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Organ donations after death

Data shows more women are willing to donate organs

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Green becomes the costliest overseas buy

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Indian linked to Sydney beach attack

- Sajid Akram, a resident of Hyderabad, last came to India in 2022, say officials
- His radicalisation appears to have no link to India or Telangana, according to police
- In Australia, Akram married a European woman; he retained his Indian passport

Vijaita Singh
Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Sajid Akram, one of the two Bondi Beach attackers who killed at least 16 people at a Jewish event in Australia on Sunday, was an Indian citizen from Hyderabad, government officials who ran a background check on the deceased told *The Hindu*. He last came to India in 2022 for a two-week visit.

Akram, 50, was a resident of Tolichowki in Hyderabad, but after migrating to Australia on a student visa in 1998, he only visited India on six occasions, the Telangana Police said in a statement on Tuesday.

"His father died in 2017, he did not come even to attend his last rites," a top government official said.

Akram's relatives in India say that he has had limited contact with his family in Hyderabad over the past 27 years, the police said. He visited India primarily for family-related reasons, such as property matters and visits to his elderly parents.

"The family members have expressed no knowledge of his radical mindset or activities, nor of the circumstances that led to his radicalisation. The factors that led to the radicalisation of Sajid Akram and his son, Naveed, appear to have no connection with India or any local influence in Telangana," the Telangana Police said, adding that they do not have any adverse record against Akram during his stay in India.

Noting reports that indicated the father-son duo were inspired by IS ideology, the police said that "further investigation in this regard is being carried out by Australian authorities."

Asked whether the Akrams had any local links in India, an official said: "Preliminary investigation do not establish any local links so far. We do not have access to his activities in Australia. His background was checked based on information from our sources."

The Telangana Police remain committed to cooperating with Central agencies and other counterparts, as and when required, the statement said, urging the public and media to avoid speculation or attribution without verified facts.

Akram died during the attack. His son Naveed, the other Bondi Beach attacker, was born in Australia in 2001 and is an Australian citizen. He was shot at by the police and has been admitted to a hospital.

The official said that Akram's immediate family still lives in Hyderabad, and his elder brother is a doctor. His late father had worked in the United Arab Emirates.

"After completing his Bachelors [degree] in commerce from Hyderabad, Akram moved to Australia and married a European woman. He retained his Indian passport," the official said.

Sources also confirmed to *The Hindu* that Australian authorities are "in touch" with Indian officials about the investigation.

Philippines immigration officials had earlier said that Sajid Akram had travelled to the Philippines on an Indian passport last month. "Sajid Akram, 50, Indian national, and Naveed Akram, 24, Australian national, arrived in the Philippines together last November 1, 2025, from Sydney, Australia." Bureau of Immigration spokesperson Dana Sandoval told news agencies in Manila on Tuesday.

The Ministry of External Affairs did not respond to queries on the Filipino official's statement. MEA officials said that it was for Australian authorities to provide details of their investigations.

Thus far, Australian authorities have declined to comment on the origins of the attackers. When asked specifically whether Sajid Akram belonged to India or to Pakistan, as reports suggested, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said that such details were part of the investigation.

"So I can't go into that detail, and it wouldn't be appropriate to undermine the investigation by going into it," Mr. Albanese told presspersons on Tuesday.

RELATED REPORT ON » PAGE 14

Background check

Sajid Akram, one of the two Bondi Beach attackers who killed at least 16 people in Australia on Sunday, is an Indian citizen

- The 50-year-old was a resident of Tolichowki in Hyderabad and migrated to Australia on a student visa in 1998



- His relatives in India say that he had only limited contact with his family in Hyderabad
- Preliminary investigation do not establish any local links



Painful moment: Relatives of one of the victims of the shooting during a vigil in Sydney. REUTERS

SIR outcome

The Election Commission has completed the special intensive revision and prepared draft electoral rolls for 5 States & U.T.s. Data show about 90% voter retention following the exercise

State/UT	Draft list (%)	Deceased (%)	Shifted/ Absent (%)	Enrolled at multiple places (%)
Rajasthan	92.34	-	5.43	0.63
Goa	91.56	2.16	6.12	0.17
Lakshadweep	97.53	1.22	0.43	0.82
West Bengal	92.4	3.15	4.26	0.18
Puducherry (U.T.)	89.87	2.04	7.89	0.2

- Unlike Bihar's SIR, no documents were required at this stage; all voters who submitted enumeration forms were included in the draft list
- Voters left out can seek inclusion during the claims and objections period (Dec. 16 to Jan. 15), before final rolls are published on February 14
- **The EC announced SIR 2.0 across 12 States and Union Territories, but postponements were made due to intense work pressure of Booth Level Officers**



Helping hand: Booth-level officers assist a voter in filling out the enumeration form for the special intensive revision, in Rajasthan on November 27. PTI

» REPORT ON PAGE 4

INSIDE

Bengal's Sports Minister resigns over Messi fiasco

KOLKATA
West Bengal Sports Minister Aroop Biswas on Tuesday resigned over the chaos at Lionel Messi's event at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata on December 13. Mr. Biswas tendered his resignation to CM Mamata Banerjee who accepted it. » PAGE 4



'Peace proposals to be presented to Russia soon'

KYIV
Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says proposals being negotiated with U.S. officials to end the fighting with Russia in the nearly 4-year-old conflict could be finalised within days, after which American envoys will present them to the Kremlin. » PAGE 14



Rahul, Sonia get relief in *National Herald* case

NEW DELHI
A Delhi court on Tuesday refused to take cognisance of the Enforcement Directorate's money laundering complaint against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, in connection with the *National Herald* case. » PAGE 5



Cranes clear the charred remains of buses after a pile-up in thick fog triggered fires on the Yamuna Expressway in Mathura on Tuesday. PTI

At least 13 people killed, 60 injured in pile-up on Yamuna Expressway

The Hindu Bureau
GHAZIABAD

At least 13 people were killed and 60 injured in a massive vehicle pile-up on the Agra-Lucknow Yamuna Expressway in Mathura district of Uttar Pradesh in the early hours of Tuesday.

Eight buses and three smaller vehicles rammed into each other due to poor visibility in the dense fog, official sources said. Local people said they had heard a blast as the vehicles caught fire after the crash near the 127 milestone on the expressway.

Preliminary investigation and eyewitness accounts reveal that most deaths were due to burns. Within minutes of the accident, the vehicles were gutted. Three bodies have been identified so far. Some of the deceased were charred beyond recognition and would be identified through a DNA test.

In a six-hour rescue operation, police personnel from nine stations, the fire brigade, and the State Disaster Response Force were involved. The accident resulted in a three-kilometre traffic jam on the expressway.

The District Magistrate has ordered a magisterial inquiry into the accident. The police have also registered an FIR to determine the cause of the pile-up.

A four-member committee, led by an Additional District Magistrate, has been asked to submit the report within 48 hours.

Cause of the accident

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Superintendent of Police, Rural, Suresh Chandra Rawat said preliminary investigation had revealed that the AC duct of a bus caught fire after the collision. "The diesel tank of the vehicle has been found intact. The impact of the crash suggests that apart from dense fog, high speed contributed to the accident," he said.

Regarding survivors' complaints about the lack of lighting along the expressway, Mr. Rawat said that on expressways, people navigate using vehicle headlights. Regarding the safety measures taken during pile-ups, which happen every year, he said an assessment was conducted before the start of the winter season.

The district administration has released helpline numbers for assistance and information.

The injured have been sent to government hospitals in Mathura and Vrindavan, and the critically injured have been referred to S.N. Medical College, Agra.

Locals won praise from survivors for their quick response. They assisted with the rescue and transported the injured to the local hospital.

Expressing sorrow, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a compensation of ₹2 lakh each to the families of the deceased and ₹50,000 each for the injured.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced ₹2 lakh each for the kin of the deceased and ₹50,000 each for the injured.

On Monday, four major accidents involving a total of 31 vehicles were reported across the State, resulting in injuries to 11 people.

Nearly 100 vehicles have been involved in accidents over the past three days owing to fog-induced poor visibility.

Centre introduces Bill to replace MGNREGA amid loud Opposition protests

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Tuesday introduced the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, 2025, which seeks to replace the two-decade-old Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), amid Opposition protests.

Introducing the Bill, Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said, "The [Narendra] Modi government has done more for rural development than previous governments. We not only believe in Mahatma Gandhi but also follow his principles... We will fully develop villages and work to establish a balance between agriculture and labour... This entire Bill is in line with Gandhiji's sentiments and is meant to establish *Ram Rajya*."

Opposition leaders strongly objected with the DMK's T.R. Baalu saying, "The father of the nation is being ridiculed."

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra called MGNREGA a "revolutionary Act" which was unanimously supported by Parliament. "This Bill (VB-G RAM G) is weakening the employment rights of the poor. It is against the Constitution," she said, accusing the government of dismantling the demand-driven architecture of MGNREGA and replacing it with a pre-decided budget.

She also flagged centralisation of decision making. "The new Bill weakens the rights-based structure of the MGNREGA," she said.

Ms. Vadra warned that reducing the Centre's share of funding from 90% to 60% would hit State finances already strained by GST compensation delays.

Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, in a post on X, alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had always opposed Mahatma Gandhi's ideas and sought to weaken MGNREGA since coming to power. "Modi *ji* has a deep hatred for two things – the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and the rights of the poor," he said, vowing Congress will oppose any such move.



Growing clamour: Opposition MPs protest as Minister Shivraj Singh introduces the VB-G RAM G Bill on Tuesday SANSAD TV

Ill-advised: Tharoor

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor called the Bill a "retrograde step" and "ill-advised", criticising the removal of Mahatma Gandhi's name.

"It strips the Bill of its moral compass and historical legitimacy," he said. Quoting a 1971 Hindi film song, he said, *"Dekho o deewano ye kaam na karo, Ram ka naam badnaam na karo* (don't do this, don't malign Ram's name)." Mr. Tharoor argued that shifting liability to States violated fiscal federalism.

The Trinamool Congress's Saugata Roy demanded the Bill be referred to a select committee. The RSP's N.K. Premchandran pointed out technical flaws, and said States could not afford the financial burden.

Congress general secretary K.C. Venugopal dismissed the promise of 125 days of work as "hollow". Addressing Mr. Chouhan, he said, "Your name will be remembered as a Minister who removed Mahatma Gandhi's name."

Opposition members stormed the Well of the House, holding photographs of Gandhiji. Amid the din, Mr. Chouhan reiterated that the Bill reflected Gandhian ideals and aimed to create "Ram Rajya" in villages. After walking out, Opposition MPs marched to the Mahatma Gandhi statue. Women members raised slogans from the old Parliament building's balcony. Left parties staged protests before the sitting began.

The Congress announced nationwide protests on Wednesday. In a letter to State presidents, Mr. Venugopal called for demonstrations at district headquarters.

INBRIEF



Court allows activist Navlakha to move to his Delhi house

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday said it was inclined to permit human rights activist Gautam Navlakha to move to his Delhi home until proceedings in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case begin, noting that he has shown no tendency to abscond. A Division Bench of Justices Bharati Dangre and Shyam Chandak observed, "We are satisfied with the reasons shown in his plea and there is nothing to show that he is a flight risk. We have made up our mind." The judges observed that Mr. Navlakha, who is 73, has been living in Mumbai since securing bail in 2023 under a condition that barred him from leaving the city.

CM announces Hansi as 23th district of Haryana

To be carved out of the existing Hisar district, Hansi will the 23 district of Haryana. The announcement to this effect was made by Chief Minister Nayab Saini on Tuesday at a "Hansi Vikas Rally". Mr. Saini said the official notification would be issued within a week, after which Hansi would formally attain district status from the revenue administration perspective. Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister also inaugurated and laid foundation of three development projects worth ₹77.30 crore. These include the foundation laying of a water management project worth ₹.61.44 crore from Barwala Branch to Hansi city.

BJP and Shiv Sena start discussions on BMC poll; to devise ward-wise plan

Delegations from the two Mahayuti allies meet for an hour, resolve to put up a united front with the target of winning at least 150 of the 227 wards of the civic body in the January 15 election

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

A joint strategy was decided upon between Mahayuti allies the BJP and the Shiv Sena at their first meeting on Tuesday over seat sharing for the upcoming Brinhanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) poll, leaders of the two parties said.

A senior leader present in the meeting claimed that the BJP offered 52 of the 227 seats overall to Shiv Sena while the latter demanded 125 seats. This was however denied by other leaders, including BJP MLA and Mumbai unit chief Ameet Satam, who took part in the discussion.

"We did not talk of seat sharing at all. We discussed joint strategies to fight the elections, how we will hold joint rallies of [Chief Minister] Devendra [Fadnavis] and [Deputy CM] Eknath Shinde. Nothing else was discussed," he said.



Political hoardings being removed after the model code of conduct kicked in for BMC election in Mumbai on Tuesday. PTI

Another leader told *The Hindu*, "No seats were offered or demanded. The talks haven't yet reached that stage. We discussed a joint strategy for putting up a united front so that we win at least 150 of the 227 seats," the leader said.

Sources said both sets of leaders dispersed after an hour's discussion and have decided to work on ward-wise plans and proposals internally.

"We will meet again after two days after consulting with our party's superiors. We will fight the BMC elections together as Mahayuti, and we will win 150 seats. Mumbai's mayor will be from Mahayuti," said Shiv Sena leader Rahul Shewale.

NCP out in cold

Both tge Shiv Sena and the BJP have said that they will not hold talks with their third Mahayuti ally, Nationalist Congress Party, if the party's senior leader Nawab Malik is included in the talks.

Shiv Sena sources indicated that since the party has 125 sitting corporators, it should be factored in while allocating seats. "Winnability of the ward will be a major factor while deciding which ward will be allocated to whom," a Shiv Sena leader said.

The BJP is also learnt to have offered to lend candidates to the Sena to fight on the latter's ticket. "A similar arrangement was made during the Assembly election as well last year. We have said we can do it this time as well," a BJP leader said.

The Shiv Sena delegation consisted of Mr. Shewale, Sheetal Mhatre, Yogesh Kadam and Prakash Surve. The BJP delegation consisted of Mr. Satam, Mumbai MLA Atul Bhatkhalkar, Maharashtra Cabinet Minister Ashish Shelar and Pravin Darekar.

Goa Police get transit remand of deported nightclub co-owners

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Luthra brothers at the Delhi airport on Tuesday after their deportation from Thailand. ANI

A Delhi court on Tuesday granted the Goa Police a two-day transit remand of Gaurav Luthra and Saurabh Luthra, co-owners of the 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub in Goa where 25 people were killed in a fire incident on December 6. They were deported to India from Thailand on Tuesday.

The Goa Police produced both the accused before Judicial Magistrate Twinkle Chawla in the Patiala House Court to seek transit remand of three days. The Judicial Magistrate allowed the Goa Police a transit remand of the brothers for two days.

Heavy security

Both the accused were taken to court in two separate police vehicles amid heavy security.

Speaking to media, Goa Police's public prosecutor, Surjendu Sankar Das said the accused will be taken to Goa on Wednesday.

He added that the court allowed the accused to take their medicines, as prescribed by the doctors. The court also ordered their medical check-up for which they were taken to the Safdarjang Hospital.

The deportation of the duo comes amid an ongoing probe into the deadly blaze, which triggered widespread outrage and led to scrutiny over alleged safety violations and lapses by the nightclub management.

The Luthras, left for Phuket in Thailand, shortly after the fire incident.

The two were detained by the Thai authorities in Phuket on December 11 following the intervention of the Indian mission, which was in close touch with the Thai government in the case.

Five managers and staff members have already been arrested by the Goa Police in connection with the fire.

Din in Chhattigarh Assembly as Cong. MLAs stopped from raising deforestation issue

The Hindu Bureau
RAIPUR



The Oppn. alleged that Vishnu Deo Sai govt. was working for the benefit of industrialists.

The Congress MLAs created a ruckus in the Chhattisgarh Assembly on Tuesday after their demand for a discussion on alleged rampant mining and deforestation was disallowed by the Speaker. The Opposition legislators alleged that the State's Vishnu Deo Sai-led Bharatiya Janata Party Government was working for the benefit of industrialists and capitalists.

Moving an adjournment motion notice, Congress members claimed that areas such as Surguja, Hasdeo Aranya coalfields, Tamnar and Bastar were witnessing mass protests and road blockades, alleging that fake public hearings were being conducted for the approval of coal mines.

The Congress alleged that unprecedented deforestation was being witnessed in the Tamnar area in Raigarh, and large-scale felling of trees was allegedly taking place on forest and revenue land.

'Lakhs of trees cut'

Citing Hasdeo Arand - often referred to as the 'lungs of Chhattisgarh'- the Opposition MLAs said that deforestation in the region has already led to loss of lakhs of trees, and poses serious threats to biodiversity, water resources and elephant corridors.

The adjournment motion statement also said "there are widespread instances of fraudulent public hearings, public protests, lathi-charges, sit-ins, and road blockades".

Responding to the allegations, Forest and Climate Change Minister Kedar Kashyap said the State government was sensitive towards forests, wildlife, tribals and the environment, and was committed to their protection and conservation, even as he rejected claims of fake public hearings, protests and lathi-charges.

He cited the Forest Survey of India report to claim that Chhattisgarh's forest cover had increased by 94.75 sq km, while the area under 'trees outside forests' had risen by 702 sq km, the highest in the country.

BJP eyes stronger NDA for 2026 Assembly poll with election in-charge appointments

N. Sai Charan
CHENNAI



Ideal choice: Piyush Goyal is a relatively known face to the BJP's alliance partners, particularly the AIADMK, as he played an instrumental role in seat-sharing negotiations for the 2019 poll.

The appointment of three Union Ministers by the BJP high command to oversee party activities for the 2026 Assembly election in Tamil Nadu assumes significance, as the national party looks to gain a foothold in the State and strengthen the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) ahead of next year's poll.

On December 15, BJP national president J.P. Nadda appointed Union Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal as the election in-charge for Tamil Nadu. Mr. Goyal replaced Lok Sabha MP Baijayant Panda, who was appointed to the post on September 25.

The BJP high command also appointed Union Minister of State for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal as the election co-in-charge, while retaining Union Minister of State for Civil Aviation and Cooperation Muralidhar Mohol, who was appointed the co-in-charge earlier.

Better coordination

The fresh appointments coincide with the meeting of BJP Tamil Nadu president Nainar Nagenthran with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on December 14, and the appointment of Nitin Nabin, a member of the Nitish Kumar-led Cabinet in Bihar, as the party's national working president.

BJP sources in Tamil Nadu feel the appointment of Mr. Goyal as the election in-charge will help them organise party activities and coordinate better with alliance partners for the 2026 Assembly election. According to the sources, Mr. Goyal was a relatively known face to the BJP's alliance partners, particularly the AIADMK, as he played an instrumental role in seat-sharing negotiations as the party's election in-charge for the 2019 Lok Sabha poll.

They say Mr. Goyal, who has been a part of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Cabinet, holding various key portfolios since 2014, enjoys the confidence of the BJP high command. He also played an important role in coordinating the election efforts of the party in a few other States.

These appointments are seen as crucial for the party, which is gearing up to gain a foothold in Tamil Nadu. Two weeks ago, Mr. Shah, while speaking in Ahmedabad, had asserted that the NDA will score a big victory in the upcoming election in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. Though the BJP is directly taking on the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, it plays the role of a junior partner in Tamil Nadu's version of the NDA, as the Chief Ministerial face remains AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami.

HC seeks Centre's reply on Agniveer's death benefits

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday issued a notice to the Union Ministry of Defence on a petition filed by the mother of Agniveer Murali Naik, who was killed in cross-border shelling in Jammu & Kashmir, challenging the denial of full death benefits granted to families of regular soldiers.

The plea, filed by Naik's mother Jyothibai Shriram Naik, contends that the Centre's Agnipath scheme creates an "arbitrary and unreasonable" distinction between Agniveers and regular soldiers, resulting in "discriminatory" denial of long-term welfare benefits to families of those who die in service. It argues that Agniveers perform the same duties and face identical risks as regular soldiers but are excluded from post-service pension.

Court to hear plea on higher compensation to IndiGo passengers

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court will hear on Wednesday a public interest litigation (PIL) petition seeking directions to the Centre and the crisis-hit IndiGo airline to pay four times the full ticket price in compensation to all passengers whose tickets were cancelled during recent flight disruptions.

The PIL also sought an enquiry by a retired judge or Lokpal to identify the alleged negligence and lapses of the Directorate of Civil Aviation (DGCA) in precipitating the meltdown of IndiGo operations.

The petition also asks the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Department of Consumer Affairs to initiate a 'class action suit' under the Consumer Protection Act against IndiGo for the problems passengers have faced.

According to the petitioner, Centre for Accountability and Systemic Change (CASC), an independent think tank, the IndiGo fiasco has triggered widespread concern across the aviation sector.

"IndiGo operates around 410 aircraft with 5,700 pilots, translating to roughly 14 pilots per aircraft. This skeletal staffing model is insufficient as new rest rules require more pilots to operate the same flight schedule," the plea said.

Archery gives policeman a new lease of life after losing a leg in anti-Maoist operation

Shubhomoy Sikdar
RAIPUR



Standing against odds: Kishan Kumar Hapka, 27, underwent training and competed in the Bastar Olympics. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Until he lost his left leg in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast last July, life and kabaddi went hand in hand for Bijapur District Reserve Guard (DRG) employee Kishan Kumar Hapka. While still under treatment, a bedridden Mr. Hapka, now 27, learnt about an Indian Paralympian medallist's journey whose success story inspired him to take up archery. A gold medal win in the recently concluded Bastar Olympics has given him hope to take up the sport at a more competitive level.

Recalling his journey, Mr. Hapka, now posted in Bijapur Kotwali police station, says that on July 16, 2024, he and his fellow policemen were returning from an anti-Maoist operation when an IED planted by the Maoists went off, resulting in the loss of his limb.

State of despair

"Kabaddi was an inseparable part of my life. I had played the game at the national level in the junior category without any coaching. I had plans to play it till 60. Such is my body clock that even at the hospital, I would wake up at my usual time of 4 a.m. but the realisation that I couldn't step out filled me with despair," Mr. Hapka said.

The situation prompted a detailed search on what other people in his situation did. Browsing YouTube, he learnt about the Indian Paralympian whose name he is unable to recall but says that it was a female badminton player who took up the sport after losing her legs in an accident.

Mr. Hapka's own choices were narrowed down to badminton and archery. However, it was a fellow archer from Bijapur who introduced him to archery and connected him to a local coach.

'Will represent India'

Mr. Hapka underwent training under the coach and within a month and a half competed in the Bastar Olympics, a mega sports event. While he cleared various levels to reach the finals, he competed in the para category and shot for gold. When asked about his future goals, he says that he would like to "represent India some day".

Naveen questions Odisha govt. over gang-rape of minor

The Hindu Bureau
BHUBANESWAR

The gang-rape of a minor girl in the Odisha capital has created a furore in the State, with the principal Opposition party, the Biju Janata Dal, alleging that criminals are becoming fearless and the State government is steadily losing credibility.

The gruesome sexual assault on the minor girl had taken place on December 10. The girl, along with a male friend, was returning from Dhauli, a popular Buddhist tourist site in Bhubaneswar, when three miscreants obstructed their path. The male friend was brutally attacked and the girl dragged to an isolated place and gang-raped. A complaint was filed by the family of the girl after she narrated her ordeal.

The city police have arrested two accused while the main accused is still absconding. Urmila Mohapatra, member of the State Commission for Women, on Tuesday made a spot visit and asked the police to arrest the main accused.

In a post on X, former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said, "Criminals are fearless, the government is losing credibility... The government should not react after the incident, but it must act proactively in preventing such incidents."

Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida criticised Mr. Patnaik for "politicising" the incident.

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Kerala HC issues interim stay on ED notice to KIIFB

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI



The ED had initiated proceedings under the Foreign Exchange Management Act

The Kerala High Court has issued a three-month interim stay on a notice issued by the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) to the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) on the utilisation of funds raised through masala bonds for the board.

A Bench of Justice V.G. Arun issued the interim stay on further proceedings on the matter on Tuesday in a plea, which was filed by KIIFB challenging a notice issued against the board by the ED in connection with the usage of funds generated through masala bonds for infra development in the State. The ED had initiated proceedings under the Foreign Exchange Management Act.

KIIFB had earlier this month approached the High Court seeking to quash the notice. Stating that the ED often issued such notices during election time, the board contended that there was no hassle in spending the funds to purchase land for infra development and that everything was being being done in adherence to Reserve Bank of India norms.

The ED opposed the plea, stating that it was not maintainable since it had only issued notice seeking explanation on the issue.

Kerala to screen all IFFK movies barred by Centre

CM says decision reflects autocratic tendencies of Sangh Parivar regime; Culture Minister slams 'undemocratic approach'; I&B Ministry later gives nod to screen 5 of the 19 films barred earlier

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM


Film enthusiasts protest at the IFFK venue in Thiruvanathapuram against I&B Ministry's decision. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

A day after the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) denied censor clearance for the screening of several films at the 30th International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK), the State government on Tuesday said all films will be screened at the event as per schedule.

Among the movies denied permission are Palestinian films such as *Palestine 36* and *All That's Left of You,* as well as Soviet-era classic *Battleship Potemkin*.

Santosh, which portrays police brutality and casteism, also did not receive clearance. Also on the list were *Timbuktu* and *Bamako*, directed by Abderrahmane Sissako, who is being honoured with the IFFK Lifetime Achievement Award this year.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said in a statement that the Centre's decision to deny permission to the films was unacceptable.

"The censorship directed at the IFFK is a direct reflection of the autocratic tendencies of the Sangh Parivar regime, which suppresses diverse voices and creative expressions in the country. Enlightened Kerala will not give in to such censorship. All films that have been denied permission will be screened at the festival," said Mr. Vijayan.

Minister for Cultural Affairs Saji Cherian, in a statement, lashed out at the Centre for adopting "an undemocratic approach towards the State's progressive art and cultural tradition." "Such an undemocratic approach that destroys the tradition and progressive nature of the festival cannot be accepted," he said.

"The government will continue to take an uncompromising stand against attacks on artistic expressions," he said.

He said all the 19 films that were denied Central approval were recognised worldwide and were well received by film buffs. "The right of the delegates to watch these films cannot be denied. These were published in the festival schedule as well as the festival book that have been widely circulated," he said.

The main festival venue at Tagore Theatre witnessed protests by the Democratic Youth Federation of India on Monday night.

Five get clearance

Early on Tuesday, the I&B Ministry issued clearance to five of the 19 films barred earlier. The movies are *Beef*, *Eagles of The Republic*, *Heart of The Wolf*, *Yes,* and *Once Upon A Time In Gaza*.

Woman deprived of land ownership gets relief under RTI Act

S. Vijay Kumar
CHENNAI

Officials initially said the land belonged to a temple, but failed to furnish records to prove their claim

More than a decade after her agricultural land was erroneously recorded as temple property, depriving her of ownership, a woman turned to the Right to Information (RTI) Act to uncover the truth.

In 2012, S. Narayani of Chennai was shocked to know that her ancestral land, measuring 75 cents, at Tiruporur in Chengalpattu district had been shown in the encumbrance certificate as property belonging to the Arulmigu Kandaswamy Temple, Tiruporur.

Along with her son, S. Rajkumar, Ms. Narayani approached officials of the Revenue, Registration, and Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) Departments, seeking an explanation as to how the family's private land was listed as temple property. However, there was no response.

"We had all the land records, such as parent documents, patta, chitta, and other revenue certificates, to establish our ownership. But the officials could not produce a single document to justify our land being shown as government property. They refused to entertain our request to change the records based on facts," Mr. Rajkumar said.

With no relief forthcoming, Ms. Narayani filed an RTI Act application in 2022 with the District Registrar-cum-Public Information Officer (PIO), Chengalpattu, seeking to know how the ownership of her land had been altered. When the application drew no response, she moved an appeal before the Tamil Nadu Information Commission (TNIC) the following year.

When the matter came up before State Chief Information Commissioner Md. Shakeel Akhter, he summoned the PIOs of the three departments and directed them to explain how private patta lands in Survey No. 56/1, 56/3, and 56/5 had been converted into temple property.

Though the officials initially maintained that the lands belonged to the temple, they failed to furnish any records to substantiate their claim.

After several adjournments over two years, the Registration Department's PIO submitted a report stating that mistakes and erroneous entries had been made in 2007.

The PIO further informed the Commission that the petitioner could approach the appropriate authorities for registration of the property.

Passing orders after hearing both sides, Mr. Shakeel Akhter directed Ms. Narayani to approach the District Registrar, Chengalpattu, for registration of her land.

SC to hear plea against HC guidelines to clinical establishments

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday decided to entertain a petition against a Kerala High Court direction to clinical establishments to prominently display a list of the services offered and package rates.

A Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta issued notice to the State government on a petition challenging various provisions of the Kerala Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2018.

Kerala Private Hospitals Association and Hussain Koya Thangal, represented by senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan and Zulfiker Ali P.S., had moved the apex court against the High Court's November 26 decision.

The Bench directed authorities not to take any coercive steps against the members of the association till the next date of hearing, February 3.

It said the members of the association would continue getting themselves registered under Section 19 of the Act. The court also asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to assist the court in the case.

Issuing a slew of guidelines, the High Court had said each clinical establishment shall prominently display, in Malayalam as well as in English.

The guidelines were to be displayed at the reception or admission desk and on its official website a list of the services offered and the baseline and package rates for commonly performed procedures, with a note that unforeseen complications or additional procedures shall be itemised.

Besides other guidelines, it had directed clinical establishments to maintain a grievance desk or helpline and register every complaint with a unique reference number, issuing an acknowledgement immediately through text messages, WhatsApp or in the physical form.

Deploy AI to prevent theft: A.P. High Court to TTD

V. Raghavendra
VIJAYAWADA

Justice Gannamaneni Ramakrishna Prasad of the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Tuesday expressed the opinion that the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) should mechanise the process of segregating currency notes, coins, and other offerings made to the deity, and counting/assessing their value ('Parakamani'), while observing that there had been multiple instances of theft earlier.

Justice Prasad also suggested that the CCTV system be equipped with AI for better monitoring. Later, he posted the matter to December 19.

Hearing a batch of writ petitions related to the Parakamani theft case, Justice Prasad noted that AI would bring down human intervention, thereby reducing the scope for theft/misappropriation of money. The TTD should secure the offerings and protect the sentiments of the people, he said.

The TTD must refrain from disturbing what the *Agama Shastra* said about counting, but since it had moved out of the temple premises and, consequently, the *Agama Shastra* might not come in the way. The handling of offerings should be changed from manual to automatic, the judge said, adding that it would be good to stop outsourcing this.

The judge was emphatic in his observations, and called for suggestions on how to prevent irregularities in the conduct of 'Parakamani', senior counsel Unnam Muralidhar Rao told *The Hindu*.

Floating decoration


Christmas sights: Residents of Kadinamkulam set up a floating Christmas tree off the Marianad beach to welcome the Christmas season in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

'I will continue as CM until high command decides'

The Hindu Bureau
BELAGAVI


Siddaramaiah

The leadership issue in the ruling Congress figured in the Assembly session on Tuesday, with Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah stating on the floor of the Assembly that he would continue as Chief Minister until the high command made a decision.

He emphasised that the Congress regime will continue for the full five-year term "as the people of the State have blessed it".

"I am the Chief Minister. I want to clearly say that we have a high command and we will abide by whatever it decides. Secondly, people of the State have blessed us to rule for five years, and we will continue to rule for five years," the Chief Minister said, while replying to Leader of the Opposition R. Ashok who raised the issue during Question Hour.

Taunting the Chief Minister for his diplomatic stand, BJP member S. Suresh Kumar said, "So far the Chief Minister would say that he would continue in his post for five years. But now he has switched to the plural by replacing 'I' with 'We'," he said, adding that it reminds him of St. Kanaka Dasa's famous lines on shedding egoism and selfishness.

He asked the BJP not to compare him with the great saint-poet. Continuing to emphasise the choice of plural, he said, "We are running the government and hence I am using the plural".

Mr. Siddaramaiah said that the Congress government would not only complete the full term, but also return to form the government by winning the 2028 Assembly polls.

"All the 140 Congress MLAs are with us, and they would not get provoked however much ever your try," he said.

ISRO releases RESPOND Basket, invites proposals

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

It comprises the most important research problems identified by ISRO

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) released the RESPOND Basket 2025, comprising research problem statements aligned with ISRO's current and future mission requirements.

On Tuesday, ISRO Chairperson V. Narayanan released the RESPOND Basket 2025 at the inauguration of the ISRO-Academia Day.

Collaborative research

In his inaugural address, Dr. Narayanan underscored the vital role of academia in contributing innovative ideas, advanced research and skilled human resources to India's expanding space programme, and highlighted the impact of the RESPOND programme in addressing complex technological challenges through collaborative research.

As part of the programme, ISRO scientists delivered detailed technical talks on the research topics listed in the RESPOND Basket 2025, providing academic participants with deeper insights into mission-driven requirements, expected outcomes, and potential areas of collaboration.

The RESPOND Basket comprises the most urgent and important research problems identified by ISRO and Department of Space Centre/Units on the basis of ISRO's upcoming programmatic R&D requirements.

The RESPOND Basket 2025 invites submission of research proposals from various premier universities, and other recognised academic and R&D institutions in areas relevant to ISRO's upcoming missions and national priorities. The last date for submission is January 31, 2026.

Study affirms Kerala's rich butterfly diversity in the Western Ghats region

Sarath Babu George
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM


Paris peacock swallowtail. DR. KALESH SADASIVAN

Kerala hosts the highest butterfly diversity among all Indian States along the Western Ghats, with 328 species documented, including 41 species endemic to the Western Ghats, according to a new monograph published in *ENTOMON*, an open access quarterly journal by the Association for Advancement of Entomology.

The researchers of the study 'The Butterflies (Lepidoptera, Rhopalocera) of Kerala: Status and Distribution' have reported that the Western Ghats support 337 butterfly species and Kerala accounts for nearly the entire diversity. The butterfly fauna of the State spans six families, led by Nymphalidae (97 species), Lycaenidae (96 species), and Hesperiidae (82 species), followed by Papilionidae, Pieridae and Riodinidae.

The study, undertaken by a team of researchers led by Kalesh Sadasivan, has also documented 36 migratory butterfly species to highlight the State's role as a key corridor for seasonal butterfly movements. Notably, 22 species recorded from Kerala are included in the IUCN Red List, though most fall under the 'Least Concern' category, while two are listed as 'Near Threatened.'

The monograph highlights that 70 butterfly species found in Kerala are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Of these, only four have the highest level of protection under Schedule I.

One of the most significant contributions of the work is the extensive larval host plant checklist which documents over 1,800 feeding records, including over 350 new field observations. Covering nearly 800 plant species, the list represents one of the largest region-specific compilations in India.

Blood transfusion case: six children test HIV positive

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

The CMHO says that the children could have also contracted it from contaminated syringe or injection

At least six children have been found HIV positive in Madhya Pradesh's Satna allegedly due to contaminated blood transfusions at the district hospital during treatment for thalassaemia, officials said on Tuesday.

According to officials, the children include five boys aged under 11 and a nine-year-old girl who have been undergoing blood transfusions at the hospital. While the children were found positive between January and May 2025, the matter has come to light now, prompting the State authorities to order inquiries.

Deputy Chief Minister Rajendra Shukla, who holds the Health portfolio, said that he has sought a report on the matter.

"We will only be able to reveal anything once the report comes. It is also being investigated whether the blood transfusion took place in other hospitals also or only in the government hospital," Mr. Rajendra said.

Satna Collector Satish Kumar S. said that an internal investigation at the hospital level has been launched into the matter.

"The children have received transfusions at different hospitals, including the district hospital as well as in Jabalpur and in private hospitals too. But if anyone is found responsible for this, strict action will be taken against them," Mr. Kumar said.

Dr. Manoj Shukla, incharge Chief Medical and Health Officer of the district hospital, said that the children have been receiving treatment for thalassaemia for a long time as they require regular blood transfusions.

"Because they develop a history of multiple transfusions, they come into high risk category for HIV. So, the programme head of AIDS here conducted further tests on them and their treatment was started immediately," Dr. Manoj said.

While the source of infection is yet to be detected, the CMHO said that apart from blood transfusion, the children could have also contracted the infection from any intravenous injection or contaminated syringe.

EC publishes draft voter list for five States, U.T.s

Over 58 lakh names have been removed from the existing voter list in West Bengal, 42 lakh in Rajasthan, 10 lakh in Goa, a little over a lakh in Puducherry, and nearly 1,500 in Lakshadweep

Sreeparna Chakrabarty
NEW DELHI



Roll call: People check their names on the draft electoral rolls at Balurghat in Dakshin Dinajpur of West Bengal on Tuesday. PTI

The Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday published the draft electoral rolls of five States and Union Territories – including that of West Bengal, which is due to go to the polls next year – as part of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise.

More than 58 lakh names have been removed from the existing voters list in West Bengal, nearly 42 lakh in Rajasthan, 10 lakh in Goa, a little more than a lakh in Puducherry and nearly 1,500 in Lakshadweep.

Unlike the SIR exercise in Bihar, voters were not required to submit any of the 11 indicative documents to be included in the draft list under this phase, announced on October 27. Thus, the names of all voters who submitted the enumeration form would be on the draft list.

In case of any doubt, notices would be issued to voters whose names are on the draft list, and they could then be asked to produce documents, EC sources said. The draft list also includes names of voters who could not be mapped on the 2002-03 list when the SIR was last conducted, as well as those who might have been wrongly matched.

"Verification of each case will start now," a source told *The Hindu*.

In West Bengal, 7.08 crore (92.4 %) voters – out of 7.6 crore on the electoral roll as of October 2025, before the SIR was announced – have submitted enumeration forms and, as a result, have been included on the draft list. Of the names deleted, 24.16 lakh (3.15%) were dead, 32.65 lakh (4.26 %) were found to have shifted or were absent, and 1.38 lakh (0.18 %) were found enrolled at multiple places.

In Rajasthan, of 5.46 crore voters on the existing list, 5.04 crore (92.34%) have been included in the draft list. Of the names deleted, 8.76 lakh (0.63%) were deceased voters, 29.6 lakh (5.43%) were those who had shifted or were absent, and 3.44 lakh (0.63 %) were found enrolled at multiple places.

In Goa, 10.84 lakh (91.56%) of 11.85 lakh names are on the draft list. Of the names removed, 25,574 (2.16%) were deceased, 72,471 (6.12%) were found to have shifted or absent, and 1,997 (0.17%) had enrolled at multiple places.

In the Union Territory of Puducherry, of the existing 10.21 lakh names, 9.18 lakh (89.87%) are on the draft list. Of the names deleted, 20,798 were deceased, 80,645 were found to have shifted or have been absent, and 2,024 were enrolled at multiple places.

Lakshadweep, the other Union Territory, has 56,384 (97.53%) names on the draft list, of the existing 57,813 voters. Of those left out, 705 were dead, 252 were found shifted/absent and 472 were those who had enrolled at multiple places.

The EC said that the draft rolls, along with a detailed, booth-wise list of deleted voters and reasons for deletion, have been made available on the Chief Electoral Officer website, the Election Commission's voter portal and the ECINET application.

It said that if a voter does not find his or her name on the draft voter list, he or she must fill Form 6 and submit it along with the requisite documents.

During the claims and objections period from December 16 to January 15, any existing or prospective elector may file claims or objections. The verification phase will end on February 7; final rolls will be published on February 14.

West Bengal Sports Minister resigns over chaos at Messi event

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA



Aroop Biswas

West Bengal Sports Minister Aroop Biswas on Tuesday resigned over the chaos at Lionel Messi's event at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata on December 13.

Mr. Biswas tendered his resignation to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who accepted it.

"As per the enclosed letter, I appreciate the sentiment and intention of the Sports Minister to offer a relief from the Sports Department for the sake of impartial inquiry into the Vivekananda Yuva Bharati Krirangan (VYBK) incident on 13th December, 2025," a letter signed by the Chief Minister said.

Ms. Banerjee added that Mr. Biswas "is correct (to resign) and until and unless the impartial inquiry is over, the Sports Department will be looked after by me for the time being".

Violence had erupted at the stadium as football fans vandalised the premises after Mr. Messi's brief appearance. Organisers of the event, including the Minister, surrounded Mr. Messi, while spectators who had bought tickets at a hefty price were enraged over being unable to get a glimpse of the football icon.

The State government also issued show cause notices to Director-General of Police Rajeev Kumar, Bidhannagar Police Commissioner Mukesh Kumar and Principal Secretary of Youth Affairs and Sports Department Rajesh Kumar Sinha.

A Special Investigation Team has been constituted with Additional Director-General of Police (Law and Order) Jawed Shamim, ADGP, South Bengal, Supratim Sarkar, Director (Security) Peeyush Pandey and Barrackpore Police Commissioner Muralidhar. The government also suspended Bidhannagar DCP Aneesh Sarkar and initiated departmental proceedings against the officer. On December 13, the government set up an inquiry commission led by Justice Ashim Kumar Ray (retd.).

The chaos had prompted Mr. Banerjee to apologise to sports lovers.

SC issues notice after Justice Varma challenges inquiry panel formed by Speaker

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI



Justice Yashwant Varma

The Supreme Court on Tuesday decided to examine a petition filed by the Allahabad High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma assailing the action of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla in "unilaterally" constituting a committee under the Judges (Inquiry) Act to investigate him.

A Bench headed by Justice Dipankar Datta issued notice to Mr. Birla through the Lok Sabha Secretariat, Lok Sabha Secretary-General, and Secretary-General of the Council of States. The petition was filed under the acronym 'X' to maintain anonymity. The case is likely to be taken up on January 7, 2026.

In March, sacks of half-burnt currency notes were allegedly videotaped in a storeroom of Justice Varma's official residence in Delhi after a fire on the premises. Justice Varma was a sitting judge of the Delhi High Court at the time of the incident. He was later transferred to the Allahabad High Court.

An in-house inquiry procedure started by then Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna recommended the removal of Justice Varma from office. The recommendation was forwarded to Parliament, after which Speaker Om Birla constituted a three-member committee.

Justice Varma, represented by senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, said the constitution of the committee violated both his right to be treated and protected equally by the law. He argued that though notices of motion for removal were given in both Houses of Parliament on the same day, the Speaker constituted the committee unilaterally. The Act mandated joint consultation with the Rajya Sabha Chairman.

With PM in Jordan, Jaishankar in Israel, India reiterates its position on West Asian conflicts

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI



Boosting ties: Prime Minister Narendra Modi shakes hands with Crown Prince Al Hussein Bin Abdullah II in Amman on Tuesday. ANI

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Amman calling for an India-Jordan collaboration for the reconstruction of war-ravaged Syria, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in Tel Aviv expressing India's support for the Trump peace plan for Gaza, India on Tuesday reiterated its willingness to play an important role in the fast-evolving scenario in West Asia.

Speaking at the India-Jordan Business Forum, Mr. Modi said King Abdullah II had shared his vision of developing railways and "next-generation infrastructure" in Jordan. "During our meeting yesterday, His Majesty also highlighted the infrastructure reconstruction needs in Syria. Indian and Jordanian companies can collaborate to address these requirements together," he said.

Mr. Modi – who was in Jordan earlier during Monday-Tuesday for his ongoing three-nation tour covering Jordan, Ethiopia and Oman – met with King Abdullah II and expressed mutual determination to fight "terrorism, extremism and radicalisation". The two dignitaries also discussed regional conflicts. "Prime Minister reaffirmed India's support for efforts being made to achieve durable peace in the region," the External Affairs Ministry said.

A day after Mr. Modi reached Jordan, Mr. Jaishankar landed in the Israeli capital Tel Aviv where he was welcomed by the Foreign Minister Gideon Saar. Mr. Jaishankar condemned the terror attack in Bondi beach of Sydney, Australia, and said, "Where India and Israel are concerned, we are both countries who have a policy of zero tolerance towards terrorism."

"I also would like to listen to you about the regional situation. I want to say that India supports the Gaza peace plan (given by President Trump) and hopes that it will lead to a lasting and durable solution," he said.

Mr. Jaishankar's visit has attracted attention as in its backdrop, the Israeli Knesset passed a law to stop the activities of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees that India has historically assisted.

PM honoured with Ethiopia's highest award

Press Trust of India
ADDIS ABABA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday was conferred with Ethiopia's highest award 'The Great Honour Nishan of Ethiopia' by his Ethiopian counterpart Abiy Ahmed Ali.

The award was to honour Mr. Modi's role in strengthening India-Ethiopia ties, the Ministry of External Affairs said.

India and Ethiopia also elevated their ties to a strategic partnership, after the leaders discussed issues of bilateral interest.

Policeman killed in Udhampur encounter

Peerzada Ashiq
JAMMU

A policeman was killed in an ongoing anti-terror operation in Jammu's Udhampur on Tuesday.

"A small team of SOG (Special Operation Group) had an encounter with three terrorists, and our officer, Amjad Ali Khan, was hit during the firing. We tried to rescue him but lost him due to the excessive blood loss," Inspector General of Police (IGP) Bhim Sen Tuti said.

"The cordon and search operation was launched Monday evening in Soan village following a specific input. The input proved accurate and a small team of the SOG came under fire from terrorists," Mr. Tuti said, adding that the operation was still on-going.

878 infiltrators held from Myanmar border in two years, govt. tells LS

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI



As many as 43 gates were operationalised to regulate movement of people along the Myanmar border. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

As many as 878 "infiltrators" were caught along the India-Myanmar border over the past two years, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said in a written reply that 9.2 km of the total 1,643-km border with Myanmar had been fenced so far.

The reply stated that from 2014 to 2025 (till November 30), the number of infiltrators arrested along the Myanmar border stood at 45, 32, 20, 15, 39, 57, 58, 73, 173, 212, 441 and 437, respectively.

FMR regulated

In February 2024, months after the 2023 ethnic violence in Manipur, Home Minister Amit Shah announced that the entire Myanmar border will be fenced and the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the north-eastern border will be scrapped. However, FMR, which allows cross-border movement of people to a certain distance without visas and passports, continued but was regulated.

In December 2024, a new framework was implemented, under which the territorial limits of FMR was reduced from 16 km to 10 km. As many as 43 designated exit and entry gates were operationalised to regulate the movement of people, and biometrics and gate passes were introduced.

From Bangladesh

The reply also added that in 2024 and 2025, the number of infiltrators who were arrested along the Bangladesh border stood at 2,525 and 2,556, respectively. Between the years 2014 and 2023, the number of such arrests stood at 2,160, 2,809, 1,601, 907, 884, 1,109, 955, 1,208, 2,076, and 2,617, respectively.

The reply added that 93.25% of the India-Pakistan border, which is 2,289.66 km long, has been physically fenced. The remaining 154.524 km is unfenced. It added that of the 4,096.70-km India-Bangladesh border, 3,239.92 km, that is 79.08%, has been physically fenced. The remaining 856.778 km is unfenced.

NIA can take over cases of 'hardcore' criminals: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday suggested the National Investigation Agency (NIA) take over the cases prosecuted under Central penal laws involving "organised, professional and hardcore" criminals. A Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said these cases could be transferred to special courts exclusively trying NIA cases in Delhi.

Justice Bagchi said the NIA had the power to take over from the States the investigation and prosecution of offences "affecting the sovereignty, security and integrity of India, security of state". The court said such cases scattered across States could be brought under one roof.

SC expresses shock over money lost to digital arrest fraud

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday expressed to the Union government its shock at the "staggering amounts" digital arrest scammers have been able to siphon off from India.

Digital arrests were widely reported in India since 2022, through 2024, when fraudsters would impersonate police officers and even judges to threaten innocent people with "online arrest" and scam money from them.

A note given by the Centre in the court showed that ₹3,000 crore has already been scammed by fraudsters from victims, mostly drawn from the elderly population, through 'digital arrests'. But these statistics are based on reported complaints of digital arrests.

The Chief Justice addressed the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), represented by advocates M.R. Ramesh Babu, that lapses on the part of bankers to allow such a large-scale scam to happen and even thrive may amount to 'deficiency in service'. The court said there ought to be a system to alert customers against such scams.

On December 1, the court tasked the Central Bureau of Investigation to crack down on 'digital arrest' scammers and their associates.

On Tuesday, Attorney General R. Venkataramani, for the Centre, assured the court that an inter-ministerial meeting to "patch the gaps" in the system would be held shortly.

CBI books five in racket targeting aspirants to U.S. jobs

Devesh K Pandey
NEW DELHI



The CBI said that the human trafficking agents tried to facilitate illegal entry to the U.S.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has registered two cases against five alleged human trafficking agents who cheated people on the pretext of arranging jobs for them in the U.S. and Europe. One of the complainants, who was arrested by the U.S. Army while attempting to enter the country illegally, was deported to India on February 16.

In the first case, the agency has named Balwinder Singh from Karnal in Haryana, his brother-in-law Sahib Singh, and friend Amrit Singh. The accused allegedly promised jobs in the U.S. and facilitated illegal entry through human traffickers.

According to government figures, between January 20 and July 22, the U.S. deported 1,703 Indian nationals, including 1,562 men and 141 women.

The CBI came across one victim, Ravinder Singh, who was deported by U.S. authorities in February. In his complaint, he alleged that during 2024-25, Balwinder Singh and others induced him to pay ₹25 lakh for legal entry into the U.S. and a job in houseware. In January, the amount was paid in cash and through banking channels.

The accused and others allegedly made him stay at a hotel in Delhi and gave him an air ticket to Cairo, Egypt. He was then allegedly "transported, harboured, transferred" and finally received in Managua, Nicaragua. As alleged, he was physically and mentally tortured and exploited abroad. He was arrested by the U.S. Army while attempting to enter the country "illegally" and was deported to India.

Accused Manoj Panwar and his younger brother Anuj Panwar, from Bhiwani in Haryana, have been named in the second case. The "unscrupulous travel agents" allegedly offered better jobs in Europe to extract money from people. The CBI identified two such victims as Navdeep and Ashish.

The victims lodged a complaint regarding missing passports at a police station in Almaty on June 18. They then approached the Indian Embassy and were issued emergency certificates and deportation papers, following which they returned to India on July 6.

Court rejects ED plea against Rahul, Sonia in *National Herald* case

ED's complaint not maintainable as case is not based on an FIR, but on a special complaint filed by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy, says court

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI


The case stems from a ₹90 crore loan advanced by the Congress to the publishers of *National Herald*. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

A Delhi court on Tuesday refused to take cognisance of the Enforcement Directorate's money laundering complaint against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, in connection with the *National Herald* case.

Special judge Vishal Gogne of the Rouse Avenue Court noted that the complaint filed by the Central agency, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), was not maintainable because the case is based on a special complaint filed by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy before a magistrate under Section 200 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, not on a first information report (FIR).

"An investigation and the consequent prosecution complaint pertaining to the offence of money laundering, defined under Section 3 and punishable under Section 4 of the PMLA is not maintainable in the absence of an FIR for the offence mentioned in the Schedule to the Act," the court said.

The *National Herald* case stems from a ₹90 crore loan advanced by the Congress to Associated Journals Ltd. (AJL), the publisher of *National Herald*, which was then assigned to Young Indian for a consideration of ₹50 lakh. Young Indian is a not-for-profit company in which the Gandhis hold a majority stake. It has been alleged that there was misappropriation of assets worth over ₹2,000 crore in an equity transaction.

'Conspiracy claims'

The complaint in the case was filed by Mr. Swamy, who highlighted an alleged criminal conspiracy by several prominent political figures, including the late Motilal Vohra, the late Oscar Fernandes, Suman Dubey, and Sam Pitroda, apart from the Gandhis and Young Indian.

While dismissing the agency's complaint against the Congress leaders, the court pointed out that the Delhi police's economic wing has already lodged an FIR in the matter. Hence, it would be premature to decide the submissions made by the ED in relation to the merits of the allegations against the accused, the court said.

'Without jurisdiction'

It a detailed order that runs into 117 pages, the court said it was a challenge to recognise the complaint, given that the investigation itself commenced without jurisdiction, the consequent prosecution complaint was also without jurisdiction, and the court is equally deprived of the jurisdiction to take cognisance due to these lapses in law.

'Politically motivated' campaign exposed, say Congress leaders

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The BJP, however, said that the Rouse Avenue court's order is not a clean chit to the Gandhis

The "politically motivated prosecution" by the Narendra Modi government stands fully exposed, the Congress said on Tuesday after a court refused to take cognisance of the chargesheet filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the *National Herald* money laundering case against senior Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and others.

"The *mala fide* and illegality of the Modi government stand fully exposed. The court has ruled that the ED case is without jurisdiction; it has no FIR, without which there is no case. This politically motivated prosecution by the Modi government over the last decade of the principal Opposition party stands exposed before the people of India," the Congress said in a statement.

It said the case was part of a "political witch hunt" and "reputation assassination campaign" that has been defeated.

"No case of money laundering, no proceeds of crime and no movement of property; all baseless charges that have been a part of a political witch hunt, propaganda, reputation assassination and campaign which stands defeated today," the statement added.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said, "Today, the court too has declared the Modi government's actions illegal and foiled this conspiracy hatched with the malicious intent of political revenge. No matter how much force this 'vote-chor government' deploys to crush democracy, we will continue our fight for 1.4 billion Indians and to save this Constitution. The victory of truth is certain."

Party general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said, "The court has exposed the illegal and *mala fide* political targeting by the Narendra Modi government."

'Weird case'

Senior Congress spokesperson and advocate Abhishek Singhvi said he had described it as a "very weird case" with not "a millimetre movement of money or of immovable property."

The BJP, however, said that the Rouse Avenue court's order is not a clean chit to the Gandhis. "No cognisance is not a clean chit, law doesn't run on hashtags. The Dismissal is Procedural, Not on Merit. There is no finding in favour of the accused," BJP spokespsperson Gaurav Bhatia said in a X post, responding to Mr. Singhvi.

Delhi Police arrest 10 for inter-State digital fraud

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police have arrested 10 persons involved in an inter-State digital fraud, amounting to over ₹50 crore, by impersonating law enforcement officials.

The probe that began after a complaint lodged with the South East Delhi district police was taken forward with several raids across seven States – Delhi, Maharashtra, Kerala, Odisha, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.

The matter came to light when a complaint was filed on December 7 by a Shaheen Bagh resident, who alleged that he had been cheated of ₹99,888 by fraudsters who posed as the Karnataka police personnel and threatened him. An FIR was registered and a probe was launched.

During investigation, the police found that the arrested accused were part of an inter-State and cross-border network involving mule bank accounts, illegal SIM activation and social media authentication using multiple devices. "Probe showed that more than ₹50 crore was linked to at least 66 complaints registered against the accused on the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal," an officer said.

"One of the accused was arrested at the Mumbai airport while he was attempting to fly to Dubai," the officer said on Tuesday.

Centre should fill three lakh vacancies in ICDS: Sonia

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday raised concerns over the distress faced by women frontline workers, urging the Centre to double its contribution to their honorarium and fill nearly three lakh vacancies in the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).

Raising the issue during Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha, Ms. Gandhi said Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers, anganwadi workers and helpers, and community resource persons under the National Rural Livelihood Mission remain overburdened and underpaid despite their vital role in public service delivery.

"Across the country, ASHA workers undertake immunisation, mobilisation, maternal health, and family welfare. Yet, they remain volunteers with low honorarium and limited social security," she said.

Ms. Gandhi pointed out that anganwadi workers received a base honorarium of ₹4,500 and helpers ₹2,250 per month from the Centre.

She also flagged nearly three lakh vacancies in ICDS at various levels, leaving lakhs of children and mothers without essential services.

"Even when filled, these posts fall short of population norms due to the lack of updated Census figures since 2011," she said.

The Congress leader sought the appointment of an additional ASHA worker in villages with a population of over 2,500 and doubling the number of anganwadi workers to enable early childhood education alongside nutrition and health initiatives.

'Conscious' decision to separate funding from regulator, say officials on higher education Bill

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI


The new Bill has segregated the roles of regulation, accreditation, and standards-setting in the higher education sector. FILE PHOTO

The Union government's decision to take away funding powers from the regulatory authority and create separate regulatory, accreditation, and standards councils for higher education institutions under the proposed Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, was a 'conscious' move in keeping with the National Education Policy, 2020 suggestion to minimise conflicts of interest, senior government officials said on Tuesday.

They said that this is why the Bill has segregated the three roles of regulation, accreditation, and standards-setting. However, the officials said the grant-disbursal function currently being exercised by the University Grants Commission (UGC) is proposed to be performed by the Ministry of Education.

Without providing details, Education Ministry officials said that under the proposed law, the mechanism that will be used to disburse grants to Central universities "will be similar to or better than the existing mechanisms". They added that institutional performance on regulatory compliance will continue to be a "major factor" in deciding the quantum of funds to be distributed, but not the only one, citing the need for a "holistic view" while giving grants.

The VBSA Bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha on Monday amid objections from the Opposition, proposes an overhaul of India's higher education regulatory framework, replacing the UGC, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), with a single apex commission – the VBSA, which will coordinate between a regulatory, an accreditation, and a standards councils, operating "autonomously". Most notably, it takes away grant-disbursal power from the regulatory authority, a power that UGC exercises in the current system.

A coalition of teachers' and students' associations and unions from across the country have raised objections, among others, about the proposition to take away funding power from the regulatory authority, noting that leaving it in the direct control of the Education Ministry would risk grants being subject to "political influence".

Education Ministry officials explained that even though the NEP 2020 had suggested a separate Council for disbursing grants that the UGC currently disburses to Central universities, "it was a conscious decision that this is not going to be possible" because of the multiplicity of "sources and funnels" through which higher education institutes across the country receive funding.

As soon as the government introduced the Bill in the Lok Sabha on Monday, it proposed that the Bill be sent for deliberation to a 31-member joint committee of Parliament.

Officials said the government hopes to engage in an intense discussion over the Bill's provisions and is encouraging suggestions to be submitted to the panel.

Nadda defends SIR, asks Congress to look into 'actual reason' for its electoral losses

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI


Congress had misled people by creating 'false narrative' on SIR, says J.P. Nadda. SANSAD TV

The Rajya Sabha concluded the discussion on electoral reforms on Tuesday, with Leader of the House and Union Minister J.P. Nadda defending the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, and urging the Opposition to cooperate with electoral reforms as they are essential for democracy. The Opposition's response was spearheaded by Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien, who said SIR seeks to "divide, distract and deflect".

The Opposition Congress had misled the people of the country by creating a "false narrative" on SIR, Mr. Nadda said in his concluding remarks. The Congress had hurt national sentiments by questioning the Election Commission of India (EC) in order to hide its (the Congress's) electoral failures, he alleged. "Instead of blaming the Election Commission and electoral process, the Congress should find the actual reason for its successive defeats in elections," Mr. Nadda said.

No infiltrators would be included in the voter lists, or allowed to vote in elections, the Minister said. "The SIR falls within the Constitutional powers of the EC and it is the Commission's duty to periodically purify and rectify the electoral rolls to ensure no eligible voter is excluded from the list, and no ineligible voter is included. An attempt has been made to create an atmosphere in the country regarding the SIR...as if some rigging is taking place... The [Bihar] election results that have come in must surely trouble you (the Congress). You are applying the medicine somewhere, but the disease is somewhere else. You will have to find your own disease," he said.

Opposition's attack

Countering Union Home Minister Amit Shah's statement that the SIR is meant to "detect, delete, deport," Mr. O' Brien said the 'Ds' actually stood for "divide, distract and deflect". The Centre was using the SIR to divide people and "polarise the electorate on the basis of religion and language". "You speak Bengali in some other States and you are targeted as being Bangladeshis – that's divide," Mr. O' Brien said.

Cong. issues whip asking MPs to be present

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday issued a whip in the Lok Sabha, mandating its MPs to be present in the House for the next three days as key Bills such as the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill and a new Bill to overhaul laws governing India's civil nuclear sector are likely to come up for consideration.

The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill could be taken up for discussion on Wednesday.

INBRIEF



Rajya Sabha clears additional funds for fertilizer subsidy

The Rajya Sabha, on Tuesday, cleared the first batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants that authorises the Union government to additionally spend ₹41,455 crore in 2025-26. This includes over ₹ 18,000 crore towards fertilizer subsidy. The gross additional expenditure in the Supplementary Demands for Grants is ₹1.32 lakh crore, in which ₹90,812.17 crore is savings by various Ministries. The Supplementary Demands for Grants also has allocation of ₹9,500 crore to the Petroleum Ministry to compensate oil marketing companies for under-recoveries and ₹1,304 crore for additional expenditure by the Department of Higher Education.

'Nitish was fatherly when he pulled hijab off doctor's face'

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had acted in a "fatherly" manner when he pulled the hijab off a young woman's face, Minority Affairs Minister Zama Khan said on Tuesday. The incident, which happened on Monday at a function where AYUSH doctors were handed appointment letters, triggered a controversy. "The CM is, perhaps, older than the father of the woman in question. I have a daughter, and I could sense the fatherly affection he had expressed," Mr. Khan said. More than 1,000 AYUSH doctors were handed appointment letters at the function, and 10 of them, including Nusrat Parveen, who was wearing a hijab, received theirs from Mr. Kumar.

Lok Sabha passes Bill for repealing obsolete laws

The Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed a Bill for repealing or amending 71 obsolete and outdated laws, including the Indian Succession Act. The proposed legislation is aimed at removing outdated laws, correcting errors that had crept in during the law-making process and removing discriminatory aspects of certain laws, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal said. He said the progressive legislation would contribute to ease of living for citizens.

INBRIEF



India-Maldives joint military exercise EKUVERIN concludes

The bilateral military exercise EKUVERIN between the Indian Army and the Maldives National Defence Forces (MNDF) concluded with a joint validation exercise in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday, marking the culmination of two weeks of intensive training. The validation phase was witnessed by Major-General R.D. Sharma of the Indian Army and Brigadier General Abdulla Ibrahim from the Maldivian side, along with observer delegations from both countries. The Indian Army said that the exercise focused on Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorist operations in contemporary operational environments, with the aim of enhancing interoperability, operational synergy.

34 Maoists surrender in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur

Thirty-four CPI(Maoist) cadres, including 26 carrying a cumulative bounty of ₹84 lakh, laid down their arms in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur on Tuesday, the police said. "As a result of the State government's comprehensive anti-Naxal policy, 34 Maoist cadres have today decided to abandon the path of violence and return to the mainstream of society. The group includes 7 women and 27 men," Bijapur Superintendent of Police Jitendra Yadav said. Under the government's rehabilitation process, each cadre will be provided with immediate financial assistance of ₹50,000 as an incentive, a police press release stated.

Area where *deepathoon* is located belongs to the dargah: T.N. Waqf Board

It cites the judgment in the 1920 Original Suit on demarcating the portions belonging to the temple and the Sikandar Badusha Dargah; says issue can be resolved through 'court-monitored mediation'

The Hindu Bureau
MADURAI

The Tamil Nadu Waqf Board on Tuesday contended before the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court that as per the judgment in the 1920 Original Suit, the summit of Thiruparankundram hill and its adjuncts, "including where the stone pillar (*deepathoon*) was located", belonged to a dargah.

A Division Bench of Justices G. Jayachandran and K.K. Ramakrishnan continued to hear the appeals preferred against the order of Justice G.R. Swaminathan, who had directed the Subramaniya Swamy temple management to light the Karthigai Deepam at the *deepathoon* besides the usual spots, as well as other related appeals.

Advocate R. Abdul Mubeen, representing the Tamil Nadu Waqf Board, referred to the judgment in the 1920 Original Suit on demarcating the portions belonging to the temple and the Sikandar Badusha Dargah. He said that as per the order, the flight of steps from Nellithope, the summit of the hill, and its adjuncts, including a mandapam, belonged to the dargah/mohammedans.



Contentious issue: Justice G.R. Swaminathan had directed the Subramaniya Swamy temple management to light the Karthigai Deepam at the *deepathoon* besides the usual spots. FILE PHOTO

"The stone pillar or *deepathoon* was accessible from the dargah," he said, but added that the issue could be resolved through a "court-monitored mediation".

Imagined notion

Senior Advocate Vikas Singh, representing the Madurai Collector and Commissioner of Police, said the stone pillar being called a *deepathoon* was a figment of imagination of the petitioners, and the Single Bench had latched on to it. He said there was no mention of the *deepathoon* in previous court orders.

The petitioner, in his representation to the temple authorities, had not made a mention of it. The petitioner has no legal right to seek lighting of the deepam at the stone pillar/*deepathoon*. However, the Single Bench proceeded and issued the direction in favour of the petitioners. The people of Thiruparankundram were living peacefully.

However, following the Single Bench order, the issue was being discussed as though Tamil Nadu was against Hindus, he said, adding that the State had to consider public order.

The senior counsel appearing for the petitioners, however, contended that the State's stand that the deepam was lit only at the Uchipillaiyar temple has been taken for the purpose of this case.

The court will continue to hear the appeal on Wednesday.

SC to examine plea seeking safeguard of intersex children

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Petition calls for intersex recognition alongside male and female options in the Census, other forms

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to examine in detail a petition filed by intersex rights activist Gopi Shankar Madurai seeking urgent safeguards for intersex children, including a ban on non-consensual sex-selective surgeries on intersex infants, and comprehensive recognition in official records.

"This is a very good issue. We want to hear this," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, accompanied by Justice Joymalya Bagchi, remarked.

The Chief Justice ordered the petition to be placed before a larger Bench of three judges the next time.

The petitioner, represented by advocate Astha Deep, urged the inclusion of intersex infants in India's population Census, which currently overlooks this diverse group by enforcing binary sex norms.

"This invisibility affects over 25 million intersex individuals (1.7% of the population), denying them access to welfare, healthcare, and identity services. Inclusion of intersex in the national Census is crucial for accurate data collection and policy-making," the petitioner submitted.

The petition called for intersex recognition alongside the existing male and female options in the Census and other forms.

The case underscored the vital need for the judiciary and government to distinguish between sex identity and gender identity, and to clarify that intersex persons were not transgender.

"Sex identity referred to innate biological variations, including intersex traits that did not fit typical male or female binaries, whereas gender identity was a personal and social construct often involving a mismatch with assigned sex (as in transgender experiences). The conflation of these terms in laws, identity documents such as Aadhaar and passports, and policies leads to forced interventions on infants, and discrimination. Issuing cards that separately record sex and gender is urged to uphold Articles 14, 15, and 21, fostering dignity and equality," the petitioner submitted.

'IndiGo will implement new norms before Feb.10'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Tuesday told the Delhi High Court that it will ensure IndiGo implements the new pilot rest and duty norms expeditiously, despite the regulator granting the airline an exemption until February 10.

Appearing before a Bench of Justice Amit Sharma in connection with a contempt plea moved by a pilot body seeking proceedings against the regulator for relaxations to various airlines, the DGCA said the "exemptions are not granted happily". The Bench asked the top officials of the DGCA to file their response.

The court listed the case for the next hearing on April 17, 2026.

Rashtrapati Bhavan displays portraits of all 21 Param Vir Chakra awardees

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

Portraits of all 21 Param Vir Chakra awardees are now on display at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, replacing the previously displayed portraits of 96 British *Aide-de-Camps* (ADCs).

The Param Vir Chakra is India's highest military honour, awarded for displaying the most exceptional acts of valour, courage, and self-sacrifice during war.

The initiative aims to honour the memory of soldiers who had laid down their lives in the service of the nation. President Droupadi Murmu inaugurated the 'Param Vir Dirgha' at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Tuesday, on the occasion of Vijay Divas.

"The move will assist in educating visitors about our national heroes who displayed dauntless resolve and unconquerable spirit in defending our nation. The initiative to display portraits of Indian national heroes marks a step toward shedding the colonial mindset and embracing, with pride, the richness of India's culture, heritage, and timeless traditions," a release issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan said.



President Droupadi Murmu felicitates a veteran official during the inauguration of the 'Param Vir Dirgha' gallery in New Delhi. PTI

The government had been working to restore pride in India's "sanatan values", with prominent changes including the renaming of the Rajpath to Kartavya Path, a senior Central government official said.

Similarly, the Indian Navy's ensign has shed the Saint George's Cross, adopting instead a design featuring the National Flag and a Navy blue-gold octagon dedicated to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. The 2022 Republic Day Beating Retreat ceremony, part of the '*Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav*', embraced Indian instruments, including the sitar, santoor, and tabla.

Decolonial renaming

Across India, including on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, colonial nomenclature has been replaced, the official said.

In 2018, Ross Island was renamed Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Dweep, Neil Island became Shaheed Dweep, and Havelock Island was renamed Swaraj Dweep.

In 2024, the capital of the Union Territory, Port Blair, was renamed Sri Vijaya Puram, and 21 islands were named after Param Vir Chakra awardees. The Rashtrapati Bhavan's Mughal Garden was renamed Amrit Udyan.

"Through various initiatives, the Centre is dismantling colonial legacies," the official said.

Indian Army receives final batch of Apache helicopters

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

The Indian Army on Tuesday received the final batch of three AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, completing its six-unit fleet at the 451 Army Aviation Squadron based in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. The helicopters landed at the Air Force Station, Hindon, in Ghaziabad before being inducted into the service.

The Apaches were contracted in February 2020 under a $600-million deal with the United States. The first batch of three helicopters was delivered earlier this year, and the arrival of the final batch will ensure full operationalisation of the Army's dedicated Apache squadron.

The six advanced attack helicopters will be stationed at Jodhpur. The squadron was raised in March last year to cater specifically to operational requirements on the western front.



Taking flight: The AH-64E Apache is regarded as the world's most advanced multi-role combat helicopter. AFP

The deliveries come against the backdrop of a telephonic conversation between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth in July this year, during which both sides reviewed ongoing and upcoming initiatives to strengthen bilateral defence cooperation. During the talks, the United States had assured India of delivering the first batch of three Apaches within two weeks and the remaining three by November this year. The first batch was delivered after a delay of nearly 15 months from the original delivery schedule of May 2024, primarily due to global supply chain disruptions.

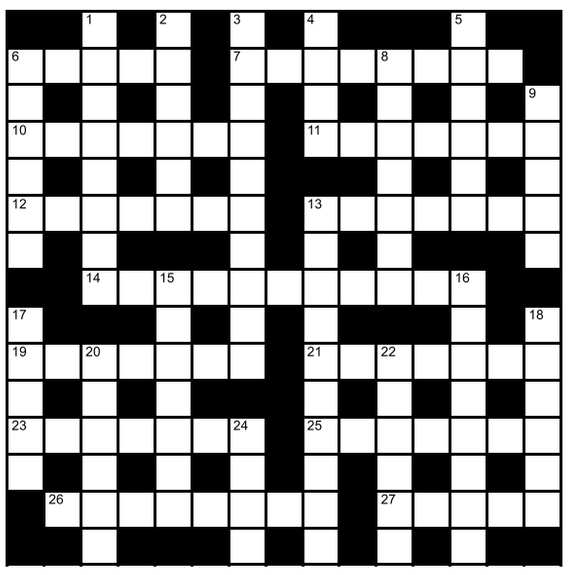
The AH-64E Apache is regarded as the world's most advanced multi-role combat helicopter.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD + 14667

(set by Arden)

Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at *https://crossword.thehindu.com*

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

6 A short distance to a new capital (5)
7 West averts calamity with change in leadership (8)
10 Nobility's bid to acquire jewelry occasionally (7)
11 Discharge private detective finally (7)
12 Almost in hostile region of central Tuscany (7)
13 College study, within one metre (7)
14 Source, in other words for a rapid, intense training (5,6)
19 Team refused, sorry to reject a novice (7)
21 Choose to block river? One follows (7)
23 Fail to incorporate law on milk product (7)
25 Take it and you would be upset (7)
26 Proceed before one finally leaves - they make you laugh (8)
27 Deadly, not able to sustain (5)

Down

1 One doesn't remember the middle name, in case lost (8)
2 Harry relocates to skip national service, to no avail (2,4)
3 Invitation to success - she is flirtatious (4-6)
4 Book on laws (4)
5 Hotel accommodating not even their trainee (6)
6 For a cap, lady came up with some wool (6)
8 He makes sense of animal eating fish (7)
9 It's safe to taper off (5)
13 Could be a sudden downpour (10)
15 One came up like a needle (7)
16 Transport at the door (8)
17 Bird bit off dog's head (5)
18 Space traveller's remote adjustment (6)
20 Discontented with Anglican Church, our host (6)
22 Infection causing bacteria gets energy after six (6)
24 Not good to stay up (4)

SUDOKU

7			8	5				
8		3				5		
		1			2	4		7
			1	3		9	6	
				7				
	3	6		8	9			
4		5	9			6		
		9				1		4
				6	4			5

No.SS6733 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle

C	S	M	T	W	J	C		
T	A	I	P	E	I	O	R	I
G	I	N	A	L	N	U	N	S
N	U	S	R	O	U	T	I	N
S	I	D	E	J	O	B	S	O
U	D	Y	I	A	A	D	U	M
B	R	A	T	E	I	T	C	H
Y	L	E	H	A	S	R	E	F
R	E	S	H	E	R	C	O	U
R	S	E	E	S	I	E	A	E
N	E	M	Y	C	R	O	T	C
H	E	T	S	E	I	S	Y	A
U	E	C	O	N	O	M	I	C
A	L	Z	E	R	O	T	D	E
I	E	A	D	T	A	K	E	P
A	R	T	N	O	R	W	A	Y
R	R	R	E	E	D	Y		

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

9	8	1	2	4	3	6	5	7
5	4	6	1	7	8	9	3	2
7	3	2	6	9	5	8	4	1
4	1	7	9	8	2	3	6	5
6	5	8	4	3	1	2	7	9
3	2	9	7	5	6	1	8	4
1	7	4	3	6	9	5	2	8
8	9	3	5	2	4	7	1	6
2	6	5	8	1	7	4	9	3

FAITH

Vyasa's contributions

In the first three yugas – Krita yuga, Treta Yuga and Dwapara yuga, the Vedas were just one body of knowledge, explained Thenthirupperai Aravindalochanan in a discourse. But sage Vyasa divided Vedic literature into four, and gave it to us as Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva Vedas. But why did he have to do this? People had a huge life span in the earlier yugas, but that is not the case in Kali yuga. The grasping power of those in Kali yuga is also less than that of those who lived in the first three yugas. So, it is for the benefit of those born in Kali, that Vyasa organised the Vedas.

Vyasa is an avatara of Lord Vishnu. The Vedas are like an ocean. Vyasa churned this ocean using his intelligence as the churning rod, and it was from this churning of the Vedas, that he came up with the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata contains information on the dharma which we have to follow. The Mahabharata was born to explain the Vedas, which are difficult to comprehend. The Mahabharata also has many stories and stories within stories. Vyasa wrote the 18 Puranas too. Vyasa had four disciples – Paila, Vaisampayana, Jaimini and Sumanthu, through whom he preserved the Vedas, the Itihasas and Puranas. But the Ramayana was written by Valmiki long before Vyasa, and Valmiki popularised the Itihasa through Lava and Kusa, the sons of Rama. How can we credit Vyasa with preservation of the Ramayana? The Ramayana took place in the Treta yuga. And people could have forgotten it or remembered it incompletely by the time Dwapara yuga arrived. Vyasa taught the Ramayana to his disciples, and thus may be said to be the preserver of the Ramayana also.

Inhalable microplastics, a hidden toxin worsening the air in our cities

A study which researched the threat posed by inhalable microplastics has warned that they can also smuggle in toxic co-pollutants, including heavy metals such as lead and cadmium, and hormone-disrupting chemical compounds like diethyl phthalates; researchers found atmospheric lead levels to be highest in Kolkata, followed by Delhi

Neelanjana Rai

On successive weekends in November, hundreds of Delhi residents gathered at India Gate holding placards that read, "I miss breathing" and "right to live, not just survive". Winter's onset has once again plunged the National Capital Region into dense smog, with the air quality index refusing to exit 'severe' (301-400) or 'very poor' (201-300) levels.

Even now, regulators are scrambling to enforce graded action plans to mitigate the concentration of PM2.5 and PM10 particles in the air.

Into this toxic mix, new research has introduced a previously overlooked problem known as inhalable microplastics. According to scientists, they pose a direct and alarming risk to human health.

Atmospheric pollution has traditionally been associated with the so-called criteria pollutants; aside from the two size-wise groups of particulate matter, these include carbon monoxide, lead, sulphur oxides, nitrogen oxides, and ozone. Of late, however, they've been joined by respirable emerging contaminants – including inhalable microplastics – fuelled in no small part by the production of 400 million metric tonnes of plastics every year. The world also releases 52.1 million tonnes a year of plastic waste into the environment.

A first-of-its-kind comprehensive study published in *Environment International* in November examined inhalable microplastics in India. These are plastic particles smaller than 10 micrometres (µm). The researchers, led by Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Kolkata professor Gopala Krishna Darbha, monitored ambient concentrations at human breathing height (1.5 m) in five highly populated markets in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai.

Thus, the team estimated the average concentration of inhalable microplastics in all four cities to be 8.8 µg/m³.

This "means the average city resident is breathing in about 132 micrograms every single day," Dr. Darbha said. "This is a very high daily dose of pollution. The most critical factor is the size of these particles. They are so tiny that they can bypass our natural defences and penetrate deep into the lungs. This chronic exposure presents a serious, ongoing risk to public health."

Researchers, however, said that the greater danger is these plastic particles serving as Trojan horses that smuggle in toxic co-pollutants, including heavy metals like lead and cadmium and hormone-disrupting chemical compounds like diethyl phthalates. The team found atmospheric lead levels to be highest in Kolkata, followed by Delhi.

The team members also found, reportedly for the first time, that the inhalable microplastics can also carry microbes, including harmful fungi like *Aspergillus fumigatus*, that contain antibiotic-resistance genes, meaning they could spread infections that don't respond to common antibiotics.

By comparing this information with major toxicology databases, the team found that breathing these contaminated plastic particles was associated with a higher risk of cancer, hormone-related diseases, breast problems, and respiratory illnesses.



A smoggy winter morning, in Gurugram, on December 16, 2025. PTI

Time and place

In all four cities, winter evenings had a mean inhalable microplastic concentration of 32.7 particles/m³ while non-winter evenings averaged 18.8 particles/m³, reflecting a 74% seasonal increase during winter.

There was a significant inter-city variation as well: the data revealed that the residents of Delhi and Kolkata were exposed to high concentrations of inhalable microplastics – 14.18 µg/m³ and 14.23 µg/m³ respectively – whereas Mumbai (2.65 µg/m³) and Chennai (4 µg/m³) fared much better.

"The major factors here are meteorological conditions," Dr. Darbha said alluding to Mumbai and Chennai being coastal cities. "Second is urban population density, and the third is waste mismanagement."

Zeroing in on the particles themselves, the researchers identified 11 kinds of plastics in the air, most of them coming from places the researchers said people usually overlook.

> The most critical factor is the size of these particles. They are so tiny that they can bypass our natural defences and penetrate deep into the lungs. This chronic exposure presents a serious, ongoing risk to public health
>
> **GOPALA KRISHNA DARBHA**
> INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH KOLKATA

"The particles were primarily less than 100 µm in size (56.2%), followed by 100–500 µm (24.7%) and over 500 µm (19.1%). Fragments were more common than filaments," the team wrote in its paper.

"Larger filament-shaped airborne microplastics typically ... originate from synthetic textiles or toy fillings. Smaller fragments, often secondary airborne microplastics, arising from packaging, tyre wear, household release, cosmetics, mini- and micro-industries, construction, [and] were more prevalent due to their small size and weathering, particularly in areas like Sealdah Market and Chandni Chowk."

Policy imperative

According to Dr. Darbha, the current air quality index may capture "a certain percentage of nanoplastics" but describes the existing evidence as "too preliminary" to correlate AQI values with inhalable microplastics. He did say workers such as traffic police and labourers are especially vulnerable, since "tyre-wear particles seem to be more carcinogenic and may be a severe threat to their lungs. Policy reform is needed to protect such vulnerable groups."

The study also said the particles persist in the air due to low gravitational settling velocity.

"The government should ban single use plastic and many such polymers," he said, adding that cotton-based clothing is preferable to synthetics and that "recycled and refurbished polyester or reused fabrics ... are capable of releasing these tiny plastics."

He also said that uncontrolled waste disposal, improper waste segregation, and burning emitted poisonous gases and smaller particulate matter, some of which could piggyback on the inhalable microplastic particles into our lungs.

Overall Dr. Darbha said the study provides a new baseline for an emerging environmental crisis: "This is a starting point, and we are definitely looking forward to more results coming up in the country, to have more knowledge-sharing in the ... scientific community as well as among the common public to have more awareness."

Against the backdrop of the accumulating evidence of the persistence and harms of microplastic and nanoplastic pollution, the researchers also expressed hope that the Indian government would take serious measures regarding plastic disposal and worsening air quality.

(Neelanjana Rai is a freelance journalist who writes about indigenous communities, environment, science and health. neelanjana189@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Atmospheric pollution has traditionally been associated with criteria pollutants; they have now been joined by respirable contaminants fuelled by the annual production of 400 million metric tonnes of plastics, and the release of 52.1 million tonnes of plastic waste

Researchers found that inhalable microplastics can also carry microbes that contain antibiotic-resistance genes; these contaminated plastic particles were also found to be associated with a higher risk of cancer, hormone-related diseases, breast problems, and respiratory illnesses

In all four cities, winter evenings had a mean inhalable microplastic concentration of 32.7 particles/m³ while non-winter evenings averaged 18.8 particles/m³. There was significant inter-city variation: Delhi and Kolkata fared much worse than Mumbai and Chennai

BIG SHOT



Under the Nutri3D project, scientists in Italy's public research agency are developing sweet snacks with lab-grown plant cells and fruit residues, producing a material that a 3D printer can then process into 'pastries' with high nutritional content. REUTERS

QUESTION CORNER

Wisdom teeth: evolutionary relic

Vasudevan Mukunth

Q: Why do we have wisdom teeth?

A: The wisdom teeth are the third molars that sit at the very back of the jaw. They usually start forming in the teens and try to erupt in the late teens to the mid-20s, hence the name "wisdom".

We have wisdom teeth because of our ancestors, whose lives demanded more chewing to get through.

For most stretches of their evolution, humans' diets were tougher and grittier, including uncooked plants, fibrous roots, meat unsoftened by modern tools, and nuts and seeds. So chewing them led to more cavities and cracks (relative to today) and wore teeth down faster.

Having an 'extra set' of grinding teeth could help adult humans keep eating well into midlife before experiencing discomfort.

These human ancestors also tended to have larger jaws. Over thousands of years, however, human diets and technologies changed and cooking and other forms of processing foods reduced the daily chewing load.

At the same time, the average jaw size declined in many populations, leaving less room at the back for the third molars to erupt cleanly. This is an example of 'evolutionary mismatch', where our genes build teeth suited to older diets but our modern jaws and foods don't match those conditions.



Having an 'extra set' of grinding teeth could help adult humans keep eating well into midlife before experiencing discomfort. ENIS YAVUZ/UNSPLASH

The wisdom teeth are the last adult teeth to erupt, so they compete for space after the jaw has already settled. Sometimes they emerge at awkward angles, if they emerge at all, and require dental care if they become a source of discomfort.

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Stepping stone

India's nuclear governance needs regulatory independence

Nuclear power contributed only around 3% of the electricity generated in India in 2024-25. The government has set a target to install 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047, including from at least five indigenous small modular reactors by 2033. In this picture, the SHANTI Bill proposes to change who can legally build and operate civil nuclear facilities. By allowing the Centre to permit nuclear energy activities through licences to government entities, joint ventures and "any other company" (subject to conditions), SHANTI indicates that the intended new class of operators is domestic private capital rather than foreign plant owners. India being able to meet its 100 GW target will indeed require large capital mobilisation, and allowing licensed non-government entities expands the roster of entities that can share the construction risk. SHANTI also seeks to keep the most sensitive fuel cycles in state control while holding room for private participation in plant delivery and parts of the supply chain, reducing scope of commercial entry to those segments most relevant to scale power generation and keeping functions sensitive to nuclear proliferation with the state. The Bill could also mitigate the legal ambiguity new entrants face by putting safety, enforcement and dispute resolution and the terms of participation in the same statute. This could also reduce transaction costs for developers and shrink site approval and commissioning timelines.

However, the Bill's liability and governance provisions warrant caution. The maximum operator liability for a nuclear incident is ₹3,000 crore. The Centre is liable for nuclear damage beyond the operator's cap and can also assume full liability for a non-government installation if in the public interest. These choices make investment risk easier to price but also ask whether the capped operator amount is adequate for victims and for environmental remediation. Second, SHANTI requires operators to maintain insurance or other financial security, but exempts the Centre's nuclear installations, rendering clear public accounting very important. It also allows operator recourse only when expressly provided in a written contract or when an incident is due to an act or an omission with the intent to cause nuclear damage. This makes supplier accountability depend largely on what the operator secures by contract, which means how much recourse the operator has against suppliers can vary across projects. Finally, India's nuclear governance needs to address its regulator's independence. While SHANTI creates a statutory framework, it also vests significant influence in appointments with the Centre and the Atomic Energy Commission. This is still not conducive to increasing public trust and may also deter investor confidence.

Blatant foul

U.S.'s militarised approach to Venezuela is a violation of international law

In line with a series of hostile moves, the U.S. seized a Venezuelan oil tanker, *Skipper*, on December 10. Venezuela called it the latest example of Washington's "piracy, kidnapping, theft of private property, extrajudicial executions in international waters". The tanker was part of Venezuela's ongoing efforts to support Cuba through subsidised oil shipments, with proceeds from resale to China providing Havana crucial revenue. For decades, Venezuela has sent oil to Cuba at highly subsidised prices, with Cuba sending doctors and security professionals to Venezuela. The seizure represents a troubling escalation in U.S. policy toward Venezuela under President Nicolás Maduro. It is also clear that the U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, a major hawk on U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba, has sought to disrupt one of the island nation's economic lifelines. The overt moves to engineer regime change in Venezuela and other brazen acts mark a new low in U.S. foreign policy, recalling the interventionist era of its Monroe Doctrine in Latin America.

Before the seizure of *Skipper*, the U.S. had also conducted strikes in Caribbean waters on boats that Washington alleged were used by drug traffickers. These attacks appear to constitute acts of war carried out without clear legislative authorisation. The Trump administration insists that the operations are part of its "war on drugs", but has not presented credible evidence to link Mr. Maduro to cartels or to drug trafficking networks. To be clear, Mr. Maduro is credibly accused of manipulating the results in the 2024 presidential elections and his government also bears substantial responsibility for Venezuela's crippling economic collapse. But, acknowledging its failures does nothing to justify the Trump administration's hostile approach. Be it the disproportionate economic sanctions that hurt Venezuela's ability to sell its crude oil, covert actions to take down the Maduro presidency, the ill-conceived recognition of an opposition politician, Juan Guaidó, as President, or the extrajudicial killings in the Caribbean and the seizure of the oil tanker, these actions are tantamount to flouting the rules of the international order that the U.S. purports to uphold. The parallel with U.S. policy towards Cuba since the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s is instructive. The U.S. has maintained an embargo on trade to force regime change in the island nation. The world must condemn these moves, even while maintaining the critique of the Venezuelan regime. A principled defence of international law that applies equally to all actors, including the rich and the powerful, is an imperative so that the world does not descend further into anarchy.

The Trump NSS, Europe's existential crisis



Priyanjali Malik

writes on nuclear politics and security

Hope is not a strategy. For most of this year, European leaders have hoped that the Trump Administration has not actually meant its President's oscillating support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), its Vice-President's berating his European hosts in Munich over their liberal values and immigration policies, President Donald Trump's tirade against migration at the United Nations, and of course his mercurial support for Ukraine. The hope was that, all things considered, America would ultimately stand with Europe.

The Trump Administration's National Security Strategy – a 33 page document that spends much time congratulating the President for saving America from apparently terminal decline as it charts an unapologetically MAGA-esque America-first mercantilist position – appears not to notice Africa, Australia and New Zealand. It sweeps by Asia as it focuses strongly on perceived trade imbalances with China and lands squarely on a defence of the 'Western Hemisphere' according to American interests while lamenting the decline of Europe. Europe is a problem, not an ally.

The stand on Europe

In 'Promoting European Greatness', the NSS warns of Europe's 'civilizational erasure', precipitated by the European Union (EU)'s policies on migration and freedom of speech, 'the suppression of political opposition', and the 'loss of national identities and self-confidence'. In case there was any doubt about which migrants were unwelcome, the NSS declares that if Europe continues on its present trajectory, 'within a few decades ... certain NATO members will become majority non-European.' The U.S. will help Europe regain its 'former greatness' by choosing 'patriotic European parties' to promote what this administration views as 'genuine democracy' and 'unapologetic celebrations of European nations' individual character and history'. To most Europeans, at best this reads as a meddling in the internal politics of sovereign nations, and at worst as regime change.

Europe, the NSS states, needs to stand on its own feet, assume 'primary responsibility for its own defense' and re-establish 'strategic stability with Russia'. NATO 'cannot be a perpetually expanding alliance', a warning of course to Ukraine, but also an interesting glossing over of Sweden and Finland's accession to the alliance after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. In this document, the threat is not Russia and its invasion of a sovereign nation, but Europe's cultural decay. The tramp of the jackboots of 1930s Europe echos with every mention of civilisational decline.

> With the Trump Administration's National Security Strategy making it clear that American support to Europe is now faint, it remains to be seen how Europe responds

Of course, an administration's national security strategy is not policy, but a guide to its thinking. They can and have been over-ridden by events, most notably George H.W. Bush's 1990 NSS, which was overtaken by the fall of the Berlin Wall, German reunification and the first Gulf War. Observers could chart the evolution of the administration's thinking in the two subsequent iterations of 1991 and 1993.

As a high-level document, the NSS often provides the lens through which to interpret an administration's foreign policy goals and is assumed to set the tone for the administration's national defence strategy, its Quadrennial Defense Review and national military strategy. Mr. Trump's famously mercurial nature might caution against viewing it as declared policy. However, given that this is a Congress-mandated document, it is more than just a rhetorical exercise: while it should not be taken literally, it should be taken seriously.

What Europe's response could be

As the dust settles, Europe now faces three options in responding: it can ignore the NSS and hope that it will go away; its leaders can dial up their flattery of Mr. Trump in the hope that he will change his mind on Europe; or Europe can face up to the prospect that Mr. Trump's America is not a reliable ally and that they will need to fend for themselves.

Europe tried a mixture of the first two strategies after J.D. Vance's outburst at the Munich Security Conference. After some tepid talk of needing to pull together to see off Russian President Vladimir Putin's 'imperialist' ambitions in trying to 'rewrite history' or the need for Europe to wean itself off U.S. dependence, Europe doubled down on doing whatever it would take to keep America in NATO and Europe. Britain flattered Mr. Trump with an invitation for an unprecedented second state visit. Germany's Friedrich Merz forgot about his observations of February this year as Chancellor-in-waiting that his 'absolute priority will be to strengthen Europe ... so that ... we can really achieve independence from the USA'.

Germany has since abandoned half-explored plans of developing European capabilities and ordered more American military kit, which is dependent on American intelligence to work. NATO's Hague Summit of June this year will be remembered as much for European states agreeing to raise their military spending to 5% of GDP as for Secretary-General Mark Rutte's calling Mr. Trump 'Daddy.'

The third option will not be easy. Europe has never defended itself as an entity and there is no concept of integrated European defence. Even limited projects of joint development of military kit tend not to get very far, as the stalled Franco-German project on sixth generation fighter jets demonstrates. If the U.S. pulls American troops out of Europe – as this administration has periodically hinted it might do – then Europe will have a serious manpower problem that experiments in 'voluntary' conscription will not even begin to address. Then there is the question of nuclear deterrence and Britain's uneasy post-Brexit relationship with the EU and Europe.

The state of the world order

How Europe responds will have implications beyond the continent. Mr. Trump's NSS, with its attack on transnational institutions (that he insists 'undermine political liberty and sovereignty'), its dismantling of the post-war trading order in favour of a mercantilist America-first policy; and the signalling of a U.S. retreat into its own 'Hemisphere' (however that might be defined, and with the implication that China and Russia are free to carve up the rest of the world as long as they do not impinge on America's trading footprint) have profound implications for the rest of the world. The post-war world order that America helped shape and uphold is imperfect and crumbling. The power imbalances at the United Nations and the Bretton Woods Institutions that help anchor expectations of peace, security, development and trade reflect an outdated world order. But, however imperfect this rules-based system might be, it is still a bulwark against a descent into a Hobbesian free-for-all, where might makes right.

The debate about this National Security Strategy is, therefore, not about a document that might shed light on an administration's thinking. It is about whether Europe chooses to defend a rules-based liberal order or defers to a President whose transactional and racist view of the world will have consequences that stretch far beyond his borders.

The three revolutions reshaping American power



Anil Raman

is Research Fellow, Takshashila Institution and a retired brigadier

When United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio proposed restructuring the G-20 into an elite "inner caucus" of powerful states, it should have dominated the week's geopolitical news. It signalled a major reordering of global economic governance, shifting rule-making to a narrower group and weakening emerging economies. Yet, the proposal barely registered. It was immediately eclipsed by the release of the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), that embodied the same underlying ideological shift. Days later, the Heritage Foundation, the intellectual core of U.S. President Donald Trump's MAGA project, issued its own blueprint, Restoring America's Promise: 2025-26.

The alignment between the G-20 restructuring, the NSS, and Heritage 2026 reveals three simultaneous revolutions in American statecraft: a transformation of political morality, a recasting of foreign policy, and a restructuring of global economic governance. The common thread is the institutionalisation of exclusion and the acceptance of unequal burdens as policy design rather than error. In this sense, cruelty functions as an analytical term, capturing a system in which harm is anticipated, normalised, and strategically deployed.

Shrinking of civic space

The first revolution is internal. Mr. Trump's political project dismantled the traditional moral architecture of American public life. Norms of restraint, institutional deference and civic responsibility gave way to an ethos where transgression signalled authenticity and the erosion of shame became a political asset. The NSS integrates this shift into formal doctrine by treating internal cultural cohesion, ideological alignment and demographic stability as national security requirements.

The Heritage document demands bureaucratic remaking, ideological vetting, and mass personnel turnover. The NSS echoes this through sovereign autonomy, institutional suspicion and domestic culture as security treating independent institutions not as correctives but as obstacles to political will.

Cruelty here takes the form of permissive indifference: hardship from administrative purges, narrowing civic space, or punitive regulatory change is not acknowledged as collateral damage but folded seamlessly into the architecture of governance.

> The central thread around the internal, external and economic policies is an 'architecture of cruelty', where harm is anticipated, normalised, and strategically deployed

Foreign policy around conditionality

The second revolution is external. The U.S. traditionally relied on predictable commitments and institutional stability. Even Mr. Trump's first-term disruptions occurred within recognisable boundaries. The 2025 NSS departs sharply from this tradition.

Alliances are reframed as conditional transactional contracts with obligations justified continuously. The Western Hemisphere displaces Europe and the Indo-Pacific as the primary theatre, reviving the Monroe Doctrine. Migration, a domestic concern, is elevated into the central security threat, while institutions once amplifying American power are described as constraints on sovereignty.

The Heritage document provides the ideological framework. It frames multilateral bodies as infringements of sovereignty, border control as geopolitics, and allied compliance as contingent on ideological alignment, not shared interest.

The result is neither isolationism nor traditional realism. It is selective dominance: assertion where leverage is high, retreat where obligations are costly, and judging partnerships by conformity not capability. The structural effect is fragile alliances, revisionist adversaries and a fragmentation of global order.

The third revolution is economic. Mr. Rubio's G-20 proposal is not an administrative adjustment but the formalisation of a tiered global economy, an architecture of privileged rule-makers and peripheral rule-takers. Decision-making on debt relief, trade standards and climate finance will consolidate within a narrower circle of states with the capacity to shape outcomes.

The NSS fits precisely within this trajectory. Its emphasis on reshoring, tariff leverage and industrial sovereignty promoted toward a hemispheric economic model centred on North America. Heritage 2026 expands on the logic: globalisation is treated as a strategic vulnerability and multilateral economic systems as threats to national autonomy.

The consequences will be felt disproportionately by countries with limited negotiation power. Debt restructuring will become more conditional, supply chain diversification more politically selective, and access to global capital more closely tied to geopolitical alignment. The predictable hardship that follows, from inflationary pressures to disrupted export markets, will fall on global and domestic workers.

Cruelty here is systemic: unequal distribution of economic pain is treated as a mechanism for stabilising a more hierarchical global order

A return of imperial logic

Across these three revolutions runs a common thread: the restoration of a colonial-imperial mindset. Not territorial colonialism but a structural world-view built on hierarchy, entitlement, and the presumption that the strong may impose costs while the weak absorb them.

The NSS provides bureaucratic vocabulary; the Heritage supplies the ideological foundations.

The analytical utility of cruelty lies in naming this organising logic. It captures a system where the suffering generated by policy is neither incidental nor unfortunate but integrated into the functioning of the political and economic order.

The G-20 restructuring and the 2025 NSS are manifestations of the same deeper shift. The world is entering an era where the U.S. seeks to protect its sovereignty through contraction, assert influence through hierarchy, and reshape global governance through exclusion.

The final irony is that the victims of this reordering are not confined to distant shores. They live in Maputo and Dhaka, yes, but also in Harlan, Kentucky. The architecture of cruelty is global, but its consequences are intimate. It reaches the world, but it also circles back home.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MGNREGA replaced

Twenty years since the initiation of MGNREGA, a welfare policy that assured 100 days of guaranteed employment has seen an erosion and the addition of political colour. Welfare schemes, irrespective of political differences, should be left untouched and all-out efforts must be made to continue and improve the schemes, which should be the foremost priority for effective governance. The name change is inappropriate; equally so the increased financial burden on States.

Balasubramaniam Pavani,
Secunderabad

The proposed restructuring of NREGA, shifting nearly 40% of the funding onus to States, is a major alteration of a consequential social safety net. The Bill warrants scrutiny by a Parliamentary Standing Committee, given its implications for rural livelihoods, fiscal federalism and constitutional balance. States differ vastly in fiscal capacity. So, transferring expenditure responsibility without assured revenue devolution risks hollowing out the programme where it is needed most. The Finance Commission ought to append clear recommendations on compensatory devolution, either through enhanced tax shares or a dedicated fund pool for employment guarantees.

R. Narayanan,
Navi Mumbai

Renaming/replacing the MGNREGA Act with the 'Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)' Bill marks a shift from a proven, rights-based employment guarantee to political rebranding. While increasing workdays is welcome, it could have been done through amendments. By altering funding responsibilities and weakening central commitment, the move risks undermining rural livelihoods, cooperative federalism, and the credibility of a long-standing social safety net.

N. Sadhasiva Reddy,
Bengaluru

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

India and the U.S.: 2005 versus 2025



Amitabh Mattoo

Dean and Professor, School of International Studies, JNU;
and former Member National Security Advisory Board

In 2005, when I served on the Prime Minister's Task Force on Global Strategic Developments chaired by K. Subrahmanyam, India and the U.S. stood at the threshold of a historic transformation. Washington had declared that it wished to "help India become a major world power in the 21st century." It was an extraordinary statement, not merely because of what it promised but because of the confidence it reflected. The U.S. then still believed that strengthening responsible rising powers would strengthen the world. That belief seemed to form, for many, the bedrock of the civil nuclear breakthrough and of a strategic partnership built on a shared sense of possibility.

The U.S.'s retreat

Reading the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) is therefore an unsettling experience. The document is saturated with self-praise. It claims to have "brought our nation – and the world – back from the brink of catastrophe and disaster" and asserts that "no administration in history has achieved so dramatic a turnaround in so short a time." But this assertiveness feels defensive. It projects a nation unsure of its place in a world it no longer fully comprehends, yet unwilling to concede that uncertainty even to itself. The result is a strategy that is less a map for global action and more an exercise in national reassurance.

The contrast with the intellectual spirit of 2005 could not be sharper. Then, Washington spoke the language of partnership. Today, it speaks the language of burdens. "The days of the United States propping up the entire world order like Atlas are over," the strategy declares. Global leadership, once embraced with ease, is now treated as a cost to be minimised. The overriding imperative is not to elevate the international system but to lighten America's load.

Nowhere is this shift more stark than in the treatment of India. Cooperation is acknowledged but is instrumental. India is framed less as a civilisational actor and more as a component in America's China calculus. The NSS states that the U.S. must "continue to improve commercial (and other) relations with India to encourage New Delhi to contribute to Indo-Pacific security, including through continued quadrilateral cooperation with... 'the Quad'." In this framing, India is not an end in itself but a means to a balance-of-power arrangement the U.S. seeks to preserve.

In 2005, India's rise was an objective; now, it is a function. This narrowing is part of a broader retreat from internationalist confidence. The so-called Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, declaring an intent to "assert and enforce" hemispheric exclusivity, speaks to a nation turning inward. The irony is difficult to miss. In 2005, when India spoke of strategic autonomy, many in Washington bristled. In 2025, when America claims an expansive and unilateral autonomy, it calls it realism.

The document's tone reinforces this inwardness. It catalogues a series of claimed diplomatic triumphs, resolving multiple global conflicts "from Cambodia and Thailand" to "Pakistan and India". These read less like diplomatic achievements and more like political assertions crafted for domestic effect. Strategy becomes performance, and performance becomes a substitute for engagement with the world's real fissures.

For India, the implications are clear. The U.S. that sought to create strategic space for India in 2005 is not the U.S. reflected in the NSS – it is preoccupied with its own vulnerabilities, identity, and hierarchy of burdens. It demands more from partners yet offers less in return. It speaks of shared interests while retreating from shared responsibilities. It calls for burden-sharing but often means burden-shifting.

This does not diminish the importance of India-U.S. cooperation. It simply changes its foundations. India cannot rely on the assumption that Washington will invest in India's rise as a matter of strategic design. India's rise will depend on India. Partnership will endure where interests converge and remain measured where they do not. As the NSS itself insists, partners must increasingly "assume primary responsibility for their regions," a polite but unmistakable signal that U.S. support will be conditional and limited.

The path forward

The lesson of 2005 remains valuable because it reminds us of the conditions under which strategic transformations occur: confidence on both sides and a belief that the other's ascent strengthens one's own. The 2025 strategy lacks that confidence. It is shaped by grievance at past overreach, suspicion of institutions, and a preoccupation with restoring an earlier notion of American primacy.

India therefore must resist the temptation to interpret this document through the lens of earlier hopes. The era that produced the civil nuclear breakthrough was an era of widening horizons for both India and the U.S. The era that produced this strategy is one of contracting horizons for the U.S. and expanding responsibilities for India. If India is to be a major world power in the 21st century, it will not be because any external actor wills it. It will be because India possesses the strategic confidence and material capacity to act independently within a fragmented global order.

Paradoxically, the 2025 strategy makes that reality clearer than its authors intend. By reducing the scope of American commitments, it widens the space for others. For India, the challenge is not to fill a vacuum but to craft a role suited to its scale, interests, and civilisational temperament. The assumptions of 2005 cannot return, but the aspiration that animated them is ours to pursue.

The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy document marks a profound departure from the logic articulated in 2005. For India, the implications are clear.

In a state of political flux

Leadership issues plague the two major parties in Karnataka

STATE OF PLAY

Sharath S. Srivatsa
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Karnataka politics seems to be undergoing a churn with leadership tussles in two national parties emerging prominently in public discourse. If the tussle in the ruling Congress over the last few months has taken the focus away from governance issues to the so-called "secret understanding" over the sharing of power, the fractured State unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is losing out on opportunities to corner the Congress both on governance and political issues.

In the Congress, a recent breakfast meeting in Bengaluru between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, who is also the president of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, was believed to have brought temporary truce between them and their factions ahead of the ongoing winter session of the Assembly at Belagavi. The conversation on the yet-to-be-publicly-acknowledged power-sharing agreement between the two leaders, and public statements by their followers, had threatened to embarrass the party and provide fodder to the BJP attack the government during the session.

However, the fragile understanding arrived at during the breakfast meeting, after a nudge from the party's high command, gave way at the very start of the session. MLC Yathindra Siddharamaiah, who is the son of the Chief Minister, rekindled the issue by stating his "personal view" that his father would head the government for the full term, spawning a series of reactions.

While both Mr. Siddharamaiah and Mr. Shivakumar have deferred the leadership decision to the high command, several party leaders are keen on an early resolution, so the party can move forward. Ambitious second-rung leaders are also quietly making their moves to further their political careers. Some have even said that they are anxious that the government's image is taking a beating because of the unresolved leadership issue and may impact the next Assembly elections – still two and a half years away. The constant chatter about whether or not there will be a Cabinet reshuffle or expansion – with the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister camps divided on the issue – is only adding to the atmosphere of confusion.

Amid the unending debate on leadership, the government is accused of falling short in carrying out developmental work. It is also facing the burden of spending about ₹60,000 crore annually to implement the Congress's five flagship guarantee schemes. Despite these issues, the BJP's ability to put the government on the mat is dented due to the friction in the party over B.Y. Vijayendra's leadership in the State unit. A section of BJP legislators and leaders have been opposed to the elevation of Mr. Vijayendra, son of Lingayat strongman and former Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa, as the State BJP president. Senior lawmaker Basannagouda Patil Yatnal has been expelled from the BJP for repeatedly expressing in public his views against the party chief, but Mr. Vijayendra has more detractors within the party. With a new BJP president, Nitin Nabin, set to take office at the national level, the party is hoping for an early end to dissidence.

In the legislature in the ongoing Belagavi session, the BJP also appears to lack the teeth to attack the Congress. The Congress top leadership has been in the Assembly for over three decades and the party also has a large number of second-rung leaders. On the other hand, the saffron party's senior leadership has limited presence in the legislature. For example, two former Chief Ministers from the party – Jagadish Shettar and Basavaraj Bommai – are now in Parliament. Only a few leaders are capable of holding fort in the Assembly.

Meanwhile, the BJP's National Democratic Alliance ally, Janata Dal (Secular) [JD(S)], the regional party that celebrated its silver jubilee this year, is looking to elevate Nikhil Kumaraswamy, the grandson of former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, in the party's hierarchy. As the JD(S) fights to hold on to its turf, Mr. Nikhil Kumaraswamy's father is for the most part tied up in New Delhi as a Central Minister.

The party has recently recast its committees, but is holding back on announcing the State president. There are reasons for this: G.T. Deve Gowda, a senior Vokkaliga leader who has a sizeable following in the Old Mysore district, is now ignored and a few other legislators too are believed to be unhappy in the party. The JD(S) appears to providing the family's scion, who has faced three electoral defeats, a chance to cut his teeth in politics.

Women more willing to donate organs posthumously in India

In 17 out of 21 major States, more women were willing to donate organs posthumously than men

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

India belongs to a small cluster of nations where living organ donations vastly outnumber deceased organ donations. Ironically, this is not due to a lack of intent; data indicate that posthumous organ donation intent among Indians is relatively high.

Crucially, women showed a greater willingness to donate organs after death. This sentiment aligns with the reality that women continue to shoulder the burden of donations. However, men significantly outnumber women among organ recipients – a trend that data suggest is driven not only by social factors, but potentially by a higher need among men.

These insights stem from an analysis of Indian driving license applications submitted in 2024, which explicitly asked applicants if they were willing to donate their organs or tissue in the event of death. **Chart 1** illustrates the State-wise percentage of men and women who answered 'yes'.

This trend holds true even in populous States such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, where willingness among women ranged from 17% to 21%, while men lagged behind in the 12% to 19% range. The highest level of willingness among women was seen in Delhi (approximately 27%). This far outstripped the male share of 16%. Meanwhile, Odisha led the charts for men with a national high of 20%; yet even in that State, women were more willing, at 22%.

However, there are caveats. First, stated intent differs from action. Second, the data are skewed towards a younger demographic typical of new license applicants, though they do include renewals. Yet, the potential is undeniable: if even a fraction of these pledges translated into reality, it would transform India's donation landscape, where transplants from deceased donors have only been fewer than 24,000 in the last decade.

Chart 2, which plots the 2024 data across 77 countries, lays bare this disparity. While India ranks a respectable 20th globally for living donors (10.8 living donors per million), it plummets to 67th for deceased donors (0.8 deceased donors per million).

When read together, Charts 1 and 2 raise a pertinent question. We know that public willingness is high, and the robust figures for living transplants prove that the medical infrastructure is capable. This suggests that the failure lies somewhere in the middle, in the systemic disconnect between a citizen's intent and the hospital's ability to execute it.

The gender skew in Chart 1 is noticeable. Of the 21 major States for which data were considered, more women were willing to donate organs in 17. So, higher willingness could also explain why women donate more organs than men. In 2023, over 60% of donors were women **(Chart 3).**

In sharp contrast, when we look at organ recipients, in 2023, nearly 65% were men. This is a lopsided ratio that reflects a long-standing and persistent skew in India's transplant ecosystem. **Chart 3** details the organ-wise breakdown of recipients in 2023. The share of male recipients was distinctly higher than that of women across every category. In the case of liver transplants, men accounted for a staggering 70% of recipients in 2023.

Does this reflect a higher medical need? An earlier analysis by us revealed that in 2022, 4.5 times more men than women died of liver disease – a gap that has widened over the last decade **(Chart 4).** Crucially, these deaths were concentrated among middle-aged men, pointing to alcohol-related complications as a primary driver.

Skewed donor gap

The data for the charts were sourced from NOTTO's annual reports, the Global Observatory on Donation and Transplantation, and MCCD reports

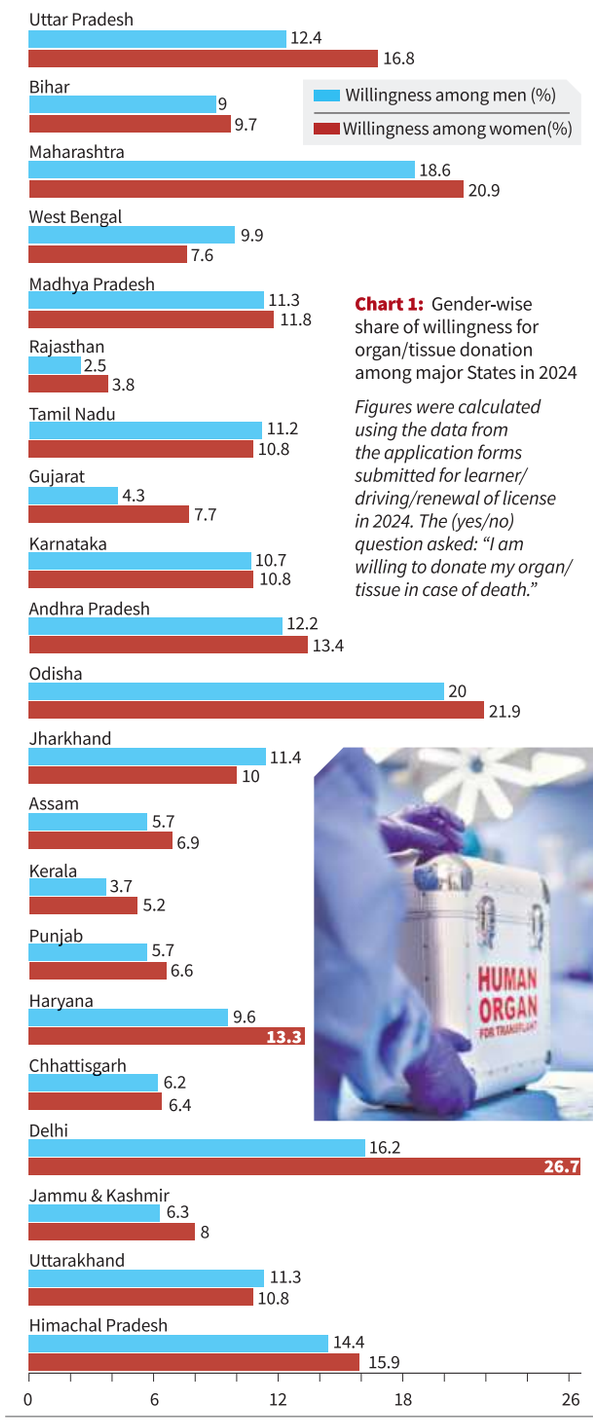


Chart 1: Gender-wise share of willingness for organ/tissue donation among major States in 2024

Figures were calculated using the data from the application forms submitted for learner/ driving/renewal of license in 2024. The (yes/no) question asked: "I am willing to donate my organ/ tissue in case of death."

Chart 2: Deceased and living donors per million population in 77 countries (2024)

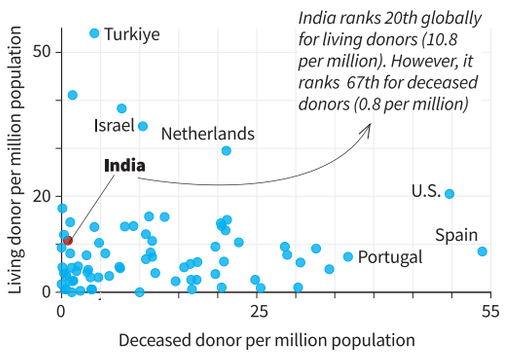


Chart 3: Gender-wise breakdown of donors and recipients for select organs in 2023

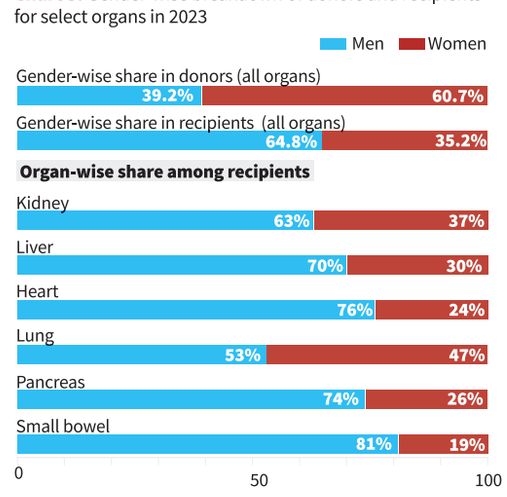
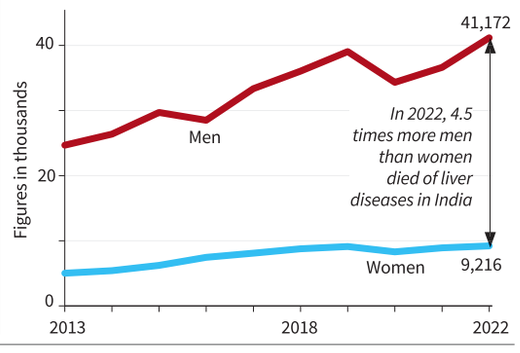


Chart 4: Gender-wise number of certified deaths due to liver diseases in India between 2013 and 2022



FROM THE ARCHIVES
The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 17, 1975

British-time silver bars seized in Madras

Madras, Dec. 16: Four pre-Independence silver bars bearing the stamp "H.M. Mint, Bombay 1945" each weighing 40 kgs and valued at Rs. 1.75 lakhs were recovered recently from the house of an unregistered pawnbroker in Madras by a special squad of the Central Excise Department. Also found were primary gold and gold ornaments valued at over Rs. 15 lakhs.

Disclosing this at a press conference to-day, Mr. I.J. Rao, Collector of Central Excise, said "this idle hoard of wealth" might have been in the family for a long time but the Gold Control Rules of the Union Government required that any person having in his possession more than 4,000 grammes of gold ornaments should declare it to the Government.

Mr. Rao pointed out that the investigation personnel raided the house in the city and located the hoarded wealth buried under the floor of an unused kitchen. The pawnbroker later confessed his guilt.

The Collector has further intensified the drive to detect undeclared wealth and smuggled goods. He deployed senior detective personnel in three districts of Salem, North and South Arcot. The strategy paid dividends and these officials caught a person at Attoor in Salem district and seized 1.430 grammes of gold ornaments valued at over Rs. 1.45 lakhs.

At Namakkal, the party raided another house and recovered gold ornaments valued at over Rs. 37,000, concealed in rice bags.

Mr. Rao said another squad detected about Rs. 34,000 worth of jewellery hidden inside the hollow bottom of a table, at Namakkal.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 17, 1925

English emigrants to Canada

Leafield (Oxford), Mid. Dec. 16-17: Very cheap passages for emigrants to Canada were announced in Parliament by Major Ormsby-Gore, Under-Secretary for Dominions. He said that under the agreement reached between His Majesty's Government and the trans-Atlantic shipping companies, persons proceeding to Canada next year under assistance under the Marine Settlement Act would be able to travel to eastern ports of Canada for £3 instead of £15-5s and to Winnipeg for £5-10s instead of £20-10s.

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of arrests on the India-Bangladesh border in 2025

2,556 In a written reply, the Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai gave the data on infiltration attempts and arrests of infiltrators across the Indian borders with Bangladesh, China, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. PTI

China's anti-dumping tariffs on pork imports from the EU

18.9 In per cent. Beijing also levied anti-dumping duties on European brandy, most notably cognac produced in France, though major brandy producers received exemptions. Imports of dairy products from the EU were also subject to anti-dumping probes. PTI

Global economic losses from natural disasters in 2025

220 In billion dollars. Natural disasters caused an estimated $220 billion in global economic losses in 2025, according to reinsurer Swiss Re. This marks a 33% decline compared to the previous year, mainly due to a much milder North Atlantic hurricane season. AFP

Deaths caused by a fog accident on the Mathura expressway

13 At least 13 people were killed and 43 injured after multiple vehicles collided due to dense fog on the Yamuna Expressway in Mathura. The pile-up involved several buses and smaller vehicles, some of which caught fire, leaving passengers trapped. Police said low visibility caused the crash. PTI

Voter names deleted from draft electoral rolls in Rajasthan

41.85 In lakh. According to the state Chief Electoral Officer Naveen Mahajan, around 11 lakh voters will be issued notices seeking their documents. He said the highest number of voter deletions were in Jaipur. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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The future of governance in post-Maoist India

India's Fifth Schedule areas became the hotbed of Maoist insurgencies due to administrative neglect, exacerbating discontent and a lack of representation of tribal groups in local bodies. Effective governance is crucial to address these issues and mitigate the ongoing challenges in these regions

FULL CONTEXT

Niranjan Sahoo

A key element missing in the dominant discourse around the evolution and growth of the Maoist movement is governance. An overwhelming volume of empirical literature accounts the rapid growth of the Maoist movement in the 1990s and early 2000s to underdevelopment, and structural socio-economic issues. This is evident from the scores of official, non-official and scholarly articles which have attempted to study the "root causes" for insurgency in central and eastern India (popularly called the Red Corridor). These articles have argued for an accelerated development push to address the acute material needs of an impoverished population which includes many vulnerable tribes. As a result of these articulations, the Indian state has been relying on a "two-pronged" approach (combining security and development) to counter the Maoist threat.

This does not mean other factors such as governance, justice redressal and other issues have been completely neglected in the official discourse. On several occasions, policy makers and official reports have sought to bring attention to creating good governance frameworks and quicker justice redressal mechanisms to address the long-standing grievances of the affected population. But there has been little effort to understand the governance challenges that intensified the Maoist insurgency in different cycles.

Unpacking challenges of governance

While the Maoist insurgency has evolved in different phases since the Naxalbari uprising (1967), the movement in its current avatar has largely been concentrated around the Fifth Schedule areas of central and eastern India – States with substantial tribal populations.

The Fifth Schedule was conceptualised and offered as a new social contract to the *adivasis* in these regions, by the framers of the Constitution, taking into account the special needs of the population. The Schedule provided a legal framework and instrumentality for governance of these tribal homelands. It offered special provisions such as the Tribal Advisory Council with three-fourth of members from the *adivasi* population and a special financial provision via the tribal sub-plan. Further, the Governor of each State was given discretionary powers to oversee the enforcement of these provisions, particularly with respect to checking land alienation.

However, extensive provisions notwithstanding, the local populations were subjected to the severest forms of discrimination and exploitation in everyday life. As recorded in the Planning Commission's Expert Committee Report (2008), a vast region with abundant natural resources was reduced to penury due to state neglect and poor governance. That these special provisions were of little use is evident from tribal populations' persistently low social and economic status compared to other social groups. The Oxford University Multidimensional Poverty Index in 2010 ranked the region worse than Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, for tribal populations, the far bigger challenge was how to exercise their rights over the land and forests. Despite legal safeguards and constitutional protection against arbitrary land acquisition, millions of them were dispossessed to penury. In his seminal study, writer Walter Fernades found that "more tribals have lost their land since the commencement of economic liberalisation than any time in the post-independent history".



Returning home: Maoists with copies of the Constitution of India, after they surrendered at the police lines in Jagdalpur in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district, on October 17. PTI

Thus, while the Constitution makers imagined a new lease of life for the *adivasis* under the Fifth Schedule, successive governments failed to bring up appropriate governance structures to transform this lofty vision into reality. The same colonial structures and administrative forms, rules of business, and justice system were retained for Scheduled Areas, which made tribal groups, with very low literacy, barely able to understand these rules and the modern justice system.

A lack of representation

What deepened the alienation was the complete absence of locals in the administrative units implementing provisions enumerated in the Fifth Schedule. B.D. Sharma, the then commissioner of the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes Commission, succinctly put that "the personnel who are overwhelmingly outsiders carried their attitudes, bias and lived experiences while performing day to day tasks". Importantly, apex bodies such as a separate Ministry of Tribal Welfare, and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes created to oversee the execution of special provisions for the tribal population, as vividly observed by the Mungekar Committee (2009), did very little to stop the exploitation.

Moreover, while the Governors are constitutionally assigned to protect the interests of *adivasis* in Schedule areas, not a single Governor has acted since Independence in these regions. These institutions have been further handicapped by weak and ineffective service delivery institutions such as health, education, revenue, police, and the judiciary.

The lone exception was the Panchayat Extension to Schedule Areas Act (PESA), 1996. PESA was enacted to address *adivasi* underrepresentation and alienation in the form of "self-governance". These democratic forums were envisioned to create space for *adivasis* to take their own decisions on welfare issues, land, natural resources, livelihood and preservation of culture and their way of life. While PESA made some substantial changes by improving political representation at the lower level of governance, key provisions were routinely violated. The Expert Committee Report (2008) found flagrant violations of PESA by the appointed officials. One of the most abused provisions has been with regards to land acquisition.

To sum up, governance maladies and relatively low political priority accorded to the Fifth Schedule in many ways created a fertile ground for the Maoist leadership to mobilise the aggrieved *adivasi* population against the Indian state. The growing governance deficits which directly impacted development, welfare functions and mitigation of local grievances created an opportunity for the Maoists to spread their ideologies of a people's government (*Janatan Sarkar*). There is a rich body of evidence that indisputably credits tribal frustrations, anger and low trust in governance institutions as the reasons that drove many *adivasis* to support Maoist ideology and revolutionary missions. Many relied on the Maoist movement as some sort of instrument to get justice from state agencies such as the police, forest and revenue departments (which they often viewed as corrupt and oppressive). For instance, the entire Dandakaranya region largely characterised by extreme underdevelopment and poor governance was easily captured by the underground Maoists in the 1990s with the promise of providing ownership to *adivasis* over lands, and the forest (under the broad slogan of *Jal, Jungle and Zameen*). Persistent governance and development deficits created a space for Maoists to run parallel governments (offering critical services such as paramedics, schools, food rations and speedy justice through kangaroo courts) in many of their strongholds.

Need for a new imagination

Going forward, India must pay close attention to governance paradoxes that continue to plague most regions under the Fifth Schedule. In recent years, there has been visible improvement in key service functions, particularly with respect to welfare schemes and critical infrastructure (roads, electricity, telecom) in Maoist affected regions. Both the Centre and affected States have found ways to improve service delivery functions via digital technology and cash transfer. However, critical service delivery institutions such as justice, health, education, policing, and revenue functions remain thin and unsatisfactory. Persistent structural bottlenecks (under-representation of locals) in the existing governance system have a significant bearing in their effectiveness.

On the other side, crucial rights-based legislations like the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and PESA need greater political push from the Centre as well affected States. The FRA which remains a key legal tool to protect the rights of *adivasis* and forest dwellers to access forest resources for their sustenance is batting for its survival today. While many core provisions have been violated by state institutions, there have also been amendments and judicial interventions in recent years which have diluted its original mandate and effectiveness. In addition, the enactment and expansion of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Act, 2016 has grossly diluted legal safeguards, apart from affecting the livelihoods of forest dwellers in India. Similarly, PESA despite initial promises faces growing resistance from the States concerned. Under pressure to unlock huge mineral deposits, most State governments in Fifth Schedule Areas have undermined the powers granted to Gram Sabhas under PESA, particularly on the issues of granting consent for mining/land acquisition. Incidentally, the most widespread violations of PESA has been in the most Maoist-affected State of Chhattisgarh.

Thus, going forward priorities must include the reversal of political and administrative under-representation of *adivasis*. While there are mandatory quotas at the local levels, considering these self-governing bodies lack real autonomy and financial power, representation remains largely performatory. The permanent bureaucracy (overwhelmingly non-tribal) still calls the shots. Given the persistent alienation and trust deficits among the local population, the post-Maoist Fifth Schedule Areas governance vision can benefit by borrowing some feathers from the Sixth Schedule Areas which are governed by Autonomous Districts/Zonal Councils. In short, post-Maoist India needs a new governance charter.

Niranjan Sahoo is Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, Delhi.

THE GIST

While the Maoist insurgency has evolved in different phases since the Naxalbari uprising (1967), the movement in its current avatar has largely been concentrated around the Fifth Schedule areas of central and eastern India — States with substantial tribal populations.

As recorded in the Planning Commission's Expert Committee Report (2008), a vast region with abundant natural resources was reduced to penury due to state neglect and poor governance.

Going forward, India must pay close attention to governance paradoxes that continue to plague most regions under the Fifth Schedule.

FULL CONTEXT

Inside a teacher's exhausting day as a booth level officer

Kusum, a Mathematics teacher, has traded her classroom for a grueling role as a BLO since November 4. She now spends her days in an office scrutinising hundreds of voter forms, often working late into the night

Mantasha Ahmed

Kusum (name changed on request of anonymity), a Mathematics teacher at Government HSS Dudhia, Indore, lives in the Saket area with her husband and mother-in-law. Ms. Kusum's husband has taken early retirement from a government job, she has no children and has lived for several years with chronic vertigo. Every morning, she rides her scooter for half an hour to reach her school in Dudhia, where she teaches Mathematics to Classes 10 and 12. But for the past month, her daily routine has completely changed, due to her role as a Booth Level Officer (BLO) at Booth No. 95, Saket.

Since November 4, when the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) work began across Madhya Pradesh, Ms. Kusum has not stepped into her school. Every morning, around 9-9.30 am, she used to leave for school and come back at 4:30 pm. Now, though she leaves at the same time every day, she stays in the booth till 10 or 11 at night, sometimes more.

I spent a day with her to see the conditions BLOs go through in a day.



Intense process: Ongoing verification of voter SIR Forms in Chennai on December 8. RAGU. R

The daily routine

As recorded on November 30, 2025, Ms. Kusum's day began at 6 am. She had *chai* with her mother-in-law, and cooked breakfast and lunch. She left home around 9:00 am and reached the Saket BLO office, set up inside an old Public Works Department (PWD) building, by 9:30 am, the latest allowed arrival time.

9:30-11 a.m: I joined her at 9:17 am at the building gate. When we entered the office together, most BLOs had arrived. This is not the first time I had visited the office; everyone is familiar with my presence. This time, however, they were sceptical and scared that the article in the media might take away their jobs.

Ms. Kusum and everyone's job is to scrutinise nearly 700 forms and check for incomplete details, missing photographs, unreachable phone numbers, and incorrect entries. She processes about 50 forms a day. She tells me Saket, being a posh area, is "the toughest zone" because residents ignore calls, don't open doors, block numbers, and often refuse to cooperate. She is busy with digitising the forms and getting the faulty ones right.

Mr. Chiranjeev told me that 80% of the work is done, and they are just "winding up" these last days. He said it is not as much pressure as it used to be when the BLOs had to go to colonies and distribute the forms. But the WhatsApp reporting cycle is relentless – from 8 am to the next day's 8 am, even during nights. He often stays up working till 1 am.

12-2 pm: By noon, BLOs stand in the sun in the corridor to escape the cold indoor rooms; it is a long corridor, and the rooms are old and chilly. Everyone has made a fixed place for themselves, with their papers and belongings scattered. Ms. Kusum's phone data pack had just reached its limit; the building has no WiFi. All the BLOs use their own internet data to digitise the forms. She asked a younger colleague to recharge her regular ₹299, which is a 1.5 GB daily plan.

2-4 pm: I noticed no one has had lunch yet, and thus I asked if there is a designated time slot given as a lunch break. There were five people in the room, excluding me; they all said there is no assigned time for lunch, and they eat lunch whenever it is convenient. I saw that Ms. Kusum had a tote bag with two water bottles, a three-box warm lunch, and a small *sev* packet.

The floor's five to six rooms were all busy, tables stacked with forms, phones, laptops, tablets. Around 3 pm, some BLOs stood in the sun chatting, while others were on calls or helping visitors with queries.

Ms. Kusum finally said she can take time to have lunch and talk to me. She took out a china cup, poured warm water, added her medicines, and joined the room's laughter. She added she needs to take these medicines all her life; if she skips them or sits too long in one place, her vertigo flares up, triggering nausea and spinning.

Meanwhile, a confused resident with his scanned papers in hand was speaking to a BLO in the outer corridor. I immediately went to see him, and he told me he is searching for his form; his wife's form was completed, but his own has not reached his house, as he had shifted from Durg, Chhattisgarh, to Indore in 2002. The case boiled down to sending the man back because his form "might have come to the old Durg office". Despite trying multiple databases, the BLOs could not find his EPIC number. He was eventually told to contact the Durg office. He left anxious, after 20 minutes of uncertainty.

The impact on day-to-day tasks

4-6 pm: We had lunch with fellow BLOs at another table. When asked about her schoolwork, Ms. Kusum said "*phase hue hein* (we are stuck)." She teaches Mathematics to Classes 10 and 12, and pre-boards are around the corner for Class 10. For one month, she has not gone to school or taught online. She thought she would make videos of herself explaining the lectures, like during COVID times, but she does not really get time for that. Her school principal had sent three applications from September to November to exempt Ms. Kusum from BLO duty, citing Class 10 board exams and her role as exam in-charge. The Election Commission acknowledged receipt but never responded. Finally, she was forced to join BLO duty on November 2.

She said her students still call her seeking help with syllabus doubts; she helps them over the phone, but she regrets missing regular classroom teaching. In her school, six teachers have been pulled into SIR work as BLOs or supervisors.

This is Ms. Kusum's first time as a BLO. She doesn't know what compensation, if any, they will receive; she simply has no choice but to do the duty.

6-8 pm: Around 6 pm, a well-dressed man wearing a kurta-pyjama and a Nehru jacket walked in. He turned out to be Nitish Jain, Indore BJP's *mandal adhyaksh* (board president) for the area. He interacted with the BLOs, asking about their issues, such as people not answering calls, and half-filled, pending forms to be collected from houses.

When introduced to me, he urged me to write about "Bangladeshi infiltrators." We spoke for about 40 minutes about the "infiltrator" and "migration" issues in the country. He avoided the core issues of overwork, tech and health strain, saying, "It's a matter of country interest... It's just a matter of a month." Mr. Jain, after one hour of being in the office, asked my name and learning that I have a Muslim name, abruptly ended the conversation and left, saying his father was hospitalised.

The sixth round of *chai* started around 7 pm. Some BLOs were again out, in fog this time; some were busy with papers; some were with people who had come regarding their forms; some were chatting or busy with the digitisation; others had gone to the Collector's office to submit the forms. By 8 pm, the sixth round of WhatsApp reports was also done. Mr. Chiranjeev avoided detailing the WhatsApp reporting chain but confirmed there's a mandatory report at 11 pm, which forces everyone to stay till late.

8-11 pm: Ms. Kusum had her second batch of medicines, one tablet and warm water with a few drops. She looked exhausted but kept working silently. I had spoken to almost everyone in the office by 8 pm, and they are all tired of the process that goes on all day.

I asked Ms. Kusum if she was planning to go home or have dinner. On the family front, she said her mother-in-law is unhappy with her long work hours since dinner gets delayed. Her husband, however, is supportive – he helps digitise forms at home, occasionally drives her to school, and now picks her up from the booth office. "If he didn't come on time, I would be here all night. The work just doesn't stop," she said. I saw most of the people having dinner at around 9-10 pm, wearing more woollens than before. Most had their boxes packed from home; a few did not eat. I am assuming a few even went out to a restaurant or their homes to have dinner, mostly male BLOs.

Everyone was sorting papers into bundles of filled, faulty, unfilled, problematic, and completed forms, tying them with a rubber band and handing them to Mr. Chiranjeev. "I even remember the names of everyone assigned to the BLOs," he said as he took the stacks.

By 10:30, nearly two hours had passed without Ms. Kusum and me speaking. I didn't want to interrupt her, and I sensed others were a bit cautious talking around me. When I finally asked if she would have dinner, she immediately stood and asked me to join her at another table where several women were seated. She reopened her lunch box. She saves some for dinner, so she doesn't have to carry extra. We ate till 11 pm, and Ms. Kusum then wound up her papers. Others were winding up too. Mr. Chiranjeev was tired and wanted to speak to me separately.

Around 11:30 pm, Mr. Chiranjeev, Ms. Kusum, and another male BLO stood outside the office, chatting as they wrapped up the day. Mr. Chiranjeev shared an honest thought, almost like feedback, that instead of assigning election-related duties to everyone, the government could deploy newly appointed staff on probation for tasks like electoral roll revision, to relieve people of the burden. We spoke for about 20-30 minutes. By 12 am, Mr. Chiranjeev had to send another update on the WhatsApp group. Ms. Kusum left in her vehicle, and I left soon after.

Mantasha Ahmed is an independent journalist based in Indore with five years of experience.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the difference between 'invent' and 'discover'? (M. Murugan)
When you invent something, you use your mind to create something new; something which had never existed before. For example, Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. The Wright Brothers invented the aeroplane. If, on the other hand, you discover something, you find something that had already existed. You are not creating anything new, you are merely finding it. For example, Columbus discovered America. He did not invent it. The land existed even before Columbus was born and all that Columbus did was to find it. He discovered it. Similarly, Madame Curie discovered radium. In her case, she deliberately set out to discover radium. Sometimes, we discover things by accident as well. For example, while digging in the garden we may discover hidden treasure.

What is the difference between 'murder' and 'kill'? (Dr. N. S. Ramasubrahmanyam, Jannapura)
Both 'murder' and 'kill' result in the death of someone. When you 'murder' someone, it is done intentionally and is usually well thought out. A great deal of planning takes place. For example, Shobha was planning to murder her husband so that she could get his money. The politician is suspected to have murdered his rival. When you 'kill' someone, it can be accidental or deliberate. For example, you may run over a total stranger quite accidentally. You had no plans of running over the man, but it happened. In this case, you killed the man, you did not murder him. But you could plan to kill someone and carry out that plan. For example, the convict planned to kill the warden at 7.00 the next morning. So a 'kill', like 'murder', can be well thought out/planned. Unlike the word 'murder', the word 'kill' can be used with both animals and people. You can kill a cat or a man. You can murder a man, but not a lion. The word 'murder' cannot be used with animals. Animals can only kill, but people can kill, as well as, murder.

What is the meaning of 'to throw in the towel'? What is the origin of this expression? (Vidhya Raman, Chennai)
When you throw in the towel, you give up doing something because you realise that you cannot succeed. In other words, you accept defeat. For example, when Sekhar's experiment failed the tenth time, he realised it was time to throw in the towel. The dejected bowler said that he was going to quit playing the game. The coach, however, convinced him that it was too early to throw in the towel. This informal expression comes from the world of boxing. In boxing, two people are allowed to stop a fight – the referee and the fighter's manager. During a fight, if the manager finds that his man has no chance of winning and he is getting unnecessarily punished, the manager can end the fight by throwing the boxer's towel into the ring. This action of throwing the towel indicates that the manager is willing to accept defeat.

Published in The Hindu on January 5, 1999.

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

The final season (Volume 1) of 'Stranger Things' premiered on November 26. Volume 2 is slated for December 25. Here is a quiz on the show

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1
Here's an easy one. Who are the show's creators?

QUESTION 2
What is the name of the creature that abducts Will Byers in the first season?

QUESTION 3
What was the series originally called?

QUESTION 4
What is the name of the artist and her song that comes in season 4, featuring Max?

QUESTION 5
Hashtags grew in popularity after the series' release, such as "#ImWithBarb" and "#JusticeforBarb". Who was Barb?

QUESTION 6
What is the food product that Eleven liked?



Visual question:
Identify this monster from season 4. COURTESY OF NETFLIX

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. This British law was the immediate cause of the Boston Tea Party. **Ans: The Tea Act of 1773**
2. The Tea Act was seen as a threat because of this. **Ans: It implicitly affirmed the British Parliament's right to tax the colonies without their consent**
3. This organisation carried out the Boston Tea Party. **Ans: The Sons of Liberty**
4. The estimated monetary value of the destroyed tea in 1773. **Ans: £9,659 sterling**
5. These were the ships from which the tea was dumped during the Boston Tea Party. **Ans: The Dartmouth, the Eleanor, and the Beaver**
Visual: Identify this pioneering American filmmaker. **Ans: Edwin S. Porter**
Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan| Erfanally Oosmany| Tito Shiladitya| Mohan Lal Patel| Ambarin Aslam

Word of the day

Comport:
behave well or properly; behave in a certain manner; show a certain behaviour

Synonyms: acquit, act, bear, behave, carry, conduct, deport, do

Usage: *He comported himself with dignity.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/comportpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /kəmˈpɔː(ɹ)t/

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

INBRIEF



Panel may moot easing rules for commodity derivatives

A panel set up by India's market regulator will recommend easing curbs on commodity derivatives and suggest steps to make it more attractive to institutional investors in a final report to be submitted early next year, three sources with direct knowledge of the matter said. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), which saw a change of guard in March with Tuhin Kanta Pandey taking over as chief, set up the panel earlier this year. REUTERS

Private sector growth hits 10-month low in December

India's private sector activity expanded at its weakest pace in 10 months in December on a slowdown in new orders and hiring slowed to a near-standstill, according to HSBC's Flash India Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) on Tuesday. The data suggest growth in Asia's third-largest economy remains strong but is slowing from the 8.2% growth reported in the latest quarter, and reinforce the view overall that inflation pressures remain weak. REUTERS

RBI allows HDFC Bank units to acquire 9.5% in IndusInd

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has accorded approval to HDFC Bank Ltd. and its units to acquire "aggregate holding" of up to 9.50% of the paid-up share capital or voting rights in IndusInd Bank. HDFC Bank is the promoter/sponsor of the group entities HDFC Mutual Fund, HDFC Life Insurance Company Ltd., HDFC ERGO General Insurance Company Ltd., HDFC Pension Fund Management Ltd. and HDFC Securities Ltd. The approval is valid till December 14, 2026

Rupee breaches 91 level, turns weakest Asian currency in '25

With India's growth strong and inflation contained, policymakers may be 'comfortable' allowing some depreciation, currency experts opined

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI



Currency cauldron: Uncertainty around the India-U.S. trade deal and the trade-war environment is weighing on markets. REUTERS

The rupee on Tuesday breached one more psychological mark by depreciating beyond 91 to 91.14 on the spot market against the U.S. dollar during intraday trade, making it one of the weakest major currencies globally this year and the weakest in Asia in 2025.

But it gained a bit during the day to close at 90.93 as compared with it's previous close of 90.78, down nearly 16 paise, a fresh all time low.

Anindya Banerjee, Head Currency and Commodity Research, Kotak Securities, said the pressure on the currency is being driven by three key factors: sentiment, capital flows, and the global macro backdrop. "The uncertainty around the pending India-U.S. trade deal and the broader trade-war environment is weighing on markets. From a flows perspective, foreign portfolio investors have pulled out close to $2.7 billion in the first two weeks of December alone, already among the largest monthly outflows this year, with the month still unfinished," he said.

He said globally rising U.S. bond yields and expectations of a Bank of Japan rate hike have triggered an unwinding of the yen carry trade.

"This has led to risk aversion across equities, credit, crypto, and some commodities, adding speculative pressure on emerging-market currencies, including the rupee," he added. Stating that the rupee may head towards 92, he said, RBI's relatively limited intervention so far appeared deliberate.

"With India's growth strong and inflation contained, policymakers may be comfortable allowing some currency depreciation, especially in a global trade-war environment where a weaker currency can support export competitiveness," he said.

"And on a day when the rupee has reached 91, I think it is important to also flag that we have been expecting [it] for a while, but not wide depreciation. And there are strategic and tactical decisions involved in the rupee," said Neelkanth Mishra, Chief Economist of Axis Bank, Head of Global Research at Axis Capital, and part time member at the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (PMEAC).

"I think the RBI is letting the currency move around a bit. It's not a bad idea. We will have to see at what level they [would say] in the three-to-six-month basis, more than this volatility is not allowed. I think the mistake was in pegging it [rupee to $] at 83. Those past sins are still haunting us," he emphasised.

In a note, Finrex Treasury Advisors said the rupee made a new lifetime low as dollar buying continued with news that U.S. President Donald Trump had not agreed to the new proposals as he wanted agri and its products to be included in the proposal which India had not agreed to.

(With inputs from Ashokamithran T)

Lok Sabha passes Bill on 100% FDI in insurance

N. Ravi Kumar
HYDERABAD

The Bill also empowers IRDAI to disgorge wrongful gains from insurers and intermediaries

The Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed an all important Bill that proposes to raise foreign direct investment (FDI) in insurance sector from 74% to 100% besides a clutch of other amendments to insurance laws amid protests from the opposition.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her reply to the discussion, said allowing 100% FDI would pave the way for further capital infusion, better technology as well as better insurance products. It would ease the process for global companies to foray into the Indian insurance market without domestic partners, she said, adding forming a joint venture is a mammoth task.

All Indian laws will apply to the companies. They will be regulated like other insurance entities, she said, seeking to allay apprehensions around changes the Bill is proposing to the Insurance Act, 1938; the Life Insurance Corporation Act, 1956; and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999.

The FDI limit for insurance companies was raised from 26% to 49% in 2015 and from 49% to 74% in 2021. On the amendment reducing net owned fund requirement for foreign reinsurance branches from ₹5,000 crore to ₹1,000 crore, she said the move would invite more reinsurers to the country for creating greater risk capacities and create level playing field for FRBs in domestic tariff area as opposed to IFSC.

Stating that government's priority is to strengthen the public sector insurance companies, she said ₹17,450 crore was infused in three public sector general insurance companies to strengthen their capital base. Listing of LIC, GIC Re and New India Assurance was also a step in the direction of boosting public insurers.

The Bill also empowers insurance regulator IRDAI to disgorge wrongful gains from insurers and intermediaries. As part of proposal to rationalise penalties to be imposed by IRDAI, the maximum limit of penalty on insurance intermediaries like in the case of insurers is to be increased from ₹1 crore to ₹10 crore to "act as a deterrent and encourage legal and regulatory compliance."

Terming the Bill a landmark reform, General Insurance Council Chairman and Bajaj General Insurance MD and CEO Tapan Singhel said by strengthening policyholder protection, improving transparency and empowering the regulator, the Bill builds trust at the core of the insurance system.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	TUESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	84,680	-0.63
US Dollar	90.93	-0.16
Gold	1,35,900	-1.23
Brent oil	59.00	-2.33

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter	2247.90	-31.00
Adani Ports	1499.00	-13.60
Apollo Hosp	7051.50	-35.00
Asian Paints	2790.90	10.70
Axis Bank	1219.60	-65.20
Bajaj Auto	9008.00	68.00
Bajaj Finserv	2035.20	-35.30
Bajaj Finance	998.40	-14.30
Bharat Elec	388.00	-2.75
Bharti Airtel	2102.00	32.30
Cipla	1499.60	-8.40
Coal India	381.60	-2.85
Dr Reddys Lab	1276.90	-3.70
Hindustan Unilever	40.20	0.00
Eicher Motors	7061.50	-60.00
Eternal Ltd.	284.45	-14.00
Grasim Ind	2799.10	-21.90
HCL Tech	1651.70	-32.30
HDFC Bank	994.30	-1.80
HDFC Life	764.35	-8.35
Hindalco	837.15	-10.70
Hind Unilever	2281.10	-12.40
ICICI Bank	1366.00	0.80
IntGlobeAvi	4974.00	8.50
Infosys	1592.90	-13.90
ITC	401.70	-0.60
Jio Financial Services Ltd.	295.25	-4.35
JSW Steel	1082.60	-32.20
Kotak Bank	2182.40	1.10
L&T	4063.80	-28.50
M&M	3621.00	13.00
Maruti Suzuki	16354.00	-61.00
Max Healthcare	1073.00	-12.40
NestleIndia	1240.60	-2.90
NTPC	321.00	-2.95
ONGC	232.21	-3.14
PowerGrid Corp	260.35	-1.85
Reliance Ind	1542.30	-13.90
SBI Life	2036.00	1.10
State Bank	961.15	-6.10
Shriram Finance Ltd.	848.40	-6.95
Sun Pharma	1781.30	-15.80
TataConsumerProduct	1169.90	12.50
Tata Steel	169.83	-3.04
TCS	3205.10	-25.10
Tech Mahindra	1578.20	2.80
Titan	3929.50	63.30
Tata Motors PV	345.45	-1.70
Trent Ltd.	4108.70	-0.30
UltraTech Cement	11528.00	-200.00
Wipro	259.22	-2.52

NCLT okays Vedanta Ltd.'s demerger plan

The NCLT Mumbai has approved the demerger of Vedanta Ltd., paving the way for its split into five sector-specific entities across aluminium, oil and gas, power, and iron and steel.

Singareni, Altmin ally for battery grade lithium refinery in Telangana

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD



Telangana CM Revanth Reddy at the MoU signing ceremony.

Singareni Collieries Company (SCCL) and Hyderabad-based Altmin have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to set up India's first large-scale battery-grade lithium refinery here.

The project envisages an investment of ₹2,250 crore and the establishment of a 30,000-tonne- per-annum lithium carbonate refinery in Telangana.

The refinery is targeted to commence operations by 2027 and poised to play a strategic role in supporting India's rapidly-growing electric vehicle and energy storage ecosystem. It will position the State at the forefront of India's critical minerals and clean energy transition, the Telangana Government said. The MoU was signed in the presence of CM A. Revanth Reddy at the recently concluded Telangana Rising Summit in Hyderabad.

Under the partnership, SCCL, jointly owned by the Government of Telangana and the Government of India and Altmin would form a joint venture to localise lithium refining in India and bring globally bench marked technology into the country. The project includes plans to secure long-term raw material supply via overseas mineral assets, strengthening India's energy security.

It will be the first-of-its-kind project in India establishing large-scale, domestic refining capacity for battery-grade lithium.

Stirred up



Fiery flame: Pallets burn as French farmers block the A63 motorway at the Cestas interchange in Gironde, south-western France on Tuesday. French farmers have been protesting against the government's mandatory culling protocol for cattle herds affected by lumpy skin disease first detected in France in June that has led to the slaughter of over 3,000 cattle across more than 110 outbreaks nationwide. AFP

Govt. to sell up to 3% stake in IOB to raise ₹2,100 crore

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The government has decided to divest up to 3% stake in State-owned Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) via an Offer for Sale (OFS) commencing on Wednesday.

At the current market price, the government would be able to garner about ₹2,100 crore via stake sale. IOB shares closed at ₹36.57 per unit, down 1.08% on the BSE on Tuesday. "Offer for Sale in Indian Overseas Bank opens tomorrow for Non-Retail investors. Retail investors can bid on Thursday," Department of Investment and Public Asset Management Secretary Arunish Chawla said.

Sugar production shows an increase

The Hindu Bureau
COIMBATORE/NEW DELHI



Prices have dropped in all the major sugar producing States.

Sugar production from October 1, 2025 to December 15 saw a 28% increase compared with the same period in 2024.

As per Indian Sugar and Bioenergy Manufacturers Association, sugar production touched 78.25 lakh tonne in the first 75 days of the current sugar marketing season as against 61.28 lakh tonne last year.

Sugar production is up in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. However, the current ex-mill sugar price has fallen to ₹3,600 to ₹3,660 a quintal in Maharashtra.

The prices have dropped in all the major sugar producing States, the ISMA said. Meanwhile, ISMA Director General Deepak Ballani told *The Hindu* it was suggested the Centre raise ethanol blending from the present 20%, to 22% and thereafter to 25% in a 'phased manner.'

WhatsApp SIM binding order may not meaningfully reduce cyberfraud: IAMAI

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI



Ordering WhatsApp to "bind" user accounts to a SIM card in their phones may not "meaningfully reduce cyber fraud," while causing "hurdles to the modern communication habits such as use of international numbers during travel [or] secondary devices" like laptops, the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) said in a letter to Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia.

The Department of Telecommunications ordered WhatsApp and other messaging apps last month to ensure that the messaging platform stops working if a user takes out their SIM card. While the DoT was compelled to backtrack on another direction issued by the same division, the AI and Digital Intelligence Unit – requiring smartphone makers to install the Sanchar Saathi app on devices sold in India – this "SIM binding" order has remained, with some pushback from WhatsApp.

IAMAI represents Big Tech firms including Meta, which owns WhatsApp.

IAMAI argued that the DoT does not have the statutory power to order firms like WhatsApp to comply with orders like this. "Over-the-top (OTT) services are not within the scope of the Telecommunications Act, 2023," the letter said, referring to apps that work online without owning telecom hardware and airwaves. "This limited scope was further outlined by the former Minister of Communications, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw, who stated that "OTT has been regulated by the IT Act of 2000 and continues to be regulated by the IT Act. There is no coverage of OTT in the new telecom bill passed by the Parliament"."

The DoT order also requires WhatsApp to log out users on WhatsApp Web after six hours. There is no fixed timeout for WhatsApp Web sessions. Making this change "will adversely impact many business owners and MSMEs rely on web-based messaging applications throughout the workday to coordinate with customers, suppliers, and internal teams," IAMAI argued.

What's more, IAMAI said, these directions may not achieve their goal of reducing cybercrime, while causing widespread inconvenience.

B. Sairam named chief of Coal India

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

State-owned miner Coal India appointed B. Sairam as their new chairman and managing director effective Monday.

He would succeed Sanoj Kumar Jha, also the Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Coal, who held interim charge of the State-owned miner following the superannuation of P. M. Prasad October-end.

Prior to his latest appointment at the Maharatna, Mr. Sairam served as the CMD of Northern Coalfield Ltd.

He also served as the director (technical) at Coal India's subsidiary Central Coalfield Ltd.

Coal output rises

Meanwhile, overall coal production in India rose 2.06% in November when assessed with the comparable period last year, although it fell slightly short of the stipulated target for the month, according to provisional data from the Coal Ministry. Power generated in November declined about 5.8% compared with the previous month, owing to moderate climatic conditions reducing demand for appliances.

Production in November this year stood at 92.68 million tonne (MT) compared with 90.81 MT in the same period last year.

Global insured catastrophe losses set to hit $107 billion in 2025, report shows



Huge losses: Cars driving along Pacific Coast Highway next to houses destroyed in wildfires. REUTERS

Reuters

Annual global insured losses from natural catastrophes are expected to hit $107 billion in 2025, driven by the Los Angeles wildfires and severe convective storms in parts of the United States, a Swiss Re Institute study showed on Tuesday.

Most affected

The U.S. stood as the most affected market in 2025, accounting for 83% of the global insured losses.

Insured losses from natural catastrophes topped $100 billion in 2025 for the sixth straight year, according to the report, shifting focus back on tighter underwriting, higher premiums and fresh scrutiny of risk models.

"Reinsurers and the broader insurance sector have a dual role: acting as financial shock absorbers and supporting the development of resilient, risk-informed public policy and private investment that reduce future losses," said Jérôme Jean Haegeli, Swiss Re's Group Chief Economist.

Below forecast

However, the figure was below Swiss Re's earlier forecast of $150 billion in total insured losses. Global insured losses from natural catastrophes had reached $80 billion in the first half of 2025, according to a preliminary report issued earlier this year.

The Palisades Fire, which tore through Southern California in early 2025 and burned more than 23,000 acre, destroying homes and businesses and forcing thousands to flee, was the costliest wildfire event on record globally with insured losses of $40 billion, Swiss Re said.

Climate risks rising

Rising climate risks are prompting insurers to pull back from high-risk areas across the U.S., widening coverage gaps and increasing financial pressure on vulnerable communities.

"2025 once again reminds us that elevated natural catastrophe losses are no longer outliers but the new baseline. It's critical we double down on investing in resilience and adaptation so communities can be better prepared for the future," said Monica Ningen, CEO of U.S. Property and Casualty at Swiss Re.

Global insured losses from severe convective storms rose to $50 billion in 2025, making it the third-costliest year after 2023 and 2024, and extending a multi-year upward trend.

However, hurricane losses were low, as none of the storms made landfall on the U.S. coast, for the first time in 10 years, despite an active season, helping keep insured losses below Swiss Re's pre-season expectations.

Delayed U.S. employment reports may show softening labour market

Non-farm payrolls are forecast increasing 50,000 in Nov.; employment is expected to have declined in October due to Federal government job losses; unemployment rate estimated to come in at 4.4% in Nov; there will be no jobless rate for Oct. as govt. shutdown prevented the collection of data

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
WASHINGTON



Tough time: A customer walks by a now hiring sign posted in front of a store. GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

U.S. job growth likely rebounded in November following an anticipated decline in non-farm payrolls in October because of federal government cost-cutting, economists predicted, still consistent with a gradually weakening labour market.

The Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics will on Tuesday publish the delayed employment report for November and a partial update for October, which will not include the unemployment rate and other metrics after the 43-day shutdown of the government prevented the collection of data from households.

Challenge to interpret

Economists said while the data would be a challenge to interpret, they did not believe the labour market had deviated much from its recent pattern of stall-speed hiring and a slow upward grind in the unemployment rate. They say employers have pulled back from hiring because of what some described as a shock from President Donald Trump's sweeping import tariffs.

The import duties have raised prices for many goods, resulting in consumers, mostly lower- and middle-income households, being selective in purchases and ultimately cutting back on spending.

"We have a situation where corporations don't want to hire more people, but there is no wholesale firing that you would see like in a recession," said Brian Bethune, an economics professor at Boston College. "When large businesses get hit with a shock that they didn't anticipate, one contingency plan is stop hiring, that's the easiest thing to do."

Non-farm payrolls likely increased by 50,000 jobs last month, a *Reuters* survey of economists predicted. While no consensus estimate was produced for October, economists overwhelmingly forecast payrolls declined that month, with BNP Paribas penciling in a drop of as much as 100,000. The anticipated job losses in October reflect the departure of more than 1,50,000 federal employees who took deferred buyouts as part of Mr. Trump's push to shrink the government's footprint. Most of them dropped off government payrolls at the end of September. No impact on payrolls is expected from the furloughing of workers during the longest shutdown in history as they were retroactively paid when the government reopened.

> "We have a situation where corporations don't want to hire more people, but there is no wholesale firing you see like in a recession
>
> **BRIAN BETHUNE**
> Boston College

'Not meaningful'

"The resignations are not economically meaningful as we expect that those who took the offer have mostly either retired or found other employment in the interim," said Andrew Husby, a senior U.S. economist at BNP Paribas.

The economy added 1,19,000 jobs in September. Some economists estimated the underlying pace of job gains at around 20,000 jobs per month.

They expect job gains in November likely remained heavily concentrated in the healthcare and social assistance as well as the leisure and hospitality sectors in line with recent trends. Professional and business services, transportation, wholesale trade, retail and manufacturing industries likely shed jobs.

Rate cut

Federal Reserve officials last week cut the U.S. central bank's benchmark overnight interest rate by another 25 basis points to the 3.5% - 3.75% range, but signalled borrowing costs were unlikely to fall further in the near term as they awaited clarity on the direction of the labour market and inflation.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell told reporters the labour market "seems to have significant downside risks," alluding to a preliminary benchmark revision estimate in September that-suggested 9,11,000 fewer jobs were created in the 12 months through March than previously reported, the equivalent of 76,000 fewer jobs per month.

The BLS will publish the final payrolls benchmark revision in February along with January's employment report.

Labour market weakness is likely to be underscored by an elevated unemployment rate, forecast to have been at 4.4% in November, but it could come in above expectations. Households' perceptions of the labour market deteriorated in November.

While the jobless rate for October will never be known, some economists said it probably jumped from 4.4% in September.

"Had the BLS produced an October print, we would have expected it to be around 4.6% to 4.7%, with furloughed federal government workers being on temporary unemployment due to the government shutdown," said Marc Giannoni, chief U.S. economist at Barclays.

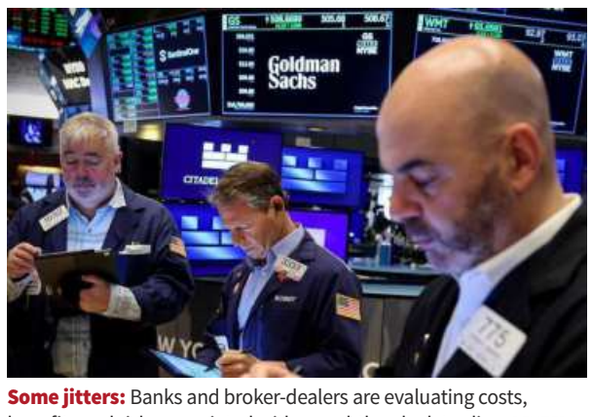
Curbing wage growth

Slowing job growth is curbing wage growth, a boost to the fight against inflation but a headwind to consumer spending, the economy's main engine. Average hourly earnings are estimated to have increased 3.6% in the 12 months through November. They advanced 3.8% year-on-year in September.

"Consumer demand is holding up but has become increasingly polarised, as weakening sentiment collides with mounting labo ur market fragility and a widening gap between lower-income households' wage growth and higher-income households' wage growth," said Lydia Boussour, senior economist at EY-Parthenon.

Wall Street ready for round-the-clock trading

Reuters
NEW YORK



Some jitters: Banks and broker-dealers are evaluating costs, benefits and risks associated with round-the-clock trading. REUTERS

Round-the-clock trading is fast approaching U.S. stock markets, but not all of Wall Street is embracing the move. Several of the largest U.S. banks are reluctant to push aggressively into enabling round-the-clock stock trading, even as equity markets are marching toward a broad rollout of nearly nonstop trading later next year and exchanges are preparing for action. Nasdaq on Monday filed paperwork with regulators to extend trading to 23 hours a day on weekdays. The push toward nonstop weekday trading for the first time on a major global bourse comes as investors globally have clamoured for greater access to U.S. capital markets in recent years, prompting regulators to introduce new rules and bless proposals from large exchanges to extend trading hours.

Questions on risks

While U.S. exchanges, clearing houses, and market-plumbing firms are charting the technical path and infrastructure, some large U.S. dealers are raising questions about the risks of such a move that will require tens of billions of dollars of investment, with little guarantee of a huge payday, according to interviews with half a dozen executives at U.S. banks, including JPMorgan, Bank of America, and Morgan Stanley, who requested anonymity to discuss the matter.

'More of nuisance'

"It's being viewed as more of a nuisance than something that will drive revenue upside for these firms," said Patrick Moley, a senior research analyst at Piper Sandler. "Banks and brokers will need to roll out additional technology and support capabilities. And at the moment, it's difficult to know how quickly they will see a return on that investment."

Banks and broker-dealers are evaluating the costs, benefits, and risks associated with enabling round-the-clock trading. In recent weeks, some top executives have flagged concerns about managing risk around big market-moving events.

"We need to make sure that we have the right protections for risk management in place to handle events ... before we really unleash this on the market," said Sonali Theisen, global head of FICC E-Trading & Markets Strategic Investments at Bank of America, on a recent panel discussion hosted by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Outside investors

Proponents of the move to round-the-clock trading have argued it will allow retail and institutional investors - especially those based outside the U.S. - to respond more quickly to news that breaks outside U.S. market hours. Market structure experts and executives at big banks, however, warn that the quality of trading will be affected by thin overnight liquidity, which can make pricing less precise, and question the demand.

Institutional demand

"We're not going to change all of our systems and all of our end-of-day processes, extend everything, and hire people to work overnight," said Brian Suth, head of electronic trading at Evercore ISI, who said he did not currently see institutional demand for such trading. BlackRock executives said in a white paper this year that overnight sessions are less liquid than normal market hours, which can result in wider bid-ask spreads, increased volatility, and higher trading costs.

Ford retreats from EVs, takes $19.5-bn charge amid Trump plans

Reuters

Ford Motor said on Monday it will take a $19.5 billion write down and is killing several electric-vehicle models, in the most dramatic example yet of the auto industry's retreat from battery-powered models in response to the Trump administration's policies and weakening EV demand. The Dearborn, Michigan-based company said it will replace the fully electric F-150 Lightning with a new extended-range electric model that uses a gas-powered engine to recharge the battery. The company is also scrapping a next-generation electric truck, code named the T3, as well as planned electric commercial vans.

"When the market really changed over the last couple of months, that was really the impetus for us to make the call," Ford CEO Jim Farley told *Reuters* in an interview. Ford said it will pivot hard into gas and hybrid models, and eventually hire thousands of workers, even though there will be some layoffs at a jointly owned Kentucky battery plant in the near term. The company expects its global mix of hybrids, extended-range EVs and pure EVs to reach 50% by 2030, from 17% today. The car company will spread out the write down, taken primarily in the fourth quarter and continuing through next year and into 2027, the company said. About $8.5 billion is related to cancelling planned EV models.



Losing power: A cab of a model of F-150 Lightning e-pickup truck is seen at a Ford facility. REUTERS

Around $6 billion is tied to the dissolution of a battery joint venture with South Korea's SK On, and $5 billion on what Ford called "programme-related expenses."

The automaker also raised its 2025 guidance for adjusted earnings before interest and taxes, to about $7 billion, up from a previous range of $6 billion to $6.5 billion.

Ford shares rose about 1% in after-hours trading.

Reshape market

Ford's shift reflects the auto industry's response to waning demand for battery-powered models, after car companies ploughed hundreds of billions of dollars into EV investments early this decade.

The outlook for electrics dimmed significantly this year as U.S. President Donald Trump's policies yanked federal support for EVs and eased tailpipe-emissions rules, which could encourage carmakers to sell more gas-powered cars.

EV sales skid

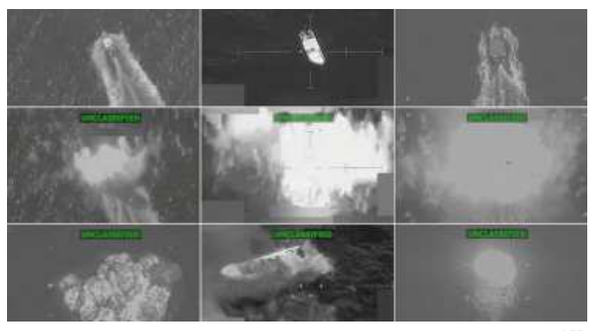
U.S. sales of electric vehicles fell about 40% in November, following the September 30 expiration of a $7,500 consumer tax credit, which had been in place for more than 15 years to stoke demand. The Trump administration also included in the massive tax and spending bill that passed in July a freeze on fines that automakers pay for violating fuel-economy regulations.

The F-150 Lightning rolled off assembly lines starting in 2022 with much fanfare - comedian Jimmy Fallon wrote a song about the truck. Ford increased production of the model to meet an influx of 2,00,000 orders, but sales haven't kept pace. The company sold 25,583 Lightnings through November of this year, a 10% decrease from the prior-year period.

The successor to the F-150 Lightning, the T3 truck, was supposed to be built from the ground up at a new complex in Tennessee, and be a core part of Ford's second-generation EV lineup. Ford is now replacing production of the EV pickup with new gas-powered trucks starting in 2029 at the Tennessee factory. Ford effectively killed the entirety of its second-generation of EV models with Monday's announcement. For its future EV lineup, the company is shifting focus to more affordable EV models, conceived by a so-called skunk works team in California. Ford plans to price the first model from that team at about $30,000. Ford is building this midsize EV truck at its Louisville plant. "Rather than spending billions on large EVs with no path to profitability, we are allocating that money into higher-returning areas," said Andrew Frick, head of Ford's gas and electric-vehicle operations.

WASHINGTON

U.S. military kills eight in eastern Pacific strikes on alleged drug boats



AFP

Strikes on three alleged drug-trafficking vessels in the eastern Pacific Ocean killed eight people on Monday, according to the U.S. military. Since early September, the U.S. military under Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth has targeted alleged drug-smuggling boats, destroying at least 26 vessels and killing at least 95 people. AFP

LAHORE

Pakistani court awards 35-year jail term to top leader of banned TLP



AP

Zaheerul Hassan Shah, Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan's deputy chief, has been sentenced to 35 years in jail by an anti-terrorist court for inciting people to "behead" Pakistan's then-Chief Justice Qazi Faiz Isa, in July 2024. Qazi Faiz Isa had been criticised by extremists after he granted bail to an Ahmadi suspect accused of blasphemy. PTI

TAIPEI

Taiwan says it can respond rapidly to any sudden attack by China



REUTERS

Taiwan's military can respond rapidly to any sudden Chinese attack with all units able to operate under a decentralised mode of command without awaiting orders from above, Taipei's Defence Ministry said in a report. It added that the frequency and scale of China's military activities have increased year by year. REUTERS

WASHINGTON

U.S. designates Colombia's largest drug-trafficking gang as terrorists



AP

The United States said on Tuesday it was designating Colombia's largest drug-trafficking gang, Clan del Golfo, as terrorists, just as the group engaged in talks with the country's leftist government. "We are committed to denying funding and resources to these terrorists," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said. AFP

'We are closer now than ever to a peace deal,' says Trump on Ukraine

Ukraine's Zelenskyy says proposals being negotiated with the U.S. could be finalised within days and then American envoys will present them to the Kremlin; Russia claimed it was in full control of the key city of Kupiansk in northeastern Ukraine

Associated Press
KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says proposals being negotiated with U.S. officials for a deal to end the fighting in Russia's nearly 4-year-old invasion of his country could be finalised within days, after which American envoys will present them to the Kremlin before possible further meetings in the U.S. next weekend.

A draft peace plan discussed with the U.S. during talks in Berlin on Monday is "very workable", Mr. Zelenskyy told presspersons hours after the discussions.



Volodymyr Zelenskyy speaks as Keir Starmer, Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump listen during a meeting in August. AP

He cautioned, however, that some key issues – notably what happens to Ukrainian territory occupied by Russian forces – remain unresolved.

The proposal for security guarantees will be based on Western help in keeping the Ukrainian army strong, an official from a NATO nation said.

"Europeans will lead a multinational and multi-domain force to strengthen those troops and to secure Ukraine from the land, sea and air, and the United States will lead a ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanism, with international participation," the official said.

American officials said on Monday there's consensus from Ukraine and Europe on about 90% of the U.S.-authored peace plan.

U.S. President Donald Trump said: "I think we're closer now than we have been, ever" to a peace settlement.

Plenty of potential pitfalls remain, notably the land issue. Mr. Zelenskyy reiterated that Kyiv rules out recognising Moscow's control over any part of the Donbas, in eastern Ukraine made up of Luhansk and Donetsk.

Meanwhile, Russia said it was in control of the key city of Kupiansk in northeast Ukraine. "The city of Kupiansk is under the control of the Russian Sixth Army," Leonid Sharov, head of the Zapad military group, told state news agency TASS.

Indian arms makers held meetings in Russia: sources

Reuters
NEW DELHI

At least half a dozen executives from top Indian arms makers, including Adani Defence and Bharat Forge, attended rare meetings in Russia this year to discuss potential joint ventures, three people familiar with the matter said.

The meetings took place during the first visit of India's defence business leaders to Russia since Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The visit by the defence business leaders had not previously been reported.

The Indian government is seeking to re-orient its decades-old defence ties with Russia to focus on joint development of weapons.



The meetings discussed the potential for manufacturing of spares for MiG-29 fighter jet. PTI

The talks in Moscow were held on the sidelines of a visit by an Indian defence-industrial delegation on October 29-30, headed by India's Defence Production Secretary Sanjeev Kumar, that was aimed at laying the ground for Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India on December 4-5.

Spokespeople for Adani Group and Bharat Forge denied that executives from any of their companies attended the meetings. India's Defence Ministry and the other firms cited by the sources did not respond to requests for comment.

The meetings discussed the potential for manufacturing of spares for Mikoyan MiG-29 fighter jet, and other Russian-origin air defence and weapon systems, as well as a Russian proposal to set up production units in India for development of equipment that could potentially also be exported to Moscow, said two of the sources and another industry executive.

They spoke on condition of anonymity, citing the sensitivity of the matter.

Cambodia must announce ceasefire 'first', says Thailand

Agence France-Presse
BANGKOK

Thailand said on Tuesday that Cambodia must be first to announce a truce to halt fighting between the two nations after more than a week of deadly clashes in a reignited border conflict.

"As the aggressor onto Thai territory, Cambodia must announce the ceasefire first," Thai Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maratee Nalita Andamo told presspersons in Bangkok, adding that Cambodia must also cooperate in demining efforts at the border "sincerely".

Renewed fighting between the Southeast Asian neighbours this month has killed at least 32 people, including soldiers and civilians, and displaced around 8 lakh people, officials said.

Cambodia did not immediately respond to Thailand's statement.

Cambodia, which is outgunned and outspent by Bangkok's military, said on Monday that Thailand's forces had expanded their attack "deep into" Cambodian territory.

The ongoing conflict stems from a territorial dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of their 800-kilometre border and a smattering of ancient temple ruins situated on the frontier.

Deadly flight



Emergency services working to extinguish a fire caused by the crash of a Cessna Citation aircraft that struck an industrial warehouse in the Santa Maria Totoltepec neighbourhood near Toluca International Airport in Mexico on Monday. At least four persons were killed. AFP

Mass shooting duo driven by 'Islamic State ideology': PM

Agence France-Presse
SYDNEY

A father and son were driven by "Islamic State ideology" when they fired on crowds at Bondi Beach in one of Australia's deadliest mass shootings, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Tuesday.

Sajid Akram and his son Naveed opened fire on people thronging the famous beach for the Jewish festival of Hanukkah on Sunday, killing 15 people and wounding dozens more.

Authorities said the attack was designed to sow panic among the nation's Jews, but have so far given little detail about the gunmen's deeper motivations.



Anthony Albanese

Mr. Albanese gave one of the first hints that the pair had been radicalised by an "ideology of hate".

The pair travelled to the Philippines before the shootings and authorities are investigating whether they met Islamist extremists during the trip, Australian media reported.

Trump sues BBC for $10 bn, accusing it of defamation over editing speech

Associated Press
Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON/LONDON

U.S. President Donald Trump filed a lawsuit on Monday seeking $10 billion in damages from the BBC, accusing the British broadcaster of defamation as well as deceptive and unfair trade practices.

The 33-page lawsuit accuses the BBC of broadcasting a "false, defamatory, deceptive, disparaging, inflammatory, and malicious depiction of President Trump," calling it "a brazen attempt to interfere in and influence" the 2024 U.S. presidential election.

It accused the BBC of "splicing together two entirely separate parts of President Trump's speech on January 6, 2021" in order to "intentionally misrepresent the meaning of what President Trump said."



The lawsuit, filed in a Florida court, seeks $5 billion in damages for defamation and $5 billion for unfair trade practices. REUTERS

The lawsuit, filed in a Florida court, seeks $5 billion in damages for defamation and $5 billion for unfair trade practices.

The broadcaster had apologised last month to Mr. Trump over the edit of the January 6 speech. But the publicly funded BBC rejected claims it had defamed him, after Mr. Trump threatened legal action.

BBC chairman Samir Shah had called it an "error of judgment," which triggered the resignations of the BBC's top executive and its head of news.

The speech took place before some of Mr. Trump's supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol as Congress was poised to certify President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election that Mr. Trump falsely alleged was stolen from him.

Meanwhile, spokesperson for the British broadcaster confirmed to AFP that the BBC will defend itself against Mr. Trump's lawsuit. "As we have made clear previously, we will be defending this case. We are not going to make further comment on ongoing legal proceedings," a BBC spokesperson said.

Israeli settler shoots dead 16-year-old Palestinian in West Bank, says mayor

Reuters
RAMALLAH

An Israeli settler shot dead a 16-year-old Palestinian in Tuqu' on Tuesday after the funeral of another teenager, the town's mayor said.

Violence has escalated in the West Bank since the beginning of the war in Gaza in October 2023. Attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank have increased sharply, with the UN reporting the highest number of attacks on record in October.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Muheeb Jibril's death on Tuesday.

"Today, after the funeral of 16-year-old Ammar Sabbah, who was killed yesterday by the Israeli army in the town centre, a number of youth were gathered by the main street when a settler shot 16-year-old Muheeb Jibril in the head," Tuqu' Mayor Mohammed al-Badan told Reuters by telephone.



Mourners carry the body of Ammar Sabbah, draped in Palestinian and Fatah flags, who was killed in an Israeli military raid. AP

Israeli forces killed Sabbah on Monday during a military raid on the town, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. The military said the incident was under review. It said rocks were thrown at soldiers who used riot dispersal means and later responded with fire. The West Bank is home to 2.7 million Palestinians who have limited self-rule under Israeli military occupation. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis have settled there.

Most world powers deem Israel's settlements, on land it captured in a 1967 war, illegal, and numerous UN Security Council resolutions have called on Israel to halt all settlement activity.

Israel denies the illegality of the settlements, citing biblical and historical connections to the land.

Israeli forces have cleared out refugee camps, forcing thousands of Palestinians from their homes and maintaining their presence in some West Bank cities for decades.



A young woman celebrates her graduation at a shelter for girls rescued from FGM in Narok County, Kenya. AFP

Despite ban, female genital mutilation continues in Kenya

Agence France-Presse
NAROK

Maasai women erupted with mocking heckles as a community elder, wrapped in a traditional red blanket, claimed that female genital mutilation had all but stopped in their community in southern Kenya.

The women know that mutilating young girls by removing their clitoris and inner labia – framed as a rite of passage – is still an entrenched practice in some remote villages of Narok county.

One local nurse told *AFP* some 80% of girls in the area are still affected, despite the practice being made illegal in 2011.

"Why are you telling people that you have stopped, when we have teenage girls coming to the hospital who have been cut?" asked a woman in the crowd, gathered in Entasekera village to discuss the issue.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) has survived decades of pressure to end it, from British colonialists and later Kenyan and global NGOs. A 2022 government survey said the number of affected teenage girls had fallen from 29% to 9% since 1998 nationally. But that does not reflect reality in some areas.

"I was screaming and struggling," said Martha, 18, who was 10 when two women, under pressure from their community, cut her at home in Narok East on her father's say-so. She later fled to a local shelter run by activist Patrick Ngigi, who says his organisation Mission with a Vision has rescued some 3,000 victims of FGM since 1997.

Nurse Loise Nashipa, 32, at the Entasekera Health Centre, described FGM as "a monster".

"There's bleeding, and there's pain, and infection," she said, saying most cutting was still done by elderly women in unsanitary conditions.

Bangladesh electoral scheduling amid political unrest casts a cloud of doubt

The country's election commission announced last week a timetable for the long-awaited general election; despite political parties welcoming the news, pre-poll buzz remains muted; questions arise on security concerns, public trust and poll body's capability to conduct free and fair elections

Rabiul Alam
DHAKA

It is Friday noon in Dhaka (2:25 p.m. local time), just hours after the announcement of the national election schedule. In the capital's busy Bijoy Nagar area, Sharif Osman Hadi, a key leader of last year's uprising and an independent candidate for the Dhaka-8 constituency, was shot in the head by unidentified assailants on a motorcycle in broad daylight. Mr. Hadi remains in a life-threatening condition.

The attack, among several recent incidents, has intensified concerns over security and political stability in the run-up to the polls. Md. Abu Shadik (Kayem), Vice-President of the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU), alleged that elements of the "fallen fascist regime" were attempting to sabotage the upcoming election. He said the ousted group "has already issued threats and launched programs to resist the election," warning that an attack on a candidate raises serious questions about fairness and safety.

Forty months after the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government on August 5, 2024, Bangladesh finally announced the schedule for its 13th parliamentary election, an announcement closely watched at home and abroad.

In a televised address on Thursday evening, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) A.M.M. Nasir Uddin said the election would be held on February 12, 2026, ending months of speculation over whether a timetable would be announced amid political flux. He also declared that a national referendum on implementing the "July Charter" would be held on the same day, marking the first instance in Bangladesh's history where a general election and referendum will take place simultaneously.

Despite the announcement, some uncertainty lingers over whether the polls will proceed on schedule, although the interim government led by Nobel laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus has repeatedly assured that the vote will be held.



Standing vigil: Policemen guarding the Election Commission office in Dhaka, Bangladesh. REUTERS

Warring views

Major political parties welcomed the announcement.

BNP Secretary-General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir described it as a "day of joy," saying the schedule demonstrates that political actors and institutions intend to ensure the people's right to vote. Jamaat Secretary-General Mia Golam Porwar welcomed the announcement, while NCP Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary raised questions about the Commission's ability to remain neutral amid political pressure. The Amar Bangladesh Party (AB Party), too, welcomed the schedule but warned that political violence continues to create an unfavourable environment for a free and fair election.

In contrast, the Bangladesh Awami League, the party of ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, outright rejected the schedule as "illegal." The party is barred from contesting the polls after its political activities were banned, and its registration cancelled by the Election Commission (EC). In a statement, the party claimed that the current administration "cannot ensure transparency, neutrality, or the reflection of the people's will"..

Meanwhile, parties have already announced candidates for most constituencies. The BNP, which had earlier declared nominations for 237 seats, has now expanded its list to 272. The NCP has released its first list of 125 candidates, and has sold more than 1,600 nomination forms. Jamaat-e-Islami has also published its candidate list, although many nominations may be revised as the party negotiates a joint platform with other Islamist parties under a "one-box policy" to field unified candidates.

Despite this activity, the usual pre-election buzz remains muted. Many candidates have begun small-scale campaigns, but the atmosphere is subdued.

"I am eagerly waiting to cast my first vote," Bijoy Talukder, a private sector employee in Dhaka, told *The Hindu*. "Even though the election is only a few months away, there's still not much excitement and buzzing in the country," he added.

Ahsanul Mahbub Jubair, an NCP aspirant from Feni-1, said he was campaigning despite not being confirmed as the official nominee. Commenting on the prevailing uncertainty, Mr. Jubair said, "Of course, some uncertainties and challenges will remain, but they cannot stop the elections from taking place," he added.

The health of BNP Chairperson and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has also emerged as another critical factor shaping the political landscape ahead of the polls. Her condition has deteriorated in recent days, and she has now been placed on ventilator support. BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, who has been living in London in political exile and is widely viewed within the party as the frontrunner for the prime ministership if BNP wins, has yet to return to Bangladesh.

Departing from past practice, the EC has introduced an extended timeline, allowing nearly two months between the schedule announcement and polling day. On voting day, parliamentary ballots will be printed on white paper and referendum ballots on pink paper, with extended polling hours to accommodate the dual process.

In his address, the CEC urged political actors to participate and asked citizens to vote "without fear," while acknowledging challenges such as ensuring neutrality, maintaining security, and rebuilding public trust. Akhtar Ahmed, senior secretary of the EC Secretariat, said the Commission is "fully prepared" to conduct both the parliamentary election and the referendum.

Business leaders say the announcement has eased immediate uncertainty. Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Taskin Ahmed said greater political clarity would help businesses plan, although investor confidence will depend on whether the law and order situation remains stable.

The overall human rights situation in Bangladesh still remains "alarming". According to Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), at least 107 persons were killed in political violence and 130 others in mob attacks during the first nine months of 2025.

According to sources in EC, 94,000 security personnel will be deployed during the polls

The total number of registered voters stands at 127,695,183 according to the the final voter list published by the EC.

'Waiting to die': the toxic trade of recycling in Vietnam's 'craft' villages

Agence France-Presse
HANOI

Crouched between mountains of discarded plastic, Lanh strips the labels off bottles of Coke, Evian and local Vietnamese drinks so they can be melted into tiny pellets for reuse.

More waste arrives daily, piling up along the roads and rivers of Xa Cau, one of hundreds of "craft" recycling villages encircling Vietnam's capital Hanoi where waste is sorted, shredded and melted.

The villages present a paradox: they enable reuse of some of the 1.8 million tonnes of plastic waste Vietnam produces each year, and allow employees to earn much-needed wages. But recycling is done with few regulations, pollutes the environment and threatens the health of those involved, both workers and experts told *AFP*.



Dirty business: A women picking up plastic waste at a landfill on the outskirts of Hanoi, Vietnam. AFP

It is a conundrum facing many fast-growing economies, where plastic use and disposal has outpaced the government's ability to collect, sort and recycle.

"Air pollution control is zero in such facilities," said Hoang Thanh Vinh, an analyst at the United Nations Development Programme.

In one village, Minh Khai, Mr. Vinh said a sediment analysis found "very high contamination of lead and the presence of dioxins", as well as furan – all of which have been linked to cancer. And in 2008, the life expectancy for residents of the villages was found to be a full decade shorter than the national average, according to the Environment Ministry.

Ms. Lanh believes the toxic waste in Xa Cau gave her husband blood cancer, but she still spends her days sorting rubbish to pay his medical bills. "This village is full of cancer cases, people just waiting to die," she said.

But there is also no shortage of workers, keen for the economic lifeline recycling provides.

"We get richer thanks to this business," said 58-year-old Nguyen Thi Tuyen, who lives in a two-storey home. "Now all the houses are brick houses... In the past, we were just a farming village."

Misery compounded



A Palestinian boy stands next to his mother washing clothes as mattresses are hung to dry over their tent in a makeshift camp in Gaza City on Tuesday. Gaza is facing another hardship as heavy rain and cold weather hit thousands of displaced people living in fragile tent camps. AP

Residents of a Myanmar town await 'junta-run' polls in the shadow of civil war

Agence France-Presse
NAWNGHKIO

The election billboards are shining new in Myanmar's northern town of Nawnghkio, but the homes are still shattered by combat.

Myanmar's military clawed back the town in a pre-election offensive this summer, but political campaigning is coloured by the pall of destruction rather than the promise of democratic renewal.

"We are still living in fear," said one resident, speaking to *AFP* on condition of anonymity for security reasons. "We have no idea when fighting could happen."

Nawnghkio is perched on a portion of misty plateau in Shan, once most famed for plantations yielding a cornucopia of oranges, vibrant flowers and coffee with hair-raising caffeine content.

More recently, it became a turning-point town in Myanmar's civil war – captured by a rebel alliance last year, then retaken by the military in July after an 11-month battle.

Nawnghkio candidates were shadowed by plain-clothes security last week, apparently for their own safety, and one would-be MP complained his campaign trail around outlying villages was littered with landmines.

The town is bounded by military and police checkpoints, where security forces photograph suspect vehicles and inspect civilian identity cards.

The military snatched power in a 2021 coup, toppling the democratic government, jailing its leaders and sparking a war that has riven Myanmar.

'Return to civilian rule'

The junta has promised a phased election – which begins on December 28 in around a third of the country's townships, including Nawnghkio – will salve the conflict and return the country to civilian rule.

Critics say the parties running are vetted by the military and that the poll is a charade to rebrand martial rule.



Campaign trail: A man holding a pamphlet at a People's Party event ahead of the general election in Nawnghkio, Myanmar. AFP

For the Nawnghkio resident whose ballot is being courted, the vote seems less like an opportunity for hard-won democracy than an obligation to appease the military overseeing the vote.

"We are not interested, but we will go to vote," she said. "We do not want to flee again. We do not know much about politics."

Myanmar has a history of guerrilla uprisings, but the coup triggered a full-blown civil war as long-active ethnic minority armies were joined on the battlefield by pro-democracy partisans.

The disordered Opposition initially struggled to make gains, before a joint offensive starting in late 2023 made nationwide advances and caught the military on the back foot.

In Shan, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and pro-democracy People's Defence Force surged out of the country's fringes and down the main trade route with China – reaching as far as Nawnghkio.

Aik Tun fled that fighting, but is now back home on his farm, and politically engaged as the candidates make their case.

Perhaps, the 58-year-old reasons, the vote will help his ailing homeland. "We need development for our village, our town, our states and regions," he said.

Polling after the putsch

Just an hour's drive south is Pyin Oo Lwin, housing the military officer training academy.

Myanmar's second largest city of Mandalay is just a further hour's drive in the same direction.

A watershed battle at Nawnghkio managed to turn the tide on this front of the civil war ahead of the phased vote, which is due to deliver results around late January and install a nominally civilian government.

The National League for Democracy, which won 2020 elections in a landslide, has been dissolved, while the military government has introduced decade-long sentences for election critics and protesters.

In once-threatened Pyin Oo Lwin, Hein Htoo Hlaing is now running for office for the People's Party after serving as a captain in the Army that seized power in the coup. But he strikes a conciliatory tone. "I want to work for peace mainly," the 33-year-old said.

He now campaigns in civilian garb, concerned that old rivalries might harm him on the campaign trail. "I have no idea who is out for me."

WITHIN BUDGET

We were quite happy with the price: KKR CEO on buying Green



FILE PHOTO

First of all, we are very happy [to get Cameron Green]. We were quite happy with the price. We were very keen [on buying him], but not so attached. If we felt it would have affected the rest of the auction, we would've let Green go. Fortunately, it came within the range we were looking at — Venky Mysore, CEO, KKR.

FINGERS CROSSED

We're looking forward to hopefully playing in Bengaluru: Mo Bobat



FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

As for the tragedy at the Chinnaswamy Stadium [stampede], I don't think I have much to comment on that at this stage. I think everybody knows how sad that incident was. We're looking forward to hopefully playing in Bengaluru and being able to get amongst our fans and people — Mo Bobat, Director of Cricket, RCB.

LENDING DEPTH

Mumbai Indians got lucky with de Kock, says Jayawardene



FILE PHOTO

Mumbai Indians coach Mahela Jayawardene expressed his delight after the franchise acquired South Africa wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock for his base price of ₹1 crore. "We were lucky. Quinny was part of MI in the past. Wanted to ensure we have depth in that crucial spot at the top of the order. Gives us flexibility in the playing XI".

VALUABLE ADDITION

We rate Venky highly, it's great to have him on board: Flower



FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

For two years running we've battled KKR for Venky (Venkatesh Iyer). We rate him highly, so it's great to have him on board. We met him, chatted, and loved his competitive spirit and leadership qualities for the dressing room and field. Looking forward to working with him — Royal Challengers Bengaluru head coach Andy Flower.

Green shoots up the IPL overseas charts; Prashant, Kartik strike gold

KKR spends a whopping ₹25.20 crore to sign the Australia all-rounder; CSK breaks the bank to buy the uncapped players for ₹14.20 crore each

AUCTION

Amol Karhadkar
ABU DHABI

Cameron Green lived up to the billing as he emerged the costliest overseas player in the Indian Premier League (IPL) – and the third-highest overall – at the mini-auction ahead of the 2026 season.

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) outbid Chennai Super Kings (CSK) to secure the Australia all-rounder for a whopping ₹25.20 crore at the Etihad Arena here on Tuesday.

Armed with the biggest purse, KKR also snapped up Sri Lankan slinger Matheesha Pathirana for ₹18 crore while Liam Livingstone made a late splash in the recall round, with Sunrisers Hyderabad spending ₹13 crore on the England all-rounder.

The flavour

Yet, the auction will be remembered less for the marquee overseas buys and more for a historic windfall for domestic uncapped players.

CSK shattered records by acquiring Uttar Pradesh all-rounder Prashant Veer and 19-year-old Rajasthan wicketkeeper-batter Kartik Sharma – who lit up the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy – for ₹14.20 crore each.

The duo jointly became the most expensive uncapped players in IPL history, comfortably eclipsing the previous record of ₹10 crore by pacer Avesh Khan at the 2022 mega auction.

Paradigm shift

Remarkably, Prashant and Kartik fetched more than 47 times their base price of ₹30 lakh, underlining a clear shift in the franchises thinking towards backing domestic talent.

That trend was further reinforced when Delhi Capitals secured Jammu & Kashmir swing bowler Auqib Nabi for ₹8.40 crore while Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) signed Madhya Pradesh left-arm pace-bowling all-rounder Mangesh Yadav for ₹5.20 crore. All four uncapped Indians featured among the top 15 buys of the auction, prompting CSK head coach Stephen Fleming to remark that "the T20 babies are coming to the fore."

Among established Indian names, Venkatesh Iyer and Ravi Bishnoi – two of the most high-profile releases ahead of the auction – also commanded a high price.

Rajasthan Royals brought in Bishnoi as its lead spinner for ₹7.20 crore while RCB finally landed Venkatesh Iyer after being outbid by KKR last season, holding firm until KKR withdrew at ₹7 crore.

In all, 77 players were signed at the auction as franchises spent ₹215.45 crore combined.

Not surprisingly, KKR emerged as the biggest spender, having entered the auction with a significant advantage over its nearest rival CSK (₹64.30 crore in its purse as compared to the Chennai outfit's ₹43.40 crore).

CSK added nine players to its roster, including experienced batter Sarfaraz Khan.



Moneyball

The 77 players — 48 Indian and 29 overseas — who made the cut at the IPL 2026 mini-auction at the Etihad Arena in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday

Player	Team	Base	Sold
Cameron Green	KKR	2.00 Cr	**25.20 Cr**
Matheesha Pathirana	KKR	2.00 Cr	**18.00 Cr**
Kartik Sharma	CSK	30.00 L	**14.20 Cr**
Prashant Veer	CSK	30.00 L	**14.20 Cr**
Liam Livingstone	SRH	2.00 Cr	**13.00 Cr**
Mustafizur Rahman	KKR	2.00 Cr	**9.20 Cr**
Josh Inglis	LSG	2.00 Cr	**8.60 Cr**
Auqib Nabi	DC	30.00 L	**8.40 Cr**
Ravi Bishnoi	RR	2.00 Cr	**7.20 Cr**
Jason Holder	GT	2.00 Cr	**7.00 Cr**
Venkatesh Iyer	RCB	2.00 Cr	**7.00 Cr**
Rahul Chahar	CSK	1.00 Cr	**5.20 Cr**
Mangesh Yadav	RCB	30.00 L	**5.20 Cr**
Ben Dwarshuis	PBKS	1.00 Cr	**4.40 Cr**
Pathum Nissanka	DC	75.00 L	**4.00 Cr**
Tejasvi Dahiya	KKR	30.00 L	**3.00 Cr**
Jack Edwards	SRH	50.00 L	**3.00 Cr**
Cooper Connolly	PBKS	2.00 Cr	**3.00 Cr**
Mukul Choudhary	LSG	30.00 L	**2.60 Cr**
Adam Milne	RR	2.00 Cr	**2.40 Cr**
Akshat Raghuwanshi	LSG	30.00 L	**2.20 Cr**
Matt Henry	CSK	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**
Lungi Ngidi	DC	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**
Rachin Ravindra	KKR	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**
Tom Banton	GT	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**
Ben Duckett	DC	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**

Player	Team	Base	Sold
Akeal Hosein	CSK	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**
Anrich Nortje	LSG	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**
Wanindu Hasaranga	LSG	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**
Kyle Jamieson	DC	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**
Finn Allen	KKR	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**
Jacob Duffy	RCB	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**
David Miller	DC	2.00 Cr	**2.00 Cr**
Matthew Short	CSK	1.50 Cr	**1.50 Cr**
Tim Seifert	KKR	1.50 Cr	**1.50 Cr**
Salil Arora	SRH	30.00 L	**1.50 Cr**
Quinton de Kock	MI	1.00 Cr	**1.00 Cr**
Akash Deep	KKR	1.00 Cr	**1.00 Cr**
Naman Tiwari	LSG	30.00 L	**1.00 Cr**
Ravi Singh	RR	30.00 L	**95.00 L**
Sushant Mishra	RR	30.00 L	**90.00 L**
Ashok Sharma	GT	30.00 L	**90.00 L**
Luke Wood	GT	75.00 L	**75.00 L**
Kuldeep Sen	RR	75.00 L	**75.00 L**
Sarfaraz Khan	CSK	75.00 L	**75.00 L**
Prithvi Shaw	DC	75.00 L	**75.00 L**
Zak Foulkes	CSK	75.00 L	**75.00 L**
Shivam Mavi	SRH	75.00 L	**75.00 L**
Jordan Cox	RCB	75.00 L	**75.00 L**
Rahul Tripathi	KKR	75.00 L	**75.00 L**
Aman Khan	CSK	30.00 L	**40.00 L**
Sahil Parakh	DC	30.00 L	**30.00 L**

Player	Team	Base	Sold
Kanishk Chouhan	RCB	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Aman Rao	RR	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Mayank Rawat	MI	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Vishal Nishad	PBKS	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Brijesh Sharma	RR	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Daksh Kamra	KKR	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Vihaan Malhotra	RCB	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Vicky Ostwal	RCB	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Sarthak Ranjan	KKR	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Prashant Solanki	KKR	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Karthik Tyagi	KKR	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Prithvi Raj Yarra	GT	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Mohammed Izhar	MI	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Danish Malewar	MI	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Vignesh Puthur	RR	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Yash Raj Punja	RR	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Satvik Deswal	RCB	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Krains Fuletra	SRH	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Praful Hinge	SRH	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Amit Kumar	SRH	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Onkar Tarmale	SRH	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Sakib Hussain	SRH	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Shivang Kumar	SRH	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Atharva Ankolekar	MI	30.00 L	**30.00 L**
Pravin Dubey	PBKS	30.00 L	**30.00 L**

COMPILED BY **SIDDHARTH G & SURYA SS**

Rajasthan Royals bought Bishnoi for ₹7.20 crore

In all, 77 players were signed at the auction as franchises spent ₹215.45 crore combined

Uncapped Indians rake in the moolah

Domestic uncapped crorepatis

Kartik Sharma (CSK) **Base price:** 30 lakh **Selling price** 14.20 crore	**Prashant Veer (CSK)** **Base price:** 30 lakh **Selling price** 14.20 crore	**Auqib Nabi (DC)** **Base price:** 30 lakh **Selling price** 8.40 crore
Mangesh Yadav (RCB) **Base price:** 30 lakh **Selling price** 5.20 crore	**Tejasvi Dahiya (KKR)** **Base price:** 30 lakh **Selling price** 3 crore	**Mukul Choudhary (LSG)** **Base price:** 30 lakh **Selling price** 2.60 crore
Akshat Raghuwanshi (LSG) **Base price:** 30 lakh **Selling price** 2.20 crore	**Salil Arora (SRH)** **Base price:** 30 lakh **Selling price** 1.50 crore	**Naman Tiwari (LSG)** **Base price:** 30 lakh **Selling price** 1 crore

Amol Karhadkar
ABU DHABI

A limited supply of proven, match-winning overseas options and the growing fearlessness of India's next generation combined to produce one of the standout narratives of the Indian Premier League auction on Tuesday: nine domestic uncapped players breaking into the crorepati club, with three more fetching bids in excess of ₹90 lakh.

While the scale of the spending may have surprised viewers and fans, it was far less unexpected inside the auction room.

True product of T20s

"I just wonder if we are now seeing the true product of T20 cricket coming to the fore," said Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming. "It certainly started last year, maybe even the year before. Earlier, my view was that experience would win. But now you're seeing fearless athletes who've grown up on T20 cricket and possess a skill set that is mouth-watering."

Fleming believed the defining trait of the new generation is the absence of fear. "They have no concern about the environment in which they need to express their skills. That's something we have to acknowledge – the T20 babies are coming through. Sometimes, experienced players can get caught trying to read the game too much.

"These young players only know one way, and that freedom has real appeal, especially as the game gets faster and faster. It's a natural by-product of T20 being around for a long time now."

CSK was at the forefront of this shift. A franchise once labelled 'Dad's Army' for its reliance on experience, CSK made a clear statement by investing ₹14.20 crore each in rookies Prashant Veer and Kartik Sharma – two of the most expensive uncapped players in IPL history.

Delhi Capitals head coach Hemang Badani, whose franchise went all out to sign Jammu & Kashmir medium-pacer Auqib Nabi, echoed Fleming's views, stressing that the demand for domestic talent continues to rise.

"Only when someone has to bring it against you do they go that high," Badani said. "That tells you the kid has something in him – like a Prashant Veer or a Kartik Sharma. There's a reason franchises are willing to go to ₹12 or ₹14 crore. One player doesn't go that far on his own. It reflects a bigger picture – a lot of young boys are coming through."

The auction, in that sense, may have offered a glimpse into the future of the IPL.

The IPL-2026 dugouts

As the dust settled on the mini-auction, here are the new-look outfits:

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

RETAINED: Anshul Kamboj, Ayush Mhatre, Dewald Brevis, Gurjapneet Singh, Jamie Overton, Khaleel Ahmed, M.S. Dhoni, Mukesh Choudhary, Nathan Ellis, Noor Ahmad, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shivam Dube, Shreyas Gopal, Urvil Patel

■ **Traded in:** Sanju Samson

TUESDAY'S PICKS: Kartik Sharma, Prashant Veer, Rahul Chahar, Matt Henry, Akeal Hosein, Matthew Short, Zak Foulkes, Sarfaraz Khan, Aman Khan

DELHI CAPITALS

RETAINED: Abishek Porel, Ajay Mandal, Ashutosh Sharma, Axar Patel, Dushmantha Chameera, Karun Nair, K.L. Rahul, Kuldeep Yadav, Madhav Tiwari, Mitchell Starc, Mukesh Kumar, Sameer Rizvi, T. Natarajan, Tripurana Vijay, Tristan Stubbs, Vipraj Nigam

■ **Traded in:** Nitish Rana

TUESDAY'S PICKS: Auqib Nabi, Pathum Nissanka, Kyle Jamieson, Lungi Ngidi, Ben Duckett, David Miller, Prithvi Shaw, Sahil Parakh

GUJARAT TITANS

RETAINED: Anuj Rawat, Arshad Khan, B. Sai Sudharsan, Glenn Phillips, Gurnoor Singh, Ishant Sharma, Jayant Yadav, Jos Buttler, Kagiso Rabada, Kumar Kushagra, Manav Suthar, Mohammed Siraj, Nishant Sindhu, Prasidh Krishna, Rahul Tewatia, Rashid Khan, R. Sai Kishore, Shahrukh Khan, Shubman Gill, Washington Sundar

TUESDAY'S PICKS: Jason Holder, Tom Banton, Ashok Sharma, Luke Wood, Prithvi Raj Yarra

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

RETAINED: Ajinkya Rahane, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Anukul Roy, Harshit Rana, Manish Pandey, Ramandeep Singh, Rinku Singh, Rovman Powell, Sunil Narine, Umran Malik, Vaibhav Arora, Varun Chakaravarthy

TUESDAY'S PICKS: Cameron Green, Matheesha Pathirana, Mustafizur Rahman, Tejasvi Dahiya, Rachin Ravindra, Finn Allen, Tim Seifert, Akash Deep, Rahul Tripathi, Daksh Kamra, Sarthak Ranjan, Prashant Solanki, Kartik Tyagi

LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

RETAINED: Abdul Samad, Aiden Markram, Akash Singh, Arshin Kulkarni, Avesh Khan, Ayush Badoni, Digvesh Rathi, Himmat Singh, M. Siddharth, Matthew Breetzke, Mayank Yadav, Mitchell Marsh, Mohsin Khan, Nicholas Pooran, Prince Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Shahbaz Ahamad

■ **Traded in:** Arjun Tendulkar, Mohammed Shami

TUESDAY'S PICKS: Josh Inglis, Mukul Choudhary, Akshat Raghuwanshi, Anrich Nortje, Wanindu Hasaranga, Naman Tiwari

MUMBAI INDIANS

RETAINED: Allah Ghazanfar, Ashwani Kumar, Corbin Bosch, Deepak Chahar, Hardik Pandya, Jasprit Bumrah, Mitchell Santner, Naman Dhir, Raghu Sharma, Raj Bawa, Robin Minz, Rohit Sharma, Ryan Rickelton, Suryakumar Yadav, Tilak Varma, Trent Boult, Will Jacks

■ **Traded in:** Mayank Markande, Shardul Thakur, Sherfane Rutherford

TUESDAY'S PICKS: Quinton de Kock, Mayank Rawat, Atharva Ankolekar, Mohammad Izhar, Danish Malewar

PUNJAB KINGS

RETAINED: Arshdeep Singh, Azmatullah Omarzai, Harnoor Pannu, Harpreet Brar, Lockie Ferguson, Marco Jansen, Marcus Stoinis, Mitchell Owen, Musheer Khan, Nehal Wadhera, Prabhsimran Singh, Priyansh Arya, Pyala Avinash, Shashank Singh, Shreyas Iyer, Suryansh Shedge, Vishnu Vinod, V. Vyshak, Xavier Bartlett, Yash Thakur, Yuzvendra Chahal

TUESDAY'S PICKS: Ben Dwarshuis, Cooper Connolly, Vishal Nishad, Pravin Dubey

RAJASTHAN ROYALS

RETAINED: Dhruv Jurel, Jofra Archer, Kwena Maphaka, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, Nandre Burger, Riyan Parag, Sandeep Sharma, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dubey, Tushar Deshpande, Vaibhav Suryavanshi, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Yudhvir Singh

■ **Traded in:** Donovan Ferreira, Ravindra Jadeja, Sam Curran

TUESDAY'S PICKS: Ravi Bishnoi, Adam Milne, Ravi Singh, Sushant Mishra, Kuldeep Sen, Brijesh Sharma, Aman Rao Perala, Vignesh Puthur, Yash Raj Punja

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BENGALURU

RETAINED: Abhinandan Singh, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Devdutt Padikkal, Jacob Bethell, Jitesh Sharma, Josh Hazlewood, Krunal Pandya, Nuwan Thushara, Phil Salt, Rajat Patidar, Rasikh Salam, Romario Shepherd, Suyash Sharma, Swapnil Singh, Tim David, Virat Kohli, Yash Dayal

TUESDAY'S PICKS: Venkatesh Iyer, Mangesh Yadav, Jacob Duffy, Jordan Cox, Kanishk Chouhan, Vihaan Malhotra, Vicky Ostwal, Satvik Deswal

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

RETAINED: Abhishek Sharma, Aniket Verma, Brydon Carse, Eshan Malinga, Harsh Dubey, Harshal Patel, Heinrich Klaasen, Ishan Kishan, Jaydev Unadkat, Kamindu Mendis, Nitish Kumar, Pat Cummins, R. Smaran, Travis Head, Zeeshan Ansari

TUESDAY'S PICKS: Liam Livingstone, Jack Edwards, Salil Arora, Shivam Mavi, Krains Fuletra, Praful Hinge, Amit Kumar, Onkar Tarmale, Sakib Hussain, Shivang Kumar

Can the Proteas push the series into a decider?

The Men in Blue, leading 2-1, will be looking to seal their eighth consecutive T20I series victory; Bumrah likely to play; Ekana's two-paced pitch will be a litmus test for South Africa's middle-order

SA IN INDIA

S. Dipak Ragav
LUCKNOW

It is that time of the year when cricketers across the world are glued to the screens, waiting with bated breath to know whether they have hit the jackpot.

Amid all the attention on the IPL mini-auction in Abu Dhabi, there are far more pressing matters at hand for India and South Africa.

The Men in Blue, leading 2-1, will look to seal their eighth consecutive T20I series victory when they take on the Proteas in the fourth T20I at the Ekana Stadium here on Wednesday.

Suryakumar Yadav's men bounced back strongly in the previous outing in Dharamshala with a comprehensive seven-wicket win to edge ahead in the five-match contest.

At the same time, the first three matches have shown that one can't read too much into the form guide in the fickle world of T20 cricket, where one fine spell of bowling or a cameo batting effort can flip the outcome quickly.

India and South Africa alternated between posting competitive totals and defending them easily in Cuttack and New Chandigarh.

For the hosts, there were quite a few positives to take home from the Dharamshala victory. The bowlers, who were sent on a leather hunt in the second encounter, found their bearings, especially Arshdeep Singh, to restrict the visitors to a paltry total.

Harshit Rana, who replaced Jasprit Bumrah, hit the ground running, giving early breakthroughs while Varun Chakaravarthy continued to bamboozle batters. Bumrah, who missed the previous game due to personal reasons, is likely to be available for this game. Shivam Dube's tight spell would have warmed the hearts of the management. If the all-rounder can chip in a few overs consistently, it will give the squad more depth and flexibility ahead of the T20 World Cup.



Balancing act: Captain Suryakumar will also have to get his batting form sorted. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

> I really think it's just about trying to be as consistent as you can, but also understanding it might not be your night
> – NORTJE

But concern persists over Suryakumar and Shubman Gill's meagre returns. The skipper hasn't scored a half-century in his last 21 visits to the crease, while that number is 18 for Gill.

The vice-captain, who made a comeback into the T20 set-up ahead of the Asia Cup, needs to strike form sooner rather than later, with Sanju Samson waiting in the wings.

The Kerala wicketkeeper-batter, who had three centuries as an opener last year, was shunted down the order to accommodate Gill and has been forced onto the sidelines despite reasonable performances in the middle-order as well.

Meanwhile, Aiden Markram's men also have quite a few headaches to solve with their batting unit. In both defeats, the team lost half its line-up with the score reading 50 and 44.

If not for Markram's fighting half-century in Dharamshala, South Africa might have been bundled out for less than 100 for the second time in the series.

Considering the pitch here at the Ekana Stadium could be two-paced, the South African middle-order needs to find a way to tackle the Indian spinners if it hopes to push the series into a decider.

The teams (from): India: Suryakumar Yadav (Capt.), Shubman Gill, Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Shahbaz Ahmed, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Varun Chakaravarthy, Arshdeep Singh, Kuldeep Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Harshit Rana and Washington Sundar.

South Africa: Aiden Markram (Capt.), Ottneil Baartman, Corbin Bosch, Dewald Brevis, Quinton de Kock (wk), Donovan Ferreira (wk), Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, George Linde, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje and Tristan Stubbs.

Match starts at 7 p.m.



Dube. R.V. MOORTHY

Dube credits think tank for improved bowling show

S. Dipak Ragav
LUCKNOW

Shivam Dube has become a regular starter in India's T20 set-up mainly for his batting prowess. But the 32-year-old is now slowly growing in confidence with his bowling and is ready to shoulder the challenge of being a genuine all-rounder.

In the last year, Dube has increased his bowling load. He returned figures of one for 21 in three overs in the previous game in Dharamshala.

"I have worked a lot in the off-season on my fitness. And when I am with the Indian team, I have many conversations with (bowling coach) Morne (Morkel). It helps me a lot," said Dube about his bowling on the eve of the fourth T20I against South Africa.

"As soon as (head coach) Gautam (Gambhir) and (skipper) Surya (Suryakumar Yadav) supported me and told me that I could do it, I put myself in that situation. I realised that I can bowl in challenging situations as well," he said.

Dube also backed Suryakumar to come good soon. "He's the kind of player who can win you five out of five matches on his own. Yes, he is short of runs, but his form will return at the right time. He is a fighter".



At what cost? Private investment on high-profile visits by stars like Messi and not on player-development initiatives is coming at a disconcerting time. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Messi to Medvedev: India courts stars, but forgets the systems

GENERAL

N. Sudarshan
BENGALURU

The Indian men's National football team is ranked an abysmal 142. In tennis, there is no Indian in the singles top-250, men or women.

India is light years away from qualifying for even an expanded, 48-team FIFA World Cup. Indian singles players have won a grand total of two matches at Majors in the last decade.

Yet, even as two truly global sports are bed-ridden in the country, India is courting international stars.

Argentine legend Lionel Messi just completed a four-city tour, and from Wednesday, a battery of renowned tennis players, led by former World No. 1 and 2021 US Open champion Daniil Medvedev, will descend in Bengaluru to play the World Tennis League (WTL) exhibition.

"It's a waste of time bringing stars like Messi for such events," Pradhyum Reddy, who has donned the roles of a coach, technical director and CEO at multiple clubs, told *The Hindu*.

"Bring them for a game, like the last time Messi was here and Argentina played Venezuela [2011].

"This trip was an absolute waste of money, and if they have that kind of money, it can be better spent. That people are willing to pay huge sums to get a glimpse [of Messi] from a distance is a sad state of our affairs," he added.

Such private investment being directed towards star visits and exhibitions and not player-development initiatives comes at a disconcerting time.

Top flight football, the Indian Super League (ISL), is in limbo, and the All India Tennis Association (AITA), late last year, closed down the National Tennis Centre in New Delhi.

"You have sponsors because a big name like Mahesh [Bhupathi] is heading it [WTL]," said Zeeshan Ali, former India Davis Cup coach.

"The AITA, for whatever reason, is not able to attract sponsors. The onus then falls on the big names, and there is no reason why they cannot get together and start a grassroots-level programme."

Glitzy, star-driven tournaments like WTL aren't new to India. The International Premier Tennis League (IPTL) – also founded by Bhupathi – ran from 2014 to 2016. The Vijay Amritraj-led Champions Tennis League was held in 2014 and 2015. But there is no tangible proof that either helped the sport. "In cricket, IPL viewers are consistently watching the best in the world and it does have a knock-on effect, but how much of an impact can a one-off tennis match have on a kid?" wondered Pradhyum. "And seeing Messi just walking around the stadium can hardly inspire anyone to play."

Play a role

Zeeshan believes that stars do have a role but player development should march in step. "When [Roger] Federer came to India [2014 IPTL], and when [Rafael] Nadal did for Davis Cup [2016], there was a queue for tickets. So big players do generate interest.

"But given where Indian tennis is, money can be spent better. Every good junior shouldn't be taking a scholarship to a college in the United States. If there is a path that parents see within India, the tennis scene will change."

Haryana stuns Hyderabad, takes on Jharkhand in final

SMAT

Shayan Acharya
PUNE

Jharkhand's winning streak was halted on Tuesday as it lost to Andhra by nine runs in the last match of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy Super League stage. But that did not stop Ishan Kishan's men from reaching their maiden final in the T20 tournament.

Enjoying a superior net run rate (NRR) of + 0.221, Jharkhand finished atop Group-B to set up a summit clash with Haryana, who stunned Hyderabad with a 124-run win at the MCA Stadium.

Coming on the back of two successive wins, Hyderabad would have fancied its chances. But as the frontline bowlers faltered on a flat deck, Haryana made optimum use of it.

Riding on captain Ankit Kumar's 27-ball-57 and Samant Jakhar's 22-ball-60, Haryana put up 246 for seven, before off-spinner Amit Rana (3 for 14) and seamer Ishant Bhardwaj, who claimed a couple of wickets, helped it bundle out Hyderabad for 122.

After conceding a massive total, Hyderabad had to score at least 195 runs to make the summit clash but fell short.

In a Group-B fixture, Nitish Kumar's 22-ball-45 and two for 32 was not enough to take Andhra to the final as Jharkhand stayed ahead on NRR.

Chasing a target of 204, Virat Singh (77, 40b, 4x4, 7x6) and Ishan Kishan (35, 18b, 5x4, 2x6) added 88 runs for the opening partnership. However, things went downhill thereafter as none of the middle-order batters could deliver.

Defending champion Mumbai crashed out despite defeating Rajasthan by three wickets. Sarfaraz Khan brought up his second consecutive fifty, off just 15 balls, with four national selectors in attendance.

To better its NRR, Mumbai had to chase down Rajasthan's total in 10.2 overs, but it could reach home with only 11 balls to spare.

The scores: Madhya Pradesh 225/8 in 20 overs (Venkatesh Iyer 70, Aniket Verma 31, Gurnoor Brar 3/45) lost to Punjab 226/8 in 19.1 overs (Harnoor Singh 64, Anmolpreet Singh 38, Salil Arora 50, Ramandeep Singh 35 n.o., Shivam Shukla 3/39).
Rajasthan 216/4 in 20 overs (Ramnivas Golada 48, Deepak Hooda 51, Mahipal Lomror 39, Mukul Choudhary 54 n.o.) lost to Mumbai 217/7 in 18.1 overs (Ajinkya Rahane 72 n.o., Sarfaraz Khan 73).
Andhra 203/7 in 20 overs (K.S. Bharat 35, Ashwin Hebbar 30, Nitish Kumar 45) bt Jharkhand 194/8 in 20 overs (Ishan Kishan 35, Virat Singh 77).
Haryana 246/7 in 20 overs (Ankit Kumar 57, Samant Jakhar 60, Parth Vats 45) bt Hyderabad 122 in 16.1 overs (Buddhi Rahul 37, Amit Rana 3/14).

Kundu's double ton flattens Malaysia

UNDER-19 ASIA CUP

Press Trust of India
DUBAI

Abhigyan Kundu's record 209 not out and a five-wicket haul from Deepesh Devendran set up a massive 315-run victory for India against Malaysia in their Under-19 Asia Cup match here on Tuesday.

India's margin of win is its second biggest in terms of runs in Youth ODIs, after a 326-run thrashing of Uganda in 2022.

Kundu etched his name in record books with a first-ever double century India in Youth ODIs, scoring his runs off 125 balls with 17 fours and nine sixes to fire the side to a mammoth 408 for seven. In reply, right-arm medium pacer Deepesh ran through the Malaysian middle-order. Despite a late resistance from Hamzah Panggi (35), Malaysia was bowled out for 93 in 32.1 overs.



Making history: Kundu became the first-ever double centurion for India in Youth ODIs. FILE PHOTO

It was a perfect outing for the Indian colts who put together a robust batting show in which the tone was set by Vaibhav Suryavanshi, who notched up a quick-fire 50 off 26 balls (5x4, 3x6).

Suryavanshi could not convert his start into another big score, having scored 171 a few days ago against the UAE.

India was unperturbed even as it lost skipper Ayush Mhatre (14) and Vihaan Malhotra (seven) and cheaply.

Vedant Trivedi teamed up with Kundu as the two added 209 runs for the fourth wicket to consolidate. The latter was the dominant of the two with his aggressive strokeplay, particularly on the leg side.

The 17-year-old Kundu's rotation of the strike was top notch as he collected 55 singles during his innings while hitting 17 fours and nine sixes.

Kundu's double ton is also only the second instance of a batter at U-19 level crossing the 200-run mark, with South Africa's Jorich Van Schalkwyk's 215 against Zimbabwe earlier this year being the first.

The scores: India 408/7 in 50 overs (Suryavanshi 50, Vedant 90, Kundu 209 n.o., Muhammad Akram 5/89) bt Malaysia 93 in 32.1 overs (Deepesh 5/22).

Gambits edge Kings; Grandmasters win

GCL

P.K. Ajith Kumar
MUMBAI

For a brief second, there were two queens on the board. But neither could save their king. That also meant Triveni Continental Kings, the champion of the first two editions of the Global Chess League, would suffer its first defeat in the third.

Richard Rapport's win against Vidit Gujrathi, and his two queens, helped Fyers American Gambits score a victory against Continental Kings, the team that had really looked impressive in its title defence over the first two days. On Tuesday at the Royal Opera House, in front of an enthusiastic crowd, Gambits won 10-8.

Anand sizzles

The day also saw Ganges Grandmasters beat PBG Alaskan Knights rather convincingly, 12-3, with Viswanathan Anand turning the clock back in style to beat D. Gukesh.

Alpine SG Pipers scored a maiden victory, beating upGrad Mumba Masters 9-7.

Mumba Masters, however, is leading the table with 33 points, one more than Continental Kings.

The results (third round): Ganges Grandmasters bt PBG Alaskan Knights 12-3 (Viswanathan Anand bt D. Gukesh; Vincent Keymer drew with Arjun Erigaisi; Jovakhir Sindarov bt Leinier Dominguez; Polina Shuvalova bt Kateryna Lagno; Stavroula Tsolakidou drew with Sarasadat Khademalsharieh; Raunak Sadhwani drew with Daniel Dardha).
Fyers American Gambits bt Triveni Continental Kings 10-8 (Hikaru Nakamura lost to Alireza Firouzja, Vladislav Artemiev drew with Wei Yi; Richard Rapport bt Vidit Gujrathi; Bibisara Assaubayeva drew with Zhu Jiner; Teodora Injac lost to Alexandra Kosteniuk; Volodar Murzin bt MarcAndria Maurizzi).
upGrad Mumba Masters lost to Alpine SG Pipers 7-9 (Maxime Vachier-Lagrave bt Fabiano Caruana; Wesley So drew with Anish Giri; Shakhriyar Mamedyarov drew with R. Praggnanandhaa; Koneru Humpy lost to Hou Yifan; D. Harika drew with Nino Batsiashvilli; Daneshvar Barditya lost to Leon Mendonca).
(The writer is in Mumbai at the invitation of Tech Mahindra).



Turning the clock back: Anand got the better of Gukesh to put his team on the road to victory. GCL

SNAPSHOTS

Man Utd blows lead thrice in thriller

MANCHESTER: Manchester United blew the lead thrice to miss out on moving up to fifth in the Premier League as Bournemouth would not be beaten in a thrilling 4-4 draw at Old Trafford.

The results: Premier League: Manchester United 4 (Diallo 13, Casemiro 45+4, Fernandes 77, Cunha 79) drew with Bournemouth 4 (Semenyo 40, Evanilson 46, Tavernier 52, Kroupi 84).

LaLiga: Rayo Vallecano 0 drew with Real Betis 0.

Serie A: Roma 1 (Wesley Franca 61) bt Como 0.

Sabalenka wins WTA Tour Player of the Year award

NEW YORK: Aryna Sabalenka won her second consecutive WTA Tour Player of the Year award on Monday, getting nearly 80% of the vote from a media panel after winning the U.S. Open, reaching the finals of two other Grand Slam tournaments and closing the season at No. 1 in the rankings.

Scheffler retains PGA Tour Player of the Year Award

NEW YORK: World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler has been voted PGA Tour Player of the Year for a fourth straight season after a campaign that included two Major wins, the Tour announced on Monday.

Scheffler, who won six titles in 2025, is just the second player after Tiger Woods to receive the accolade in four or more consecutive seasons.

Cummins and Lyon back in the fold; Khawaja dropped

ADELAIDE: Fit-again opener Usman Khawaja was left out of the third Ashes Test in Adelaide starting on Wednesday as skipper Pat Cummins and veteran Nathan Lyon were named in an Australia side looking to seal the series.

The squad: Pat Cummins (Capt.), Jake Weatherald, Travis Head, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Cameron Green, Josh Inglis, Alex Carey, Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Scott Boland.



The Messi odyssey: of hard-earned clicks and memories

The Argentine, along with Suarez and De Paul, spent less than an hour at the Hyderabad venue, but gave the fans something to cherish for a lifetime; in a tour dominated by flash and fanfare, and beyond the stadiums and cameras, the human connections left the deepest marks

AFP

Anirudh Velamuri
HYDERABAD

If anticipation surrounded Messi's arrival in Hyderabad, so did anxiety because of what had unfolded earlier in Kolkata. The scenes there, widely documented by the national and international media, prompted alarm bells in the City of Pearls. Security was tightened, protocols revisited, and nerves stretched

Four cities. Three days. Two close friends. One punishing itinerary.

That, in essence, was Lionel Messi's GOAT India Tour, a whirlwind that delivered all the adulation the Argentine icon deserved, along with a measure of chaos he could have done without.

Kolkata, where football borders on religion, was the tour's natural starting point. Mumbai and New Delhi, with their blend of glamour and power, were equally inevitable. The fourth and final stop, however, remained open, triggering a quiet contest among several States eager to host the world's most recognisable footballer.

While Messi's visit to India had been billed and advertised as a private event, there is no event in the country, especially one this high profile, that goes by without one, if not all, of the three industries having a hand in it: politics, films, and cricket.

And it is one part of that Venn diagram that ended up clinching Hyderabad's spot on the tour.

"We had competition from Gujarat and Rajasthan. Even Karnataka was trying. Some states were trying very, very hard to take him," Parvathi Reddy, Chief Patron and advisor for the Hyderabad leg of the GOAT Tour, told *The Hindu*.

"However, I had a trump card, and that was (Telangana Chief Minister) Revanth Reddy. Coincidentally, you know, he plays the sport and is passionate about it as well. Why not bring that in on the table?"

If anticipation surrounded Messi's arrival in Hyderabad, so did anxiety, largely because of what had unfolded earlier in Kolkata. The scenes there, widely documented by national and international media, prompted alarm bells in the City of Pearls. Security was tightened, protocols revisited, and nerves stretched.

Calmed nerves

When Messi landed in Hyderabad alongside Inter Miami teammates Luis Suárez and Rodrigo De Paul, there was little spectacle. Any concerns about the trio's mood after Kolkata, however, dissipated quickly.

"When we were in the car on our way from the stadium, I was telling De Paul that I have a son who is his age and is just as naughty as him. Then he began to joke about his age; he said he was 30 and was trying to play the fool. The other guys immediately chimed in and caught his lie. They were pulling each other's leg with age; they were adding two years to each other's ages and laughing about it. The vibe was very good."

"I think Hyderabad made them relax; we gave them the comfort for them to be themselves. It was not overwhelming for them, in spite of what happened in Kolkata. They landed with some fear, understandably, maybe thinking, 'What is going to happen?' But we didn't invade their personal spaces.

Messi was mobbed in the City of Joy, not by the masses but by bureaucrats, all wanting a piece of the legendary pie. Fans could barely spot their idol, and the hallowed turf of the Salt Lake Stadium, for once, left all fans, irrespective of their club or national allegiances, equally betrayed and seething with anger.

That episode shaped Hyderabad's approach.

"I did have a conversation with Messi when they all landed, and we were in the car. The first thing I told them and the whole team was that everything in Hyderabad was in control. We also told them we will not have anybody on the field at the stadium. Only the children and four photographers, no one else to mob them," she said.

Further proof of their ease came as soon as they reached Falaknuma Palace.

"There was this band playing as soon as we entered Falaknuma. The hotel arranged it, it is a regular thing they do. Bouquets were given, and then they had these dancers dancing to some music. I saw De Paul shake a leg and I was like 'okay, let's move a little bit.' He's such a wonderful character! They were all very chilled out."

Recouping investment

Messi's time in Hyderabad began with a meet-and-greet session at the Falaknuma Palace. The private event, for which tickets were sold to the crème de la crème of society for ₹10 lakh each, generated a lot of debate online.

Parvathi, however, vehemently defended the model.

"In theatres, why do we have 500 rupee tickets and then cheaper ones? Why do you segregate? It's as simple as that. Why do you have a business class ticket and a normal economy class ticket? Why don't you question that? In the end, you have to generate money to have an event like this and also make it 'normal' for regular people who wouldn't otherwise fly to Argentina or the US or somewhere to see Messi."

The demand ultimately fell short of expectations.

"We had 100 slots that we wanted to sell, but we barely sold 20 to 25. People were hardly willing to spend that kind of money. Meaning, they're still not mentally prepared, even the ones who can afford it. The response to that event was definitely very, very minimal," she said.

"Sponsors got to take a picture for free. Some we had sent as a courtesy, especially to people who have helped us put it together. There were some that were purchased and there were some that went to sponsors as a deliverable. So all of these categories of people were there."

The players moved along, insulated from these logistical elements. Their mood also got a boost when they could switch back to a more familiar tongue – Spanish – during a brief chat with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

"Rahul ji, Revanth Reddy, myself, Messi, Suarez, De Paul, all of us were there and had a chat for a few minutes around the courtyard garden. He (Rahul) had a conversation with them in Spanish, and they felt very comfortable with that."

Wants, and hard lines

The tour then moved to Uppal, where a section of the cricket stadium had been converted into a makeshift football pitch. Images of Messi, Suarez, and De Paul casually striking footballs into the stands soon flooded social media – a rare moment of ease amid a relentless schedule.

They spent less than an hour at the venue, but left behind memories that fans will carry for a lifetime. With Mumbai and Delhi still to come, the rest was the priority, though not before dinner.

"The players asked for grilled chicken and fish. De Paul told me that he loves eating sweet potatoes and requested me to ensure he gets that."

There was one unanimous instruction, however.

"They didn't want spice. The line 'We don't want spice,' was said about 10 times."

Officially, Messi's Hyderabad visit ended that night. For fans, it didn't.

"I saw a kid who had come from Mumbai. He wanted to see Messi, and at around 11:30 p.m. or so, when I was leaving the hotel, he asked me, "Aunty, will he not come out?" I said no, he's retired for the night. The next morning, I saw him waiting in the courtyard again."

And he was not the only kid at the hotel who was eager to get a brush with greatness, pushing Parvathi to improvise.

"There were a lot of children in Falaknuma who wanted a picture. I knew it would be chaotic; there were at least 20 to 30 children. Since individual pictures were not possible, I made them sit together, in three levels."

"One standing, one kneeling, and one sitting down. And I told them to leave space for three people in the center. One of Messi's personal security was unsure if a picture would happen. But I fought back and said it will happen."

"Then Messi walked out, and then all three of them went straight to the children and took a picture. They saw those kids beautifully in three levels, and I didn't have to tell them anything. They just walked straight to them and took a picture. I felt very good that I could give that picture for free to 20 children who I thought would go home happy."

Quiet regrets

While Hyderabad delivered the hospitality India prides itself on, Parvathi was left with a few personal regrets.

"My entire team couldn't get a picture with them, nor did anyone from Hyderabad Talkies (the company managing the event)," she said, adding, "But when you host something, you have to be very responsible. Our focus was fully on that, and in the end, we couldn't get a picture with the team."

Even she missed out.

"In fact, I spent a lot of time with them in the car, and I do not have a single selfie with all three of them. I still cannot believe I forgot that! Thankfully, De Paul was kind enough to suggest I take one with him when we were in the stadium."

While she couldn't get her family to also have a picture with the three players, she is glad to have gotten their autographs for her daughter-in-law.

"My daughter-in-law is pregnant, and we didn't want to take her to public spaces. And because there was so much happening, you can't steal their time for yourself. Unfortunately, she couldn't get a picture with Messi, but we managed to get her his autograph, that too on her handbag! So she's very happy about it."

"When I told Messi that my daughter-in-law wants his signature on her bag, he paused and then asked me if I was sure. I told him that the memory that he will give her will be priceless."

In a tour dominated by flash and fanfare, and beyond the stadiums and cameras, it was the human connections that left the deepest marks. The small gestures and the fleeting smiles were a reminder that Messi is more than a footballer; he's a moment-maker.

For Hyderabad, and for the fans lucky enough to witness it, it was less about chaos and more about character. Messi's boots may have left the city, but his footprint is now permanent.

The small gestures and the fleeting smiles were a reminder that Messi is more than a footballer; he's a moment-maker

THE GIST

- When Messi landed in Hyderabad alongside Inter Miami teammates Luis Suarez and Rodrigo De Paul, there was little spectacle. Any concerns about the trio's mood after Kolkata, however, dissipated quickly
- Images of Messi, Suarez, and De Paul casually striking footballs into the stands at Uppal flooded social media – a rare moment of ease amid a relentless schedule
- For Hyderabad, and for the fans lucky enough to witness it, it was less about chaos and more about character



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