

# Across State

Year -8 Issue - 7

Mumbai, Thursday 21-27 Nove '24

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Rs.5/- PAGES- 8

## BJP-led Mahayuti likely to retain Maharashtra, predict exit polls



### Mumbai

The ruling Mahayuti is poised to retain power in Maharashtra with the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) also putting up a strong show in the Assembly polls, most exit poll predicted on Wednesday after the conclusion of polling on 288 seats in the state.

According to Republic TV-PMARQ exit poll, the Mahayuti alliance could win 137-157 seats, whereas the Maha Vikas Aghadi could get 126-147 seats and others 2-8 seats.

Mahayuti includes BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP while the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi includes Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP).

ABP-Matrize exit poll projected 150-170 seats for the Mahayuti alliance and 110-130 seats for Maha Vikas Aghadi. It said others could get 8-10 seats.

News 24-Today's Chanakya projected that Mahayuti will win 152-150 seats, MVA 130-138 seats and others 6-8 seats 'Peoples Pulse' projected Mahayuti scoring a decisive victory by getting 175-195 seats. It said Maha Vikas Aghadi is poised to get 85-112 seats and 'others' winning 7-12 seats.

The majority mark in Maharashtra Assembly is 145.

Maharashtra polled 58.22 per cent votes till 5 pm on Wednesday.

The elections saw a keen contest between Mahayuti and MVA. It was first Assembly poll in the state after splits in Shiv Sena and NCP.

*Voting for 288 assembly seats in Maharashtra was held on Wednesday (November 20). According to the Election Commission of India, Maharashtra reported 58.41 per cent voter turnout in the assembly elections 2024. Mumbai City recorded the lowest 49.07 per cent voter turnout. The ruling BJP-led Mahayuti alliance is aiming to retain power, while the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance is also hopeful for a comeback. Elaborate security arrangements have been made for polling. A total of 4,136 candidates were in the fray for the fierce contest. Among these candidates, 2,086 are independents. Rebels are in the fray in over 150 constituencies, with candidates from the Mahayuti and MVA contesting against their party's official nominees.*

Source	NDA	MVA	Others
Matrix	150-170	110-130	08-10
Chanakya strategy	152-160	130-138	06-08
People's Pulse	175-195	85-112	07-12
Voting Diary	122-186	69-121	12-29
Democratic Marathi-Rudra	128-142	125-140	18-23
Electrol Age	117-118	149-150	19-20
SAS Hyderabad	127-135	147-155	10-13
P-mark	137-157	126-146	02-08
Dainik Bhaskar	125-140	135-150	20-25
Times Now-JVC	158-159	115-116	12-13
Poll of polls	139-156	119-136	11-16

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# Devendra Fadnavis dismisses Anil Deshmukh's attack claims as movie script from yesteryears

**Nagpur**

A day after former Maharashtra Home Minister and NCP (SP) leader Anil Deshmukh's car was allegedly attacked by miscreants, resulting in a brain injury to him, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday (November 19) questioned the veracity of the incident, terming it reminiscent of scenes from a Rajinikanth movie. Speaking to reporters in Nagpur, the Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister said the "entire story" appears to be a hoax, orchestrated to gain sympathy just ahead of the polling date. "This

purported attack is part of a larger conspiracy orchestrated by the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) to divert attention from the imminent defeat they are facing in the (November 20) assembly elections," Fadnavis remarked. Significantly, the BJP leader, speaking to the media also elaborated on the claim regarding "10-kg stone" allegedly being thrown at Deshmukh's car. Reacting to this, Fadnavis stated that the circumstances do not add up. If such a large stone had been hurled, the vehicle should have suffered significant damage, which was not the case. "If such



a large stone was hurled at the car, the windshield should have been smashed. Moreover, the bonnet of the car didn't even receive a scratch," he said.

"If a stone is claimed to have been hurled from the backside of the car, how did Deshmukh suffer injuries to his forehead?" Fadnavis asked.

"Why did Deshmukh sustain only minor abrasions? This entire story is reminiscent of scenes from a Rajinikanth movie rather than reality. It reads like a Salim-Javed script from yesteryears," he further remarked.

Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the alleged attack, NCP (SP) leader Anil Deshmukh slammed the BJP, accusing them of orchestrating the attack.

"I want to tell the people of BJP that you can hit me with stones and even shoot me, but I, Anil Deshmukh, will not die," he said.

"We will not leave without teaching you a lesson," he added.

# 111-year-old woman votes in Gadchiroli

**Mumbai**

As the festival of democracy continued, a 111-year-old woman exercised her franchise in the Naxalite-infested Gadchiroli district in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.

The grandmother, Fulmati Binod Sarkar is a resident of Govindpur in Mulchera taluka. Fulmati was born on January 1, 1913.

Since she is unable to walk, the administration had arranged a four-wheeler and a wheelchair.



Fulmati also appealed to people to vote and do their duty.

"The grandmother created enthusiasm among the voters by voting in person. The grandmother's enthusiasm for voting was commendable. While this enthusiasm of the 111-year-old grandmother was exemplary for the young class who are turning their backs on voting,"

Gadchiroli district officials said.

The Election Commission of India has ensured home voting facilities for voters above 85 years of age, however Fulmati preferred to come to the booth and vote.

"It is a matter of pride for this 111-year-old grandmother to participate in the celebration of democracy by voting in person. She refused to vote at home and participated in the celebration of democracy in person. Not only that, but she also appealed to everyone to vote in her native Bengali language," official said.

## Tawde booked in 'cash-for-votes' row

**Virar**

Police on Tuesday registered two FIRs against BJP general secretary Vinod Tawde, party candidate Rajan Naik and others in connection with the alleged distribution of cash to voters at a hotel in Palghar a day before the Maharashtra polls, an official said.

The cases were registered at the Tulinj police station

in the district for alleged violation of the election code of conduct in place for the November 20 Assembly elections, he said.

The first FIR named Tawde and others for assembling at a hotel in violation of the poll code, while the second one accuses them of luring voters by offering cash and alcohol to them, the police said.

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## 'Rama Krishna Hari': Supriya Sule responds to Ajit Pawar's remark on bitcoin controversy

**Pune**

NCP-SCP MP Supriya Sule on Wednesday broke silence on cousin Ajit Pawar's statement regarding allegations against her and Nana Patole and said he is Ajit Pawar, he can say anything. 'Ram Krishna Hari', he can say anything," she said. On allegations against Vinod Tawde, Supriya Sule said, "It was a very disturbing video. Vinod Tawde is a big politician not only in the state but the country..."

Supriya Sule also asserted that she is prepared to answer the five questions raised by BJP MP Sudhanshu Trivedi regarding her alleged involvement in a cryptocurrency fraud case.

Speaking to ANI, Sule said, "I am ready to answer his (Sudhanshu Trivedi) 5 questions wherever he wants. Time of his choice, place of his choice and platform of his choice. I am ready to answer him because all the allegations are completely false."

On Tuesday, BJP MP Sudhanshu Trivedi raised several questions about Sule's alleged involvement in a 2018 cryptocurrency fraud case, which former IPS officer Ravindranath Patil claims involved Sule and Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole.



Addressing a press conference on Tuesday, Trivedi said, "we want to ask 5 questions to the Congress Party, one, are you involved in the bitcoin transaction? Second, are you in contact with this person named Gaurav Gupta or Mehta?"

Third, the chats are yours (of your leaders) or not? Fourth, the audio in the audio clips is yours or not? Fifth, who are the 'big people'?"

Earlier in the day, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar claimed that he recognized his sister's voice in the audio clips mentioned by former IPS officer Patil as evidence of Sule's involvement in the scam and promised an investigation into it.





Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday cast his vote at a polling station in Mumbai. He was accompanied by his wife Rashmi Thackeray and son and party leader Aaditya Thackeray.

After casting their vote, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray urged the voters to cast their vote, saying "Step out and vote."

## Voting Concludes for Maharashtra Assembly Elections

### Mumbai

Maharashtra witnessed voting for its 288 Assembly constituencies today, with voter turnout recorded at 58.22% by 5 PM. The elections marked the first major political showdown in the state after a significant shift in political equations, pitting the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance against the Congress-NCP-Shiv Sena (UBT) Mahavikas Aghadi (MVA). All parties engaged in intense campaigning to secure dominance in the state's governance.

The high-stakes election saw heated exchanges and clashes between party workers of the Mahayuti and MVA at several polling stations from early morning. Allegations, counter-allegations, and reports of cash distribution to influence voters created a chaotic environment. In some places, candidates allegedly issued death threats, further escalating tensions.

### EVM Malfunctions

Technical glitches with electronic voting machines (EVMs) were reported at multiple locations. In Kolhapur North constituency, EVMs at Vikram High School polling center near the central bus station malfunctioned, causing delays. Similar issues were reported in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, where voters faced initial disruptions before technical

problems were resolved, allowing polling to continue smoothly.

A significant controversy emerged in Igatpuri constituency's Talegaon polling station, where voters alleged that pressing a button on the EVM registered votes for a different candidate. This led to a temporary suspension of the voting process at the center, causing confusion among voters.

## Congress Will Emerge as the Leading Party in the Assembly - Nana Patole

### Mumbai

During the voting for the Assembly elections, the public displayed great enthusiasm. I am confident that the proud people of Maharashtra will choose a new government keeping the state's best interests in mind, said Nana Patole, the President of the Maharashtra Congress Committee.

He asserted that based on public response, it is clear that the Congress Party will emerge as the largest party within the Mahavikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance and that the formation of an MVA government is inevitable.

Nana Patole exercised his voting right along with his family members in the Sakoli Assembly constituency in the Bhandara district. Speaking on the occasion, he accused the BJP of violating constitutional norms during the elections. He pointed out that BJP National General Secretary Vinod Tawde was caught distributing money at a hotel in Virar. Patole questioned Tawde's presence in a constituency that is not his own, adding

## Mahayuti will get thumping majority, people will vote for development, says CM Eknath Shinde

### Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Wednesday expressed confidence that the Mahayuti government will get a thumping majority as people will vote for development and work done by his dispensation.

Shinde, who heads the ruling Shiv Sena and seeking his re-election from the Kopri-Pachpakhadi assembly constituency in Thane, was talking to reporters after casting his vote along with his family members, including his MP son Shrikant Shinde.

He said election is a festival of democracy that will take Maharashtra towards a brighter future and make India an economic superpower.

Shinde urged voters across the state to actively participate in the electoral process.

"This festival is our opportunity to take part in building a stronger Maharashtra. Every citizen should fulfil the duty to vote. I humbly request everyone to cast vote and make our democracy prosperous. We



must ensure a high voter turnout today," he said.

"People have seen their (Maha Vikas Aghadi's) two-and-a-half years of rule vis-a-vis the work done by us in the same amount of time. People will vote for development and for the work done by us," Shinde said.

"We restarted the development work that was stalled...In the last five years, people have seen our path of development. They know who has truly worked for the state's progress," he said.

Shinde said people know the welfare schemes implemented

by his government for women, youth, farmers and senior citizens.

"The Mahayuti government will win with a thumping majority," Shinde said.

The chief minister said in 2019 people saw that a government was formed in a wrong way, contrary to their expectations. People have not forgotten that, he said.

Shinde was referring to the then Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray joining hands with the Congress and the National Congress Party after the Shiv Sena-BJP won the 2019 assembly polls.

Voting makes democracy stronger, he said, and urged people to vote in large numbers.

Shinde's rebellion against the leadership of Uddhav Thackeray led to a split in the Shiv Sena, and also to the collapse of the Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in June 2022.



that his claim of meeting party workers is false. According to election rules, leaders from outside the constituency cannot stay there once campaigning ends, making

Tawde's justification baseless.

Patole further alleged that Wankhede, the BJP candidate from the Arvi Assembly seat, who is also Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis's personal assistant, was found hoarding liquor bottles in a warehouse. He questioned how such a stockpile of liquor was brought to Wardha district despite a liquor ban. Patole accused the BJP of trying to win votes by distributing money and liquor but expressed confidence that their attempts would fail. Commenting on BJP's propaganda, Patole said the party is claiming "vote jihad" took place in the Lok Sabha elections. He questioned whether appealing for votes by any caste group constitutes "vote jihad" and pointed out the hypocrisy of BJP when a certain community appeals for votes in their favor.

Patole concluded by stating that the public would see through BJP's conspiracy to malign him with false allegations and give them a fitting response at the ballot box.



# Kartik Aaryan to Suniel Shetty, Bollywood celebs cast vote in Maharashtra Assembly Elections 2024



Actor Akshay Kumar echoed a similar sentiment after voting, lauding the smooth arrangements for senior citizens and cleanliness at polling stations. "I want everyone to come out and cast their votes," Kumar said.

Rajkumar Rao, who voted at Gyan Kendra Secondary School in Mumbai, described voting as a fundamental responsibility. "It is our right in a democracy, so it's important that we step outside and vote. I have performed my duty. It is your turn now," he stated. Actor Sonu Sood also weighed in, urging people not to treat election day as a holiday but as an opportunity to make a difference. "It's very important for the country," he said.

Actor duo Riteish Deshmukh and Genelia D'Souza cast their votes in Latur, with Deshmukh expressing

confidence in the Maha Vikas Aghadi's prospects. Genelia stressed the transformative power of voting, calling it "an important day" and encouraging citizens to practice their rights.

Bollywood actor Gautami Kapoor described the experience of voting as liberating. "Every vote makes a huge difference. Please vote — it's very important. We can change the country," she shared.

Musician Vishal Dadlani appealed to voters, emphasizing love for the state and country as motivation to step out and vote. Actor and filmmaker Pooja Bhatt also took to social media to urge fans to make their votes count, writing, "Go vote Mumbai. Go vote Bandra. Your vote matters."

Among other early voters were filmmakers Kabir

Khan and Zoya Akhtar, actors Ali Fazal and John Abraham, and multi-talented Farhan Akhtar. Farhan Akhtar, known for his civic engagement, reminded citizens that voting is essential before raising complaints about governance, adding that he hoped for more cinema screens in Mumbai.

With polling underway across 288 constituencies, the state is witnessing intense battles in key regions. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Deputy Chief Ministers Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar, and other political heavyweights are vying for seats in this crucial election.

As voter turnout remains a focal point, the Election Commission and high-profile influencers continue to urge citizens to make their voices heard by heading to the polls.



# I'm Not Stupid To Distribute Money In Opponent's Hotel: BJP Leader Tawde

**Mumbai**

BJP general secretary Vinod Tawde on Wednesday dismissed the allegations of distributing money to influence voters, saying he was well aware of the rules and not foolish to indulge in such an activity at the hotel of political opponents. Hours before the assembly polls, Bahujan Vikas Aghadi (BVA) leader Hitendra Thakur on Tuesday accused Tawde of distributing Rs 5 crore at a hotel in Virar, 60 km from Mumbai, to woo voters.

Amid claims by BVA leaders that Rs 5 crore cash was distributed, an election official on Tuesday said Rs 9.93 lakh cash was recovered from the



hotel rooms. The BJP leader has denied the allegation, saying he was only providing guidance to party workers on poll procedures. "The Vivanta Hotel (at Virar in Palghar) is owned by the Thakurs. I am not stupid to go to their hotel

and distribute money there," Tawde told reporters here.

The BJP leader said he was in politics for 40 years and was aware of the rules and regulations, particularly the 'silence period' before elections. "I was having

a casual chat with party workers. I was not campaigning," Tawde said. The BJP leader said he was only engaging in discussions with party workers about voting procedures.

Leaders of the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) have sought a comprehensive investigation by the Election Commission. Tawde expressed surprise that national leaders had become involved in the issue and said, "BJP people are no longer stupid to distribute money in a hotel owned by opposition parties. They should realise this much."

Reiterating that no money was found on him, Tawde quipped,

"The Rs five crore that Rahul Gandhi and Supriya Sule saw, please send it to me. They can deposit it into my bank account." Police on Tuesday registered two FIRs against Tawde, BJP candidate Rajan Naik and others in connection with the alleged distribution of cash to voters at the hotel in Palghar.

A separate FIR was registered against BJP and Bahujan Vikas Aghadi functionaries for allegedly trying to address a press conference. The three cases were registered at the Tulinj police station in Palghar district for alleged violation of the election code of conduct in place for the assembly polls.

# Bitcoin Scam Allegation: 'It's Supriya's Voice', Says Ajit Pawar; 'All Lies,' Responds Sule

**Pune**

The big pre-poll allegation dropped by former IPS officer Ravindra Patil that NCP leader Supriya Sule and Congress' Nana Patole had used Bitcoin scam tainted cash to fund polls has blown out into an all-out political war on polling day.

Sule on Wednesday refuted all allegations levelled against her saying all the allegations are completely false.

Speaking to ANI, Sule said, "I have filed a defamation case and a criminal case. I am ready to answer his (Sudhanshu Trivedi) 5 questions wherever he wants. Time of his choice, place of his choice and platform of his choice. I am ready to answer him because all the allegations are completely false. All lies."

Earlier today, Pawar claimed that he could recognize the voice of his sister in the purported audio clips that the former IPS officer Patil had alluded to as proof of Sule's involvement in the scam. The Deputy CM also promised an investigation into the scandal.

"Whatever audio clip is being shown, I just know that I have worked with both of them. One of them is my sister and the other is someone with whom I have worked a lot. The audio clip has their voices; I can figure it out from their tone. An inquiry will be done and the truth will come in front of the people," Pawar said.

Replying to Ajit Pawar's assertion on the audio being hers Sule said, "He is Ajit Pawar, he can say anything. 'Ram Krishna Hari'.

Earlier today, NCP-SCP MP Supriya Sule and her family cast their votes at a polling station in Baramati.

One of the most anticipated battles in these elections is taking place in Baramati. Where Ajit Pawar is contesting against the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Chandra Pawar faction) Yugendra Pawar, the son of his younger brother, Shrinivas Pawar.

Baramati also drew attention in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections when Sunetra Pawar challenged



Supriya Sule, who ultimately won by a margin of 1.5 lakh votes. Voting began at 7 am on Wednesday for the single-phase Maharashtra assembly elections and will conclude at 6 pm. Polling is taking place across 288 assembly constituencies.

A total of 4,136 candidates are contesting the elections, including 2,086 independents. The BJP is contesting 149 seats,

Shiv Sena 81, and the NCP 59. The Congress has fielded 101 candidates, Shiv Sena (UBT) 95, and NCP (Sharad Pawar faction) 86. The BSP is contesting 237 seats, while other smaller parties are also in the fray. The state has approximately 9.7 crore registered voters.

Elaborate security arrangements have been made to ensure the smooth conduct

of the polls. Mumbai Police has deployed over 25,000 personnel, including riot-control teams and home guards. More than 2,000 police officers and over 25,000 police personnel are on duty to maintain law and order during the elections.

Shifting alliances, ideological conflicts, complex caste dynamics, and emotional appeals have characterised the battle for power in the Maharashtra Assembly. The primary contest is between the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance and the Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA).

The ruling BJP-led Mahayuti alliance includes the BJP, Shiv Sena, and the Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar faction), while the opposition MVA comprises the Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT), and the NCP (Sharad Pawar faction).

In the 2019 Maharashtra assembly elections, the BJP won 105 seats, Shiv Sena secured 56, and the Congress won 44. In 2014, the BJP claimed 122 seats, Shiv Sena 63, and the Congress 42.



## Srinagar sees winter chill as temperature drops to minus 0.7 degrees Celsius

### Srinagar

Srinagar and several other parts of Kashmir experienced the coldest night of the season on Wednesday, with temperatures dipping below freezing point in most places of the valley. According to officials, Srinagar recorded a minimum temperature of minus 0.7 degrees Celsius.

The officials said that several locations across the Kashmir Valley experienced the coldest night of the season, with most areas recording sub-zero temperatures. Qazigund registered a minimum of minus 1.6 degrees Celsius, while the Pahalgam tourist resort recorded a low of minus 3.7 degrees Celsius. Shopian experienced an even colder night, with the mercury dropping to minus 3.9 degrees Celsius.



Gulmarg ski resort registered a low of minus 0.6 degrees Celsius, while Kupwara town minus 0.8 degrees Celsius.

Kokernag was the only weather station where the minimum settled above the freezing point at 1.2 degrees Celsius, the officials said.

The Meteorological

Department has said the weather would stay generally till November 23. On November 24, the weather would likely be cloudy with a possibility of light rain/light snow, especially in the higher reaches, at scattered places of Kashmir.

## Kharge writes to President Murmu on deteriorating law and order in Manipur

### New Delhi

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge has written to President Droupadi Murmu over the deteriorating situation in Manipur and urged her immediate intervention to ensure that people of the state live peacefully in their homes with dignity.

In his two-page letter to the President, Kharge highlighted the "failure" of the Manipur Government and the Centre in ensuring law and order and safety of people for the last 18 months.

He said the violence in Manipur had taken more than 300 lives, including that of women, children and even small babies.



He said the deteriorating law and order in Manipur had internally displaced nearly a lakh of human population, rendering them homeless and forcing them to live in different relief camps. The agony of the people continued

unabated, he said.

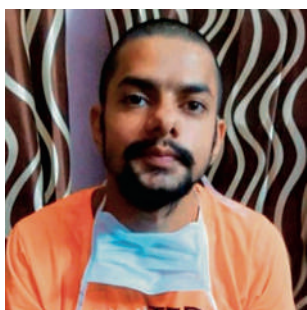
I consider that it has become constitutionally imperative on the part of yourself, as the President of the Republic of India and the custodian of our Constitution to uphold the constitutional propriety and immediately intervene to ensure the protection of lives and properties of our own citizens in Manipur, as enshrined in the Constitution."

"I am confident that, through your intervention of your esteemed office, the people of Manipur will again live peacefully in their homes in security with dignity," Kharge wrote to the President.

## Anmol Bishnoi, wanted in Siddique case, 'detained'

### New Delhi

Jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi's brother Anmol, wanted for the murder of NCP leader Baba Siddique and firing outside actor Salman Khan's Mumbai home, has been detained in the US, Mumbai police sources said on Monday. Anmol, who was



believed to be living in Canada and making regular travels to the US, is the younger brother of Lawrence Bishnoi. Earlier this month, an official said the police had sent a proposal to the Centre to extradite Anmol, who has also been named in an FIR filed by the National Investigation Agency.

## Air pollution: Supreme Court allows virtual hearings but rules out complete shift to online mode

### New Delhi



Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna on Tuesday said all judges have been asked to allow virtual hearings wherever possible in view of the worsening Air Quality Index (AQI) levels in the national capital region even as he ruled out a complete shift to online mode.

"We have told all the judges to allow virtual hearings wherever possible," a Bench of CJI Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar told Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) president Kapil Sibal who raised the issue at 10.30 am when it assembled for the day's proceedings.

He, however, did not agree to demands for a complete shift to online mode, saying lawyers had the option to appear online.

Stating that "pollution is getting out of control," Sibal submitted that a message needed to be sent to other courts and tribunals in Delhi in this regard.

Supporting Sibal's suggestion,

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said as a matter of principle the top court should shift to virtual mode.

Senior counsel Gopal Sankaranarayanan pointed out that around 10,000 lawyers came to the Supreme Court daily using their own vehicles and even their clerks often used personal vehicles which added to the poor AQI. He said GRAP-IV restrictions were implemented in Delhi-NCR and there were no such specific instructions for courts in the national capital.

"The way we are functioning today, if anybody wants to be online, they can go online... We will leave it to the lawyers concerned. We have given them that facility, whenever you want to appear virtually, you can... You have the option, you exercise that option. We have already said so. We will accommodate everyone," the CJI said.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) 24-hour average bulletin released at 4 pm on Tuesday, Delhi's AQI was recorded at 460, falling in the 'severe' category.

On Monday, the top court directed all Delhi-NCR states to immediately set up teams to strictly enforce anti-pollution GRAP 4 restrictions, making it clear that the curbs will continue till further orders.

## Coast Guard rescues 7 fishermen held by Pak

### New Delhi

An Indian Coast Guard (ICG) ship successfully rescued seven Indian fishermen on Sunday in the Arabian Sea. These fishermen had been apprehended by a Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) ship near the India-Pakistan Maritime Boundary in the Arabian Sea.

The Coast Guard said at approximately 3.30 PM on Sunday, a distress call was received from an Indian fishing boat. The boat was near the no-fishing zone. The caller from the boat narrated how another Indian fishing boat, Kal Bhairav, had been intercepted by a PMSA vessel, and seven Indian crew members had been apprehended. In response, ICG Ship immediately proceeded to the location.

The PMSA ship tried to retreat, but the ICG Ship intercepted the PMSA ship and persuaded the Ship's Captain to relieve Indian fishermen. The ICG ship was able to retrieve the seven fishermen safely, who were all found to be in stable medical condition.

# Congress accuses Tawde of 'distributing' money to voters in Maharashtra, attacks PM Modi

## New Delhi

Senior Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi accusing the BJP of using money power in the Maharashtra polls, after a video surfaced in which party leader Vinod Tawde is being accused of distributing money to electors in Palghar on the eve of voting.

The Congress demanded the Election Commission take immediate action against the BJP leader.

"Modi Ji wants to make Maharashtra 'safe' with 'money power' and 'muscle power'! On one hand, there is a deadly attack on the former Home Minister (Anil Deshmukh) of the state, on the other hand, a senior BJP leader is caught red-handed with Rs 5 crore in cash," Kharge said in a post in Hindi on X.

"The public will answer this by voting tomorrow," the Congress chief said.

Gandhi reposted a video posted by the Congress which allegedly showed money being distributed to voters in Palghar.

"Modiji, from whose SAFE did these 5 crores come from," he asked on X.

"Who looted the public money and sent you in the tempo?" the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said, referring to Modi's comments made during the Lok Sabha elections when he accused top

businessmen of sending "tempos full of money" to the Congress top brass.

Hitting back at Gandhi, BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said, "If Rs 5 crore is found, he should produce it. Ensure all CCTV footages are looked up.

In the meanwhile, after all the tamasha, BVA leader Hitendra Thakur took BJP national general secretary Vinod Tawde out for lunch. In all this, Uddhav and Rahul Gandhi again come out looking like losers."

Soon after the video of Tawde caught up in a row with Bahujan Vikas Aghadi (BVA) chief Hitendra Thakur accusing him of distributing money to voters in Palghar surfaced, Congress leader Supriya Shrinete addressed a press conference at the party headquarters and demanded that Election Commission take immediate action against the BJP leader.

"Tawde was found in Virar East of Mumbai and he is not a voter there and has no business of being there according to rules and regulations. What was he doing in a hotel with Rs 5 crore cash and a diary that has entries of Rs 15 crore? To whom was this cash being distributed? Why was this cash being distributed? Why is the EC quiet up until now?" she said.

"We have seen the money power being abused in the Maharashtra assembly polls. We have seen the kind of money that has



exchanged hands. We have seen how this government came into being by stealing a popular mandate, by openly buying MLAs, which is exactly what we are seeing in motion right now. This undermines the vote of Maharashtra and the state will not take it lying down," Shrinete said.

At her presser, she also raised the issue of the Comptroller and Auditor General allegedly instructing Maharashtra to stop the audit consisting of the performance audit, the state-specific compliance audit and the thematic audit.

"The CAG has the responsibility for auditing and making the state and the central government and enterprises accountable for every penny they spend or earn. The present CAG has been quiet

and has gone into a slumber for the past 10 years. They have even refused to audit the PM CARES Fund, which has money that comes from the PSEs," she said.

"They have denied 13 crore people of Maharashtra their right to know: How much money was spent on their projects? What were the irregularities and the scams that took place? They ensured that the people of Maharashtra never get to know the details," she said.

On October 9, 2023, the CAG instructed Maharashtra to stop the performance audit, the state-specific compliance audit and the thematic audit, Shrinete said.

This audit is special and sometimes, it reveals uncomfortable truths that may embarrass governments and expose scams, she said.

Why was this audit stopped? Projects are decided in January and it takes 9-10 months for audits to be carried out. By November-December, these reports are prepared and following the final signatures of the Chief Auditor, they are tabled in the Parliament and state legislatures," Shrinete said.

"Does Maharashtra not have the right to know the cost overruns, the irregularities and the scams? What were the uncomfortable truths that made the CAG stop the audit?" she said.

## 'Linguistic tyranny': Tamil Nadu CM Stalin slams LIC for using Hindi language on its website

### Chennai

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Tuesday took strong exception to the use of Hindi language on the website of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India, and said that the website has been reduced to a propaganda tool for imposing Hindi.

Posting a screenshot of the LIC of India webpage containing Hindi, the chief minister said in a post on social media platform 'X': "the LIC website has been reduced to a propaganda tool for Hindi imposition. Even the option to select English is displayed in Hindi!"

This, he claimed, was nothing but cultural and language imposition by force, trampling on India's diversity.

"LIC grew with the patronage of all Indians. How dare it betray the majority of its contributors? We demand an immediate



rollback of this linguistic tyranny. #StopHindiImposition," the chief minister said in the post.

Meanwhile, the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) said its website was not shuffling language pages due to some "technical problem", and the

issue has been resolved.

In a post on X later in the evening, LIC regretted the inconvenience to the users of its website and cited technical glitches which stopped the shuffling of the language.

"Our corporate website was not shuffling the language page due to some technical problem. The issue is resolved now, and the website is available in English/Hindi language," LIC said.

Terming the move as a "blatant imposition" of Hindi on other language-speaking people, BJP's ally and PMK founder Dr S Ramadoss, said this attempt by LIC is highly condemnable as it was trying to "push" a language among the non-Hindi speaking people.

"Giving sudden priority to Hindi alone is not acceptable as the LIC has a customer base drawn from the people

from diverse languages in India," Dr Ramadoss said in a post on 'X'.

He reminded that both the Centre and other institutions under the control of the union government belonged to all sections of the people and not just to the Hindi-speaking population.

"Hence, the home page of LIC of India should immediately be changed to English and a Tamil version website should be started," he said.

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami flayed the LIC for making it all Hindi and said the revamped website was currently unusable for people who did not know that language.

"The language change option on the website is also in Hindi and is not possible to find it. It is reprehensible that the central government is going to any extent in imposing Hindi," he said on 'X'.



## Rajnath in Laos to meet Chinese counterpart at ASEAN meet

**New Delhi**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Wednesday, left for a three-day visit to Vientiane, Laos, to attend the 11th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus). He is expected to hold bilateral meetings, among others, with his Chinese and US counterparts.

The Defence Minister posted on X: "Today 20th November, I'm leaving for Vientiane to attend the 11th ADMM Plus in Lao PDR. Various regional and international security issues will be discussed during the meeting".

"There would also be separate bilateral meetings with my counterparts from other participating nations. Looking forward to it", he added.

Rajnath is expected to meet his Chinese counterpart Admiral Dong Jun, on Wednesday. Notably, Admiral Dong, who has been at the helm in his country's defence ministry since December last year, is not a member of the Central Military Commission of China, that country's highest body on military matters. Traditionally, Defence Ministers in China are from the CMC.

The meeting of Rajnath and Admiral Dong comes just two days after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi met on the sidelines of the G20 Leaders Summit at Rio De Janeiro, Brazil on Monday night.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had said about the meeting, "The two Ministers felt that it was imperative that the focus should be on stabilizing ties, managing differences and taking the next steps."

Also, on Monday, the Ministry of Defence in a statement had put out the details of Rajnath's visit to Laos.

It said: "On the sidelines of 11th ADMM-Plus meeting, the minister is expected to hold bilateral meetings with participating counterparts from Australia, China, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea and USA". These meetings are aimed at further enhancing bilateral defence cooperation with these countries.

The minister would address the forum on Regional and International Security Issues during the meeting.

## Make capability building process efficient, IAF told

**New Delhi**

In an address at a conference of top commanders of the IAF, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh today asked them to be efficient and effective in the process of building capabilities and in adding capacity.

Rajnath Singh commended the IAF for its dedication and professionalism in safeguarding the nation's sovereignty.

The minister said he was confident of the IAF's ability to adapt to evolving challenges. The minister was briefed on the operational capabilities of the IAF.

He asked the commanders and senior officials of the Ministry of Defence to make the process of adding capabilities and capacities more efficient and effective. This, he said, should be in line with national aims and aspirations.

The ongoing conference has



witnessed in-depth discussions on key operational, administrative and strategic issues. The top IAF leadership also interacted with the Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi and Navy Chief Admiral DK Tripathi. The conference serves as a vital platform for the IAF's senior leadership to deliberate on current challenges and strategise future

actions to maintain operational excellence and self-reliance in defence capabilities.

Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, Chairman DRDO Dr Samir V Kamat and Secretary Defence Production Sanjay Kumar were present at the event.

Upon his arrival at Air Headquarters, the minister was welcomed by IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal AP Singh.

## Delhi CM Atishi blames Centre for not taking steps to curb air pollution

**New Delhi**

The Delhi Chief Minister Atishi on Monday blamed the Centre for not taking any steps to mitigate the deteriorating air quality in the North India region.

The national Capital woke up to a dense fog with the AQI plunging further to 481 in the 'severe-plus' category.

"All of North India has been plunged into a medical emergency as stubble burning continues unchecked across the country.

All cities across the country - in UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana, MP and Delhi - are reeling under severe levels of pollution," the CM said.

She claimed that the Punjab government had reduced farm fires. The farm fires in Punjab were reduced to 36,650 in 2023 from 71,300 in 2021, she said. "This year when 80 per cent of the farm fires have been conducted, it was reduced to 8,404 farm fires in Punjab," she added.

## 'Undersized' Underwear: SC Restores Criminal Proceedings Against Kerala MLA For Evidence Tampering In Drugs Case

**New Delhi**

The Supreme Court on Wednesday restored the criminal proceedings initiated against Kerala MLA Antony Raju in connection with the alleged tampering with evidence during a drug case he handled as a junior lawyer in 1990.

The verdict was delivered by a bench comprising justices C. T. Ravikumar and Sanjay Karol. The bench said the Kerala High Court committed an error in holding that the criminal proceedings were barred due to Section 195(1)(b) of the Code of Criminal Proceeding. The bench said that the high court was not in error in ordering that a de novo investigation can be initiated against Raju.

"The order taking cognisance, in all other proceedings pursuant to the same are restored to the files of judicial first class magistrate concerned, the proceedings in



the case emanate from nearly two decades ago. Therefore, in the interest of justice, we deem it appropriate to direct the trial court to conclude the trial within the period

of one year from today. The accused shall appear before the trial court on December 20, 2024, or on the next working day of the court concerned", said Justice Karol,

pronouncing the judgement on behalf of the bench.

Raju belonged to Janadhipatya Kerala Congress, a constituent of the ruling LDF. He was a minister till December last year. The detailed judgement in the case will be uploaded later in the day.

The case against Antony Raju is that he had allegedly tampered the evidence to help an Australian citizen in a drug case. The police arrested the Australian on April 4, 1990 at Thiruvananthapuram airport, as he tried to smuggle drugs hiding it inside his underwear. The sessions court had sentenced the accused in connection with the case. But an appeal was filed before the high court and he was exonerated by the high court as it was found that the evidence, the underwear, produced before the court was undersized.



# India Looks Forward To Closely Engaging With President-Elect Donald Trump, His New Administration: Amb Harish

New York

India looks forward to closely engaging with US President-elect Donald Trump and his new administration once they take over, New Delhi's envoy to the UN has said. "We respect the choice of the American citizens. We deal with all governments. I think the relationship with India enjoys bipartisan consensus amongst both parties," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said during an interactive session at Columbia University here on Tuesday.

Harish was responding to a question on India's reaction to the just concluded US presidential elections in which Trump emerged victorious, defeating his Democratic rival Vice President Kamala Harris, and was elected as America's 47th President.

Harish said that India has had a very close cooperation and relationship "when President Trump was there in his first



tenure. We look forward to closely engaging with the President and his new administration once they take over."

The Indian envoy delivered a keynote address on 'Responding to Key Global Challenges: The India Way' at an event at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). The event was co-sponsored by the MPA (Master of Public Affairs) programme in Global Leadership and the International Organisation and UN Studies programme (IO/

UNS) and attended by students, faculty and policy experts.

Following Trump's victory, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated him on his "historic election victory," saying in a post on X "As you build on the successes of your previous term, I look forward to renewing our collaboration to further strengthen the India-US Comprehensive Global and Strategic Partnership. Together, let's work for the betterment of our people and to promote global peace, stability and prosperity."

## Russian Prez to visit India soon: Kremlin

Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit India soon, the Kremlin said today.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said, "We are looking forward to the visit. The dates will be mutually worked out soon."

The visit, which is likely to be early next year, will be part of a laid down structure between the two countries for reciprocal annual visits by their leaders.

The announcement of

Vladimir Putin's visit to India came on the day Russia updated its nuclear doctrine for the second time, allowing Moscow to target non-nuclear states should the need arise.

President Vladimir Putin will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi during his visit.

The two leaders had last met during PM Modi's visit to Kazan in Russia for the BRICS Summit in late October. At that

meeting, Modi had reiterated that India supports "dialogue and diplomacy" and not war. Though Modi had not named the ongoing conflicts like Russia-Ukraine or the one in West Asia, he said "we support dialogue and diplomacy, not war".

The BRICS, he said, was fully capable of creating new opportunities for a safe, strong and prosperous future for the coming generation.

## India, Italy announce 5-year joint plan on defence, space

New Delhi

India and Italy on Tuesday announced an ambitious five-year 'joint strategic action plan 2025-2029' that would include cooperation in space sector, critical technology, research, co-production of military equipment and widening the ambit of economic cooperation.

The Ministry of External Affairs said the five-year plan was announced after Prime Minister Narendra Modi met his Italian counterpart Giorgia Meloni on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio

de Janeiro, Brazil, on Monday. The two decided to give further impetus through focused, time-bound initiatives and joint plan of strategic action, the MEA said. At the political level, India and Italy will "intensify meetings and interactions between the heads of other ministries to deepen cooperation in all sectors of common interest", the MEA said. On economic cooperation, the two sides look to leverage the work of the Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation and of the Italy-India Joint Working Group on Food Processing.

# PM meets Starmer, takes up return of economic offenders hiding in UK



New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday met his British counterpart Keir Starmer and took up the issue of Indian economic offenders whose extradition is awaited from the UK.

The Modi-Starmer meet was among the seven separate bilateral meetings held on the sidelines of the G20 Leaders' Summit in Brazil since Monday.

In a statement on Tuesday, the Ministry of External Affairs said, "Prime Minister Modi noted the importance of addressing the issue of economic offenders from India in the UK."

Though the statement did not name anyone, India is seeking extradition of Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and Sanjay Bhandari from the UK. The three are facing cases in India.

Modi and Starmer also agreed on the need to make progress on the issues related to migration and mobility of people between the two countries.

PM Modi also announced establishment of two new Consulates General of India in Belfast and Manchester in the UK. The two leaders recognised opportunities for further engagement between the two sides in light of growing bilateral economic and business relations.

Modi and Starmer also spoke about the importance of resuming the Free Trade Agreement negotiations at an early date.

On Monday, the PM met

French President Emmanuel Macron, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, Prime Minister of Norway Jonas Gahr Store, Prime Minister of Portugal Luís Montenegro and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Today Modi had a bilateral with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Modi assured full support to the "Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty" initiative launched yesterday. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "Discussions focused on exploring opportunities for greater cooperation in renewable energy, biofuels, defence, agriculture, healthcare and digital technology."

During their meeting, Modi and Macron commended the strengthening of trade, investment and technology ties, including in the areas of digital technology and artificial intelligence, as well as partnership on digital public infrastructure.

In another bilateral, Modi and Montenegro noted that the year 2025 marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Portugal. They agreed to jointly celebrate the occasion in a befitting manner.

With Indonesia, the issue of close collaboration within the G20 was discussed. The two sides called for giving primacy to the concerns of the 'Global South'.



# AFSPA returns

THE reimposition of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in Manipur marks a sombre turn in the state's struggle for stability and peace. After years of gradual reduction in AFSPA-designated areas, recent escalations have led the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to reinstate the Disturbed Areas status in the jurisdiction of six police stations across the state. This decision reflects the grim reality that, despite past gains, Manipur's path to peace remains perilously uncertain. AFSPA is controversial due to its broad powers, which allow the armed forces to act with significant immunity. This, in turn, has created an environment of mistrust between civilians and the military. In Manipur, its presence has often been linked with allegations of human rights violations, further complicating the peace process in a region where historical grievances already run deep.



While the MHA has cited 'volatile' conditions and "active participation of

Ethnic divides, regional grievances and economic stagnation have contributed to the unrest.

Manipur's people, including the Kukis and Meiteis who are mainly embroiled in the conflict, deserve a future free from violence and repression. To achieve this, the Central government must prioritise non-military solutions, promoting dialogue, economic investment and social programmes that address the underlying issues fuelling the unrest. Enduring peace in Manipur will not come from the barrel of a gun but from comprehensive efforts to bridge divides and build trust. Reimposing AFSPA may restore order, but it is a step backward in the quest for sustainable peace.

// satyasya paramam nidhānam //

We would like to hear from you. Please share your comments on [editor.acrossstate@gmail.com](mailto:editor.acrossstate@gmail.com)

*"Never let the fear of striking out keep you from playing the game."*  
-Babe Ruth

Printer-Publisher & Editor In Chief

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Allied publication Across Mumbai (Marathi & Hindi)

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INDIA's retail inflation hit a 14-month high in October at 6.21 per cent, propelled by soaring food prices. With the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) target tolerance breached, hopes for a rate cut this December are all but dashed. This inflation surge, led primarily by vegetable prices, reveals deeper structural challenges in India's food supply chain that demand immediate government intervention. October's food inflation rate of 10.87 per cent — the highest in over a year — is a striking indicator of how volatile food prices can disrupt broader economic stability. The spike, particularly in items like tomatoes and oils, is a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities caused by

## Food inflation

### Soaring prices sink rate cut hopes



India's reliance on certain key commodities and imported goods. Unseasonal rains further aggravated the supply of vegetables, highlighting the impact of climate unpredictability on agricultural output. In response, more robust supply-side measures, including better storage facilities and a refined import strategy, are crucial to stabilising food inflation.

Industrial output, though rebounding with a modest 3.1 per cent growth in September, falls short of what's needed to buffer the pressure caused by high inflation. A narrow rise in the Index of Industrial Production reveals a sluggish recovery that, without an easing of inflation, may struggle to sustain momentum. As a result, RBI rate cuts are not likely for

another couple of months, dampening immediate consumer demand and impacting investment.

The way forward requires not only addressing immediate inflationary pressures but also improving resilience in agricultural production and industrial performance. The government must enhance domestic production capabilities, optimise supply chains and ensure food security amid rising global uncertainties. Long-term stability demands that India prioritise its agricultural reforms to prevent frequent inflationary spikes, giving consumers, particularly lower-income households, relief from the relentless pressure of rising prices.



# Bulldozer leashed

## SC shows the way by laying down norms

THE rampaging bulldozer, which has been riding roughshod over laws and rules in Uttar Pradesh and other states, will hopefully no longer have a field day. Equating 'bulldozer justice' with the 'might is right' approach, the Supreme Court has laid down pan-India guidelines for using the demolition machine. Henceforth, no illegal structure can be razed without issuing a showcause notice to the individual concerned and giving him/her 15 days to respond. In short, the

drives have been conducted in the wake of communal violence in states such as UP, Haryana and Delhi. This has left no room for doubt that the authorities roused themselves from slumber just to teach a lesson to persons suspected of involvement in disturbances. A couple of years ago, a close aide of the UP CM had warned rioters that "every Friday is followed by a Saturday", making it clear that Muslim troublemakers would be dealt with quickly and firmly.

The court's guidelines are expected to ensure that overzealous officials are taken to task for exceeding their brief. The challenge, of course, will be to implement the norms in letter and spirit. Unauthorised construction and encroachments do not come up overnight; this illegal exercise happens over months, if not years,

with political patronage and bureaucratic connivance emboldening violators. The key is to raze illegal structures in a time-bound and legal manner, irrespective of which community's members are on the wrong side of the law. Having come under intense judicial scrutiny, the bulldozer must learn to behave itself sooner than later.



due process has to be followed, even if the case involves an accused or a convict.

Brazenly usurping powers of the judiciary, the executive has been unleashing 'bulldozer justice' in an arbitrary and high-handed manner. The administrative action has often reeked of vindictiveness, particularly when members of minority communities have been targeted. In recent years, demolition

MURDER, rape, abduction, arson, plunder — Manipur has seen it all during the past year and a half, and there is still no respite for its beleaguered people. The strife-torn northeastern state has also witnessed the utter helplessness and apathy of the Central and state governments — both led by the BJP. With public anger against the ruling alliance reaching a crescendo, the National People's Party (NPP) — which has seven MLAs in the 60-member Assembly — has withdrawn support to the state government. The party has rightly claimed that the Chief Minister N Biren Singh-led dispensation has "completely failed to resolve the crisis and restore normalcy".

The NPP's pullout poses no threat to the government as it enjoys a comfortable majority. However,

the development has roused the BJP to do something to show that it is no longer in the sleep mode. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has reviewed the security situation in the state two days in a row, while the CM has held a meeting with ministers and other MLAs of the ruling coalition in a desperate bid to

# CM Biren must go

## His lapses have cost Manipur dear

# Ragging scar

## A collective outrage is imperative

THE Supreme Court had laid down stringent guidelines while banning ragging in educational institutions, with zero tolerance to the initiation ritual as the norm. Yet, ragging of freshers — that often entails humiliation, abuse and coercion, resulting in profound physical

While it holds the primary responsibility, any incident of ragging is also a societal failure. It's a telling reminder of the missing links of basic decency and civility at so many levels — at home, in college and in society at large.

There is no denying that entrenched social hierarchies and cultural biases play a role in both the scale and intensity of ragging. What is lacking in the anti-ragging strategy is understanding the psychological triggers on an individual basis. Why do a handful of students behave the way they do, and why do their problematic traits go unchecked over the years? Like in the case of sexual harassment, the slightest whisper of ragging, or of



and psychological scars — continues to cast a long shadow. The death of a first-year student of a Gujarat-based medical college after he was allegedly made to stand for three hours underscores the severity of the issue. Fifteen seniors have been suspended and booked. When even the prospect of harsh punishment is not an effective deterrent, it calls for a rethink on actionable strategies to combat ragging. Fostering a safe learning environment is a fundamental requirement for an institution.

violent bullying, needs to be taken seriously and acted upon. Mental health remains the most neglected area, too, with very few institutions using the services of qualified counsellors.

Anti-ragging cells, safety committees, orientation programmes, security surveillance and legal action are part of the mandated multifaceted approach to combat ragging. What's imperative is a collective outrage — a firm 'no' to any form of ragging.

assert himself.

Globe-trotting Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been conspicuous by his absence from the state after disturbances broke out last year, while Shah has failed to control the ever-worsening situation, even though his ministry has the CRPF and other security forces at its disposal. Moreover, the BJP has reposed trust in Biren Singh, conveniently ignoring his obvious lapses and the growing clamour for his removal. With the raging fires engulfing houses of BJP legislators, the party should stop treating the non-performing CM with kid gloves. Biren must be shown the door. Back in 2002, then PM Vajpayee had come close to sacking CM Modi after the Gujarat riots. Now, the ball is in PM Modi's court.





# Opportunity for SAD

**UNDER fire from the Akal Takht as well as Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) rebels, Sukhbir Singh Badal has finally stepped down as the party president. His resignation has ostensibly paved the way for the election of the new SAD chief,...**

UNDER fire from the Akal Takht as well as Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) rebels, Sukhbir Singh Badal has finally stepped down as the party president. His resignation has ostensibly paved the way for the election of the new SAD chief, but it remains to be seen whether that exercise would be democratic or not. Sukhbir's position became untenable after the Akal Takht, the supreme temporal seat of the Sikhs, declared him 'tankhaiya' in August for 'mistakes' committed by the party and its government from 2007 to 2017. He had already been on a weak wicket over the SAD's dismal



show in successive Assembly and parliamentary elections. The Badals have maintained a vice-like grip on the SAD for almost three decades. Five-time

Punjab CM Parkash Singh Badal admirably strengthened the party, taking everyone along, but he could not prevent things from spinning out of control in his final years. The sacrilege incidents and the Behl Kalan police firing in 2015 were a blot on his illustrious career. After the senior Badal's death in April 2023, his son Sukhbir has been struggling to control rebellion and establish himself as a leader in his own right. The present situation begs a few obvious questions: Will the party elect a non-Badal chief? Will he/she be a Badal loyalist or someone from the rebel camp? And will the new president be able to

give the party a new lease of life?

The SAD, one of India's oldest political parties, finds itself at a crossroads today. It will have to take tough decisions to regain the trust of the people, particularly Sikhs and farmers. The upcoming party election will be reduced to a sham if the Badal family manages to remain in the saddle directly or indirectly. The party must decide whether it wants to go the Congress way — the Gandhis continue to call the shots even though Mallikarjun Kharge is the party chief — or chart an entirely new course.

## New dawn in Lanka

### Dissanayake gets mandate to roll out reforms

PEOPLE of Sri Lanka have emphatically empowered leftist President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to go ahead with his pro-poor and anti-corruption reforms. The National People's Power coalition, led by his Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna party, has recorded a big win in the parliamentary elections. The strong mandate comes with great expectations: Dissanayake's prime task would be to spearhead a robust recovery from the 2022 economic crisis that had brought the island nation to its knees.

The writing was on the wall after Dissanayake triumphed in the presidential poll in September. Sensing the winds of change, former President Ranil Wickremesinghe did not contest the parliamentary polls for the first time in decades. The once-mighty Rajapaksa brothers also did not enter the fray. Both the Wickremesinghe-backed New Democratic Front and the Rajapaksa family's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna party have suffered an electoral debacle as voters have made a clean break from the country's longstanding tradition of dynastic politics. Having gained the

confidence of the people, Dissanayake cannot afford to put a foot wrong. The civil society protests in early 2022, locally known as the 'Aragalaya', had showcased the massive anger against the arrogance of the Rajapaksa brothers, who had taken almost total control over the levers of government at the time. A lot depends on how the President handles the IMF's \$2.9-billion bailout programme that has kept Lanka afloat on the fiscal front.

Regarded as pro-China, Dissanayake would be well advised not to put all his eggs in the Beijing basket. He needs to build strong ties with India, a friendly neighbour which has come to Lanka's rescue time and again. His tough stance against Indian fishermen illegally fishing in Sri Lankan waters may not be music to New Delhi's ears, but his assurance to Tamils that their land occupied by the government would be returned seems to have struck a chord with the minority community. It is hoped that Dissanayake will do a deft tightrope walk to safeguard his country's strategic and economic interests.

## Tragedy on wheels

### Accountability starts at home

RECENT tragic accidents in Tengpora (Jammu and Kashmir) and Dehradun (Uttarakhand) underline a troubling issue: underage driving continues to claim young lives. These incidents are a grim reminder of the shared responsibility parents bear in ensuring that their minor children do not drive. India's roads are among the deadliest in the world, with traffic accidents surging from 3,68,828 in 2020 to 4,22,659 in 2021. Shockingly, 9.6 per cent of fatalities involve individuals below 18, many of whom are underage drivers. In the Tengpora tragedy, two 17-year-olds lost their lives when their SUV collided with a truck, while in Dehradun, a high-speed car crash claimed six lives. Both accidents were preventable.

The law is unambiguous — under the Motor Vehicles Act, no one under 18 can drive. Yet, lax enforcement and parental neglect allow such dangerous practices to persist. Parents often indulge their children, giving them access to vehicles without considering the

dire consequences. When minors drive, the law holds guardians accountable under Section 199A of the Act, which includes penalties of up to three years in jail, a fine of Rs 25,000 and cancellation of the vehicle's registration. Equally troubling is the society's failure to instil a culture of road safety. Schools, communities and law enforcement must collaborate to address this crisis. Educating children on the risks of reckless driving is essential. As the first gatekeepers, parents must take the lead and say 'no' to their children's demands for vehicles and emphasise responsibility over privilege.

The devastating aftermath of these accidents should galvanise stricter law enforcement. Traffic violations, particularly involving minors, must face zero tolerance. Regular awareness campaigns can reinforce the dangers of underage driving. Parents must recognise that withholding a car key today could save a life tomorrow.



# Banks need to make loans affordable: FM at SBI meet



## New Delhi

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said people were finding current interest rates “very stressful” and urged banks to make them affordable.

Speaking at an event organised by SBI, the Minister

said at present, India required industry to ramp up and invest in new facilities. She added that lowering lending rates could help achieve the “Viksit Bharat” aspiration.

Last week, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal urged the RBI to cut interest rates to boost

economic growth. He suggested looking through food prices, while deciding on monetary policy.

Meanwhile, the consumer price inflation has overshoot the RBI's comfort level of six per cent, as the 6.2 per cent reading for October dashed hopes of a rate cut soon. Sitharaman said a set of three or four perishable commodities was driving the headline inflation, while the rest of the core items were at manageable levels of three or four per cent.

Addressing concerns about a slowdown in growth, Sitharaman assured people that the government was fully aware of domestic and global challenges. She said that a slew of high-frequency indicators are pointing to strong activity on the ground.

# Govt to surpass direct tax collection target: CBDT chief

## New Delhi

The government will exceed the Rs 22.07 lakh crore direct tax collection target set for the current fiscal, Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) chairman Ravi Agarwal said on Monday.

As per the latest data released by the CBDT, between April 1 and November 10, net direct tax collection has grown 15.41 per cent to Rs 12.11 lakh crore. This includes net corporate tax of Rs 5.10 lakh crore and non-corporate taxes of Rs 6.62 lakh crore. Securities transaction tax (STT) worth Rs 35,923 crore was also mopped up during the period.

Agarwal also said that taxpayers who have not disclosed their foreign income

or assets in their ITRs have time till December 31 to file their revised return for the 2023-24 fiscal. The tax department is in the process of sending SMS and emails to those assesseees, who have not disclosed high-value assets.

Inaugurating the Taxpayers Lounge at the India International Trade Fair (IITF), Agarwal also said that more than 6,000 suggestions have come in for a review of the I-T law to make the language simple and easy to understand. The CBDT has set up 22 specialised sub-committees to review various aspects of the six-decade-old I-T Act.

# Dubai-based siblings to transfer jiohotstar.com domain to Reliance free of cost

## Mumbai

Dubai-based siblings Jainam and Jivika, the owners of jiohotstar.com domain, have decided to transfer it to Reliance free of cost, resting the speculations on social media platforms.

The story of the internet domain name, which grabbed a lot of attention on social media platforms in the recent past, ended with “seva and kindness”, according to the duo.

The unique website ID was said to have been initially registered by a Delhi-based app developer last year amid speculation about the potential merger of Reliance Jio and Disney Hotstar.

Last month, the developer came up with the demand for funding his higher studies at the Cambridge University in return of the domain's ownership transfer, days after Reliance Jio and The Walt Disney formally announced the merger of their media businesses.

Later, the Dubai-based siblings purchased jiohotstar.com domain from its registered owner. According to industry observers, the domain was sold to Dubai-based siblings after Reliance declined his offer.

The siblings now shared an update, saying the Reliance IP Legal team



approached them and the duo had decided to pass the ownership to them (Reliance), hoping that it would be “useful for them”.

“Reliance IP legal team has approached us, and we will be transferring this domain to them, free of cost,” they said in a message on the website.

“There have been some rumours circulating online that suggesting that there is a payment or deal involved, but we want to make it clear — this is not

true,” the message said.

Moreover, the duo in his video also clarified there is “no pressure from anyone” and denied of having a “deal of any kind”.

“This is purely a transfer of the domain from our side because we believe it could be useful for them. Whether or not they choose to use it is up to them,” the message added.

In their previous message, the

siblings said they had received numerous offers, including some genuine ones offering significant amounts. However, they had said that the domain was not for sale.

While announcing the “journey with jiohotstar.com is coming to an end”, the duo said they were waiting for a draft from the Reliance legal team for the transfer.

“The Reliance IP legal team has contacted us. We have told them that the domain transfer will only happen after the agreement is signed. They have asked us to visit Mumbai to sign the agreement,” they said, expecting the agreement to be signed soon.

“As soon as this happens, we will transfer the domain and this website will come to an end,” the message said.

Reliance had last week announced the completion of the merger of its media assets with the India business of global media giant The Walt Disney, forming a joint venture worth around Rs 70,352 crore (USD 8.5 billion).

The JV will be one of the largest media and entertainment companies in India with a combined revenue of approximately Rs 26,000 crore and will be led by Nita Ambani as its chairperson.



# FMCG giant Marico expects moderation in food inflation to revive urban consumption

FMCG major Marico is looking for double-digit growth in the second half of FY25 and expects the prevailing high food inflation to moderate in the next two quarters, which will help revive urban consumption, its MD & CEO Saugata Gupta said.

The company, which has already gone for a price hike for its Saffola range, expects a similar action from other FMCG players as prices of raw materials such as coffee, cocoa, and palm oil have gone up.

"In the sector, there will be some price increases. If you look at some other input costs for other players, there has been a globally significant increase in the prices of coffee, and cocoa. So there is a little bit of inflation situation and now you are seeing a significant increase in palm oil prices."

"So across the sector, there will be some price increase," Gupta told PTI.

However, he also pointed out that most of the big-scale FMCG manufacturers would try to absorb a portion of the increase in commodity prices through various cost management initiatives and extend a small part of the burden, as volume growth also matters.

"I think it will be smart to absorb some of these costs and (pass on) only a part to the consumer, given the demand situation, because at the end of the day, volume, growth and market share are far more important in the short and medium and long term," he said, adding, "margins always come back for scale players."

Besides, another driver of the input costs is crude oil, and Gupta does not expect any major volatility in the near-term there.

Regarding Marico – the maker of Saffola and Parachute – Gupta said he is hopeful of improving sequential volume growth a bit in the second half of the ongoing fiscal year.

However, he added, "There are challenges in terms of input costs, which could cause margins to lag a little behind revenue growth." The biggest concern



right now is food inflation.

"We expect that to hopefully moderate over the next two quarters, and then urban growth is expected to recover because it has been impacted a little bit by the high food inflation that is prevailing," he said.

Marico, which reported a 7.6% increase in consolidated revenue to Rs 2,664 crore for the September quarter, along with a 20.2% rise in PAT, is witnessing sequential volume improvement.

"Our revenue growth is also in high single digits, and we are fairly confident about revenue moving into double digits in the second half of the year," he said.

There would be some "headwinds," but there is a recovery from rural markets, helped by MSP, good monsoons, and the government's increased spending in those areas.

Moreover, some of its products today, especially Marico's digital brands and food segment, operate at the "slightly more top-end," where they are not seeing any consumption stress, he said.

"So, we are pretty hopeful of trying to improve that sequential volume growth a little bit in the second half of the year. There are challenges in terms of input costs," which will cause a lag in margins, he added.

Asked about any possible hike in prices for its coconut oil brand Parachute, as copra prices have gone up again, Gupta said, "Wherever there has been a significant increase in inflation, especially copra, where we operate with Parachute, we

have historically done well in inflationary conditions because we compete with a lot of smaller players."

"Our historic track record on inflation has been much better than during deflation," he added.

On copra inflation, Gupta said he thinks the government wants to protect farmers but that a balance between food inflation and that will come.

"So I think some of the factors contributing to food inflation will cool down. Though current prices are far higher, we expect them to cool down," he said.

"For us, growth is important. We are very confident of delivering double-digit growth in the second half of the year," he said.

Currently, premium and food products contribute to 21% of Marico's revenue, and Gupta expects it to rise to around 30% over the next five years.

## Failure to disclose foreign assets, income to invite Rs 10 lakh penalty

New Delhi

The Income-Tax Department on Sunday cautioned taxpayers that failure to disclose assets held abroad or income earned in foreign shores in the ITR can attract a penalty of Rs 10 lakh under the anti-black money law.

The department issued a public advisory as part a compliance-cum-awareness campaign launched recently by it on Saturday to ensure that such information is reported by the assessee in their Income Tax Return (ITR) for assessment year (AY) 2024-25.

The advisory specified that foreign asset, for a tax resident of India in the previous year, includes bank accounts, cash value insurance contract or annuity contract, financial interest in any entity or business, immovable property, custodial account, equity and debt interest, trusts in which a person is a trustee, beneficiary of settlor, accounts with signing authority, any capital asset etc, held abroad.

The department said taxpayers figuring under this criteria "must mandatorily" fill the foreign asset (FA) or foreign source income (FSI) schedule in their ITR even if their income is "below the taxable limit" or the asset abroad was "acquired from disclosed sources".

"Failure to disclose foreign asset/income in the ITR can attract a penalty of Rs 10 lakh under the Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and



Imposition of Tax Act, 2015," the advisory stated.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), the administrative body for the tax department, had said that as part of the campaign it will send "informational" SMS and email to those resident taxpayers who have already filed their ITR for AY 2024-25.

The communication will be sent to such persons who have been "identified" through information received under bilateral and multi-lateral agreements "suggesting" that these individuals may hold foreign accounts or assets, or have received income from foreign jurisdictions.

The purpose of the campaign is to remind and guide those who may not have fully completed schedule foreign assets in their submitted ITR (AY 2024-25), especially in cases involving high-value foreign assets, the CBDT had said.

The last date to file a belated and revised ITR is December 31.

## Automobile sales surge 12% during festivities

Mumbai

Automobile retail sales increased nearly 12 per cent during the 42-day festive period from the year before, led by two wheelers and passenger vehicle.

According to the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) data, as many as 42.88 lakh vehicles were sold compared to 38.37 lakh for the corresponding period in 2023, registering a growth of 11.76 per cent. The season started on the first day of Navratri and ended 15 days after Dhanteras — October 3 to November 13.

According to the data, two-wheeler sales were particularly robust, registering a 13.79 per cent

growth to reach 33.11 lakh units, largely driven by strong rural demand. Last year during the festival season, the industry sold 29.10 lakh units.

Similarly, sales of passenger vehicles bounced back after a lull, growing by 7.10 per cent to 6.03 lakh units, spurred by pent-up demand and unprecedented discounts available in the market.

German luxury carmaker Mercedes-Benz on Friday said it will hike prices of its vehicles in India by up to three per cent on its entire model range January 1, citing a rise in input costs, inflationary pressures and higher operational expenses.



## India to grow at 7.2%, RBI to keep interest rates steady: Moody's



### Mumbai

Moody's Ratings on Friday forecast a 7.2 per cent GDP growth for India in 2024, saying the Indian economy is in a sweet spot, but inflation risks may prompt the RBI to retain a relatively tight monetary policy this year.

Moody's said that despite the near-term uptick, retail inflation should moderate toward the Reserve Bank's target in the coming months as food prices ease amid higher sowing and adequate food grain buffer stocks.

The retail inflation scaled to a 14-month high of 6.21, breaching the RBI's upper tolerance limit,

on a sharp jump in vegetable prices.

The agency said sporadic food price pressures continue to inject volatility in the disinflation trajectory.

"Potential risks to inflation from heightened geopolitical tensions and extreme weather events underscore the RBI's cautious approach to policy easing. Although the central bank shifted its monetary policy stance to neutral while keeping the repo rate steady at 6.5 per cent in October, it will likely retain relatively tight monetary policy settings into next year, given the inflation risks," Moody's said.

## Global brokerage CLSA shifts focus back to India, cuts China exposure

### Mumbai

Global brokerage firm CLSA has reversed its early tactical shift from Indian equities to Chinese stocks, and has decided to raise India allocation while cutting exposure to China.

In its report titled 'Pouncing Tiger, Prevaricating Dragon', CLSA cited challenges facing Chinese markets in the aftermath of Donald Trump's victory in the US elections as the reason for the move.

"Misfortune can happen in threes. So it has played out for Chinese equities over the past week. Trump 2.0 heralds a trade war escalation just as exports become the largest contributor to China's growth," the brokerage said.

Stating that it was sceptical on the endurance of the China equity melt up from the outset, CLSA said yet it committed a little more at the start of October by tactically deploying some of its over exposure to India towards China.

It had reduced its Indian overweight to 10 per cent from



20 per cent and raising our China allocation to a 5 per cent overweight from the benchmark.

"We now reverse that trade," it said. The reversal comes even as India faces sustained foreign investor outflows. Foreign institutions have sold a net Rs 1.14 lakh crore of Indian equities since October amid weak second quarter earnings and rising inflation.

CLSA said several global investors it engaged with have been waiting for such a correction to address their underexposure to Indian

equities.

On the other hand, China's economic struggles include deflationary pressures, sluggish real estate investment, and high youth unemployment.

China faces prospects of higher tariffs under the Trump administration amid a precarious domestic situation that is a blend of deflation, falling property prices, rising youth unemployment, poor household confidence, stagnant real estate investment and growth in real retail sales at half the pre-pandemic rate.

## Indian economy sailing smoothly amid global headwinds: RBI Governor

### Mumbai

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said the Indian economy has been sailing "smoothly" amid the global headwinds.

Speaking at an event organised by CNBC-TV18 here, Das declined to comment on a suggestion by Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal for a rate cut, maintaining that the rate-setting panel will take an appropriate call on it at its next meeting in December.

In comments made days after headline inflation shot up beyond the 6 per cent tolerance band of RBI for October, Das said inflation is "expected to moderate despite periodic humps".

The Governor said the domestic economy has sailed very well through the prolonged period of turbulence in the recent past exhibiting resilience, but added that there are a slew of headwinds prevailing in the global economy right now like rising bond yields, commodity prices showing a divergence and a contradiction of financial markets showing resilience despite rising geopolitical risks.

"The Indian economy is sailing smoothly, powered by buffers like strong

macroeconomic fundamentals, a stable financial system and a resilient external sector," said the bureaucrat-turned-central banker, who will be completing six years at the helm at RBI soon.

With the rupee hitting new lows, Das said India's external sector has exhibited "strength and stability" in the recent period as seen in the current account deficit remaining at a manageable level, merchandise exports starting to grow, and service exports growth being strong.

He reminded that the country has the fourth largest forex reserves in the world. The forex reserves, which stood at USD 682 billion as of October 31, are sufficient to cover the entire external debt and a year's import payments, he added.

The Governor also made it clear that the RBI does not target a rate for the rupee, and the fore interventions are for ensuring orderly movement and curbing volatility in the currency.

"If the Indian rupee has remained relatively stable despite severe external shocks, including the largest and the steepest tightening by the US Fed in 2022 and 2023, it speaks volumes about the sea change in our macro fundamentals from



the days of the taper tantrum," Das said.

On the issue of regulation, he said the RBI will be issuing a draft of the Expected Credit Loss (ECL) framework and the final guidelines will come out post public comments.

Without giving a timeline for the introduction of the draft guidelines, Das said the RBI had issued a discussion paper on the subject in 2023 and also constituted a working group to study the comments received on it.

Das said the RBI is taking a very "careful" approach on ECL, which is

widely feared to increase the provisioning requirements for Indian lenders as they need to set aside money ahead of an asset being classified as non-performing, and also called it a "major transformation".

"Now the idea is to get stakeholder comments on certain specifics of the (ECL) framework, considering its significance for the banking sector," Das said, making it clear that the RBI's endeavour is to maintain a balance between banking sector stability and economic growth.

He said the final guidelines for the disclosure framework on climate-related financial risks will also be issued shortly.

The RBI's "primary objective" is financial stability, Das said, adding that early detection and preemptive action on any risks is the intent of the central bank.

With an eye on the cyber risks, the RBI is setting up a cyber security center in Bhubaneswar along with a computing and data centre, he said, adding that further work on setting up the Reserve Bank cloud facility is also gathering pace.

"Our consistent effort is to take a holistic view of stability, which encompasses price stability, financial stability and sustained growth," he said.



# Historicising the Arthaśāstra: Early Fiscal-Military States in South Asia

## Human Capital Development

The Magadhan state seems to have been administered by that one segment of the seven-fold division of Indian society observed by the Greeks, the officials, whose characteristics and merit-based selection make them the equivalent of the modern day 'educated middle class'. Creativity flourished in this era, as can be observed from the period literature, both in Sanskrit and Pali-Prakrit; it has attracted the descriptor 'Golden Age' as it sought to ensure prosperity of its citizens and found effective means of resolving disputes to maintain peace. These are the hallmarks of the ideal state envisioned in the Arthaśāstra and its contemporaneous treatises. Unlike Machiavelli's work, they emphasise sound administration and good governance, stressing the need for a proper balance between private, social, and public life. Such conditions were significantly reversed a few centuries after Magadha. What also emerges is that while the Arthaśāstra recommends a strong army, it does not extol warfare as such, seeing the use of force as a last resort.

## Magadha and its Contemporaries as Fiscal-Military States

The conventional definition claims that the fiscal-military state existed only to support a large standing army and was not concerned about human capital development. In light of Magadha and the holistic recommendations of the Arthaśāstra which are not limited to military reform alone, can it be said that the state envisioned in the Arthaśāstra, and its practical application in Magadha, was not a fiscal-military state?

olitic entity but had various forms with diverse experiences and societal impacts. Empirical evidence indeed suggests that human development was a primal preoccupation of mature forms of such states, such as Britain (in a much later era than when the Arthaśāstra was composed). In contrast to the Sun King Louis XIV's France, which satisfied the basic characteristics of the fiscal-military state, the later, more comprehensive fiscal-military state of Napoleon went further in ensuring greater involvement of the people and demonstrating reluctance to use oppressive credit to finance armies. So too, the British fiscal-military state was not solely obsessed with its military or even its navy, but was designed to positively impact its various participants, ushering in alternate 'revolutions' in agriculture, communications, and credit and finances, and implementing a revenue system that was far from rapacious.

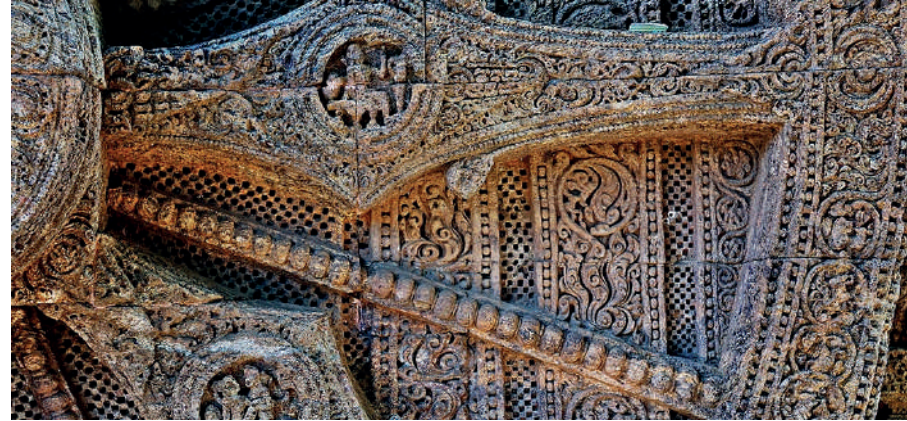
Thus the fiscal-military states acted as vehicles and agents of the 18th-century Enlightenment or the Age of Reason, bringing in unprecedented human resources development and ultimately ushering in the modern world. This extended to their militaries as well. The fiscal-military state made possible moral criticism of war because of its exorbitant costs, including human costs, birthing a military enlightenment that sought 'good war'. It is war waged only when necessary, so as not to needlessly deplete resources, especially manpower, and war waged humanely to reflect the compassion, rationality, and dignity of the human race. These were the ideas that emerged with the Enlightenment.

Just as concern for humanity did not make the 18th-century European states stop being fiscal-military states, the Arthaśāstra's emphasis on holistic societal development beyond sole military activity does not mean its envisioned state was not a fiscal-military one.

One aspect of European fiscal-military states was that the armies they raised were often used for imperialistic purposes and capturing overseas colonial possessions, whereas such considerations play no role in the Arthaśāstra. This is especially true of the earliest fiscal-military states such as Spain and the Netherlands, and then Britain. Their fascination with overseas 'imperialism' was engendered by developments in maritime and navigational technology (charts, compasses, tall-ships and more), their position on the Atlantic seaboard, and their internal conditions that made overseas ventures attractive. Not all contemporaneous fiscal-military states were equally invested in overseas colonial activity, often preferring to direct their

military energies within the continent, quite like the janapadas.

Two reasons which made colonial ventures possible were the state's monopoly over violence internally, and the mutually recognised inviolate



sovereignty that had emerged out of the Westphalian peace, which made them secure externally. It was in this latter idea of sovereignty that the backdrop of the Arthaśāstra-envisioned state differed. Several janapadas, all of them early fiscal-military

## PART IV

states which had arranged their internal processes to maintain armies and were also encouraging human resources development, were—unlike Europe more than a millennium later—still contesting for a run of the Cakravartī-kṣetra.

Despite a sense of cultural unity within this region, rivalries made political integration difficult, leading to diverse aspirant vijigīṣus (state leaders) fighting endlessly for domination, ignoring all notions of regional sovereignty. While such conflict included the ubiquitous clash of contesting armies, it also comprised revenue collection missions and provisioning expeditions into distant regions, as well as raids into the forest realms of Ātavika chiefs. A major feature of distant raids was the collection of elephants, especially war elephants for the sustenance and strengthening of the militaries.

### After Magadha

The scattered evidence gleaned from largely literary sources indicates that the Arthaśāstra was not a mere theoretical exercise but represented the political economy of the middle and eastern Gangetic plains from the 6th century BCE to the 4th century CE. It shows that the tradition of state building, best represented in Magadha, corresponds well to the definition of the fiscal-military state, albeit with significant differences from the type of states that have been given this descriptor in later times. It should also be noted that Magadha was not unique, and several realms of the mature Iron Age world—China, Rome, Greece, or Persia—also demonstrated state formation with institutionalised, meritocratic governance and professionalised armies, though the results were not the same everywhere.

It is not possible to examine everything that happened everywhere at all times in one paper, though it would be a good exercise to analyse each of these polities to see which of them qualify as fiscal-military states, and whose armies were professional to what degree. Only the case of Rome is briefly examined here for comparison, to highlight the uniqueness of the Indian experience. The Roman army at the beginning of the Republic was not professional but was made up of grades of land-owning classes who saw military service as their social duty and privilege. It was professionalised by the consul Gaius Marius, whose reforms in 104 BCE (coeval with the Jugurtha war) opened its membership to the capite censi, the vast class of landless poor. This army performed well under Marius, but also ultimately led to the dictatorships of Sulla and then Caesar, both of whom played on its loyalties with promises of plunder and provision of land assignment as retirement settlements (as Marius's reforms had promised). Such dictatorships were not entirely

unexpected, and may be seen as weak emergent properties of the complex Roman system.

While the clash of the caturaṅga was the quintessential mode of conflict among the established janapadas, all of them, including

Magadha, also faced occasional attacks by tides of cavalry from the arid west, often of Central Asian origin. The Śaka, the Pahlava, or the later Greek expeditions tended for some time to use Mathura as a base; Magadha's contest with these forces is seen in Samudragupta's campaigns against the Nāgas, Vikramaditya's relocating to Ujjain to fight the Scythians on the west coast, and Skandagupta's campaigns against the early Hūṇas. The collapse of Magadhan power in the mid-5th century CE was coincident with a renewed surge of Hūṇa cavalries, when the centre of political gravity of North India again swung to the west. For the next few centuries, Kannauj, rather than Magadha, became the 'imperial' seat of India.

The kingdoms and polities that appeared through the next millennium till the advent of English rule were fundamentally different from the Arthaśāstra ideal. While the Magadhan kings were not personal proprietors but really officials, later state rulers were increasingly personal or clannish. Harsha's or the Satavahana dynasty's courts were of the 'nomad-camp-capital' kind. The transformation was complete by the Turco-Mughal period, when states became no more than personal fiefdoms, their nobles only using them to further their personal power and sponsor conspicuous consumption of their supporting elite.

Often emerging as implicit consensus among nobles with armies, these states remained predatory and parasitic, paying no attention to moral and material improvement of the people, tending to disintegrate almost as soon as their owner-prince died, unless another prince immediately grabbed the crown. Bahadur Shah's kingdom in Gujarat evaporated the moment he was accidentally killed while visiting the Portuguese at Damañ; the Mughal throne was fought over by all brothers every time its emperor died (in Tēmūrid families, all brothers had equal claims to their father's throne, a major deviation from the Mongol junior right); to inherit the kingdom of Mysore, Tipu had to rush to the Coromandel at the death of his father Hyder Ali (who had been campaigning there) before the state could disintegrate.

Most nobles and officials too, held appointments as royal acknowledgement, not of their merit or ability, but of the power and influence they already possessed. Central authorities also reassigned appointments arbitrarily, so that no single noble/official became too powerful; designates and incumbents often needed to fight off predecessors and successors. Consequently, many of these men made the most of their appointments while they lasted. The governor of Surat, for example, did his best to fleece any European who wanted to meet the Mughal emperor, trying to extract as much of the nazr (gifts) as he could before letting the visitor proceed. Not familiar with the concept of institutionalisation or civic inheritance, the lords of the realm, themselves forever ready to behave 'treacherously' with no stigma, never quite understood why English or French generals and governors could not be tempted to switch allegiance at their behest, and put their rebuffs

down to arrogance. They did not comprehend why the French India governor Pierre Dumas, while handing over charge to his successor Joseph Dupleix, also handed him his title of Mughal mansabdar.

Another strand of state-formation can be traced through the career of Indian infantry. Caturaṅgas of the Iron Age janapadas could prevail over smaller versions of themselves, but were too humongous to be effective when attacked by more supple forces, including cavalries. Once the caturaṅga fell victim to its own gigantism, the vast supplies of infantry it had harnessed were now employed by the lords of Chanderi, Orchha, Ditiya, or Panna in the fastnesses of Central India, creating a tradition of serving in militaries far away from the soldier's home region.

The rulers of these principalities preferred to remain powerful colonel-commandants, not declaring sovereignty themselves but using their large infantry contingents to play kingmaker in many a period sultanate till their power was broken by the early Mughal emperors and Sher Shah Suri. The infantry was now available under humbler jobber-commanders to the Mughals, to other regional powers, and even to the nascent European outposts as telingas and sepoys. It was these infantrymen that later manned the ranks of the East India Company's (EIC) sepoy battalions, which were used to create what can be called a fiscal-military state.

The initial version of the EIC state, created following the Dual Rule formula established after the Battle of Buxar in 1765, met the narrowest possible definition of the fiscal-military state. The EIC established a voracious taxation system and took over military responsibilities, leaving civic administration and government to the Nawab. But once Dual Rule was discarded in 1772, other features of the fiscal-military state started appearing. The EIC's standing, professional armies remained in the field for long durations, with the EIC refusing to acknowledge regional sovereignties; this was clearly seen when Governor General Warren Hastings passed orders for armies from Bengal to march through territories of other kings towards Bombay (now Mumbai) to provide reinforcements during the First Maratha War (1775-1782). EIC rule was supported by an extractive, accurate, but increasingly fair revenue system, and also created an impersonal, institutionalised meritocratic administration, which demilitarised the countryside, and also acted as a vehicle for social improvement.

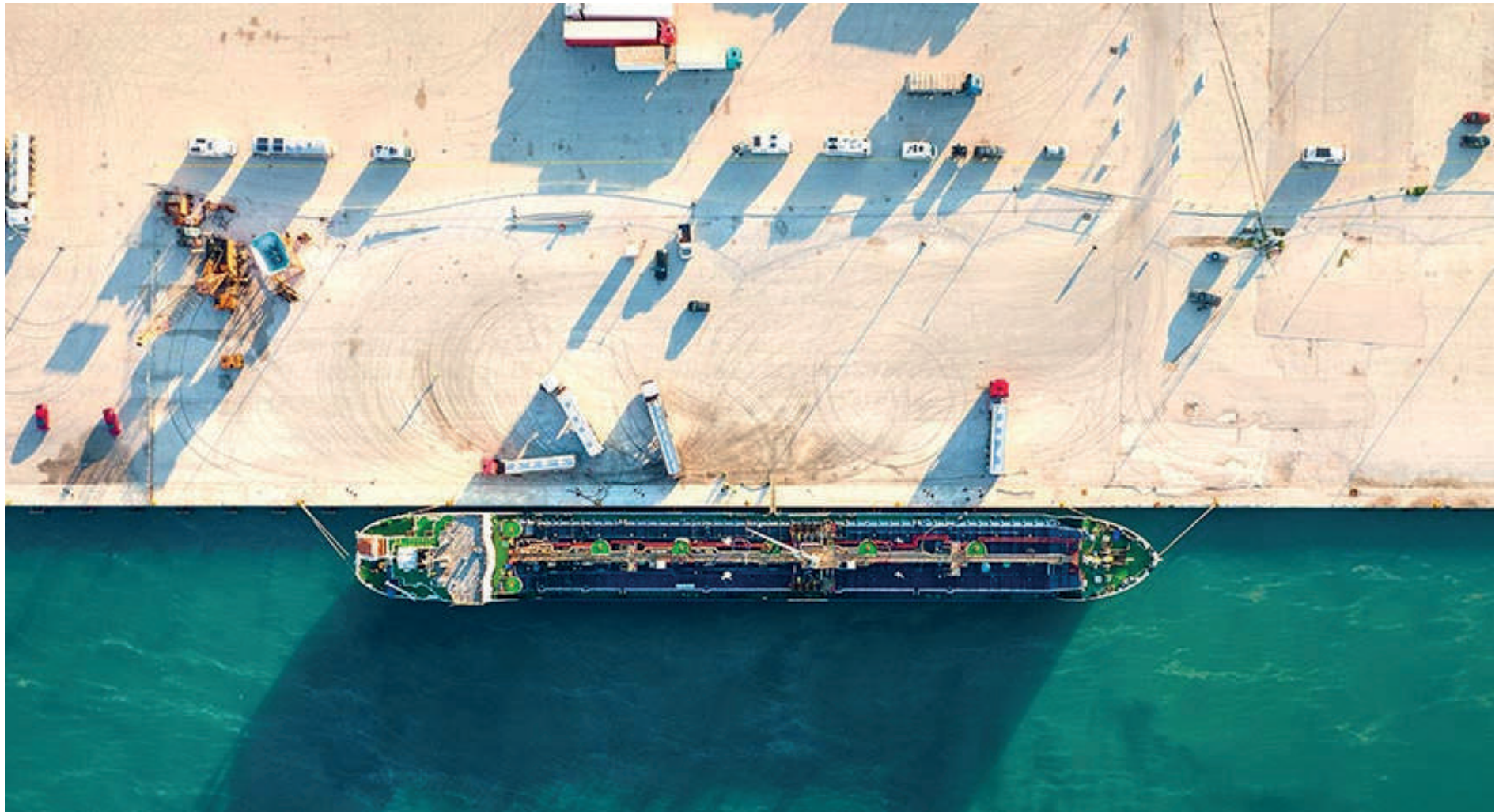
As it happened, it was this zeal to promote social improvement, increasingly marked by arrogance and scornful evangelism, which backfired, leading to the Indian uprising of 1857. The format of authority that replaced EIC rule after 1858, when the British Crown took over the administration, was markedly different on two counts. The army was not required to remain continually in the field (except for short periods called for by the 'Great Game' beyond Indian frontiers), and the push for social improvement was largely abandoned.

This longue durée examination shows that the institutionalised, meritocratic, and reformative rule introduced by the EIC was not unique but had a strong homegrown precedent in India, its nature represented in the Arthaśāstra. The Arthaśāstra was not merely a compilation of wishful thinking, but enjoined a method of providing a positive path for the people of a region, which was much more than the mere recommendations of scheming machinations that the text is usually associated with. However, so that no hasty conclusions are arrived at, it would be an interesting exercise to empirically improve the current state of data so that other period kingdoms, such as those of Kosala, Ujjain, and Tōṣālī can be examined in detail. It would also be worth examining the close relationship of these Iron Age polities with the spiritual and intellectual turmoil of what the German philosopher Karl Jasper has called the 'Axial Age' (8th to 3rd centuries BCE), which set off a remarkable trend of humanism in Eurasian societies that would have impacted the contemporary debate on state formation.





# India's rise in a changing world full of geopolitical and economic challenges



The Greek professor of Geopolitics at the University of Athens, Dr Ioannis Mazis, stated: "Trade drives economies and affects both political and geopolitical changes. Whoever is responsible for the control of trade flows on the field (control of the supply of commodities) inevitably controls the economy overall, and whoever controls the economy overall has the power to control nations and affect geopolitical changes worldwide. In other words, they possess the ultimate power to govern the planet."

Oceans, seas, and coastal areas contribute to food security and poverty eradication. Over 3 billion people use the oceans for sustenance and 80 percent of world trade occurs over the seas.

Greece, which is surrounded by the Aegean, Ionian, and Mediterranean Seas, has developed a robust shipping industry. Since ancient times, the Greeks have understood the value of overseas trading and have developed sea trade by advancing shipbuilding, navigation, and cargo trading. These developments allow a small country like Greece to become the leader of the world's shipping industry by servicing other countries' import and export of goods.

Since ancient times, the

Greeks have understood the value of overseas trading and have developed sea trade by advancing shipbuilding, navigation, and cargo trading.

In the current increasingly multi-polar world, countries with the biggest economies are facing uncertainty due to changing dynamics and various conflicts of interest within geopolitical, economic, energy, and technological landscapes. As a result, existing alliances cannot be taken for granted. Since every country is looking to strengthen its economy, minimise its reliance on other countries, and reduce vulnerability to external factors, countries must continually innovate and develop.

The imports and exports of each country support its food supply and infrastructure which, in turn, leads to the country's growth and development. Imports and exports are defined by a country's trading ability when dealing with other countries. To be efficient, the purchase or sale of goods and commodities must be cost-effective. One of the key parameters of cost-effectiveness is transportation cost; having a shipping industry efficiently manages transport costs since 80 percent of global trade travels by sea. Other factors that affect cost-effectiveness are the flow of the worldwide supply chain as well as

any sanctions that might occur.

There are five influential shipping nations: Greece, Japan, China, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Between the five of them, they control 53 percent of the world's total tonnage. Greece is a strategic partner of major trading nations. Its merchant fleet services over 22 percent of the United States' (US) imports and exports, over 20 percent of European trade and 32 percent of Asian trade. This makes the Greek shipping industry one of the cornerstones of the world economy and trade, and at the same time, a pillar of the Greek economy.

One of the key parameters of cost-effectiveness is transportation cost; having a shipping industry efficiently manages transport costs since 80 percent of global trade travels by sea.

The Greek shipping industry has motivated other countries to develop their shipbuilding and ship repair, technology, marine services, ship spares, and equipment. Consequently, the Greek shipping industry has contributed to the economic growth of these countries. For example, Greece has bought 1,500 ships from Chinese shipyards since 2000, contributing to the Chinese economy with US\$ 70 billion. This does not account for

the additional revenue from ship repairs every year.

Over the last 15 years, China has become an aggressive player in the global shipping industry. It has not only succeeded in drastically increasing its merchant fleet size but has also entered the global cargo trading sector, controlling management stakes in over 117 strategic ports in 43 countries around the world with an additional 12 ports in development. This has increased China's influence over maritime logistics, positioning it to potentially dominate the global supply chain.

In this challenging world, Greece and India must join forces to develop the Indian shipping industry and increase global competition. The development of India's own merchant fleet will strengthen India's position in global trading. Furthermore, collaborative projects would be mutually beneficial.

These include the creation of new shipyards in India for shipbuilding and ship repair, the exchange of ship technology, and training and employing more Indian seafarers.

To develop the Indian shipping industry, certain important steps must be adopted towards building supporting infrastructure.

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shipping industry, certain important steps must be adopted towards building supporting infrastructure. This includes the construction of ports, terminals, warehouses, shipyards, ship suppliers for bunkers, stores, spare parts and workshops, among others. For this infrastructure to be successfully developed, it needs sufficient public and private investment, provided that India's legislation will be favourable and allow investors to develop their projects.

Since Piraeus is the hub of the global shipping industry, establishing a team that would promote India's interests will prove to be beneficial. This team could consist of observers who track the day-to-day developments and changes in the global shipping industry, collecting valuable insight, formulating India's own maritime strategy, and managing an Indian-owned fleet.

Every two years, Greece connects the world's countries at the Posidonia Exhibition, which is the largest shipping exhibition in the world. This year, over 81 countries were represented, with 2,038 participants. A larger Indian presence in the ever-expanding and changing shipping industry will be a significant development.



# Apocalypse now, or just what the doctor ordered? Trump 2.0, tariffs, and tough love

Perhaps the doom-sayers are right. Perhaps the return of Donald J. Trump to a second presidency spells the end to women's rights, prosperity, and all things good. As if multiple crises and extreme uncertainties were not enough of a global challenge, the world's largest economy and military superpower has just gone and re-elected a leader with a known penchant for unpredictability. Buy these arguments, and it should be clear that the American people have not only shot themselves in the foot but the rest of us, too. But have they?

The first part of this article presents three arguments explaining Trump's electoral triumph should give many countries and people around the world good reason for at least cautious optimism. The second part examines three risks that the arrival of Trump and his new team may pose while highlighting why these potential challenges represent new opportunities for other actors.

As if multiple crises and extreme uncertainties were not enough of a global challenge, the world's largest economy and military superpower has just gone and re-elected a leader with a known penchant for unpredictability.

## A glass more than half full?

Three areas where a paradoxical, positive effect of Trump's re-election might be at work are trade, global governance, and diversity.

### Trade politics

First, recall that there was no love lost between President Trump 1.0 and the World Trade Organization (WTO). In August 2018, he declared the WTO to be "the single worst trade deal ever made". The actions of his team spoke even louder than these harsh words. Trade wars, tariffs, and paralysis of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Mechanism had marked the first Trump era. While the US did not return to its old role of guarantor of trade multilateralism under President Joe Biden either, Team Trump 2.0 will now likely break its own record (and certainly Biden's or President Obama's) in bringing stormy weather to global trade governance. Just prior to the election, candidate Trump described "tariff" as "the most beautiful word in the dictionary"; chances are that the self-declared "tariff-man" will be back with a vengeance when he takes up office again—his election promise has been that the US will be slapping on universal baseline tariffs (10 percent) and hitting China with tariffs of 60 percent.

Trade wars, tariffs, and paralysis of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Mechanism had marked the first Trump era.

Economists have been quick to predict the costs of such policies, internationally and domestically, especially as US trading partners will likely retaliate with counter-measures. There is also much concern about the fate of the multilateral trading system when faced with a renewed Trumpian onslaught. However, a shock to the system is perhaps exactly what is needed to shake the global elites of Geneva and Brussels out of their complacency. For far too long, the WTO has operated largely as a technocratic bubble and has thus been unable to deal



with the weaponisation of interdependence and other fundamental challenges to global trade. While there is no guarantee that the WTO will not try to continue with business as usual (and thereby fade away into even greater redundancy), Trump 2.0 provides the organisation and its members with a major opportunity. Finally, there is a real chance to reboot the system, update the rules to secure global supply chains among like-minded partners, and make global trade governance fit for purpose again.

### Global governance

It is not only trade governance where the return of a Trump Presidency creates a turning point for a much-needed reboot. The ability of multilateralism to deliver peace and prosperity in the 20th century has led to the persistence of unquestioning trust in the system among many well-meaning liberals even today. This blind trust, however, is no longer apt at a time when the founding principles of the system are under challenge (e.g. interdependence, which was supposed to bind nations into a community of peace, can now be weaponised in unexpected ways). At an operational level, too, there are reasons to question the workings of some international organisations. We need to take a close, hard look at the composition of their secretariats, the distribution of their leadership positions across nations, and whether their supposedly neutral governance machinery is, in fact, being covertly (and sometimes overtly) hijacked for the pursuit of narrow, nationalist priorities of authoritarian states. Taking a cue from the already announced Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), global governance would be well-served to harness Trump's (in)famous scepticism on multilateralism to engage in drastic reform (including funding cuts for organisations that show themselves to be easy, political instruments for some states). Unlikely alliances may thereby ensue, including those aiming to reform the UN Security Council.

### Migration, diversity and power politics

Many (perhaps rightly) balk at the anti-immigration sentiments that Trump seems to stoke. Take a closer look, however. While minorities continued to favour Democrats, Trump was viewed more favourably by Asian Americans this time. There are several explanations for the increase in the percentage of certain minority groups in favour of Trump, but at least one plausible

one relates to perceptions of "good" versus "bad" immigration. Successful, law-abiding immigrant communities may prefer the centre-right, in contrast to the "Wir schaffen das" politics of Angela Merkel (ironically herself a centre-right leader) that involved opening up borders with no immigration controls. Add to this the crucial factor of optics. The hardline on mass deportations notwithstanding, the Trump administration looks considerably more diverse (from Vivek Ramaswamy to Tulsi Gabbard and advisers in key positions from the Indian community) than many cabinets in Europe (e.g. in Germany). And think this through further: this is not just an issue of optics, but global power politics. The presence of a strong pro-India contingent in Team Trump may allow the US to draw clear red lines in dealing with Pakistan and China, more than was possible in previous US governments. And all this is not in the name of fuzzy values and global public goods but hardcore American interests.

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### Governance gaps and new opportunities

The previous section has suggested that there are good reasons for some optimism. Among causes for concern, three, however, are worth highlighting. First, there is a risk that amidst Trump's transactionalism, values will get short shrift. And insofar as interests and values are reflexive, this downplaying of values will come back to bite US interests as well as those of other players that stand for global norms (such as democracy) in the medium run. Second, even prior to the election, there was growing alarm in Europe about the risks that a Trump win would pose to support for Ukraine. Third, what is to become of life as we know it if the WTO fails to update and global trade fragments? These issues are serious but can be addressed if other powers step up.

Regarding the first concern, on transactionalism versus values, there is no reason for other powers to follow the US lead. The EU, especially, can and should put its money where its mouth is, working with other like-minded partners. For instance, by developing synergies with the concept of Lifestyle for the Environment (LiFE)

(advanced by PM Modi within the rubric of India's G20 Presidency), the EU, India, and others can offer alternatives to both the Chinese model of development, but also the US one. Such alternatives will involve not only lip service to sustainability questions but also new narratives and policies that recognise the importance of biodiversity, trans-species justice, and the worth of saving individuals more-than-humans for their own sake. The reason to pursue such alternatives will be the good of the planet and also leadership and influence for countries offering such out-of-the-box thinking. Besides such "radical" ideas, there are also good strategic reasons to appeal to the values of democracy when seeking deeper relations with a civilisational power like India. President Joe Biden was able to draw on this link via his Summit for Democracy; it is even possible that the Trump administration—even only for transactional reasons—sees it useful to deepen its ties with India via this and other such ideational instruments.

By developing synergies with the concept of Lifestyle for the Environment (LiFE) (advanced by PM Modi within the rubric of India's G20 Presidency), the EU, India, and others can offer alternatives to both the Chinese model of development, but also the US one.

Second, the Europeans and others are right to be concerned about cuts in US support for Ukraine and indeed, NATO. But such cuts have been a long time coming, and it is high time that Europe and other US allies learnt to fend better for themselves (aligning potentially with other friends via formations such as the Quad and giving them more oomph). And Trump's pre-election promise to end the Russia-Ukraine war aligns with the pro-peace position that India and others from the Global South have taken. Some face-saving for the Russians will be positive in that it will reduce the temptation for Russia to be driven further into the arms of China. Much depends on what a mediated peace will actually translate into. For Europeans (and the Ukrainians themselves) concerned about a sell-out by Trump, India may turn out to be a key factor in securing a deal that is acceptable to both parties.

Third, especially in light of institutional inertia that affects many international organisations, there is a serious risk that the WTO will not be able to withstand the Trump challenge. Plan Bs and Cs will have to be in place. These will have to include not only conventional trade deals (which have been traditionally difficult to reach with some partners, such as India) but connectivity projects linking the EU, India, and other democracies. Ideas on these are in the offing in the Global South. Raisina Dialogue, which celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2025, is a good place to pay more attention to.

Perhaps the critics are right: the arrival of Team Trump 2.0 means apocalypse now. Or perhaps the argument presented here is right: tough love is indeed what the doctor ordered to get the system working again.



# A deep dive into the India-Russia economic relationship

In the past decade, the core drivers of India-Russia relations have begun shifting. The traditionally dominant military-technical partnership has declined, with India buying less Russian weapons, technology and military platforms. The economic pillar stagnated as military dealings slowed, with bilateral trade hovering around the US\$ 10-11 billion mark. However, since 24 February, 2022, there has been a dramatic uptick in economic ties, with India emerging as Russia's second-largest trade partner. In 2022, bilateral trade surged to US\$ 49 billion, and by the end of 2023, US\$ 65 billion. This uptick in trade is primarily attributed to the increasing discounts on oil purchases offered to Indian refiners, as India did not join the sanctions regime against Russia. Along with increasing oil trade, the non-oil trade has also marginally increased in the trade basket. Along with these new trends in bilateral trade, there is a significant overestimation of the India-Russia economic cooperation, which has led to condemnation from the Group of Seven countries (G7), comprising Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States).

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## Trends in the Ttrade basket

While it's no surprise that hydrocarbon imports dominate the trade basket, in 2023, US\$ 54 billion of the US\$ 65 billion exports comprised oil imports from Russia. Similar trends were reflected in the previous year; out of the US\$49 billion total trade, US\$ 38 billion constituted oil imports. The overall trade has grown with the increasing oil and mineral imports from Russia. For instance, in 2021, bilateral trade was US\$ 12 billion, where oil and mineral fuels constituted only US\$ 5.2 billion of the total trade, leaving US\$ 6.8 billion in non-oil trade. In 2022 and 2023, non-oil trade increased to US\$ 11 billion, a significant growth, indicative of bilateral trade increasing.

Since 2022, Russia's fertiliser exports have grown substantially. The average Indian import of Russian Fertiliser was around US\$ 600 million; however, in 2022-23, fertiliser imports increased to US\$ 3 billion. It later declined in the following year, primarily because Russia ended previous discounts on the sale of di-ammonium phosphate. Further, the import of precious stones, metals, and jewellery has increased since 2021. Similarly, Russia's export of edible vegetables and animal and vegetable fats has increased.

Interestingly, the goods that traditionally dominated India's exports to Russia have come down. Pharmaceutical exports are steadily declining. By 2024, pharmaceutical exports from India had declined to US\$ 386 million. Further, trade across items such as tea, coffee,

and spices has fluctuated, as well as with clothing accessories. However, the export of some commodities has increased since the invasion, such as iron and steel, electrical machinery and consumer electronics, organic and inorganic chemicals, compounds of precious metals, rare-earth metals, soap and by-products, ceramic products,



automobiles and spare parts, and medical and surgical equipment. However, one of the biggest Indian exports that surged in 2023-2024, since the invasion, was the export of machinery and mechanical appliances, which increased from US\$ 320 million to US\$ 650 million. Further, in 2024, from April to August, machinery imports rose to US\$ 700 million.

The increase in export volumes of these goods is one of the reasons why India's total export surged from US\$ 3.1 billion to US\$ 4.2 billion in 2024. Based on early projections for 2024-2025, it is likely that trade across consumer goods, electronics, machinery, and spare parts will increase. The improvement in trade and increasing avenues for economic cooperation have emerged due to the vacuum left by Western firms in the Russian economy which allowed Russia to spend the rupees accumulated in its accounts since February 2022.

## Sanctions and India's response

Since sanctions were imposed on Russia in 2014, India-Russia trade has largely remained unchanged, seldom disrupted by supply shocks. India's trade with Russia, even though diversified, is not on a large scale in comparison to other Group of 20 (G20) countries (sans Russia). Neither are there any vast business interests for Indian elites in Russia, apart from oil and pharma, which is why trade data does not reflect any new avenues of trade except in consumer goods and electronics. In November 2022, Moscow sent a list of goods to New Delhi for delivery, including parts for cars, trains, and aircraft. The list consisted of more than 500 entries. It is clear that New Delhi

has not supplied Russia with any of the big-ticket items, such as aircraft engines or equipment with high dual-use capabilities (beyond spare parts), as bilateral trade data reflects that trade for the parts requested by Moscow has been minimal. Furthermore, New Delhi's defence imports to Russia are a by-product of the bilateral military-technical partnership and to setup joint

ventures.

The US Treasury Department imposed sanctions against 19 Indian firms for their alleged involvement in the supply of dual-use goods to Moscow, including a few pharmaceutical companies based in Mumbai re-exporting Dell Technologies' most advanced server, Dell PowerEdge XE9680, worth US\$ 434 million to Russia.

Further, trade data does not reflect any sale of restricted critical technology to Russia, as claimed by a few sources. The sources cite drones worth US\$ 5 million and goods worth US\$ 600,000 that were re-exported via Kyrgyzstan. Recently, the US Treasury Department imposed sanctions against 19 Indian firms for their alleged involvement in the supply of dual-use goods to Moscow, including a few pharmaceutical companies based in Mumbai re-exporting Dell Technologies' most advanced server, Dell PowerEdge XE9680, worth US\$ 434 million to Russia. Despite these claims, no evidence clearly substantiates them. For instance, with regards to the first claim of India exporting drones via Kyrgyzstan, the numbers do not add up. Since 2022, trade with Bishkek for electronic products has not crossed US\$1 million. Similarly, in the case of arms and ammunition and parts, the trade does not exceed US\$ 480,000. Furthermore, in a globalised world where trade takes precedence, trading firms in countries near Russia re-route such trade. For instance, several US and European firms exported US\$ 1.2 billion worth of microchips, which were later re-routed from Türkiye and Kazakhstan. Therefore, despite allegations, trade data does not justify the charges. The Indian Ministry

of External Affairs (MEA), in response to the criticism, stated that the firms involved did not violate any Indian law, as New Delhi did not recognise non-UN-approved sanctions.

Since early 2024, Western sanctions against Russia have intensified, compelling India to take a stance. For instance, early this year, TotalEnergies invoked a force majeure on Russia's Arctic LNG-2 project, which led to production being suspended. In the past, Indian firms were interested in purchasing stakes in Novatek's (a major Russian gas company) Arctic LNG-2 project as part of New Delhi's outreach to the Russian Arctic. However, the subsequent rounds of European Union (EU) sanctions targeting Russian Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) have prompted New Delhi to announce that it would not purchase LNG from the Arctic LNG 2 project. Interestingly, despite waves of sanctions against Russian energy, the EU continues to import LNG from Russia. Imports have increased by 20 percent this year. The EU has a selective approach to imposing and complying with sanctions. On the one hand, it criticises New Delhi with allegations of India reinforcing the Kremlin coffers, fueling Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, the EU continues to purchase Russian energy.

## Issue of payments

Lastly, even though India was able to address payment issues by extending the Special Rupee-Vostro account facility to Russian businesses, certain challenges remain. Regulatory bodies, such as the Securities and Exchange Board of India, have limited foreign portfolio investments by Sberbank AG, Russia's largest bank, to hydrocarbons only. Furthermore, because of Russia's classification as a "high-risk" country by the Financial Action Task Force, the commerce ministry's Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC) continues to place Russia in the same category, despite the MEA and the Indian Embassy in Moscow's request for a reevaluation.

## Conclusion

India's trade with Russia must be viewed from the point of view of one driven by supply and demand factors and not through the intervention of a political apparatus. With bilateral trade likely to continue and intensify with Russia, the intensity of secondary sanctions might impact New Delhi's economic engagement with Moscow. India is presented with a set of challenges: it must sustain its engagement with Moscow while continuing to further its cooperation with the West, all while ensuring that its short- and medium-term energy security needs are addressed. Navigating these challenges will be essential for India as it seeks to balance its strategic interests in a complex global landscape.



## AR Rahman, wife Saira Banu separating after 29 years of marriage



Oscar-winning composer A R Rahman and wife Saira Banu are separating after 29 years of marriage, their lawyer said on Tuesday.

In a statement on behalf of the couple, prominent divorce lawyer Vandana Shah said they took the decision to separate after "significant emotional strain in their relationship".

"After many years of marriage, Saira and her husband A R Rahman have made the difficult decision to separate from each other. This decision comes after significant emotional strain in their relationship.

"Despite their deep love for each other, the couple has found that the tensions and difficulties have created an insurmountable gap between them, one that neither party feels able to bridge at this time," read the joint statement, issued to media by Shah.

In a post on X, Rahman said, "We had hoped to reach the grand thirty, but all things, it seems, carry an unseen end. Even the throne of God might tremble at the weight of broken hearts. Yet, in this shattering, we seek meaning, though the pieces may not find their place again. To our friends, thank you for your kindness and for respecting our privacy as we walk through this fragile chapter."

Banu and Rahman, 57, tied the knot in 1995 and are parents to three children -- daughters Khatija, Raheema, and son Ameen.

In his Instagram Stories, Ameen wrote, "We kindly request everyone to respect our privacy during this time. Thank you for your understanding."

In the statement, Banu and Rahman said the decision to separate comes out of "pain and agony", and requested "privacy and understanding from the public" as they navigate this "difficult chapter" in their life.

Banu was first announce the separation in a statement, which was followed by a joint statement.

## 'I cry a lot in my bathroom...' says Shah Rukh Khan

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan on Tuesday attended the Global Freight Summit in Dubai, where he got candid about his personal and professional life.

During the conversation with the moderator, SRK not only talked about his stardom but also shared how he dealt with failures.

Urging people to introspect rather than dwell on their failures, he said, "When you fail, you should not believe that your product or service or job went wrong. Maybe you just misunderstood the ecosystem you were working in. You have to understand how people are reacting. If I cannot elicit an emotion from the people I cater to, then my product is not going to work how wonderful it may be."

When asked if he is critical of his work sometimes, Shah Rukh candidly admitted, "Yes, I am. I hate feeling this way, and I cry a lot in my bathroom. I don't show it to anyone. You must believe that the world is not against you. If your film did go wrong, it's not because of you or some conspiracy. You have to accept that you made it badly, and then you have to move on." He also emphasised how one should be



focused on learning how to move on from failures.

"There are moments of despair but there are moments which say, 'shut up, get up and get on with it'. You have to do it because the world is not against you. You should not believe that things are

going wrong only for you. Life moves on. Life does what it does. You cannot start blaming life for what it does," he added.

In the coming months, SRK will be next seen in King, directed by Sujoy Ghosh.

## Deepika Padukone turns cheerleader for Ranveer Singh

Actress Deepika Padukone recently gave her husband, actor Ranveer Singh, a sweet shout-out. Reacting to Singh's recent post, she mentioned that she was incredibly proud of him.

On Monday, Ranveer shared a video of him revealing the secret behind his boundless energy, a protein bar from a brand he co-founded. In the video, members of the film fraternity and audiences are seen marvelling at Ranveer's unparalleled energy levels, which often leave everyone in awe.

The montage captures snippets of the actor's journey, starting from his struggling days to his rise as one of the most beloved stars in the industry. The video also features moments where Ranveer's high-octane energy takes the centre stage, showcasing his transformation and relentless passion for his craft.

Sharing the video on her Instagram story, Deepika cheered for Ranveer and his team with heartfelt appreciation. She wrote, "Soo incredibly proud of you and the team!!! Well done, guys."

For the caption, the 'Gully Boy' star wrote, "Now you know. Don't just be You, be SuperYou." Taking to the comments section, his star wife wrote, "Brilliant."

On the professional front, both Deepika and Ranveer are basking in the success of Rohit Shetty's latest release, 'Singham Again', which hit theaters on November 1.

Ranveer Singh has an exciting line-up of projects ahead. He is set to take on the iconic role in 'Don 3'. Additionally, he has joined hands with filmmaker Aditya Dhar for another action film.





# MP Govt to make 'The Sabarmati Report' film tax free



The Madhya Pradesh Government on Tuesday decided to declare 'The Sabarmati Report', a film on the Godhra train burning incident of 2002, as tax free in the state.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav made this announcement and said he would also go to watch the movie.

Helmed by Dheeraj Sarna, the film revolves around the 2002 Godhra burning train incident, which triggered communal riots in Gujarat.

"It is a very good movie. I will go to watch the movie myself. I also told my ministers, MLAs and MPs to watch this film. We are also going to make it tax free in the state so that maximum people can watch it," Yadav said. He said it (Godhra incident) was a dark chapter of the past and truth would come out through the film.

While accusing the Opposition of playing "dirty politics" on the Godhra incident for vote bank, Yadav said Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was then the chief minister of Gujarat, saved the honour of the

state and the country.

Earlier on Sunday, PM Modi said a fake narrative could persist only for a limited period of time, while referring to 'The Sabarmati Report' film.

Modi made the comments on X, reacting to a user's post praising the movie 'The Sabarmati Report' for 'bringing out the important truth of one of the most shameful events in our recent history'.

MP Cabinet Minister Vishvas Sarang on Tuesday said the movie had brought out the truth of the Godhra incident, in which 59 persons were killed.

The facts shown in the movie had proved that the Congress and the Opposition had set a narrative to defame Gujarat in the entire world at that time, the BJP leader claimed.

The Congress always distorted history to defame the majority community in the country and mislead the society, Sarang alleged.

"We along with the party workers and public will watch 'The Sabarmati Report' movie," he said.

# Victoria Kjaer Theilvig's Miss Universe win sparks social media frenzy

A 21-year-old Victoria Kjaer Theilvig of Denmark was crowned Miss Universe 2024 in Mexico City on Saturday. She beat 120 other contestants and became the first Danish woman to win the title. However, the victory has sparked widespread sarcastic remarks online following the pageant's return to a more traditional format, even as it permitted married, plus-size, and transgender women to participate.

The 2023 competition featured a transgender contestant, Rikkie Valerie Kollé from Portugal, who was placed in the top 20 following her win as the first transgender woman crowned Miss Netherlands, earlier that year.

However, Theilvig's victory has surprised some social media users. Many of them celebrate the winner being a 'biological' woman, in comparison with the pageant's recent focus on



diversity and inclusion.

According to reports by Daily Mail, political commentator Matt Wallace wrote, 'BREAKING: Fans shocked after straight, white, biological woman wins Miss Universe 2024'. Another user commented, 'Yes an actual

white biological female won the pageant – the World is healing'.

Even billionaire Elon Musk weighed in, sharing a meme that read, 'Breaking: internet stunned after an attractive biological female human of healthy weight wins Miss Universe pageant'.

# Late Quincy Jones, Bond film producers bestowed with honorary Oscars

Just weeks after his death at the age of 91, renowned music producer and composer Quincy Jones was bestowed with an honorary Oscar by Hollywood's film academy at a gala on Sunday. Barbara Broccoli and Michael G Wilson, siblings and producers of the James Bond movie franchise, received the Irving G Thalberg Memorial Award at the annual Governors Awards ceremony, attended by stars, including Tom Hanks, Jude Law and Kate Winslet.

Jones, who died on November 3, worked with musicians ranging from Count Basie to Frank Sinatra and reshaped pop music with his collaborations with Michael Jackson over a 70-year career. In 1971, he served as musical director and conductor of the 43rd Academy Awards. He composed scores for The Wiz and The Color Purple. "Even though he lived 91 years, still gone too soon," actor Jamie Foxx said of Jones.

"Tonight we pay tribute to him for the creativity and brilliance he brought to cinema," added Foxx, who portrayed a



young Ray Charles with help from Jones. A group of singers led by Jennifer Hudson paid homage to Jones with a musical performance as images of the producer at work were shown on screens. Jones' honorary Oscar was accepted by his children, including actor Rashida Jones, who read the speech he had prepared for Sunday's honors. "I share this award and tonight's honour with all the amazing directors, legendary actors and of course exceptional songwriters, composers and musicians," Jones' speech said.

Broccoli and Wilson were introduced by Daniel Craig, the actor who was the most recent Bond. He praised the duo by saying, "I can't tell you how

much I admire your integrity in holding on to your singular vision."

British romantic comedy screenwriter and director Richard Curtis, who wrote and directed Love Actually and Four Weddings and a Funeral, was awarded the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award for his philanthropy. Curtis co-founded the British charity Comic Relief, which has raised more than 1 billion pounds (\$1.26 billion) to help children around the world, including during its annual Red Nose Day fundraising event. "Not content with saving the British film industry, he decided he also had to try and save the whole bloody world," said Hugh Grant, who acted in his films.



## Opener Shafali dropped from team for ODI series in Australia

New Delhi

Top-order batter Shafali Verma was on Tuesday dropped from India's 16-member women's team for the three-match ODI series in Australia in December after a string of poor performances in the past one year.

The BCCI selectors seem to have once again lost patience with the 20-year-old right-handed batter, whose recent ODI form has been disappointing. Shafali has scored just 108 runs in six matches this year with 33 being the highest.

She was dropped in December last year from the team midway during the home ODI series against Australia on the basis of her poor run, before making a comeback against South Africa in June this year in Bengaluru.

In fact, the youngster, rated as the next big thing in Indian women's cricket when she broke into the team in 2021, has not scored an ODI half century since making an unbeaten 71 against Sri Lanka in Pallekele in July 2022. Her next highest score was a 49 against the same opponent in the same series.

Four other players — Uma Chetry, Dayalan Hemalatha, Shreyanka Patil and Sayali



Satghare — were also left out from the squad that played in India's 2-1 home series win against New Zealand in Ahmedabad last month.

Harleen Deol, Richa Ghosh, Minnu Mani, Titas Sadhu and Priya Punia are the five players who did not face New Zealand but were named in the team for the Australia series.

The first two ODIs will be played in Brisbane on December 5 and 8 before the action shifts

to Perth on December 11 for the final match of the series.

**Squad:** Harmanpreet Kaur (captain), Smriti Mandhana (vice-captain), Priya Punia, Jemimah Rodrigues, Harleen Deol, Yastika Bhatia (wicketkeeper), Richa Ghosh (wicketkeeper), Tejal Hasabnis, Deepti Sharma, Minnu Mani, Priya Mishra, Radha Yadav, Titas Sadhu, Arundhati Reddy, Renuka Singh Thakur, Saima Thakor.

## Border-Gavaskar Trophy: First 2 Tests crucial for India: Shastri

Mumbai

India "paid a heavy price for being a little complacent" against New Zealand and the team needs to start well in the first two Tests against Australia to put behind their unprecedented loss to New Zealand at home, believes Ravi Shastri.

India will be smarting from that defeat in that series against New Zealand because they were caught unawares. They would be hurting and they'd like to get back on track ASAP. The best way to bounce back from such a series, is (to) start off another series in a good manner, so the first two Test matches become extremely crucial going ahead. Ravi Shastri

The former captain and coach Shastri said India, who were caught "unawares" by New Zealand, would be hurting after the defeat which ended their unbeaten run at home that lasted over 12 years and 18 series.

"India will be smarting from that defeat in that series against New Zealand because they were caught unawares," Shastri said.

They were a little complacent and they paid the price for it. But having said that, it's a very proud team, this Indian team. They would be hurting and they'd like to get back on track ASAP. The best way to bounce back from such a series, is (to) start off another series in a good manner, so the first two Test matches become extremely crucial going ahead," he said.

Shastri said India's coaching staff under head coach Gautam Gambhir will have to ensure that the players are in a "good state of mind" going into the five-Test affair starting on November 22 at Optus Stadium here.

"The most important thing will be to ensure that they start off well; they keep the players in a good state of mind. That will be the most important thing for the coach," he said.



## Croatia, Denmark qualify for Nations League quarters



Madrid

Denmark and Croatia completed the Nations League quarterfinals lineup after both sides secured draws. Denmark went 0-0 in Serbia and Croatia came from behind to share 1-1 with visiting Portugal. They joined France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal and Netherlands in the last-eight. The quarterfinals will be held on March 20-23.

In Warsaw, Liverpool fullback Andy Robertson scored an injury time header to give Scotland a 2-1 win over Poland and send the hosts down into League B. Scotland have a playoff to secure its League A status.

Croatia needed only a draw to secure qualification but they made the home fans in Split sweat before getting the point they needed against group winners Portugal.

With 32 minutes gone, Joao Felix brought down a superb 45-yard pass from Vitinha and slipped the ball under the advancing keeper to give the visitors the lead. When Andrej Kramaric hit the post and Josko Gvardiol had a 62nd minute goal

ruled out for offside it looked like it might not be Croatia's night.

But Manchester City's Gvardiol got the equaliser just a few minutes later and Croatia held on to take the second quarterfinal spot from Group A1.

There was little to play for in Tenerife, where Spain, top of Group A4, took on the already relegated Switzerland. Coach Luis de la Fuente offered a first start to Barcelona midfielder Marc Casado and gave debuts to Samu and Aitor Paredes in a much-changed Spain side.

But it was the two Bryans, Gil and Zaragoza, who got the goals that mattered for the European champions.

Pedri's first half penalty was saved but Yeremi Pino converted to put Spain ahead. Joel Monteiro equalised for Switzerland after 63 minutes but Bryan Gil got Spain back in front five minutes later. Andi Zeqiri equalised again from the penalty spot with five minutes remaining but a stoppage time penalty from Bryan Zaragoza at the other end gave Spain all three points.



# KL Rahul Opener, Nitish Likely To Debut; India's Probable Playing XI For First Test Of Border Gavaskar Trophy

## Hyderabad

India will take on Australia in Perth on November 22 in the opening Test of the Border Gavaskar Trophy. Ahead of the fixture, Rohit Sharma's absence and a few injury concerns have left the Indian side with multiple gaps to fill. In such a scenario, India will need to reshuffle their batting unit. Also with Rohit unavailable for the fixture, Jasprit Bumrah will lead the side.

Rohit's absence has left a vacant spot at the top to partner Yashasvi Jaiswal. Also, Shubman Gill is likely to miss the match as



he has suffered a thumb fracture according to some media reports. So, it leaves India with two

openers in the form of KL Rahul and Abhimanyu Easwaran to partner Jaiswal. Easwaran scored

only 36 runs from four innings for India A and Australia A. Thus, the team management is likely to back on the experience of KL Rahul on foreign soil and pair him up with Jaiswal at the top.

Virat Kohli, Sarfaraz Khan and Rishabh Pant are likely to make up the top five in the batting unit. Kohli and Pant have been mainstays in the team while Sarfaraz has been consistent in Test cricket since his debut with 371 runs laced with one century and three fifties.

Kohli is likely to bat at number three with Sarfaraz and

Pant coming in to bat after him.

Considering the bouncy nature of the Australian pitches, India is likely to opt for four pacers and one spinner. Thus, Nitish Kumar Reddy is likely to make a debut as the team would like to rely on his skills as a pace bowling all-rounder in Australia. In the spin department, Ashwin and Jadeja are the two options and the team can go with either of them.

The trio of Mohammed Siraj, Jasprit Bumrah and Akash Deep will comprise the pace department.

## 15 Jammu & Kashmir Players Set For 2025 IPL Auction

### Srinagar

In the IPL 2025 auction, 15 players from Jammu and Kashmir will be eyeing for buyers. Last year's auction saw nine J&K players going under auction but only two — Abid Mushtaq and Rasikh Salam Dar — managing to secure contracts.

The Auction, scheduled for November 24-25 in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), will feature 574 players vying for a spot in an IPL franchise. Umran Malik and Abdul Samad are set to steal limelight for J&K, but several emerging talents are hoping to make their mark too. Both Umran and Samad have previously represented SunRisers Hyderabad. Umran has also donned national colours.

Last year, Abid Mushtaq earned a contract from Rajasthan



Royals while Rasikh Salam was picked by Delhi Capitals. Both secured contracts for their base price of Rs 20 lakh. This year, Umran Malik is up for grabs. He is entering the auction with his base price of Rs 75 lakh—the highest among the J&K players. His teammate Abdul Samad, base priced at Rs 30 lakh, is eyeing

buyers with his explosive batting and bowling capability.

While Rasikh Salam, who has represented Mumbai Indians and Delhi Capitals in the previous editions, is entering the auction with a modest base price of Rs 30-lakh. He has recently shown his consistency while playing for India A.

Among the uncapped players, Mujtaba Yousuf, a seasoned IPL net bowler, is hopeful to go beyond the net in the league.

This year players from J&K include six all-rounders, seven bowlers, and two specialist batsmen. The all-rounders, based at Rs 30 lakh each, include Abdul Samad, Vivrant Sharma, Nasir Lone, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Auqib Nabi Dar, and Abid Mushtaq. Specialist batsmen Shubham Khajuria and Musaif Ajaz are also priced at Rs 30 lakh. The bowlers' list features Umran Malik, Rasikh Salam, Atif Mushtaq, Mujtaba Yousuf, Avinash Singh, Kunal Singh Chibb, and Murugan Ashwin. Ashwin who has played for teams like Chennai Super

Kings and Punjab Kings is also representing J&K this year.

"Ashwin is our guest player. He will be playing limited-overs cricket and the upcoming Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy for J&K. In the IPL auction, he will be representing our association," a JKCA official said.

The official further said: "The surge in representation from Jammu and Kashmir is a testament to the region's improving cricketing infrastructure. Better coaching, enhanced facilities and support from the association have created favourable conditions for the local talent. We are proud to see our players make it to the IPL auction. It's the result of years of effort from players, coaches, and the association."

## Davis cup: Final run for RaFa



Neither Rafael Nadal nor Spanish captain David Ferrer would say Monday whether the 22-time Grand Slam champion will play at the Davis Cup Final 8, his last event before retirement.

Spain is scheduled to face the Netherlands on Tuesday in the quarterfinals on an indoor hard court at the Palacio de Deportes Jose Maria Martin Carpena in Malaga. The winner will play in the semifinals on Friday. The championship will be decided on Sunday.

At a team news conference held at a hotel in Fuengirola, about 12 miles (20 kilometers) south of the competition venue, Nadal was asked how he has been feeling in practice in recent days and

whether he is ready to play.

"That's a question for the captain," Nadal responded, drawing a laugh from Ferrer, sitting to the star player's left.

Moments later, Ferrer was asked about Nadal's participation. "I don't know yet," Ferrer said. "At the moment, I have not decided the players that are going to play tomorrow." Nadal is 29-1 in his Davis Cup singles career, 8-4 in doubles.

There will be two matches in singles and one in doubles in the best-of-three matchup between Spain and the Netherlands. Nadal could appear just in singles, just in doubles — perhaps alongside Carlos Alcaraz, his partner at the Paris Olympics this year — in both or not at all.

It's up to Ferrer

There's a reason, though, that the 9,200-capacity arena is sold out for Tuesday: This could be the last chance to see Nadal play a match that matters.

"His last moments on court probably are going to be super special. Not (just) for me, but for everyone," Alcaraz said. "For me, for the team, and for everyone here in Spain, it's going to be an emotional day."

Monday represented the first chance for the 38-year-old Nadal to answer questions from reporters and explain at length his decision, announced last month, to walk away from tennis after the Davis Cup.



# Social Media Users Call Mike Tyson Vs Jake Paul Fight 'Rigged' After A Controversial Clip Goes Viral

Texas (USA)

The boxing world is buzzing with controversy currently after the recent bout between Mike Tyson and Jake Paul. The latter defeated the Iron Mike but the result caused a controversy. A clip has gone viral on the Internet and after watching it, fans are claiming that the fight was rigged. The moment of the question came in the video when Tyson seemed to be holding back his punches suddenly after throwing quick punches in the start.

The video shows that Tyson was showing quick reflexes and landing big punches at the start. Jake then clenched Tyson in the corner of the ring and according to the video, he whispered into the ear of the 58-year-old to calm



it down. Tyson then affirmed it with the tap and was seen holding

back himself afterwards in the bout. The video also claimed

that Tyson was not dodging the punches from Jake even after

anticipating them.

An X user named Simpleguy113 wrote on 'Things people will do for MONEY..... Sad. Just Rigged'. Another user named Terrell1082 also echoed the same sentiment.

Jake bowed down to the boxing legend after the fixture and stated that it was honour to fight with Tyson.

"First and foremost, Mike Tyson... he's a legend, the greatest to ever do it. This man is an icon. It's just an honour to be able to fight him."

Tyson said "Absolutely happy [with the fight]. I knew he was a good fighter. I knew he was prepared. I came to fight. I didn't prove nothing to anybody, only to myself."

## Cheteshwar Pujara Returns To Border Gavaskar Trophy In New Avatar



Hyderabad

The highly anticipated Border Gavaskar Trophy 2024-25 will start in a few days and the fans will witness a fierce India-Australia rivalry in the series. When the Indian team last toured Australia in 2022-23, they won the series by 2-1 and will be aiming to replace the performance this time around

as well. Back then, Cheteshwar Pujara played a key role in the triumph but the Indian team will miss his rock-solid defence this time around. The right-handed batter is set to return to the tournament in a brand new role as a commentator for Star Sports Hindi according to some media reports.

Pujara was a vital cog in the

Indian batting unit as he anchored the innings and also tired out Australian bowlers by showing an impeccable defence.

Pujara's standout performance came in the 2018-19 series in Australia, where he accumulated 521 runs across seven innings with an average of 74.42. His exploits in the series included three centuries and a half-century which helped him become the Player of the Series award. His performance helped India secure their maiden series win on Australian soil. Overall, the 36-year-old has amassed 993 runs in 11 matches with an impressive average of 47.28 including three centuries and five fifties.

India and Australia will be contesting in a five-match Test series for the first time since 1991-92. After the series opener in Perth, the second fixture will be played in Adelaide Oval for a pink ball Test. The third and fourth Tests will be held in Brisbane and Melbourne. The final red-ball game of the series will be played from January 3 to 7.

## 'Hungry' Virat's record in Australia will give him confidence, says Gavaskar

Mumbai

Virat Kohli will be "very, very hungry" for runs following his lean patch against New Zealand, according to former Indian captain Sunil Gavaskar, who feels the veteran batter's good track record Down Under will boost his confidence heading into the upcoming Test series against Australia.

Kohli has faced a challenging patch in all formats over the past few months. In his last 60 Test innings, he has managed just two centuries and 11 half-centuries.

This year, he has averaged only 22.72 across six Tests, and in the three games against New Zealand, he could manage only 93 runs.

"Because he hasn't scored runs against New Zealand, he'll be very, very hungry," Gavaskar told Star Sports.

"Even in that Adelaide Test, where India was bowled out for 36 in the second innings, Kohli

scored 70-plus runs in the first innings before being run out," he added.

Despite these recent struggles, Kohli has an outstanding record in Australia. The right-hander, who has been part of four tours Down Under, averages a stellar 54.08.

Gavaskar believes these stats will provide a significant confidence boost as Kohli prepares for the upcoming five-match series, starting with the first Test in Perth on Friday.

"He has consistently performed in Adelaide, a ground he knows well. Before Adelaide, it's Perth, where Kohli played one of his finest Test centuries in the 2018-19 series — a terrific hundred.

"Having performed on these grounds, he'll feel an extra bit of confidence. Of course, you need a bit of luck at the start, but if he gets off to a good beginning, he will score big runs," Gavaskar added.