking spacetime, matter, energy – **Ans: Field equations**
2. Spacetime property that tells mass how to bend – **Ans: Curvature**
3. Mathematician who formalised maths of space – **Ans: Gregorio Ricci-Curbastro**
4. Originator of theory in which gravity acted instantly – **Ans: Isaac Newton**
5. Maths tool that generalises scalars and vectors to more dimensions – **Ans: Tensors**

Visual: **Karl Schwarzschild**
First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Tamal Biswas | Anmol Agrawal | Prem Raj P. | Chitransh Soni



Visual: This photo shows various minerals displaying _____. Fill in the blank with the name of a phenomenon where they absorb UV light and reemit it as visible light. HANNES GROBE/AWI

Please send in your answers to science@thehindu.co.in



Cautious optimism

India's challenge is to maintain the growth momentum

India's September-quarter GDP data for the current financial year beat all estimates, coming in at 8.2%, higher than 7.8% in Q1 FY26 and well above the year-ago period. This offers fleeting reassurance to policymakers, days after October's trade data revealed a historic deficit of \$41.68 billion, driven partly by a trebling of bullion imports – a signal of economic uncertainty. Growth has been led by manufacturing (9.1%) and services (9.2%), supported by a recovery in private consumption. Private Final Consumption Expenditure grew 7.9% in Q2 FY26, compared with 6.4% in Q2 FY25, while government spending also provided a modest boost. Together, these suggest a broad-based uptick in domestic activity despite global headwinds. Yet, the full effects of the external shock may surface in the quarters ahead. The U.S.'s 'two-stage' India tariffs, in August, landed mid-quarter. Some front-loading of export orders ahead of these tariffs may also have inflated Q2 output. A second statistical effect is at play. Retail inflation fell to 0.25% in October, the lowest in the current CPI series, contributing to a GDP deflator reportedly below 1%. A deflator this low mechanically inflates real GDP relative to nominal; the narrow gap between nominal GDP (8.7%) and real GDP (8.2%) underscores this. Should inflation rise or input costs firm up – if oil prices climb as India diversifies away from Russian crude – headline GDP growth may moderate. The RBI's upcoming Monetary Policy Committee meeting adds uncertainty, as any policy rate will shape demand-side pressures.

The Gross Value Added breakdown shows construction growing 7.2%, and the services sub-segment of financial, real estate and professional services rising 10.2% – indicating that capital-intensive, infrastructure-linked sectors have been central to this momentum. Monthly industrial indicators reinforce this pattern: the IIP rose 4% in September, with core capital-intensive categories such as steel (14.1%) and cement (5.3%) recording strong gains. This aligns with the impact of the RBI's three repo-rate cuts this year, which lowered the policy rate to 5.5% in June and may have supported investment activity. Crucially, the composition of growth remains skewed. The quarter's expansion has been driven by capital-intensive and higher-skill sectors – banking and technology – while high-employment, labour-absorbing sectors continue to lag. IIP data for the past six months also point to weak rural consumption. There is, therefore, reason for cautious optimism. But the September-quarter growth spurt appears concentrated in better-paying formal sectors, even as low-income, export-linked, labour-intensive segments struggle. With September and October trade data already flashing warning signs, it might be too early to conclude that this pace of growth could be sustained.

War clouds

Whatever Maduro's failings, the U.S. must step back from its Venezuela plans

Donald Trump's remark that Venezuela's airspace should be considered "closed in its entirety" raised fears that the Republican "peacemaker" President may be preparing to attack the South American nation. Over the past few weeks, the U.S. has intensified pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro by conducting strikes in the Caribbean and Pacific waters against alleged drug traffickers and bolstering its troop presence in the region. Washington insists that the operations are part of its 'war on drugs', and accuses Mr. Maduro of heading Cartel de los Soles, which the U.S. has designated as a foreign terrorist organisation. The U.S. troop deployment includes two amphibious ready groups with over 4,500 Marines and sailors. The Pentagon has also sent aircraft carrier *USS Gerald R. Ford*. Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory, is hosting F-35 fighter jets and MQ-9 Reaper drones, just across Venezuela's coast. In October, the U.S. flew a pair of supersonic B-1 Lancer bombers along the coast of Venezuela. It is now evident what Mr. Trump seeks – a regime change in Caracas. And Venezuela's right-wing opposition, led by Nobel Peace Laureate María Corina Machado, has wholeheartedly endorsed America's plans.

Mr. Maduro, a self-styled socialist, stands accused of rigging the 2024 presidential election, and Venezuela's economy has suffered a near-total collapse on his watch, prompting millions to flee. He shares responsibility for Venezuela's current condition. But the U.S. is not an innocent actor either. Washington's sanctions have been a major contributor to Venezuela's economic crisis. In the past, U.S. and several European governments had recognised Juan Guaidó, an opposition figure, as the President in a bid to undermine the Maduro government. Venezuela has long been used as a transit route by drug traffickers from Colombia, the source of most of the world's cocaine. Yet, the U.S. government has not produced solid evidence to link Mr. Maduro to the cartels or to drug trafficking. The attacks in the Caribbean waters killing civilians constitute a blatant violation of international law. The threats by the Trump administration against Mr. Maduro, irrespective of the character of his regime, amount to an assault on Venezuela's sovereignty. More importantly, the U.S. seems unwilling to learn from its past mistakes. It invaded Afghanistan in 2001 only to leave 20 years later after cutting a deal with the Taliban. America's 2003 invasion of Iraq turned out to be one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes. Mr. Trump, who claims credit for ending many wars, must step back from the brink, and seek to resolve differences with Venezuela through dialogue.

India's new National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (NAP-AMR 2.0) – (2025-29) – has been released at a time when Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is affecting human health, veterinary practices, aquaculture, agriculture, waste systems and the entire food chain. Antibiotic residues, resistant organisms and environmental discharge connect these sectors in powerful ways. AMR does not remain confined to hospitals. It moves through soil, water, livestock, markets and food systems, making it a true One Health challenge. Therefore, any national plan must be matched by real and coordinated action across all levels of governance.

The evolution, from the first action plan

The first National Action Plan on AMR, launched in 2017, was a significant step forward. It brought AMR into national consciousness, encouraged multi-sectoral participation, improved laboratory networks, expanded national surveillance and supported stewardship. It also placed AMR firmly within a One Health framework, recognising the links between human health, animal health and the environment.

Despite this progress, implementation during the first plan period remained limited at the State level. Only a small group of States – Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Sikkim and Punjab – developed formal State Action Plans, and only a few moved meaningfully into execution. The majority continued to rely on fragmented activities within individual sectors; State-wide, multisectoral One Health structures did not take shape in most parts of the country.

This slow uptake was not due to a shortage of national effort, but because the major determinants of AMR fall under State jurisdiction. Health administration, hospital functioning, pharmacy regulation, veterinary oversight, agricultural antibiotic practices, food-chain monitoring and waste governance are controlled by State departments. National guidance alone cannot create uniform implementation when the operational levers sit elsewhere.

India's broader public health experience shows that real progress happens only when the Centre and States work within a structured, mutually accountable system. The National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme is a clear example: its achievements arise from regular joint reviews, shared monitoring missions and clearly defined roles across levels of government. The National Health Mission follows similar principles, where coordinated planning, dedicated funding signals and periodic performance assessments enable



Dr. Abdul Ghafur

is Senior Consultant in Infectious Diseases, Apollo Hospital, Chennai, and Coordinator, Chennai Declaration on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

The success of the National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (NAP-AMR 2.0) depends on how effectively national and State systems work together

States to turn national priorities into on-ground action. The NAP-AMR 2.0 represents a more mature and implementation-oriented framework when compared with the first plan. It moves beyond broad intent and outlines clearer timelines, responsibilities and resource planning. An important advancement is the recognition that India cannot address AMR without meaningful participation from the private sector, which delivers a major proportion of health care and veterinary services. The plan also strengthens its scientific base by placing greater emphasis on innovation – rapid diagnostics, point-of-care tools, alternatives to antibiotics and improved environmental monitoring.

It deepens its One Health perspective, giving more attention to food-system pathways, waste management and environmental contamination. Surveillance structures are more integrated across human, veterinary, agricultural and environmental sectors, creating a harmonised national approach.

In terms of governance, the NAP-AMR 2.0 introduces a higher level of national oversight by placing intersectoral supervision under NITI Aayog through a dedicated Coordination and Monitoring Committee. It repeatedly stresses that every State and Union Territory should establish State AMR Cells and prepare State Action Plans aligned with the national framework, supported by a national dashboard for progress reporting. These developments signal that AMR is evolving from a technical health issue to a national development priority requiring multi-departmental engagement.

Where the new plan falls short

Despite these important developments and the stronger emphasis on State-level implementation, the fundamental weakness of the first plan remains unchanged. The plan stresses that States must develop AMR Action Plans and establish AMR Cells, but it does not create any mechanism to ensure that they do so. There is no formal Centre-State AMR platform, no joint review mechanism, no statutory requirement for States to notify or implement their plans and no financial pathway – such as NHM-linked incentives – that could anchor sustained State commitment. In a federal system where the key determinants of AMR – health services, veterinary oversight, agricultural antibiotic use, food-chain safety and waste regulation – lie almost entirely within State jurisdiction, this is the pivotal gap. Without a structured method for political engagement, administrative follow-through and shared accountability, even a

well-designed national plan risks remaining a technical document rather than a functional national programme.

The AMR policy cannot succeed through guidance alone. Unless India builds a mechanism that brings the Centre and the States into a common implementation framework, the NAP-AMR 2.0 will struggle to convert national intent into measurable national outcomes.

The need for a coordinated mechanism

To make the NAP-AMR 2.0 effective, India needs a clear architecture that brings political leadership, senior administrators and sectoral departments from all States into a unified system. A national-State AMR council, chaired by the Union Health Minister and guided by NITI Aayog, could provide the platform for regular review, joint decision-making and coordinated problem-solving across human health, veterinary sectors, agriculture, aquaculture, food systems and environmental regulation.

State engagement would also strengthen if the Union Government formally requested each State to prepare and notify its AMR Action Plan, with timelines and annual reviews. Experience from the National Health Mission (NHM) and tuberculosis (TB) programmes shows that high-level communication, especially through Chief Secretaries, can significantly shift administrative attention.

Financial mechanisms should follow. Even modest conditional grants under the NHM can drive improvements in surveillance, stewardship, infection control and laboratory strengthening. When funding signals priority, States respond with administrative energy and policy focus.

The NAP-AMR 2.0 provides the scientific and strategic foundation India needs. But its success will depend entirely on how effectively national and State systems work together. AMR is driven by real-world practices along the entire One Health continuum – from hospitals and farms to markets, food chains and wastewater systems. Without strong State participation, national plans cannot have national impact.

India has an opportunity now to build a coordinated and accountable Centre-State model for AMR control. If such a system is established, the country can achieve measurable progress and set an international example. Without it, even the most well-crafted national plan may remain a document of intentions rather than a framework for action. With stronger coordination, political commitment and sustained support across States and sectors, the NAP-AMR 2.0 can become a turning point in India's AMR journey.

The need for 'heart-resilient' urban planning

On October 8, 2025, the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) observed World Habitat Day in New Delhi under the theme, 'Urban Solutions to Crisis'. The event spotlighted programmes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) and the Smart Cities Mission. Yet, beneath the visible challenges of pollution, heat and inequity lies a quieter emergency – a surge in heart disease and diabetes. Cardiovascular ailments are a main reason now for urban deaths, with prevalence rate nearly twice that of rural India, and witnessing more patients under the age of 50 years.

Daily life in urban India – long commutes, polluted air, shrinking green spaces, and rising stress – has resulted in rising health risks. Access to care remains limited, even as cities promise opportunity. Yet, few have addressed this crisis through deliberate, evidence-based planning. The distribution of health care still follows profit, not need. Hospitals cluster where land values and paying populations are high, while vast areas remain underserved. Market logic, not medical necessity, continues to decide who receives care and who does not.

Looking at planning

As India urbanises, fragmented planning risks locking in sedentary lifestyles, pollution and inequity. Integrating heart health into urban planning through coordinated land use, transport, housing, and green space is now essential. For decades, development has operated in silos: transport divorced from housing, green initiatives sidelined, and health rarely considered. Expressways have encouraged car dependence, fast-food zones have caused unhealthy diets, and traffic congestion has given rise to rising pollution. Integrated planning offers a remedy. Compact, mixed-use neighbourhoods can cut commutes, reduce emissions and promote active living. The World Health Organization (WHO)'s Healthy Cities Network shows that embedding health in governance lowers chronic disease risks. Reviving such an approach in India, supported by digital tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled air-quality and heat mapping, can make cities healthier and

Priyanka Kochhar

is the CEO of The Habitat Emprise, and a researcher in sustainable built environments and holistic urban development

Mansi Sachdev

is a public policy professional working extensively in the field of urban development and climate-resilient spatial planning

Dr. Anil Dhall

is a Senior Interventional Cardiologist and a leading advocate for preventive and lifestyle cardiology

The rise in cardiovascular disease in urban India points to the need for 'heart-friendly' urban planning

more resilient. Heart-healthy planning rests on interconnected pillars that address multiple crises at once and complement national missions such as the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM), Smart Cities Mission, and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT). There are some steps

First, walkability and Active mobility: safe, shaded footpaths, cycle lanes and pedestrian crossings promote movement and lower risks of hypertension and diabetes.

Second, green infrastructure: tree cover, parks and urban forests cool neighbourhoods and filter air, reducing heat stress and pollution-linked heart attacks.

Third mixed land use: combining residential, commercial and recreational areas reduces commute times and car dependence, encouraging more active living.

Fourth, public transport systems: affordable, clean-energy transit improves access, reduces emissions, and shortens sedentary travel time.

Fifth, healthy food ecosystems: local markets, community gardens and restrictions on junk-food advertising help shift diets toward heart-friendly choices. Together, these measures amplify impact: green, walkable neighbourhoods with reliable transit cut pollution while improving activity, diet, and community connection – critical determinants of cardiovascular health.

Tackling invisible urban threats

Many urban health risks remain invisible yet deadly. Fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) from vehicles and industry triggers heart attacks and strokes, while concrete-heavy layouts trap heat, heightening cardiovascular stress. Poor water and waste systems worsen metabolic disorders. Without intervention, Asia could see a 91% rise in cardiovascular mortality by 2050.

Holistic planning offers practical remedies. Expanding tree cover enhances natural ventilation, renewable energy cuts emissions, and modern water and waste systems reduce toxic exposure. Digital innovations – AI-enabled sensors, citizen-reporting apps, and urban heat-mapping tools – can make these risks visible and actionable.

Embedding such systems within urban

planning frameworks aligns with WHO's call to make health central to urban governance.

Equity must anchor every urban health strategy. Low-income communities endure the worst conditions – polluted air, poor connectivity, limited greenery and scarce health care. The India State-Level Disease Burden Study reports a 2.3-fold increase in cardiovascular disease among marginalised groups. Even well-intentioned projects risk "green gentrification", where parks and greenways displace those they were meant to benefit. Truly healthy cities must prioritise vulnerable areas, conduct equity audits, and involve communities in planning. Such participation prevents disparities, builds trust, and embeds prevention into daily life – strengthening campaigns such as Tobacco-Free Youth 3.0 by creating environments that make healthy choices easier.

An urban turning point

India's cities stand at the crossroads. Unchecked expansion could lock in unhealthy lifestyles for decades, but health-centred planning can turn them into models of resilience. Imagine Delhi's shaded corridors reducing pollution for walkers, Chennai's cycling routes tackling childhood obesity, or Surat's compact, transit-linked neighbourhoods lowering stress and emissions.

Building on the NUHM's outreach and the Asian Development Bank's \$10-billion urban investment plan announced in 2025, India can embed heart health into its development agenda. Collaboration among the MoHUA, health agencies, academia and civil society can align land use, mobility, and environment with measurable well-being outcomes. Updating planning curricula, conducting digital equity audits and engaging youth through Urban October and beyond can help shape a new generation of health-conscious urban designers.

Ultimately, cardiovascular disease is not only a personal concern—it is a reflection of how cities are built. The air we breathe, the routes we travel, and the spaces we share shape health more than willpower alone. As India reflects on Urban Solutions to Crisis, the most enduring solution may be this: cities designed to nurture the human heart.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Winter session

It will be no surprise if the winter session of Parliament turns fractious, given that the Opposition is determined to raise issues such as Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, the Delhi bomb blast, and worsening pollution in the capital. The all-party meeting convened by the

ruling party was dismissed as "ritualistic" and "useless" by an Opposition Member of Parliament. Clearly, consensus is impossible when the two sides of the political divide fail to see eye to eye. Citizens expect greater maturity and wisdom from their leaders, along with a genuine effort to lift the

quality of political discourse. In this context, one is left wondering why the ruling party does not take the initiative to hold more meaningful all-party meetings on key issues. Such consistent engagement could help bridge the widening gap, foster mutual trust, and encourage the Opposition

to participate more constructively in parliamentary proceedings.

V. Nagarajan,
Chennai

Renaming Raj Bhavans

The Union Home Ministry's move, as a letter to the offices of Governors and Lieutenant-Governors, to rename all Raj Bhavans

across India as Lok Bhavans is amusing (Inside pages, December 1). It is well-known that the Bharatiya Janata Party-led central government has been misusing the office of Governor in Opposition-ruled States to delay Bills, interfere in governance, and create political friction. The

country requires substantive reforms and implementation rather than superficial rebranding efforts.

Kshirasagara Balaji Rao,
Hyderabad

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Capturing urban dynamism in the 2027 Census

The 2027 Census will be the world's largest administrative exercise of its kind. The bedrock of India's policy, scheme design, and fiscal allocations, the Census provides a snapshot of the lived reality of citizens. The 2027 Census will have dedicated mobile apps for digital data collection, geo-tagging of buildings, and a real-time digital monitoring platform to improve the accuracy and efficiency of the exercise.

Recognising transitional areas
Capturing a comprehensive snapshot of the Indian populace requires another critical step: recognising transitional urban areas. According to official communications, Census 2027 proposes to retain the same definition of an urban area that was used in Census 2011 to ensure uniformity of comparison.

However, India already has a comparatively conservative definition of what constitutes 'urban' with a threefold criterion: population size, population density, and economic parameters. It also follows a binary classification of urban and rural, which does not capture peri-urban areas that are often located on the peripheries of cities and in villages that are transitioning to urban in situ. For instance, studies by the World Bank show that even in 2010, the share of India's population living in areas with urban-like features was 55.3%. However, Census 2011 recorded only a 31% urban population share, suggesting the existence of significant unseen and unrecorded urbanisation.

The UN Statistical Commission has introduced a global method, the 'Degree of Urbanisation', for a clearer delineation of urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. The Census 2027 could adopt a similar intervention to recognise peri-urban areas that typically fall under rural governance, and could benefit from targeted attention for planned growth and provision of basic services.



Rejeet Mathews

Program Director in the Sustainable Cities and Transport Program at WRI India. Views are personal



Raj Bhagat Palanichamy

Senior Program Manager in the Sustainable Cities and Transport Program at WRI India. Views are personal

Getting a comprehensive snapshot of the Indian populace requires recognition of transitional urban areas

Delhi is set to be among the world's five largest agglomerations (by population), based on UN estimates. The 'true extent' of Delhi's agglomeration includes the contiguous cities of Gurugram, Faridabad, Noida, and Ghaziabad that span three different States/Union Territories. The UN considers such agglomerations by their true extent rather than by administrative boundaries, but the Census records them separately by their constituent urban local bodies, districts, and State boundaries, thereby obscuring the scale of their massive, interconnected urban footprint. Such agglomerations should be recognised endogenously as well in the Census, as they have interconnected economies and shared labour markets.

A spatial approach
How can this be done? The Census 2027 could adopt a spatial approach through an open-access geo-statistical portal with due regard for data anonymity, security, and interoperability with other national datasets. Such visual dashboards can dynamically reveal the true spatial extent of agglomerations highlighting where peri-urban growth is occurring. In addition to standard tabular data downloads, thematic visualisations like maps can spotlight areas that are under-provisioned in basic services or have high population density, thus providing deeper insights for effective implementation of municipal schemes. Municipal bodies could also be encouraged to update their information in real-time (instead of waiting for the next decennial Census) based on agreed protocols and processes with the Census. This will also foster a spirit of healthy competition among urban local bodies to showcase their progress in improving access to basic services. The dynamic modifications to ward and municipal boundaries to which statistical data are tagged often make it difficult to study the

changing patterns over time. One of the ways to mitigate this issue is to use static spatial grids (such as a 1x1 km grid) as an additional overlay, amenable to administrative boundaries. Data interpolation from irregular administrative boundaries to regular grids could lead to distortions, and if the grids are too minute, they can also pose privacy and social concerns. This can be overcome with blended indicator-based themes that only show underserved areas and mask sensitive information such as caste or income groups. Similarly, blended data of age, ability, housing conditions, and service provision levels, when overlaid with climate hazard data, provides insights on vulnerable areas that require climate-proof investments. The overlays could also enable trend analysis once time series data get spatialised into the grid.

Globally, such geo-statistical formats have been adopted successfully by Mexico's INEGI and Britain's Ordnance Survey and Environmental Information Data Centre. India could also explore adopting a similar context-relevant and anonymised adaptation to enable targeted actions for a rapidly urbanising India.

Even as India's fertility rates decline, the country continues to grow on the back of its past population momentum. In this context, adopting a geostatistical approach with a modular framework along with the current statistical portal can greatly support policymakers, academia, the private sector, civil society groups, and home-grown startups to build innovative solutions. The approach can also be integrated with other government platforms such as Gati Shakti or Digital Postal Index Number, which divides India into a 4m X 4m grid-addressing system and is aligned with the 2022 National Geospatial Policy. A geo-statistical approach holds the potential to maximise impact while steering India towards a more inclusive and resilient urban future.

The AIADMK is on a weak footing

With the party's woes continuing, the DMK seems to firmly be in the driver's seat

STATE OF PLAY

T. Ramakrishnan
ramakrishnan.t@thehindu.co.in

Last week, veteran leader K.A. Sengottaiyan, who was formerly with the All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), joined the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) led by actor Vijay in Tamil Nadu, which is set to go to the polls next year.

Mr. Sengottaiyan, who is a former Transport and School Education Minister, was expelled from the AIADMK about a month ago. He felt sidelined by party general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami and resigned from his post as MLA of Gobichettipalayam constituency in Erode district before joining the fledgling TVK.

The move did not surprise many people. Mr. Sengottaiyan had only two options: to either walk over to the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) or join the TVK. He would have probably found the first option unacceptable, having been trained in anti-DMK politics for years. When there was pandemonium in the Tamil Nadu Assembly on March 25, 1989, the then Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi, alleged that Mr. Sengottaiyan had hit his face and broken his spectacles. On the same day, AIADMK supremo and the Leader of the Opposition, Jayalalithaa, too, was attacked. When she attempted to exit the Assembly during the melee, a DMK Minister held the end of her sari. Against such a backdrop, joining the TVK was Mr. Sengottaiyan's best option as Mr. Vijay has, from the beginning of his political career, presented himself as a critic of the DMK.

Even though Mr. Sengottai-



yan's critics feel that the senior leader has lowered his stature by joining the TVK, a recent entrant into the political arena, the former Minister, who was elected to the Assembly nine times since 1977, will be an asset to the TVK. There is no leader in the TVK who can match Mr. Sengottaiyan's experience in politics and election management. Mr. Sengottaiyan has been appointed the chief coordinator of TVK's high-level administrative committee and organisation secretary for four western districts, traditionally known as AIADMK strongholds. By making him in charge of four districts, Mr. Vijay has signalled that he, like the DMK, is going to make things difficult for the principal Opposition party in the elections.

The woes of the AIADMK seem to continue: in recent months, it has lost some of its prominent second-rung leaders, including former MPs A. Anwhar Raajhaa and V. Maithreyan, to the DMK. Nearly eight months have gone since the AIADMK and the BJP announced the revival of their relationship, yet they have not been able to attract any party with a considerable following to their side. If this situation continues, it is going to be difficult for the combine to take on the DMK-led front, which has been able to keep its flock together.

When the two parties announced the renewal of their

ties on April 10, their proponents predicted that they would secure a vote share of 41%. The believed that both parties would retain their allies from the 2024 Lok Sabha elections through 2026 as well. It is now clear that the AIADMK is not going to get the support of all the constituents of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, which faced the electorate in April-May last year. One of the main reasons is that the Pattali Makkal Katchi, founded by S. Ramadoss in 1989, is heading towards a split. Mr. Ramadoss's year-long political rift with his son and former Union Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss has only widened. The Election Commission's recent decision formally recognising Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss as the party president is likely to force the founder to chart his own course.

In the BJP, former State president K. Annamalai has often made remarks that have not been palatable either to the AIADMK or to Mr. Annamalai's successor, Nainar Nagenthran, who is keen on preserving ties with the AIADMK at least until the elections are over.

The Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK), established by Vijayakant and now led by his wife Premalatha Vijayakant, seems to be keeping its options open, despite having exited the alliance with the AIADMK that was formed early last year. As other allies are on the fringes, their addition to the ranks of the Opposition will not make much of a difference to the outcome.

Unless the Naam Tamilar Katchi, which secured a vote share of about 8% in 2024, or the TVK joins the Opposition – either of which appears to be a remote possibility – the DMK-led coalition seems firmly in the driver's seat.

Is it the end of progress against extreme poverty?

Unless poorest economies start growing, progress against extreme poverty is over

DATA POINT

Max Roser

In the last few decades, the world has made fantastic progress against extreme poverty. In 1990, 2.3 billion people lived in extreme poverty. Since then, the number of extremely poor people has declined by 1.5 billion people.

Leaving the worst poverty behind does not mean a life free of want, but it does mean a big change. Additional income matters most for those who have the least. It means having the chance to leave hunger behind, to gain access to clean water and better healthcare, and to have at least some electricity – for light at night and perhaps even to cook and heat.

Can we expect this rapid progress to continue? Unfortunately, we cannot. Based on current trends, progress against extreme poverty will come to a halt. As we will see, the number of people in extreme poverty is projected to decline, from 831 million in 2025 to 793 million in 2030. After 2030, the number of extremely poor people is expected to increase.

Extreme poverty declined in the last three decades because, back in the 1990s, the majority of the poorest people on the planet lived in countries that subsequently achieved very fast economic growth. In Indonesia and China (Chart 1A), more than two-thirds of the population lived in extreme poverty. But these economies then grew rapidly. Today, the share has declined to less than 10%. Other large Asian countries – including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Philippines (Chart 1B) – also achieved strong growth, and as a consequence, the share living in extreme poverty declined rapidly. Conditions in other regions improved too: the share living in extreme poverty also declined in Ghana, Cape Verde, Cameroon,

Panama, Bolivia, Mexico, Brazil (Chart 1C), and many other countries. Charts 1A to 1D show the share of population living in extreme poverty versus GDP per capita in select countries.

What is different today is that the majority of the world's poorest people are stuck in economies that have been stagnating for a long time. Consider the case of Madagascar. In the long run, the country has not seen any growth at all: GDP per capita in Madagascar is about the same today as it was in 1950. As a consequence, the number of people in extreme poverty increased in line with the country's population growth. In richer countries, it is possible to reduce poverty by reducing inequality through redistribution, but a country such as Madagascar cannot reduce its share of people in extreme poverty through redistribution. This is because the mean income is lower than the poverty line; if everyone had the same income, everyone would be living in extreme poverty.

The situation is similar in other countries, as the chart shows: in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Malawi, Burundi, and the Central African Republic (Chart 1D), more than half of the population lives in extreme poverty. As their economies have stagnated, the deep poverty that most people live in has remained largely unchanged for decades.

This is why we have to expect the end of progress against extreme poverty based on current trends. If the poorest economies remain stagnant, hundreds of millions of people will continue to live in extreme poverty.

Many people say that we are at a juncture in history where the future looks different from the past. When it comes to the fight against extreme poverty, this is true. Today, the majority of the world's poorest people are living in economies that have not achieved economic growth in the recent past.

The projection in Chart 2 makes this difference clear: the future we can expect looks very different from the recent past.

Chart 2 is based on the latest available projection made by the researchers at the World Bank. Up to 2030, this projection is based on the latest growth projections from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. From 2031 onwards, poverty projections are based on the average growth rates observed from 2015 to 2024.

These projections show that we cannot expect a continuation of the strong decline of the past. After 2030, the number of people in extreme poverty is projected to increase. Based on current trends, we have to expect the end of progress against extreme poverty.

Chart 2 also shows how the geographic distribution of poverty has shifted. Three decades ago, most of the extremely poor people lived in Asia; today, most are in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the coming years, this trend is expected to continue. Growth in Asia will largely end extreme poverty in the region, while the economic stagnation and population growth in several African countries will mean that the number of people in extreme poverty there will stagnate or even increase. Of course, this is not just a concern until 2040: without rising incomes in the poorest regions, extreme poverty will remain a reality.

Importantly, however, these projections are not predictions; their purpose is not to describe what the world in 2030 or 2040 will certainly look like. What they tell us, however, is that if the poorest countries do not start to grow, a very bleak future is ahead of us: a future in which extreme poverty remains the reality for hundreds of millions for many years to come.

Max Roser is the founder and editor of Our World in Data, and is the Professor of Practice in Global Data Analytics at the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government

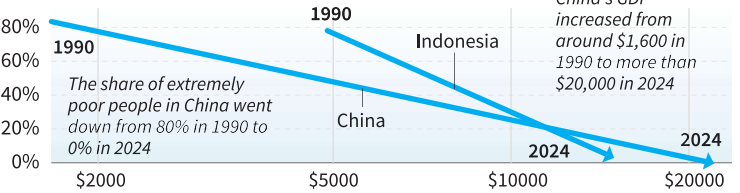
Stalled progress

The data for the charts were sourced from a study published by Our World in Data

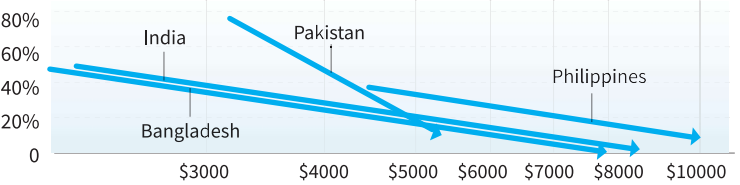


CHART 1A,1B,1C,1D: The share of population in select countries who are living in extreme poverty vs. the countries' GDP per capita (1990 to 2024)

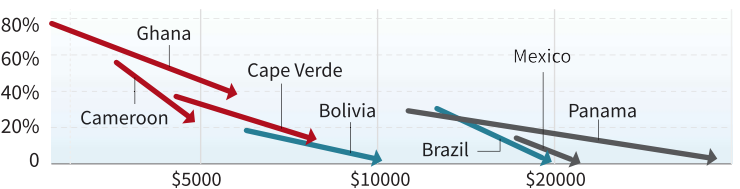
1A: China and Indonesia



1B: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Philippines



1C: Ghana, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Panama, Bolivia, Mexico, Brazil



1D: Madagascar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Malawi, Burundi, and the Central African Republic

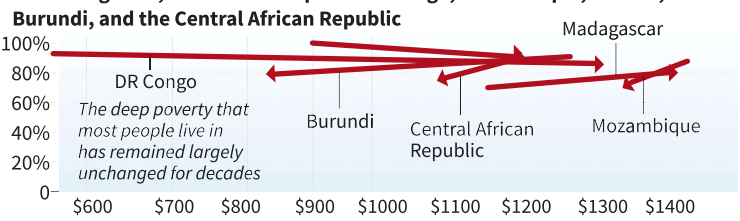
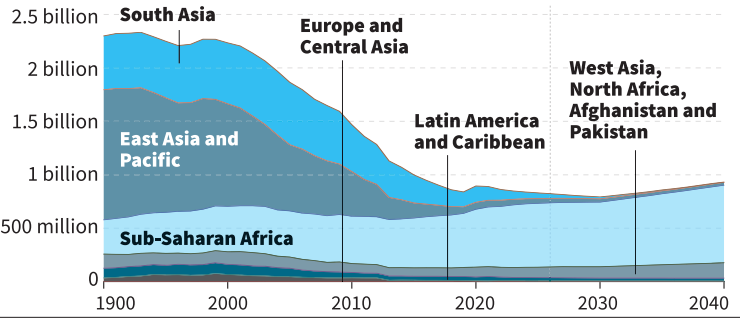


CHART 2: The total population living in extreme poverty by regions of the world, 1990 to 2040



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 2, 1975

Biggest aid to India from Britain as grant

New Delhi, Dec. 1: The British High Commissioner, Sir Michael Walker, will sign tomorrow four new aid agreements giving India as a straight grant a total of Rs. 167.7 crores, the biggest ever gift received by India in one lot from any donor nation. The Government of India has expressed its great appreciation of this very generous gesture whose significance is all the greater because Britain is making it at a time when its own economy is faced with serious problems. Apart from Sweden, no other aid-giving country, whether it is a Western or Soviet bloc nation, has so far accepted the concept of economic assistance to the third world as an international obligation. The signing of the four aid agreements to-morrow comes as the starting point for the implementation of the new aid policy of Britain which is based on the principle that all economic assistance to developing countries with a per capita income of less than 200 dollars should be given as grants instead of loans to help them achieve self-sufficiency within a reasonable span of time.

Though Sweden is the only country which has been pursuing this policy, the grants given by it have been relatively small despite the fact that its economy can afford to bear much bigger burdens. But no big power, not even the United States, has so far subscribed to this concept though it has written off from time to time enormous debts that have accumulated over the years through concessional sales of foodgrains under PL 480 programme.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 2, 1925

Indians in Zanzibar

The Indian National Association cabled to "The Indian Daily Mail" under date, Zanzibar, November 28: The agents of the British India Steam Navigation Company have entirely stopped the issuing of permits for all Indians visiting ships bound for Bombay thus even necessitating women to go on board alone. Sons and husbands cannot accompany them up to the ships. No valid reasons prompting such a drastic measure are given. Serious resentment against this order prevails. If immediate instruction to withdraw this restriction are not issued, serious difficulties are apprehended between the Company and the shipping and travelling Indian community.

ABSTRACT



A different system: Wall paintings ahead of Mizoram Assembly elections in Aizawl town on November 5, 2023. RITU RAJ KONWAR

On the mountain state vote: reading political landscapes through geography

A new study reveals how geography influences political representation in India's mountainous States, challenging traditional analyses and highlighting distinct electoral dynamics in regions like Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand

Nitika Francis

Marwah, D., & Alam, A. (2025), 'Edges of the Nation: Party System Divergence and Political Representation in Mountain India', *Studies in Indian Politics*. doi.org/10.1177/23210230251374814

When studying the political history of a country, how much does its geography come into play? India hosts mountains, valleys with river systems, deserts, and islands; ascribing the same analytical lenses to this variety might not always be productive. Research and political work in India tends to overlook the differences brought out by geography, as most such conclusions rely on electoral data taken from India's densely populated plains. This need for variety in analysis is expanded upon in Devesh Marwah's and Aniket Alam's research paper titled, 'Edges of the Nation: Party System Divergence and Political Representation in Mountain India'. The authors focus on mountain societies and differentiate their political realities from the plains using electoral data.

Through the Zomia lens Rather than looking at mountain societies through the perspective of lowland, State-governed societies, they are categorised as 'Zomia'. The term is used to describe highland regions in Southeast Asia whose communities can not be ascribed the same social science concepts as societies in the plains. The geographical term, Zomia, was

coined in 2002 by Willem van Schendel, who hypothesised that the lack of perspective on such regions marginalised its peoples and obscured their histories and political dynamics. Anthropologist James C. Scott expanded upon the concept by arguing that such areas were kept 'stateless' as a means of resistance. Mountain states wanted to evade the ways of the lowland "paddy states," which meant wet rice cultivation, taxation, and bureaucratic control. Many academic and political perspectives see the mountain state as backward and developmentally stunted, but fail to recognise the structural difference between them and lowland states. However, Scott, along with many other academics, agree that with the advent of technology, markets, and the penetration of political institutions, the need for this form of structural distinction has faded. **Duverger's law** Marwah and Alam argue that this assumption is premature by examining Indian electoral politics through the lens of Duverger's law. The law holds that in political systems with constituencies and the first-past-the-post voting system, only two political parties will emerge powerful. This holds true in most political contexts, such as in the U.S. and the U.K. India has been considered a gaping exception, due to the presence of strong regional parties, which generally splits votes, as well as its cultural heterogeneity. Some possible explanations for the compliance with Duverger's law are included in the paper. In the

first-past-the-post system, since only the party that has secured the majority forms the government, voters are more likely to engage in strategic voting. They may choose not to vote for their preferred party, but rather for the party which is more likely to win or perform better. Some literature also expands upon how Indians tend not to vote strategically, and how factors like caste tend to impact the number of effective parties. The article notes that most of the existing literature on India and Duverger's law seem to omit or limit analysis of the mountain states, and builds on this body of work by introducing the element of geography as an analytical framework. **Methodology** The paper classifies the following as mountain States: Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Meghalaya. The plains States that are studied include Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Assam. Not only are most mountain States neighbouring the plains States, but in many cases they were also carved out of the latter post-Independence. This analysis deliberately excludes Jammu and Kashmir due to its complex geopolitical situation. For each State, the Effective Number of Parties (ENP), is calculated. This index was coined by Laakso and Taagepera, and measures the number of significant political parties in a constituency by weighing them by their relative strength, rather than simply counting all competing parties. The resulting number helps in

assessing the degree of political fragmentation in each seat. For instance, an index value of 2 suggests a bipolar contest, 3 indicates a triangular competition, and 4 shows a fragmented political landscape. A score of 1 shows one-party dominance. The paper plots the share of mountain and plain States with less than 2 ENP, 2 to 2.5, 2.5 to 3, and more than 3, during the election years between 1977 and 2019. **Fragmented polity** When the States' shares of ENP are calculated over the years, trends diverge for both groups. Since 1977, the share of States with low ENP scores decreased over the years with the split and decline of the Congress, which started out as a dominant umbrella party in these States post the formation of India in 1947. Until 2019, most plain States had more than three effective parties, defying Duverger's law. This changed after the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party, whose dominance mirrors that of the Congress in the early years. Meanwhile, the shares of ENP of mountain States over time tells a different story. With the exception of 1977, 1984, and 1996, less than 50% of mountain States scored ENP values above 2.5, implying that most of their electoral matches were bipolar in nature, complying with Duverger's law. These results indicate a clear difference in the voting patterns of mountain and plain States, aligning with the theory of structural distinction between the two, backed by anthropological and historical analyses.

THE DAILY QUIZ

The U.S. is eyeing Venezuela for a regime change. This is not the first time that the U.S. has illegally intervened in other nations' political developments. Here is a related quiz

Srinivasan Ramani

- QUESTION 1** This place in Hispanic refers to the queen triggerfish that populates the coral reefs in the area. It was also the place where the U.S. launched a failed operation in Cuba to take out Fidel Castro's regime. Name it.
- QUESTION 2** The CIA driven Operation Ajax was a codename for a coup in a country whose democratically elected leader wanted to nationalise his country's oil reserves. Following the coup, a monarch was restored, who lost power in a revolution in 1979. Name the country, the leader who was deposed, and the monarch who was restored.
- QUESTION 3** While September 11 will forever be associated with the terrorist acts that took down the World

- Trade Centre in New York, the date also reminds of a coup that happened in South America, 28 years prior to the WTC attacks. This coup was supported by the CIA and led to a dictatorship coming to power. Name the leader who died in the coup and the country.
- QUESTION 4** Named after a biblical judge who defeated a vast army with just 300 men, this 2020 operation involved former U.S. Green Berets and fishing boats attempting a regime change. The mercenaries were quickly captured near Macuto. Which country was targeted? Name the leader and the operation.
- QUESTION 5** On February 5, 2003, which U.S. government official made a speech claiming that Iraq possessed "Weapons of Mass Destruction" — claims that were proven to be fabricated in order to justify an illegal invasion?



Visual question: Identify this former President who was deposed in a coup in his country in 2009. While the U.S. did not play a role in the coup, its then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton did work to prevent his return to power.

- Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. The theme for World Aids Day. **Ans: 'Overcoming disruption, transforming the AIDS response'**
2. India is the third largest country with the highest number of people living with HIV. These are the top two. **Ans: South Africa and Nigeria**
3. A lentivirus that is similar to HIV was found in these two types of primates in Africa. **Ans: Chimpanzees and gorillas in western equatorial Africa**
4. Name the scientists who were awarded the Nobel Prize for their discovery of HIV. **Ans: Luc Montagnier and Françoise Barré-Sinoussi**
5. This mode of transmission accounts for the majority of HIV infections. **Ans: Sexual transmission**
6. The two-word term used for the long phase of HIV infection. **Ans: Clinical latency**
7. Name the first antiretroviral medication used to prevent AIDS. **Ans: ZDV also known as azidothymidine (AZT)**
- Visual: Name this Hollywood star. **Ans: Rock Hudson**
- Early Birds:** Nobody got all the correct answers



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know Your English

S. Upendran

Is it wrong to use the word 'around' in the following sentence – “The amount comes to around Rs. 20,000”? (T. Smiles, Tamil Nadu)

No, it is not wrong. “The amount comes to around Rs. 20,000” is an acceptable sentence. Whether you want to include the word 'around' or not depends on the meaning that you wish to convey. When you say that the price comes to 'around Rs. 20,000', what it means is that the price is 'approximately' Rs. 20,000. In other words, it could be more than Rs. 20,000 or less than that. So the word 'around' means 'approximately' in that sentence. If, on the other hand, you drop the word 'around', then the sentence, “The amount comes to Rs. 20,000” would mean that the price is exactly Rs. 20,000. Nothing more, nothing less. So the presence or absence of the word 'around' brings about a change in the meaning of the sentence. Here are a few more examples:

The bill came to around Rs. 100. (The bill was approximately Rs. 100)

The bill came to Rs. 100. (The bill was exactly Rs. 100)

We spent around Rs. 25. (We spent approximately Rs. 25)

When I cut a joke and somebody laughs, is it correct to say “He laughed to my jokes”? (S. Meera, Tirumalgherry, Secunderabad)

First of all, you do not 'cut a joke'. You either 'crack' a joke or 'tell' a joke. For example, the teacher cracked a number of jokes. The Manager kept everyone amused by telling lots of jokes. When you finish telling a joke, the listener does not 'laugh to' your joke, instead he 'laughs at' your joke. For example, the audience failed to laugh at the speaker's jokes. My cousin Bharath used to crack a lot of jokes and everyone used to laugh at them. It is all right to laugh at people's jokes, but you shouldn't laugh at the people telling the jokes. When you laugh at someone or something, you usually make fun of them. When Mohan slipped and fell, everyone laughed at him. It isn't polite to laugh at other people's mistakes.

Which of the following sentences is correct? This is one of the best books that have been published. This is one of the best books that has been published. (C. J. Andrews, Fatima Nagar, Trichur)

The second sentence is the correct one. When you use 'one of the', it should always be followed by a plural and not a singular noun. For example, 'One of the movies I saw...'. 'One of the girls absent last week...'. 'One of the cars...'. And the plural nouns are followed by singular verbs. One of the movies I saw last week was 'The Mask of Zorro'. One of the girls absent was Saritha. And why do you use a singular verb although the noun preceding it is plural? Because you are not talking about all the movies that you saw last week, or all the girls that were absent. You are talking about only one of them. The subject is singular – 'one', so the verb is singular too.

Published in The Hindu on November 3, 1998.

Word of the day

- Perdition:** the abode of forces of evil; where sinners suffer eternal punishment
- Synonyms:** hell, inferno, nether region, pit
- Usage:** *He thought this profession was the road to perdition.*
- Pronunciation:** newsth.live/perditionpro
- International Phonetic Alphabet:** /pɜː(ɹ) dɪ.jən/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to **letters@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Text & Context'

With no cash, Sudanese turn to barter and credit



On the cusp: Before conflict began, Sudan's financial sector was at the cusp of huge transformation. AFP

Agence France-Presse
CAIRO

Surviving in Sudan these days means going back to basics: with the banking system in ruins after more than two years of war, barter and IOUs have become the only way for many people to secure the essentials.

“I haven’t held a banknote in more than nine months,” said civil servant Ali in Dilling, South Kordofan state.

The town has been besieged by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), who have been battling the army since April 2023.

In Dilling, as elsewhere, clothing and household appliances are sometimes used as currency to exchange for a couple kilos of flour or rice, or a few litres of fuel for vehicles or generators. “I once exchanged a hoe and a chair for three bags of sorghum,” a staple cereal in many parts of Africa, said Ali, 33.

With no cash and much of Sudan under a total communications blackout, many people like Ali are resorting to the barter system.

“Motorcycle and tuk-tuk (motorised tricycle) drivers are given oil and soap as payment for fares,” said Al-Sadiq Issa, a local volunteer contacted by AFP. “Some families offer corn, flour or sugar in exchange for things like vehicle maintenance,” he added. When fighting between the army and the RSF engulfed Khartoum at the start of the war, the Central Bank, connected to the secure SWIFT interbank network, was set ablaze and then occupied by paramilitary fighters for nearly two years. With banks closed or looted and safes emptied, the economy has collapsed. One euro, which used to be worth 450 Sudanese pounds, now goes for 3,500 on the black market.

Digital transactions

Before the war erupted, Sudan seemed on the verge of a breakthrough. The gradual lifting of economic sanctions, imposed on Khartoum since 1997 over its alleged support for Islamist groups, offered the prospect of reintegration into global financial systems.

Only 15% of the Sudanese people had bank accounts at the time, according to the World Bank. But digital transactions, particularly via the Bankak app owned by the Bank of Khartoum, were becoming widespread in urban areas.

“Before the conflict began in 2023, Sudan’s financial sector was on the cusp of major transformation towards a more open market approach, similar to models in Kenya, Tanzania and Ghana,” said William Cook, an expert at the Washington-based Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP). “Unfortunately, the conflict has halted much of this progress.” The war between the army and the RSF has killed tens of thousands of people, displaced 12 million and plunged Sudan into what the UN says are the world’s largest hunger and displacement crises. In much of the country, particularly areas under RSF control, law and order have completely broken down, and reports of looting and extortion have been rampant.

China’s slow-motion stock market rally starts to win foreign investors’ trust

China’s blue-chip index CSI300 has matched S&P500 with an about 16% y-t-d gain, while Hong Kong’s Hang Seng - up about 30% - is on course for its most substantial annual rise since 2017; the mood is far from the stimulus-triggered euphoria of a year ago, though the ride is becoming bumpier

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
SINGAPORE/SHANGHAI

Fund managers a rep- icking Chinese industrial stocks and holding volatile tech-shares, betting a two-year-old equities rally can withstand an economic rough patch, as valuations and steady returns lure foreign investors back.

China’s blue-chip index CSI300 has matched the S&P500 with a roughly 16% year-to-date gain, while Hong Kong’s Hang Seng - up about 30% - is on course for its most substantial annual rise since 2017.

The mood is far from the stimulus-triggered euphoria of a year ago, though the ride is becoming bumpier - especially as pressure on developer China Vanke reminds market participants that a prolonged property downturn is far from over.

But there seems to be little panic among investors and analysts who say the bull market is just taking a breather. “We believe we are just at the beginning of a gradual reallocation process by foreign investors coming back into China,” said Morgan Stanley’s chief China equity strategist Laura Wang.

“I think what they have seen so far through the course of this year has al-



Waking up: As investors take note of their full-year returns, they may become buyers in 2026. REUTERS

ready been encouraging enough for them to gradually change their mind,” she said, adding that she had been spending less time talking with investors about U.S.-China tensions.

China stocks also defied Sino-American trade friction and climbed thanks to State support, improved corporate governance and big gains for artificial-intelligence-linked stocks after the impressive release of DeepSeek’s chatbot.

Hong Kong revives

A record HK\$1.38 trillion (\$177 billion) was also poured from China into Hong Kong, where capital markets have been revived.

“The next leg of the bull run will likely be driven by fundamental improve-

ments and earnings growth,” said Xia Feng-guang, fund manager at Shenzhen Rongzhi Investment. Like others, he is supportive of Beijing’s campaign against industrial overcapacity and price wars, referred to as its anti-involution drive, betting it can improve corporate margins.

Valuations of industrial stocks are also attractive, fund managers say, and they are helping to draw investment.

“Cyclical stocks are relatively cheap, so you can start building positions when prices are weak as anti-involution policies gradually take root,” fund manager Wang An said.

Over the past three months, 13.5 billion yuan (\$1.91 billion) in net inflows entered ETFs tracking the CSI Battery Thematic Index, while another 11.2 billion yuan went into funds tracking the CSI chemicals sub-industry index, according to financial data provider Datayes.

Funds tracking the tech-heavy STAR 50 Index experienced 31.1 billion yuan of net outflows during the same period.

Xu Jie, a Shanghai-based

U.S. trade deals fails to revive demand for Asia

Reuters

Asia’s manufacturing powerhouses struggled with sluggish demand in November, extending declines in factory activity as progress in U.S. trade negotiations failed to translate into a significant recovery in orders.

A raft of purchasing managers’ indexes (PMIs) on Monday showed diverging conditions across the region, with China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan all reporting declines in activity while Southeast Asian economies mostly saw growth.

Back to contraction

In China, the world’s largest manufacturer, factory activity slipped back into contraction, a private-sector PMI showed, a day after



The outliers: Asia’s emerging-market manufacturers remained out performers. AFP

Beijing’s official measure showed activity falling for the eighth consecutive month albeit at a slower pace.

“Container throughput at Chinese ports was little changed last month compared to October. To the extent that demand did improve, it didn’t do much to support production amid already high inventory levels – the output component dropped to a four-month low,” Zichun Huang, China economist at Capital Economics, said in a note.

“And while the output price component edged up slightly, it stayed at a low

level, pointing to persistent deflationary pressures.”

Still, Capital Economics noted a general disconnect between the PMIs and hard trade data from across Asia. “Exports from most of Asia have been surging in recent months and we think the near-term outlook for export-driven manufacturing sectors in the region remains favourable,” Shivaan Tandon, Asia economist at Capital Economics, said in a separate report.

Exporters navigate

Across Asia this year, businesses in major exporting nations have been scrambling to navigate the uncertainty created by U.S. President Donald Trump’s sweeping tariffs.

While Mr. Trump’s trade deals with countries like Ja-

pan and South Korea and lowered tensions with China have given firms some confidence, many are still adjusting to the new U.S. trade reality.

Japan’s PMI showed new orders continued to decline, stretching the downturn to two-and-a-half years, blamed on factors such as a sluggish global business environment, tighter client budgets and subdued capital investment.

Official data on Monday also showed Japanese corporate spending on factories and equipment rose 2.9% in July-September versus the same period a year prior, slowing from the previous quarter.

South Korea’s factory activity contracted for a second month in November, though a finalised trade deal with the United States brought some clarity for manufacturers.

Separate data showed Korean exports rose in November for a sixth consecutive month, beating market expectations, as chip sales hit a record while autos also jumped after a U.S. trade deal. Taiwan’s PMI showed factory activity continued to fall, but at a slower pace. Meanwhile, Asia’s emerging-market manufacturers remained outperformers with Indonesia and Vietnam both reporting brisk growth in factory activity.

India’s factory activity growth slowed from October’s strong reading, however the country’s PMI remained well above those of its peers, aligning with other indicators that show strong growth in Asia’s third-largest economy.

Blue Owl’s teachable moment for investors, asset managers

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
NEW YORK

Blue Owl’s turnaround decisions in the last two weeks - to merge, and then not merge, and then maybe merge two of its private credit funds at a later time - offer a cautionary lesson for retail investors in search of higher yields and the asset managers chasing the billions in “hot money” wealthy individuals bring.

The New York-based asset manager withdrew a proposal last month to merge a \$1.7 billion non-public fund for retail investors with a \$17 billion publicly traded fund for institutional and retail clients after news of the deal

helped send Blue Owl’s shares down more than 10% in less than two weeks. The retail investors, who had to vote on the plan, were spooked by two things: it could have forced them to take a 20% loss at current prices and Blue Owl paused redemptions until early next year.

“The wild ride of Blue Owl Capital Corporation II schooled the firm and holds lessons for would-be semi-liquid fund investors,” Morningstar analysts wrote in a November 21 research note.

Semi-liquid funds

Investors were upset by the potential loss and the fact they wouldn’t be able to access their money before the merger closed, one Blue Owl investor said on



Too jarring: Blue Owl’s proposal touched a nerve in credit markets. REUTERS

condition of anonymity.

Blue Owl co-president Craig Packer told Reuters the fund had met all its obligations to investors requesting quarterly redemptions, and was seeing

flows into its other funds for wealthy individuals.

“We have done extra calls to make sure folks understand how their funds are performing. And many do want to understand

what’s going on with this fund,” he said in an interview.

Packer said the reason for not offering to buy any more this year was that this is standard procedure

before a merger. Blue Owl plans to start offering to buy shares again in early 2026.

Andrew Graham, a managing partner at San Francisco investment advisor Jackson Square Capital, said retail investors needed to look carefully at the terms of these investments and don’t always realise how restrictive the withdrawal rules are.

“These are illiquid assets and there’s no ready market for them. There’s no free lunch. They light the building on fire and then lock the doors and you’re inside. So if this is a call to arms for retail clients to look more closely at this, I think that’s a positive takeaway,” said Graham, who does not hold positions in Blue Owl, talk-

ing about semi-liquid funds generally. While non-traded equity and debt can deliver higher returns, they can also carry a higher risk of losses and can’t be cashed out quickly like most stocks or mutual funds.”

The reason that private credit can advertise more yield is because they’re providing you more credit risk ... it’s more concentrated investments in riskier companies. Now that doesn’t sound like a trade that should be in a liquid fund,” said Robert Cohen, director of global developed credit at Double Line, a bond-focused investment firm managing \$90 billion in assets, referring to private credit in general.

Blue Owl’s proposal touched a nerve in credit markets al-

Pope Leo XIV prayed on Monday at the tomb of St. Charbel Makhlouf, a Lebanese saint revered among Christians and Muslims as he brought a message of peace, hope and religious coexistence to a region torn by conflict. His visit comes at a tenuous time for the country after years of economic crises and political deadlock. AP

Nasry Asfura, a conservative candidate backed by U.S. President Donald Trump narrowly leads a right-wing rival in Honduras's Presidential election, according to partial results released on Monday. Mr. Asfura had 40% of the votes and led Salvador Nasralla by just 0.2 percentage points, with 56% of votes counted. AFP

A suicide bomb attack near a police vehicle in restive northwest Pakistan bordering Afghanistan killed at least one officer on Monday and wounded several others, officials said. The attack happened in Lakki Marwat, a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in a statement condemned the attack. AP

Israeli President Isaac Herzog said on Monday he would focus only on Israel's "best interests" when he weighs Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's request for a pardon on corruption charges. Mr. Netanyahu announced on Sunday he had submitted a pardon request, saying the long-running cases were tearing Israel apart. AFP

The whistleblower said concerns about possible “war crimes” were first flagged to the director of special forces in early 2011 but not acted on.



A supporter of Luigi Mangione holds a sign outside the Manhattan Criminal Court on Monday. REUTERS

A year on, all eyes on Luigi’s trial in CEO killing case

Associated Press
NEW YORK

As the first anniversary of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson’s killing looms this week, the man charged in his death will be in court fighting to prevent prosecutors from using evidence they say links him to the crime.

Luigi Mangione, 27, is set for hearings starting Monday on his bid to block the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office from showing or telling jurors about items seized during his arrest at a yet-unscheduled state murder trial.

Those items include a 9 mm handgun that prosecutors say matches the one used in the Dec. 4, 2024, killing and a notebook in which they say he described his intent to “wack” a health insurance executive.

After getting state terrorism charges thrown out in September, Mangione’s lawyers are now zeroing in on what they say was unconstitutional conduct that tainted his arrest and threatens his right to a fair trial.

They contend that the gun and other items should be excluded because police lacked a warrant to search the backpack in which they were found.

Thompson was killed as he walked to a Manhattan hotel for his company’s annual investor conference. Surveillance video showed a masked gunman shooting him from behind. Police say “delay,” “deny” and “depose” were written on the ammunition, mimicking a phrase used to describe how insurers avoid paying claims.

Mangione, the Ivy League-educated scion of a wealthy Maryland family, was arrested five days later at a McDonald’s in Altoona, Pennsylvania, about 230 miles (about 370 kilometers) west of Manhattan. Prosecutors in the state case have not responded to the defence’s written arguments.

Unsafe netting in one building fuelled deadly fire in Hong Kong, shows probe

Wednesday’s blaze, which took until Friday to fully extinguish, claimed at least 151 lives in Tai Po; officials say the tragedy was fuelled by renovation scaffolding netting that failed to meet fire-safety standards; donations and tributes poured in for victims even as calls for govt. accountability grew

Associated Press
HONG KONG

Hong Kong officials said on Monday that their investigation into a deadly blaze that killed at least 151 has revealed some of the netting that covered scaffolding used in renovations was not up to fire-safety codes, as a wave of public sympathy and support was met by government moves to stifle criticism.

Wednesday’s blaze, which took until Friday to fully extinguish, started on the lower-level netting covering bamboo scaffolding around one building in the high-rise Wang Fuk Court complex. It then swept inside as foam panels placed over windows caught fire and blew out the glass. Winds carried flames from building to building that all were covered in scaffolding and netting, until seven of eight were ablaze.

Initial tests of the netting showed it was up to code, but subsequently investigators collected 20 samples from all areas, including higher floors, and found seven failed safety standards, suggesting contractors skimped to make greater profits, said Eric Chan, Hong Kong’s Chief Secretary.

“They just wanted to make money at the expense of people’s lives,” he told reporters.

Donations for survivors of the fire had reached 900

million Hong Kong dollars (U.S.\$115 million) as of Monday, authorities said, as a steady stream of people placed flowers, cards and other tributes at a makeshift memorial near the burned out block of buildings. “When something happens, we come out to help each other,” said Loretta Loh, after paying her regards at the site. “I have a heavy heart.”

Some 4,600 people lived in the Wang Fuk Court complex in the suburb of Tai Po.

Hong Kong Police Disaster Victim Identification Unit staff had searched five of the burned buildings but only made partial progress through the remaining two, said Tsang Shuk-yin, head of the police casualty enquiry unit. Teams were assessing the safety of the other buildings, including the one that caught fire first and suffered the worst damage.

Rehab efforts on

On Monday they recovered another eight bodies, including three that firefighters found earlier but could not retrieve. Dozens of people remain unaccounted for, but some are likely among the 39 bodies not yet identified, Ms. Tsang said.

“We will have to wait until we get through all seven blocks before we can make a final report,” she said.

Private donations and 300 million Hong Kong



Grim sight: People look on near the Wang Fuk Court housing complex following the deadly fire on Wednesday, in Tai Po, Hong Kong, on Monday. REUTERS

dollars (\$38.5 million) in start-up capital from the government will be used to help victims rebuild their homes and provide long-term support, local officials said. The government has also given survivors cash subsidies to help with expenses, including funerals, and is working to find them housing.

By Monday, 683 residents had found places in local hotels and hostels, and another 1,144 moved into transitional housing units. Two emergency shelters remained open for others, authorities said.

Residents had complained for almost a year about the construction netting, Hong Kong’s Labour Department said. It confirmed officials had carried out 16 inspections of the renovation project since July 2024 and had warned contractors multiple times in writing that they had to meet fire safety requirements. The latest inspection was just a week before the fire.

Hong Kong’s anti-corruption authorities and police have arrested 14 people, including the directors and an engineering consultant of a construction company, according to Chris Tang, the secretary for security.

People increasingly have been questioning whether government officials should also be held responsible.

“People are angry and think that the HK (Hong Kong) government should

be accountable,” said Jean-Pierre Cabestan, a locally-based political scientist and senior research fellow at Paris’s Asia Centre think tank.

But the leeway for dissent is limited in the former British colony, which came under Chinese control in 1997 and has moved to quiet public criticism on national security grounds.

“There are rumors being spread by bad people giving fake news about the firefighters not employing the correct tactics to fight the fire, or victims being charged 8,000 Hong Kong dollars a night to stay in hotels – these are all false,” Mr. Tang said.

On Saturday, the Office for Safeguarding National Security blasted what it

called “evil schemes” that had “the ulterior motives of using the disaster to create trouble and disrupt Hong Kong.” It did not give specifics.

Muzzling dissent?

Also Saturday, a man who helped organise an online petition calling for government accountability was arrested on suspicion of sedition, local media including *HKOI* and *Sing Tao Daily* reported. Two others were arrested on Sunday, including a volunteer who offered help in Tai Po after the fire broke out, the same outlets reported.

Mr. Cabestan said Hong Kong officials were operating like authorities in mainland China, forestalling protests before they might develop.

Mr. Tang would not give specific details of the three arrests, but said that police “must take action” against those who try to “endanger national security,” saying broadly that some people have been “taking advantage of the saddening moment... and attempting to incite hatred against the government.”

Dissent in the city has been muzzled since hundreds of thousands took to the streets in 2019 against government plans to allow extradition to mainland China. Hong Kong now virtually bans mass protests and bars opposition political figures from running in legislature elections.

Kite runners



Floating along: Amid ongoing conflict in their country, Sudanese refugee children fly a handmade kite past newly built wooden tents for recent arrivals from al-Fashir at Touloum refugee camp, on the outskirts of Iriba in eastern Chad. REUTERS

Massive protests over corruption, stolen funds rock the Philippines

Associated Press
MANILA

Thousands of demonstrators including from the Roman Catholic church clergy protested in the Philippines on Sunday, calling for the swift prosecution of top legislators and officials implicated in a corruption scandal that has buffeted the Asian democracy.

Left-wing groups led a separate protest in Manila’s main park with a blunt demand for all implicated government officials to immediately resign and face prosecution.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has been scrambling to quell public outrage over the massive corruption blamed for substandard, defective or non-existent flood control



Public outcry: Protesters take part in an anti-corruption rally along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue in Metro Manila on Sunday. AFP

projects across an archipelago long prone to deadly flooding and extreme weather in tropical Asia.

Security lockdown

More than 17,000 police officers were deployed in metropolitan Manila to secure the separate protests.

The Malacanang presidential palace complex was in a security lockdown

with key access roads and bridges blocked by anti-riot police forces, trucks and barbed wire railings.

In a deeply divided democracy where two Presidents have been separately overthrown in the last 39 years partly over allegations of plunder, there have been isolated calls for the military to withdraw support from the Marcos administration.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines has steadfastly rejected such calls and welcomed on Sunday a statement signed by at least 88, mostly retired generals, including three military chiefs of staff, who said they “strongly condemn and reject any call for the Armed Forces of the Philippines to engage in unconstitutional acts or military adventurism.”

About 12 billion pesos (\$206 million) worth of assets of suspects in flood control anomalies have been frozen by authorities, Mr. Marcos said. He has pledged that many of at least 37 powerful senators, members of Congress and wealthy construction executives implicated in the corruption scandal would be in jail by Christmas.

Anti-fascist protesters push back against the far-right’s ‘accelerated’ rise in Croatia

Agence France Presse
ZAGREB

Ultranationalist views are rapidly becoming mainstream in Croatia, observers are warning, as an emboldened far-right seeks to rewrite the country’s dark World War II-era history.

From an ultra-nationalist singer’s massive concert in Zagreb earlier this year to the disruption of a Serb cultural event by masked hooligans in November, the increasing tensions mark a worrying trajectory for the Balkan nation, expert Florian Bieber from the University of Graz in Austria said.

“There is both a rise of historical revisionism and a rise of threats to those

who have different views of that past,” Mr. Bieber said, referring to attempts to rehabilitate the Ustasha, Croatia’s pro-Nazi World War II regime. “None of this is entirely new. But it’s accelerated and become more pronounced in the last year than it has been for many years.”

In July, singer Marko ‘Thompson’ Perkovic drew hundreds of thousands to a performance of his nationalistic folk-rock songs – one begins with the three-word salute of the Ustasha.

The Nazi-collaborationist government persecuted and killed hundreds of thousands during WWII – primarily Serbs, Jews, Roma and anti-fascist Croats. Although the Ustasha’s in-

dependent State of Croatia (NDH) was a Nazi puppet state, their modern sympathisers see them as the nation’s founding fathers.

Mr. Bieber said the size of Mr. Thompson’s concert and its public acceptance by leaders including Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic encouraged many subsequent far-right actions. “The roots are deeper, but certainly the concert encouraged the far-right, because it saw the number of supporters or at least the fans of Thompson visibly,” Mr. Bieber said.

Mr. Plenkovic, considered a moderate, attended Mr. Thompson’s rehearsal and posted a selfie with the singer.

Since May 2024, his



People carry a banner reading ‘united against fascism’, at a rally against the rise of far-right rhetoric in Croatia on Sunday. REUTERS

right-wing party, the HDZ, has governed in coalition with the Homeland Movement, which has a nationalist, anti-immigration and anti-LGBT agenda.

Mr. Thompson, who takes his stage name from his wartime submachine gun, rose to fame during

the bloody conflicts that tore Yugoslavia apart in the 1990s. Branding his concerts as expressions of “faith, family and homeland”, the folk-rock icon has dismissed claims of pro-Nazi sympathies as “entirely inappropriate and unacceptable”.

He has repeatedly insisted the screamed refrain “For homeland!” and a crowd response of “ready!” has nothing to do with the same words of the Ustasha slogan.

Although local courts have not found Mr. Thompson guilty of any crime, the phrase was ruled unconstitutional by the top court in 2006.

Following his concert, two lawmakers repeated the exact phrase in the Parliament. In October, right-wing MPs hosted a discussion that played down the number of Croatia’s WWII death camp victims.

The moves drew outrage, with an umbrella organisation of the Jewish community groups labelling it “scandalous” and a “moral and civilisational disgrace for Croatia”.

‘Masked ultras’

This ultranationalist rhetoric is also reigniting tensions with the country’s Serbs. While respect for the rights of Croatia’s Serb minority was one of the conditions for accession to the European Union in 2013, anti-Serb rhetoric has never disappeared.

Long-time Croatian Serb leader Milorad Pupovac said the recent push to rehabilitate the image of Croatia’s fascist regime and target the Serbs was markedly worse than he had seen before. After masked men stormed a Serb culture event chanting fascist slogans, several similar events were threatened or cancelled.

“We’ve never before seen masked groups of young ultras trying to impose their politics on culture, free speech, and minority rights, and potentially soon on state institutions themselves,” Mr. Pupovac said.

On Sunday, thousands of anti-fascist demonstrators gathered in the capital and three other cities to push back against the resurgence of far-right nationalism. In a statement, organisers decried the “violence, historical revisionism, and intimidation” of the past months, as the crowds marched with banners and signs.

AS PASSIONATE AS EVER
Steyn waxes eloquent on Kohli retaining hunger despite age



R.V. MOORTHY

When you speak to most 37 or 38-year-olds, they say they hate leaving home, their dog, their kids. But he (Virat Kohli) is eager to play for India. You can see it when he's running between the wickets, fielding and diving. He's mentally young, fresh, and wants to be here — Former South Africa pacer Dale Steyn.

UPHILL TASK
Once world-class players get going, very difficult to stop them: Jansen



R.V. MOORTHY

South Africa all-rounder Marco Jansen says stopping world-class batters like Virat Kohli becomes almost impossible once they settle in. "When you bowl to world-class players, it's quite difficult to get them out. I always try to get a batter in his first 10 or 15 balls. But once they're in, it's very difficult to stop them".

BACK IN IT
Hardik Pandya set to return to competitive cricket today



FILE PHOTO

Hardik Pandya will return to action against Punjab in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy in Hyderabad on Tuesday and also feature in Thursday's clash against Gujarat. National selector Pragyan Ojha will be in attendance to check the Baroda player's fitness before the squad for the T20I series against South Africa is announced.

RUNNING RIOT
India steamrollers Namibia in women's Junior WC hockey



X@FIH_HOCKEY

India got its campaign off to a blazing start at the FIH hockey women's junior World Cup with a 13-0 mauling of Namibia in Santiago on Monday. **The result:** India 13 (Sakshi Rana 10, 23; Kanika Siwach 12, 30, 45; Binima Dhan 14, Sonam 14, Sakshi Shukla 27, Hina Bano 35, 35, 45; Ishika 36, Manisha 60) bt Namibia 0.

Kohli puts an end to debate over place in the ODI set-up

The Indian batting mainstay reckons his vast experience, fitness and 'feel-good' factor are enough to keep him going; Kotak believes the 37-year-old is in good physical shape; the batting coach adds that the 2027 World Cup is far away

SA IN INDIA

Ashwin Achal
RANCHI

What constitutes the ideal preparation for India duty? Is it putting in the hard yards in the domestic circuit, or perhaps rigorous nets sessions? In the opinion of Virat Kohli, his vast experience, fitness and 'feel-good' factor should suffice. It would take a brave person to argue against this case, given that Kohli looked majestic in his 120-ball 135 in the first ODI against South Africa here on Sunday.

Seasoned campaigner
"I've played 300-odd ODI games and so much cricket over the last 15, 16 years. If you're in touch with the game, you're hitting balls at practice, your reflexes are there, your physical ability is there to bat long... If you can bat an hour and a half, two hours in the nets without taking a break, you're meeting all those markers," Kohli said in the post-match presentation ceremony.
"I understand if there's a dip in form, you look for games and try to get that form back. But as long as



On a high: Kohli silenced his detractors with a majestic hundred in the series opener. R.V. MOORTHY

you're hitting the ball well and you're playing good cricket, I think at this stage, with the experience that I

have, it's about being physically fit, mentally ready and excited to play the games. More or less eve-

rything else should take care of itself," Kohli added. India batting coach Sitanshu Kotak stated that

there is no reason to even discuss Kohli's position in the ODI set-up.
"I don't know why we need to look at all this. He is really batting well. I don't see any reason to talk about his future. The way he is batting — it's just brilliant. The way he is performing, his fitness — there are no questions about anything," Kotak said in the post-match press conference here.

'Outstanding player'
"Kohli is a thoroughly outstanding player. He took responsibility, and the way he batted was very good," Kotak said.

No thought has been given to whether Kohli or fellow senior pro Rohit Sharma are in the scheme of things for the 2027 ICC World Cup, Kotak explained.

Too early
"It's a matter of two years. I really don't feel there is a point in talking about it. For us, once the team comes and we start practice, we just enjoy. Obviously, they (Kohli and Rohit) do share their experience with others. I don't even think we are talking anything about the 2027 World Cup," Kotak said.

Batting order shuffle symbolic of a growing structural disconnect

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

Ruturaj Gaikwad's return to the team for the first ODI against South Africa in Ranchi after 16 months on Sunday should have been routine for one of the country's most consistent List-A batters. Instead, it became symbolic of a growing structural disconnect in Indian cricket.
Ruturaj, who consistently averages above 55 in List-A cricket and has built his career almost exclusively as an opener, walked in at No. 4 — the first time he has batted below the top-three in 87 innings.

Raising eyebrows
The decision raised eyebrows because the selection committee had earmarked Tilak Varma, Rishabh Pant and Dhruv Jurel as contenders for the No.4 slot, with Ruturaj picked as a reserve opener.
In fact, had Shubman Gill recovered from a neck spasm, Ruturaj would have continued captaining Maharashtra in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy instead of joining the national squad. One can only hope that he gets to bat at the same position in the rest of the series to prove his mettle.
This episode is only the latest indication of inconsistency of the selection panel led by Ajit Agarkar



Ruturaj batted at the No. 4 spot for the first time. R.V. MOORTHY

and head coach Gautam Gambhir's team management.
Recent matches have revealed a trend of constant reshuffling. During India's Test series loss to South Africa — a second white-wash at home in 12 months — two different batters were tried at No. 3 across two Tests, with Washington Sundar being promoted ahead of others before being pushed back down the order.
Such role changes have created insecurity within the squad, with players unsure of their position, responsibility or continuity.
As a result, criticism in public spaces — from social media forums to commentary panels — has increas-

ingly shifted away from the players and toward the decision-makers.
Traditionally, the selection committee finalises squads after consulting the captain and coach, while the team management decides the playing XI. However, the lines now appear blurred. Those familiar with recent internal discussions say extended meetings — including one ahead of the Champions Trophy squad selection — reflected disagreement rather than alignment.

Routinely bypassed
Officially, head coaches are not permitted to attend selection meetings under the Supreme Court-directed reforms, but that guideline appears to be routinely bypassed.

With major tournaments approaching — including the T20 World Cup, in which India is the defending champion next year, and an ODI World Cup in 2027 — clarity and stability have become urgent priorities.
For now, Ruturaj's batting position represents more than a tactical experiment — it reflects a system still searching for alignment, identity and clarity. And until that emerges, the players and Indian cricket remain in a holding pattern.

Argentina in knockouts; Kiwis pip Japan

HOCKEY

K. Keerthivasan
CHENNAI

Heavy showers halted the FIH Junior Men's World Cup clash between New Zealand and Japan twice for more than an hour in the third quarter at the SDAT-Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium here on Monday. Despite the long interruptions and a 1-2 deficit at half-time, the Kiwis staged a strong comeback to prevail 3-2.
Later, Argentina confirmed its place in the knockout phase with a 3-1 victory over China, thanks to Bruno Correa's hat-trick.
Argentina (seven points from three matches) pushed New Zealand to the second place by virtue of better goal difference (+5 to the Kiwis' +3).
New Zealand struck in the first minute when Scott Illerbrun slid in to push the ball home.
Japan hit back quickly, Kyoya Toya unleashing a fierce forehand to draw level. Late in the opening quarter, Japan went ahead as Matsuki Mori pounced on a rebound off the goalkeeper's pads and guided it



Flying start: New Zealand's Illerbrun struck in the first minute. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

home. Holding a 2-1 lead at the break, Japan returned for the third quarter looking assured.
But the Future Black Sticks had other plans. With rain pouring down, it struck twice in the space of three minutes through Owen Brown and Jonty Elmes to turn the match on its head.
Brown's blistering backhand from close range left no chance for the goalkeeper.
Moments later, Elmes collected a long pass from near the halfway line; his

first backhand attempt was blocked, but he latched onto the rebound and lifted the ball into the roof of the net.
For a while in the fourth quarter, New Zealand was reduced to nine players after Finlay Nealae (yellow card, 10-minute suspension) and captain Gus Nelson (green card, two-minute suspension) were sent off. Yet the side defended resolutely to preserve its slender lead.
With its second win (seven points in total) from three matches, the Kiwis

remain in contention for a place in the knockouts.
The results: In Chennai: Pool C: New Zealand 3 (Scott Illerbrun 1, Owen Brown 37, Jonty Elmes 40) bt Japan 2 (Kyoya Toya 5, Matsuki Mori 14); Argentina 3 (Bruno Correa 15, 16 & 51) bt China 1 (Yanwei Di 37).
In Madurai: Pool A: Germany 5 (Jonas von Gersum 4 & 50, Paul Glander 34, Lukas Kossel 52, Christian Franz 53) bt Ireland 1 (Samuel Dale 51); South Africa 9 (Jaydon Brooker 8, 13, 36 & 50, Brett Horn 22, Sian Maart 25, Daniel Neuhooff 38, Carlos Mentoor 48, Ross Montgomery 60) bt Canada 1 (Robin Thind 14).

Sreejesh wants players to be ruthless in front of goal

Anish Pathivil
MADURAI

Indian junior men's team head coach P.R. Sreejesh said he expected more from the side's attackers despite the glut of goals, ahead of the final FIH Junior Men's World Cup Pool-B game against Switzerland here on Tuesday.
Sreejesh had said he wanted his players to show a 'killer attitude' in front of goal after the 7-0 win against Chile in the opener. They scored 17 goals without reply against Oman. But the coach says there is more work to be done.
"In this format, we need to have that kind of mentality [to score more goals]. League matches are open, and quarterfinal slots are allotted based on your goal average," he said in a media interaction.
Sreejesh was a mentor for the junior team during its title-winning run in Lucknow in 2016. From his experience, he says playing in front of a home crowd could be a double-edged sword. "When you are playing well, every-



Taskmaster: Sreejesh has demanded more from the attackers despite them pumping in 24 goals in the two games. G. MOORTHY

ing is great. The audience acts as your 12th man. But when you have an off-day, then you feel, 'I don't want to put myself in this situation in front of my own people'.
"But it's always a matter of pride to play for your country in front of your people. You are the ambassadors for your nation, and you are representing them on a world platform," the coach said.
Despite Tamil Nadu hosting the prestigious event, there are no representatives from the State team in the India squad.

Sreejesh believes the right steps are being taken to ensure future participation.
"Tamil Nadu has started a league for schools. Many astroturfs are also coming up.
"They are building up from the grassroots level, and we will see the benefits in a few years. There is a lot of talent in Tamil Nadu and they will come forward".
Tuesday's matches:
In Madurai: Spain vs Namibia (11 a.m.); Egypt vs Belgium (1.15 p.m.); Netherlands vs Austria (3.30 p.m.); England vs Malaysia (5.45 p.m.); India vs Switzerland (8 p.m.).

Girona stops Real from going top

Associated Press
MADRID

Real Madrid failed to return to the top of the Spanish league on Sunday after being held 1-1 at relegation-threatened Girona.
Kylian Mbappe converted a 67th-minute penalty after Azzedine Ounahi had put the hosts ahead in the 45th at the Montilivi Stadium. "I liked how the team reacted, even though it wasn't enough to win," Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said. Barcelona is one point ahead of Madrid after 14 matches.
In the Serie A, defending champion Napoli won 1-0 at rival Roma to move level with AC Milan atop the standings. David Neres scored in the first half after finishing off an exchange with Rasmus Hojlund on a counterattack. Milan and Napoli have 28 points. Inter Milan and Roma have 27 each.
Top results: LaLiga: Girona 1 (Ounahi 45) drew with Real Madrid 1 (Mbappe 67-pen).
Serie A: Atalanta 2 (Kossounou 41, Lookman 52) bt Fiorentina 0; Roma 0 lost to Napoli 1 (Neres 36).

INBRIEF



Duplantis, McLaughlin-Levrone named ‘Athletes of the Year’

Sweden’s pole vault sensation Armand ‘Mondo’ Duplantis and American 400m World champion Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone were named World Athletes of the Year on Sunday. Duplantis, along with retaining his gold medal at the Worlds, broke his own world record four times and was undefeated in 16 competitions. McLaughlin-Levrone is also undefeated for two years in both the 400m and the 400m hurdles.

Other awardees: Track: Men: Emmanuel Wanyonyi (Ken); **women:** McLaughlin-Levrone. **Field:** Duplantis; **women:** Nicola Olislagers (Aus). **Out of stadium: Men:** Sabastian Sawe (Ken); **women:** Maria Perez (Esp).

Joshna makes a strong start in HCL Squash Indian Tour 4

Joshna Chinappa began her campaign in the HCL Squash Indian Tour 4 with a commanding 11-3, 11-7, 11-6 victory over compatriot Anika Dubey at the Indian Squash Academy in Chennai on Monday. The 39-year-old former world No. 10, who is part of the four-member Indian team for the upcoming SDAT World Cup in the southern metropolis, will meet the seventh-seeded Kiwi Ella Jane Lash next. Velavan Senthilkumar and Anahat Singh, the reigning men’s and women’s National champions respectively, and the top seeds, start on Tuesday after receiving first-round byes.



Italian tennis icon Pietrangeli passes away at the age of 92

Nicola Pietrangeli, a two-time winner of the French Open, died aged 92, Italy’s tennis federation announced on Monday. Born in Tunis in 1933 to an Italian father and Russian mother, Pietrangeli was widely considered the country’s greatest-ever tennis player until the emergence of current Jannik Sinner. Pietrangeli won 44 singles titles over his career, including the triumphs at Roland Garros in 1959 and 1960, and reached the Wimbledon semifinals the same year as his second French Open title. He also lost two finals in Paris to Manuel Santana, in 1961 and 1964, and reached the Wimbledon final once. An all-round sportsman, Pietrangeli played for football team Lazio until he was 18. Pietrangeli was also a Davis Cup stalwart, playing a record 164 matches for Italy and as captain leading his country to its first title in 1976.



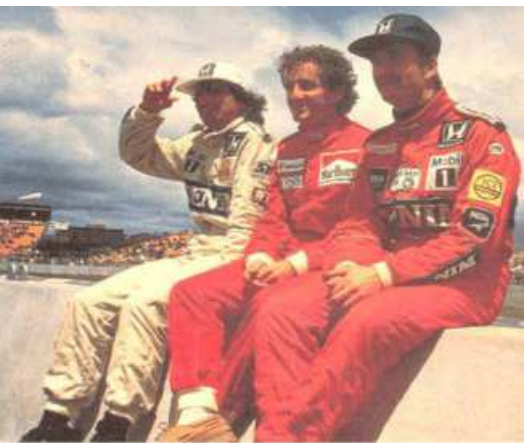
Tamil Nadu under-23 team takes the honours

The Tamil Nadu under-23 team clinched the BCCI Men’s State-A one-dayers trophy, beating Uttar Pradesh by 56 runs in the final, at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Monday. S. Mohamed Ali led the way for TN with a fine all-round performance, scoring 57 (67b, 3x4, 4x6) and then taking a five-for (10-146-5).

The scores: Tamil Nadu 297 in 49.3 overs (S.R. Athish 53, M. Boopathi Vaishna Kumar 37, S. Mohamed Ali 57, Manav Parakh 57, R.K. Jayant 32, Prashant Veer 3/30) bt Uttar Pradesh 241 in 47.5 overs (Sameer Rizvi 41, Prashant Veer 87, S. Mohamed Ali 5/46). **Player-of-the-Match:** S. Mohamed Ali (TN); **Player-of-the-Series:** Prashant Veer (UP). **Highest run-getter for TN:** S.R. Athish (506); **highest wicket-taker:** G. Govinth (15).

SYED MUSHTAQ ALI TROPHY — TUESDAY’S FIXTURES

Elite: Group A (Lucknow): Chhattisgarh vs. Odisha, Andhra vs. Railways, Assam vs. Mumbai, Kerala vs. Vidarbha. **Group B (Kolkata):** Goa vs. Madhya Pradesh, Bihar vs. Maharashtra, Chandigarh vs. Jammu & Kashmir, Hyderabad vs. Uttar Pradesh. **Group C (Hyderabad):** Gujarat vs. Pondicherry, Baroda vs. Punjab, Bengal vs. Himachal Pradesh, Haryana vs. Services. **Group D (Ahmedabad):** Karnataka vs. Tamil Nadu, Delhi vs. Tripura, Jharkhand vs. Saurashtra, Rajasthan vs. Uttarakhand. **Plate (Pune):** Meghalaya vs. Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh vs. Mizoram, Manipur vs. Sikkim.



Going down to the wire: Piquet, Prost and Mansell were involved in a close race in 1986 while 2007 witnessed Raikkonen, Hamilton and Alonso battling for glory. Red Bull’s Vettel, centre, edged his teammate Webber and Ferrari’s Alonso to claim his maiden World title in 2010. FILE PHOTOS



Race to the finish line evokes memories of the 1986, 2007 and 2010 skirmishes

The showdown in Abu Dhabi will witness a no-holds barred battle among Norris, Verstappen and Piastri; the Brit leads the Dutchman by 12 points

FORMULA ONE

S. Dipak Ragav

Formula One, for the first time since 2010, will have a three-way battle for the drivers’ title going into the final race of the season at Abu Dhabi this weekend.

Heading into the season finale, McLaren’s Lando Norris leads Max Verstappen by 12 points and is 16 points ahead of teammate

Oscar Piastri. McLaren has been the standout team, having sealed the constructors’ crown five races ago in Singapore. But the British squad has been caught in a Hobson’s choice, trying to be fair to both drivers, and, in doing so, has left the door open for Verstappen to nick it right under their noses.

And if it happens, it won’t be the first time in the sport or even for McLaren.

The most famous in-

stance of two teammates fighting amongst themselves and allowing a third driver to take away the title was back in 2007.

That year, McLaren drivers Fernando Alonso and Lewis Hamilton were seven and three points ahead of Ferrari’s Kimi Raikkonen going into the final round in Brazil.

Raikkonen won the last race with Alonso finishing third and Hamilton seventh, and edged them out by one point.

Similarly, in 1986, Nigel Mansell was six points ahead of McLaren’s Alain Prost and seven ahead of his Williams teammate Nelson Piquet.

In the final race in Adelaide, Mansell suffered a tyre failure while running third. Piquet then relinquished the lead to change tyres to avoid a similar problem and had to settle for second. This allowed Prost to win the race and the title by two points.

In 2010, Alonso, in a Fer-

rari, led Red Bull’s Mark Webber and Sebastian Vettel by eight and 15 points, respectively, going into the season-ending Abu Dhabi GP.

In that race, Vettel won from pole, while a strategic blunder in pitting early saw Alonso and Webber finish seventh and eighth. Thus, Vettel won his maiden title, beating Alonso by four points.

Coming back to 2025, Verstappen has fought his way back from being 104

points behind eight races ago. He has won five out of the last eight events, including the last two, to set up a thrilling finale.

Can the Dutchman pull off a heist to clinch his fifth title, or will one of the McLaren drivers huff and puff to the crown? All eyes are now on the Yas Marina Circuit on Sunday.

Drivers’ standings (top-5):

1. Norris 408; 2. Verstappen 396;
3. Piastri 392; 4. Russell 309; 5. Leclerc 230.

Women’s chief coach Harendra calls it quits

HOCKEY

Sports Bureau
NEW DELHI

In a surprise development, Indian women’s hockey team coach Harendra Singh stepped down on Monday with immediate effect. The team is currently training in Bengaluru ahead of the Hockey India League and the FIH Pro League starting in February. More importantly, the qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup are also scheduled in February-March.

“We thank Harendra Singh for his services. His commitment towards the development of Indian Hockey is well-known. We will announce a suitable replacement soon to ensure the team’s preparations continue as planned for the World Cup qualifiers,” HI said in a state-



Harendra.

ment. Sources said the decision was shocking since no one in the team had any idea till late Sunday when senior players had a meeting with the coach.

While former India coach Dutchman Sjoerd Marjine is being spoken about as one of the options, HI officials said nothing was finalised and there were a couple of names under consideration, a decision likely within a fortnight.

Will Abhimanyu’s T20 performance get him a foot in the door?

CRICKET

Anirudh Velamuri
HYDERABAD

The calls for Abhimanyu Easwaran’s inclusion in the national setup, especially in Tests, have always been loud, and India’s drubbing at home against South Africa amplified them further.

The domestic stalwart, however, has tuned out all the noise and stayed focused on leading Bengal by example. In a Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy clash here on Sunday, he showed that he was no one-trick pony against a Punjab side riding high on Abhishek Sharma’s carnage.

The precision hitting en route an unbeaten 130 (66b, 13x4, 8x6) even prompted Ravichandran Ashwin to sarcastically state that Abhimanyu’s



In pursuit of dream goal: Abhimanyu reckoned that he will keep working hard till he plays in the national set-up. K.V.S GIRI

T20 performances might help convince the Indian selectors to pick him for the Test team.

For his part, the 30-year-old is choosing to stay grounded and wait for his

turn, however long and arduous it may be.

“There will be times when you feel disappointed, but that is the reality you have to face. Not everybody’s journey is the

same. I have been part of the Test team for a few tours. It is just about waiting for my opportunity, and till the time comes, my job is to keep improving every single day and get better as a cricketer. I will keep working hard till I play for India. That is not going away,” he told the *The Hindu*.

While his knock against Punjab earned him plaudits, Abhimanyu was happier to have ensured that Bengal’s Net Run Rate did not take a bigger hit. He was also delighted to reap the rewards of the hard work put in training sessions.

“A few things that I have been training on worked well [against Punjab]. One of them is exploring different areas of the field. For example, the switch hits and the reverse sweeps came into play very well.”

Amirul — standing out with his powerful drag-flicks

K. Keerthivasan
CHENNAI

Sporting a hairstyle that flares like a lion’s mane, 21-year-old Amirul Islam cuts an unmistakable figure on the turf. However, at the 2025 FIH junior men’s hockey World Cup here, it is not just his striking look that has turned heads – it is his impact on the game.

The leading drag-flicker of Bangladesh’s junior team, Amirul has emerged as one of the tournament’s biggest revelations.

Against powerhouse opponents Australia and South Korea, the junior World Cup debutant refused to fade quietly – thanks to Amirul, who produced back-to-back hat-tricks, propelling himself into the list of the competition’s top scorers.

Head coach Siegfried Aikman can hardly hide his admiration. “He trains relentlessly,” Aikman said. “In every session, he attempts numerous variations

(around 50 to 100 each) in the morning and



Going for it: Amirul’s efforts made sure Bangladesh gave the fancied teams a stiff fight. R. RAGU

evening. He generates heavy topspin and finishes with tremendous wrist power. It’s all about rhythm.”

Amirul honed his technique at the country’s premier sports institute, Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishtan (BKSP).

“As a BKSP student, I first played in the Independence Cup in 2019,” he recalled. “That was my first real chance to drag-flick. I tried hard but couldn’t score. But I just kept practising.”

Now, the once-struggling teenager is one of Bangladesh’s most promising young talents – and an

admirer of Indian captain Harmanpreet Singh, one of the world’s finest drag-flickers.

Drawn in the tough Pool-F, Bangladesh has so far lost to Australia (3-5) and drawn with South Korea (3-3) and its hopes of entering the knock-outs are as good as over.

Yet when Bangladesh lines up against heavyweight France on December 2 in its last group match, one thing is certain.

Amirul will step up again, armed with his fearless approach, refined technique and a drag-flick capable of rattling even the strongest defence.

Mumbai teen prodigy Mhatre is making all the right noises

Dhruva Prasad
LUCKNOW

There is a compelling contradiction to the latest teen prodigy from Mumbai – Ayush Mhatre. He has taken to the demands of modern-day cricket like a duck to water but eschews the influence of today’s obsessive use of social media.

“He is not into social media. He is not into it at all. All that he does in 24 hours is only practise and think about cricket,” Mhatre’s childhood coach Prashant Shetty told *The Hindu* a day after the 18-year-old smashed a second successive ton in the ongoing Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy here.

Across his two centuries, against Vidarbha and Andhra, Mhatre hit 17 sixes and etched his name in the record books as the youngest to score a hundred in each of the three formats.

Though Mhatre shot into the limelight recently owing to his T20 exploits, his strong red-ball fundamentals have helped him



Mhatre ‘is not into social media’ and ‘only thinks about cricket’, says his childhood coach Prashant. UPCA

succeed. “When you are doing well in red-ball cricket, it speaks volumes of your temperament; your

basics are good. I think he is suited for all three formats,” Prashant said.

Mhatre is also blessed with an ecosystem that accepts failure as a byproduct of his natural game. Making his T20 debut for Chennai Super Kings, Mhatre cracked a 15-ball 32 to take the IPL by storm this year.

“There was a clear plan and a clear message given to him that you can play your game,” Prashant explained, crediting the franchise for giving the youngster freedom.

With great potential comes greater responsibility, and Mhatre has deservedly been named India’s captain for the u-19 Asia Cup in Dubai later this month.

“He is not someone who expresses himself a lot. But as a captain, he needs to do that... he has become better after the stint with CSK.

“With Dhoni as your captain, you cannot ask for anyone better than him,” Prashant said.

Coach Suresh Kumar, with over 30 years' experience, feels this crucial aspect rarely gets discussed as part of a player's systematic training



Keerthi Vasanth is already beaten many good players. I was not surprised by his fight, but especially happy with his physical and mental stamina

CMYK A IN-X