

Across State

Year -8 Issue - 10

Mumbai, Thursday 12 - 18 Dec '24

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Rs.5/- PAGES- 8

Bandh in Parbhani turns violent after vandalism of Constitution replica



Parbhani

A bandh in Parbhani, called to protest the vandalism of a Constitution replica held by a statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, turned violent on Wednesday. The situation escalated as protesters began pelting stones at shop shutters, vehicles, and residential buildings. Police had to use tear gas to break up the crowd. Protesters were also dispersed with water sprayed from a fire engine.

The protest began in the morning as demonstrators started staging sit-ins on Jintur Marg, Pathri Marg, and Basmat Road. Protesters burnt tyres and blocked traffic. Similar disruptions occurred on other roads across the city.

By noon, the mood worsened. Protesters began attacking shop shutters, signage boards, and vehicles, including two-wheelers and four-wheelers, in the Station Road area. They also brought signage onto the streets and set it on fire.

Despite the escalating violence, the police initially remained passive. The situation intensified when a vehicle was vandalised and set on fire. Police then stepped up their response, using force to control the

crowd and disperse protesters.

Clashes continued near the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar statue, where a large crowd refused to leave the area. Protesters targeted police vehicles near the Superintendent of Police's office. Some officers were reportedly attacked with sticks.

Tensions resurfaced as clashes broke out between police and protesters in the Basmat Road area. Authorities called in additional reinforcements to disperse protesters across various parts of the city. Tear gas was deployed in some locations to control the crowd.

What exactly happened in Parbhani?

The unrest began on Tuesday. An unidentified person damaged the Constitution replica placed in the hands of the Ambedkar statue outside the Parbhani railway station. News of the incident spread quickly. Around 200 people gathered near the site and raised slogans in protest. As tensions increased, protesters marched to the railway station at 6pm. There, they dragged the locomotive pilot of the Nandigram Express off the train and assaulted him. Protesters then blocked the railway tracks for more than 30

minutes. This disruption led to halted train services.

The Government Railway Police (GRP) and local authorities intervened to clear the tracks. The train was able to depart by 6.52pm after the area was secured. Protesters are demanding strict action against the person responsible for defacing the Constitution replica. Authorities are working to bring the situation under control as tensions remain high in Parbhani.

Prakash Ambedkar's Warning

The vandalism of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's statue or symbols of Dalit identity is not the first such incident. Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi's activists from Parbhani district were the first to reach the scene. Due to their protests and demonstrations, the police registered an FIR and arrested one miscreant.

However, Adv. Prakash Ambedkar has urged the Ambedkarite community not to take the law into their own hands and to maintain peace. He warned that if the administration fails to arrest all the attackers within the next 24 hours, they will have to face serious consequences.

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BEST bus tragedy occurred due to human error, improper training: RTO officials

Mumbai

The Mumbai RTO officials have said they suspect "human error" and "lack of proper training" led to the horrific accident in Kurla where a BEST bus fatally knocked down seven persons and injured 42 others.

Soon after the incident on Monday night, an investigation team of the Wadala Regional Transport Office (RTO) found that brakes of the Olectra-make electric bus were operating well.

The e-bus operated by the civic-run Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking rammed into pedestrians and vehicles at around 9.30 pm on Monday on the S G Barve Marg in Kurla (West).

Sanjay More (54), who was at the wheel of the

ill-fated bus, was later arrested.

Initially, it was suspected that brake failure could be the cause of the accident. Driver More's family also claimed brake failure could have led to the incident and that he did not consume alcohol.

A team of the Wadala RTO led by motor vehicle inspector Bharat Jadhav completed the inspection of the bus at the BEST's Kurla depot on Tuesday morning.

An official, who did not wish to be named, told PTI that when the RTO team inspected the bus, it found its brakes were working fine.

However, before submitting the probe report, they want to investigate a few more things, and hence they have sought some details from both Olectra and BEST.

The official said



it seems the driver was inexperienced to handle the automatic transmission bus with no clutch and gear like conventional buses, and he was probably not given proper training before being permitted to drive the 12-metre-long vehicle.

"If a driver doesn't have experience driving

an automatic transmission bus, he doesn't get proper judgment of acceleration and braking initially. Hence, it seems human error may have caused the accident," he said.

During RTO's inspection of the accident-

the driver signed on duty at around 2.45 pm on Monday, and the accident occurred at 9.35 pm.

The e-bus covered a distance of 400 to 450 meters since it dashed the first vehicle and finally crashed into the compound



struck bus, the brakes and all other systems, including its headlights, were found to be operating fine, the official added.

The electric bus was just three months old as it was registered in the name of EWEYTRANS on August 20. The driver was supplied through a Pune-based third-party agency, as per RTO sources.

The inspection team checked all three CCTV cameras installed inside the bus, and their footage suggested "the entire horror unfolded within a span of 52 to 55 seconds", an official said.

As per BEST's records,

wall of a housing society on S G Barve Road while heading to Sakinaka from Kurla station, the RTO officials said.

They also suspect the driver might have panicked after the bus rammed into the first vehicle, and probably increased the speed due to which it hit everything on the way before crashing into the society wall.

As per the records, the driver joined duty on November 29, 2024, and was given the electric bus to drive from December 1.

The BEST administration and the driver's family have made

contradictory statements about his training.

Speaking to the reporters, BEST General Manager Anil Diggikar claimed Sanjay More was given three days of induction training, while the latter's son Deep More claimed his father underwent 9 to 10 days of training before he was given the electric bus to drive.

As per the BEST records, More was driving the wet leased 7 to 9-metre Tempo Traveller mini buses in their fleet since November 2020, but had no experience driving a 12-metre electric bus as he earlier worked for M P Group, before joining Daga Group that recently withdrew its around 280 mini buses from BEST's operation.

A retired RTO official said the automatic transmission electric buses and manual transmission fossil fuel buses have different mechanisms. Hence, it takes some time to get used to driving them.

"It is a human error probably caused by lack of knowledge," he said.

The driver, perhaps, did not have proper knowledge as automatic transmission electric buses do not have air-assisted braking systems, he added.

Maharashtra Transport Commissioner Vivek Bhimanwar on Tuesday said the RTO team has investigated the bus, but the report from Olectra's engineers is still awaited.

"Our team has investigated the bus as per the set Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for inspecting the bus," he said, adding they will submit their report to the Mumbai police.

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Maharashtra: A State of Limitless Potential

Separate War Room for Flagship Schemes: CM Fadnavis



Mumbai

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis emphasized that Maharashtra is a state of limitless potential and urged senior state officials not to rest on their laurels despite being ranked number one. He stressed the need to create new milestones and directed the establishment of a separate war room for the state government's flagship schemes, similar to the one for infrastructure projects.

During a special review meeting held at the committee hall of the Vidhan Bhavan, Fadnavis discussed the government's roadmap with senior officials, including Additional Chief Secretaries, Principal Secretaries, and Secretaries. He outlined the administration's future strategy, emphasizing transparency, dynamism, and integrity.

Key Directives by CM Fadnavis:

1. Maximizing Central Government Support: Strengthen coordination and follow-up through Maharashtra Sadan in New Delhi to fully leverage central assistance.
2. Infrastructure War Room Efficiency: Enhance the existing war room for infrastructure projects. The Chief Secretary was directed to redesign its structure.
3. New War Room for Flagship Schemes: Create a dedicated war room for state and central government flagship programs to ensure faster public benefit delivery.
4. Expanding Citizen-Centric Programs: Expedite initiatives

like Janata Darbar and Lokshahi Din. Relaunch the "Aaple Sarkar" portal for improved public service delivery.

5. Administrative Tours and Inspections: Guardian Secretaries must visit their assigned districts regularly to utilize their expertise for district development.

Technological Integration:

- Update and enhance departmental portals for better efficiency and public service access.
- Recognize top-performing departments in Cabinet meetings.
- Make government websites RTI-friendly.

Citizen Service Focus:

- Prioritize improving the 'Ease of Living' by delivering essential services directly to citizens' homes.
- Identify common citizen concerns and resolve them in two six-month phases.
- Form a committee of retired officials to provide strategic recommendations.

Employee Welfare and Training:

- Address employee grievances on a priority basis through direct communication with secretaries.
- Organize mandatory training programs for newly appointed employees before their district postings.

100-Day Action Plans:

All departments must create and submit 100-day action plans, leveraging technology to improve administrative efficiency and public service delivery.

Digital Media Editor Journalist Association Felicitates Dy CM Ajitdada



Mumbai

The Digital Media Editor Journalist Association of Maharashtra honored Deputy Chief Minister Ajitdada Pawar with a shawl, bouquet, and an idol of Lord Vitthal-Rukmini. The felicitation was conducted by the organization's founding

president, Raja Mane.

State Vice President Satish Sawant, Mumbai President Sanjay Bhaire, and State Executive Committee Member Deepak Nalawade accompanied Raja Mane in meeting the Deputy Chief Minister at his official residence, Devgiri.

During the meeting, the association expressed gratitude to Ajitdada for addressing various issues, including the Journalist Honor Scheme, increase in allowances, challenges faced by digital media, journalist accreditation, and the Journalist Pension Scheme guidelines.

Assistant Engineer of BMC Arrested Accused of Accepting a Bribe of ₹3 Lakh

Mumbai

The Mumbai Police Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has arrested Municipal Corporation's Assistant Engineer Ranjan Bagve for allegedly accepting a bribe of ₹3 lakh from a 50-year-old contractor. The contractor had sought approval for a public toilet construction project under the BMC's "Pay and Use" scheme managed by the Solid Waste Management Department.

According to the ACB, the complainant has been involved in the construction and maintenance of public toilets for the Municipal Corporation for the past 25 years. He applied for a toilet construction project near Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Road and Reay Road Railway Station under BMC's 'E' Ward, Byculla.

In October 2024, Assistant Engineer Bagve allegedly

demanding ₹10 lakh to approve the project. When the contractor expressed his inability to pay such a large amount, Bagve reduced the demand to ₹6 lakh. After refusing to pay the bribe, the contractor filed a complaint with the ACB on November 29, 2024.

Acting on the complaint, ACB officials laid a trap to catch Bagve red-handed. They instructed the contractor to meet Bagve with ₹3 lakh as the initial payment. As soon as the contractor handed over the cash to Bagve in his office cabin, ACB officers arrived and arrested him on the spot.

Bagve was presented before the court, which remanded him to police custody for further investigation. The Anti-Corruption Bureau has urged citizens to come forward and file complaints without fear.

13 Accused Sent to Police Custody in Baba Siddique Murder Case

Mumbai

In the murder case of Nationalist Congress Party leader Baba Siddique, a special MCOCA court in Mumbai on Monday remanded 13 accused to police custody until December 16.

Since the Mumbai Crime Branch took over the investigation on October 12, a total of 26 individuals, including the alleged main accused Shivkumar Gautam, have been arrested. On November 30, police registered a case against all 26 accused under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA).

Thirteen of the accused were produced before the MCOCA court, where police requested their custody, citing the need to investigate financial aspects related to the crime.

Kharge slams Dhankhar, says Rajya Sabha Chairman acting like govt spokesperson



New Delhi

A day after giving a notice in the Rajya Sabha for a motion to remove the Vice-President and chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar, the joint Opposition on Wednesday alleged the latter was the biggest reason behind disruptions of the House and was acting like a spokesperson of the government.

"Biggest reason for disruptions in Rajya Sabha is chairman himself. He's working as government spokesperson," said Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha and Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge at a joint press conference by INDIA bloc leaders.

Kharge said the position of Vice-President was the second highest constitutional position in the country.

"Till now resolution for removal of Vice-President has never been brought because all the past incumbents have never been political. But today we are

forced to say politics is being played in Parliament. We are disappointed that in the 75th year of independence, biased behaviour has forced us to bring a no-confidence motion," Kharge said.

He alleged that the Vice-President sometimes praises the government, sometimes calls himself 'Eklavya of RSS', makes objectionable comments on leaders and schools them. There have been eminent personalities from different fields, whom he schools.

"I want to say that the chairman does not allow discussion on Opposition's issues in a planned manner. We feel that he has become the spokesperson of the government. The biggest reason for disruptions in the Parliament is the Chairman," Kharge said at a joint conference by INDIA bloc leaders.

Kharge said Dhankhar's conduct had harmed the country's

dignity.

"We have nothing against RS chairman, but he left us with no option but to go ahead with notice for his removal. Since 1952, no resolution has been brought under Article 67 as V-P never indulged in politics. But now politics has taken precedence over rules in RS and the chairman has indulged in partisan behaviour," alleged Kharge.

He said the chairman acts like a school headmaster, gives sermons to experienced Opposition leaders and stops them from speaking.

On Tuesday, the Opposition members from the Rajya Sabha submitted a notice to bring a motion of no-confidence against the House chairman.

The government has called the notice a ploy to distract from the issue of alleged links between Congress leader Sonia Gandhi and Hungarian-American businessman George Soros.

No possibility of alliance with Congress for Delhi polls: Kejriwal

New Delhi

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday once again ruled out the possibility of an alliance with the Congress for the Delhi Assembly polls, amid reports that the two parties could join hands for the election in the capital.

In a post on X, Kejriwal said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) would contest the election on its own strength in Delhi.

"There is no possibility of any alliance with the Congress," the former Delhi chief minister said.

His remarks came amid media reports that the two parties are likely to have a tie-up for the polls to the 70-member Delhi Assembly due in February.

Earlier this month also, Kejriwal had ruled out the possibility of an alliance between his party and the Congress for the Delhi election.

The recent buzz over an alliance between the two Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) partners was fuelled by the cancellation of the Congress's Nyay Chaupal event scheduled for Wednesday. Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi was supposed to participate in the event to mark the culmination of the Nyay Yatra taken out by the party ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls.

Kejriwal met Nationalist Congress Party (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Tuesday amid a rising demand in the INDIA bloc to appoint West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as



the head of the alliance that is currently chaired by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge.

However, neither Kejriwal nor the AAP has so far commented on the discussions that took place at the meeting with Pawar.

These developments are being seen as the Congress and the AAP making their moves cautiously in view of the upcoming Delhi polls, so that future options remain open, sources said.

AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha said reports suggesting any possible alliance between his party and the Congress are "completely baseless".

"There is no scope for any alliance in Delhi. I urge everyone not to propagate such baseless rumours. The AAP is fully prepared to contest the election independently," Chadha asserted.

Senior AAP leader Sanjay Singh said Kejriwal, the party's national convenor, has cleared it now that no alliance with the Congress is in the offing in Delhi.

The AAP will contest the election independently and defeat the BJP "comprehensively again, like it did in 2015 and 2020, winning 67 and 62 seats respectively", Singh asserted.

75 Indians evacuated from Syria as rebels overthrow Assad regime

New Delhi

India evacuated 75 of its nationals from Syria on Tuesday, two days after rebel forces overthrew President Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian government, said the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Wednesday.

The evacuation was carried out amid a rapidly deteriorating security situation in the country following the collapse of the Assad regime. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) confirmed the successful operation, stating that the evacuees had safely crossed over to Lebanon and would soon return to India via commercial flights.

"The evacuees included 44 'zaireen' from

Jammu and Kashmir who were stranded at Saida Zainab. All Indian nationals have safely crossed over to Lebanon and will return by available commercial flights to India," the MEA said in an official statement.

India's embassies in Damascus and Beirut coordinated the operation, prioritizing the safety of its citizens in the conflict-ridden nation. "The Government of India accords the highest priority to the safety and security of Indian nationals abroad," the statement added.

The MEA also urged Indian nationals still in Syria to stay connected with the Embassy in Damascus for updates. They were advised to

reach out via the emergency helpline number (+963 993385973) or email (hoc.damascus@mea.gov.in).

The situation in Syria escalated rapidly after rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) seized control of Damascus, marking the end of Bashar al-Assad's nearly 14-year rule and the Assad family's five-decade dominance. Assad fled the country and reportedly sought asylum in Russia.

In response to the developments, the MEA earlier called for a peaceful and inclusive political transition in Syria. "India will continue to monitor the situation closely and advocate for a resolution led by the Syrian people," it said.

Techie suicide: Family demands justice, strict action against harassers

Bengaluru

The family of the 34-year-old techie who allegedly died by suicide has demanded justice for him and strict action against his harassers.

Atul Subhash, who worked for a private firm in the city, had left behind a 24-page purported death note, giving extensive details of what he alleged was years-long emotional distress of marital issues; multiple cases filed against him and harassment by his wife, her relatives, and a judge based in Uttar Pradesh, police said.

Speaking to PTI videos here, Subhash's brother Bikas said, "I want my brother to get justice. I want this country to have a legal process through which even men can get justice."

Alleging corruption in the system, he said justice can be expected only when it is corruption-free, when every party is heard equally and arguments are done based on facts.

"....can expect justice only when decisions are made on the basis of facts and if it does not happen, then people will



slowly start losing faith in judicial system. It may lead to a situation where people may get afraid to get married. Men may start feeling that if they get married, they will just end up being an ATM machine for vending money," he alleged.

Subhash's body was found hanging at his residence in the Manjunath Layout area, which falls under the Marathahalli police station limits, on Monday. A placard reading 'Justice is due' was found in the room where he allegedly ended his life.

Before taking the extreme step, he recorded an over 80-minute video on Rumble, explaining the circumstances behind his decision.

In the video, which has now gone viral on social media platforms, Subhash can be heard saying, "I feel that I should kill myself because the money I earn is making my enemies stronger. That same money will be used to destroy me, and this cycle will keep going."

Subhash's uncle Pawan Kumar alleged his nephew was

being harassed and tortured for money and that he was also humiliated by his wife and the judge.

"What has happened is very unfortunate. He was losing the case (filed by his wife). He was being tortured. They (wife and family) were constantly demanding money from him. To the best of his capacity, he was giving her money for child maintenance."

Initially the family demanded Rs 40,000 per month, doubled it later and then wanted the deceased to provide Rs 1 lakh.

Kumar charged Subhash's wife and her family of 'minting' money from his nephew under the pretext of child maintenance, for the couple's four-year-old son.

He wondered how much money would be required to raise a child of this age.

"His wife even said that he should commit suicide if he cannot pay the amount to which the judge also laughed. This really hurt him," he alleged.

Suicidal thoughts had been lingering in Subhash's mind for the last six months "and till the

last moment, he didn't let us know anything". Kumar said the family had no idea Subhash may do something like this. "He had made a time table for everything."

Following Subhash's death, a case of abetment of suicide has been registered against his wife and her family members.

"We will be sending a police team led by the inspector-in-charge to Uttar Pradesh. The team will question the deceased's wife and her family members as part of the probe. We are looking into all the allegations and the matter is being investigated from all angles", a senior police officer said.

According to police, preliminary investigations revealed Subhash had been facing marital discord with his wife, who had also registered a case against him in Uttar Pradesh. He also sent his death note via email to several people and shared it with a WhatsApp group of an NGO he was associated with, the officer said.

In his purported death note, Subhash mentioned getting married in 2019. The couple had their son the following year.

Adani opts out of US funding for its Colombo Port project

New Delhi

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group has pulled out of a loan deal with a US agency to fund a port terminal in Sri Lanka, saying it will use its own resources for the project.

In an exchange filing late on Tuesday, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) said the project "is on track for commissioning by early next year".

"The project will be financed through the company's internal accruals and capital management plan," the firm said. "We have withdrawn our request for financing from the International Development Finance Corporation (DFC)".

The US IDF had in November last year agreed to provide a USD 553 million loan to support the development, construction, and operation of a deep-water container terminal called the Colombo West International Terminal (CWIT) at the Port of Colombo in Sri Lanka.

The CWIT is being developed by a consortium of Adani Ports, Sri Lankan conglomerate John Keells Holdings Plc, and the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA).

DFC financing was part of the US government's broader efforts to counter China's growing influence in the region and was seen as an endorsement of Adani's ability to develop world-class infrastructure.

However, the loan process stalled after the DFC asked that the agreement between Adani and the SLPA be amended to align with their conditions, which then went under review by Sri Lanka's Attorney General. As the project is nearing completion, Adani Ports, which holds 51 per cent of the venture, chose to proceed with the project without funding from the DFC, officials privy to the process explained. The US agency had recently stated that it was "actively assessing the ramifications" of the bribery allegations against the Adani group executives. It had so far not disbursed any money to the ports-to-energy conglomerate.

Last month, the US Department of

Justice charged the Adani group's founder chairman Gautam Adani, and seven others over allegedly conspiring to pay USD 265 million in bribes to Indian officials to secure lucrative solar power supply contracts that were expected to yield USD 2 billion in profits over 20 years.



Adani Group has denied all charges as baseless and vowed to pursue all possible legal recourse.

The Port of Colombo is the largest and busiest transshipment port in the Indian Ocean. It has been operating at more than 90 per cent utilisation since 2021, signalling its need for additional capacity.

The geopolitically sensitive port project in Sri Lanka is as much of a move by the US to counter Chinese influence in the island nation.

Phase 1 of the project is scheduled to become commercially operational by Q1 2025.

The new terminal will cater to growing economies in the Bay of Bengal, taking advantage of Sri Lanka's prime position on major shipping routes and its proximity to these expanding markets.

The CWIT project was initiated in September 2021, when Adani Ports signed an agreement with the Sri Lanka Ports Authority and Sri Lankan conglomerate John Keells Holdings, pledging over USD 700 million to expand the capabilities of Colombo Port.

The CWIT will be Sri Lanka's largest and deepest container terminal, with a quay length of 1,400 metres and an alongside depth of 20 metres. When complete, the terminal will be able to handle Ultra Large Container Vessels (ULCVs) with capacities of 24,000 TEUs and is expected to have an annual handling capacity of over 3.2 million TEUs.

As of September 30, 2024, Adani Ports had approximately USD 1.1 billion (Rs 8,893 crore) in cash reserves and generated an operating profit of USD 2.3 billion (Rs 18,846 crore) in the past 12 months.

LS passes Railways Amendment Bill, Vaishnaw says won't lead to privatization

New Delhi

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed a bill to amend Railway laws with the government insisting that it will not lead to the national carrier's privatisation.

Responding to a debate on the Railway Amendment bill, Railway Minister Ashiwni Vaishnaw said in the Lower House that a fake narrative was set afloat that the amendment would privatise railways.

"Their (opposition) fake narrative on Constitution has failed... now this will also fall flat," he asserted.

The Bill was passed by a voice vote after debate which could not be held earlier due to frequent disruptions of House



proceedings during the last week.

"A few members have said the Bill will lead to privatisation of railways, an attempt has been made to set a fake narrative. I want to appeal to them with all sincerity not to do this, their one fake narrative about the

Constitution has already failed," Vaishnaw said.

The Railways (Amendment) Bill 2024 which seeks to enhance the functioning and independence of the Railway Board was introduced in the Lok Sabha during the previous Parliament session.

REGION IN PARLIAMENT: 42 convicted in money laundering cases

New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate has secured conviction in 42 cases of money laundering since January 1, 2019, said Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary in reply to a question on the number of cases related to economic offences under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. MP Randeep Singh Surjewala had sought data for last five years. Of the total 911 complaints, as many as 257 are still pending.

3 SITP projects in Punjab

To boost investment, exports and create job opportunities in the textiles sector, three scheme for integrated textile parks (SITP) projects have been sanctioned in Punjab said Minister of State for Textiles Pabitra Margherita in reply to a question by Congress MP Amarinder Singh Raja Warring.

Women participation in MGNREGS

In the current financial year 2024-25, the participation of women in Punjab is 69.6 per cent in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) said Minister of State for Rural Development Kamlesh Paswan in reply to a question by SAD MP Harsimrat Badal.

No study on economic impact of smog

The govt has not conducted any specific study to evaluate the long-term economic impact of air pollution in Delhi-NCR and neighbouring states, replied Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary to a question by MP Randeep Singh Surjewala. There has also been no study to quantify the impact of severe smog in Northern India on industrial output and supply chain delays.

RBI will remain alert and agile to meet challenges: New Governor Sanjay Malhotra



Mumbai

New RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Wednesday said the central bank will maintain continuity and stability in policy matters, but emphasised on the need to remain "alert and agile" in the wake of the current global economic and political environment.

Earlier in the day, he took charge as the 26th Governor of the Reserve Bank, replacing Shaktikanta Das who demitted office after six years.

"As we have to be conscious of the fact that we do maintain continuity and stability, we cannot be stuck to it, and we have to be alert

and agile to meet challenges," Malhotra said in his first interaction as Governor with media. In his brief statement, Malhotra also stressed that the central bank will continue to interact with all segments, including financial regulators, state governments and the Centre, to continue the Reserve Bank's legacy.

"We do not have monopoly of all knowledge," he said, while stressing on the importance of wide consultations with other stakeholders.

The former revenue secretary emphasised that RBI will extensively use technology to further promote financial inclusion.

Small tricolour, red rose in hand, Opposition MPs urge govt to run House

New Delhi

Several opposition MPs on Wednesday greeted their BJP counterparts in Parliament premises with the tricolour in one hand and a red rose in the other, as they urged the ruling party to ensure that the House functions and all issues, including the Adani matter, are discussed.

This is the latest in a series of unusual daily demonstrations led by the Congress over the Adani issue. Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, also offered the tricolour in the form of a card to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh when the latter was entering the main Parliament building.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, MPs from the Congress, DMK, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and the Left parties, among others, stood in front of the Makar Dwar steps with most of them carrying a small tricolour card and a red rose.

Many MPs also carried placards with slogans – "Don't let the country be sold".

This comes a day after MPs carried dark blue 'jholas' with caricatures of Prime Minister



Narendra Modi and industrialist Gautam Adani printed on one side and "Modi-Adani Bhai-Bhai" written on the obverse.

On Tuesday, they had raised slogans against the alleged collusion between Modi and Adani and demanded a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) probe into the matter.

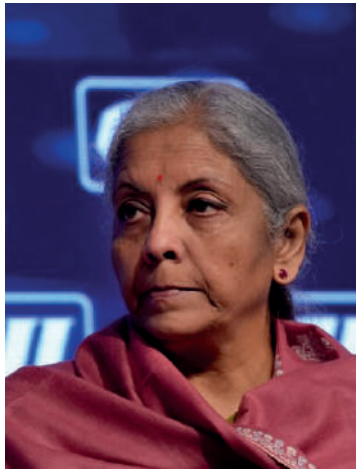
On Monday, leaders of some INDIA bloc parties had protested in the Parliament complex over the Adani row, with Rahul Gandhi conducting a mock "interview" over the issue with Congress members wearing masks of Modi and Adani.

The opposition protests on

the Adani issue have been taking place in Parliament complex since the start of the Winter session. The Congress and some other opposition parties have been demanding a JPC probe following the indictment of Adani and other company officials in a US court.

The Congress has said Adani's indictment "vindicates" its demand for a JPC probe into the various "scams" involving the billionaire industrialist's conglomerate. Rahul Gandhi has sought Adani's immediate arrest while the Adani Group has dismissed all allegations as "baseless".

Industry should realign itself keeping political, strategic policies in mind: Sitharaman



New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday said the industry will have to realign its policies keeping in mind political and strategic decisions of the country.

Outlining the priorities of the economy for the next decade, Sitharaman also said attempts should be made to restore global calm and normalcy and noted that war or any form of disruption should be avoided.

Sitharaman said the economy has to "clawback" more to regain its strength after the Covid pandemic and any skirmish or war will impact the supply chains and food value chains.

"The world is facing challenges which are reflected in the economy," the Minister said at

the CII Global Economic Policy Forum here.

Talking about ways to tackle supply chain disruptions, Sitharaman said currently there is a need to blend economic priorities with politics and strategic needs.

When we talk about restoring supply chains to frictionless supply chains, let's not forget it's not just economics, it's more than that... We have to build in our own decision making not just in economic sense but also in a political and strategic sense.

"Supply chains will have to be restored but you would have to reset it, realign it, you will have to make sure that it is spread so much that no geopolitical or strategic risks will threaten our wellbeing," Sitharaman said.

She said lessons learnt in the last decade should tell us that the country will have to now realign, and industry will have to realign itself not just on economic principles.

There is a need to blend large, small and medium industries to achieve "scale and spread" and job creation, Sitharaman said.

"Industry will have to look at ways to adapt with newer challenges," she said, adding scale cannot be the only criteria.

School Trip Turns Tragic in Karnataka: 4 Students Drown At Murudeshwara Beach; CM Announces Ex-Gratia

Uttar Kannada

A school trip turned tragic at Murudeshwara beach in Karnataka as four students drowned during an outing on Tuesday. The incident involved students from Morarji Desai Residential School in Mulabagilu, Kolar district, who were on an educational trip. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced Rs 5 lakh compensation for the families of the deceased.

Expressing his grief, the CM said, "I am deeply shocked to hear about the tragic incident involving the students of Morarji Desai Residential School, Mulabagilu taluk, Kolar district. My condolences to the bereaved families. The government will provide Rs 5 lakh compensation to the families who lost their children. I have instructed the Deputy Commissioner of Uttar Kannada to ensure arrangements to send the bodies to their native places."

The CM also stressed the importance of vigilance during trips. "Teachers must remain alert and ensure children's safety while visiting potentially dangerous places. I pray such tragedies never happen again," he said.

Local authorities said, "The incident occurred at



Murudeshwara beach on Tuesday, involving 46 students and seven teachers on an educational trip. One student, Shravanthi Gopalappa (15) was confirmed dead on Tuesday. The bodies of three missing students Deeksha (15), Lavanya (15) and Vandana (15) were recovered on Wednesday."

"Local fishermen and lifeguards rescued three students Yashoda, Veekshana, and Lipika, who are currently undergoing treatment at RNS Hospital," local authorities added.

Deputy Commissioner K Lakshmi Priya and District Superintendent of Police M Narayana visited the site and the hospital to monitor the situation. They interacted with school staff, students, and rescuers to gather

information.

The tragedy has sparked criticism of safety arrangements at Murudeshwara Beach. Locals involved in the rescue expressed frustration over the lack of basic facilities and equipment for lifeguards. Manjunath, a local rescuer, stated, "Despite the high tourist footfall here, lifeguards are not provided with essential tools, which delays and complicates rescue operations."

Residents are also demanding immediate steps to improve beach safety, including the deployment of additional lifeguards and proper infrastructure. The district administration also assured that the rescue operations will continue until the missing students are found.

'While Her Body Grows, She Will Remain A Small Baby': SC Enhances Compensation For Woman In Accident Case

New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday enhanced the compensation to a woman with 75 per cent intellectual disability due to a road accident, saying, "effectively, while her body grows, she will remain a small baby", and added marriage/companionship is an integral part of the natural life of a human being.

A bench comprising Justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan observed that marriage or companionship is an integral part of the natural life of a person.

The bench said the appellant has not only lost her childhood but also her adult life. "Although in the present case the appellant is capable of reproduction, it is near impossible for her to rear children and

enjoy the simple pleasures of marital life and companionship," it added. "The appellant will remain dependent on another person for the rest of her life. Even though her physical age will increase, her mental age will be that of a child studying in the 2nd Standard/Class. Effectively, while her body grows, she will remain a small baby," remarked the bench. The bench said the woman was seven at the time of the accident in June, 2009, and according to the medical certificate, she suffers from moderate intellectual disability. The top court enhanced the compensation to Rs 50.87 lakh. "Faced with such a situation, the family of the appellant must be financially equipped to deal with the medical conditions, current and potential", said the bench. The bench delivered its verdict on an appeal filed

by the woman challenging the November, 2017 order of the Delhi High Court that awarded her Rs 11.51 lakh compensation.

The bench said the approach of the High Court on appreciation of the evidence that the appellant would only be requiring a part-time attendant is erroneous. "On the contrary, we are of the opinion that the appellant would be dependent on an attendant throughout her life and on a full-time basis," it said. The counsel, representing the appellant, submitted that as per the doctor's evidence, the woman sustained 75 per cent moderate intellectual disability. According to the doctor, who gave evidence in the matter, the appellant would also have severe apathy and therefore, maintaining/forming marital/familial bonds with the aforementioned conditions for the

appellant is very difficult. The bench said the woman would remain dependent on another person for the rest of her life. In June 2009, the appellant was on foot along with her family members who were on their way home when a speeding car hit her when they were crossing the road. The bench noted a claim petition for grant of compensation under the provision of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, was filed before a Motor Accident Claims Tribunal which awarded a compensation of Rs 5.90 lakh. The appellant moved the High Court seeking an enhancement of the compensation. The High Court enhanced the compensation to Rs 11.51 lakh. The appellant moved the top court aggrieved by the paltry enhancement.

SC Notice To Kerala Temple Committee On Discontinuing Ancient Ritual Of 'Udayasthamana Pooja'

New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to hear a plea against an order passed by the Kerala High Court in favour of the administration of the Guruvayur Sri Krishna temple, which decided to discontinue the ancient ritual of "udayasthamana pooja" on Ekadasi. Udayasthamana pooja refers to the various worship conducted in temples throughout the day from sunrise (udaya) to sunset (asthamana).

The matter came up before a bench comprising justices J K Maheshwari and Rajesh Bindal. The bench issued notice to the Guruvayur Devaswom Managing Committee, Kerala government, and others on the plea. The bench made it clear that the chart of daily pooja displayed on the temple's website should not be altered.

"We cannot intervene now. We will issue a notice to the other side. Prima facie we are satisfied...", said the bench.

The apex court passed the order on a plea filed by P C Hary and other members of the family with priestly rights in the shrine, contending that "Ekadashi" was the most important festival of the temple.

"Guruvayur Sree Krishna Swamy Temple is one of the most sacred Maha Vishnu Temple. It is also known as the Dwarka of the South. It is believed that Guruvayoor temple's unique "Acharams" (traditions), daily rituals, pooja Sambradayas and pooja timings are streamlined by



Adi Sankaracharya and the same is religiously and systematically observed. It is believed that any disturbance or deviation from these rituals, poojas, and ceremony will impair the manifestations of divine force or Chaitanya of Guruvayoor Temple," said the plea.

The plea said udayasthamana pooja is a series of nearly 15-18 poojas that are conducted from sunrise to sunset. "It is an admitted fact that, since 1972, the Guruvayur Devaswom is conducting Udayasthamana pooja on Ekadasi day. It is the specific case of the Petitioner that the pooja has been conducted even prior to 1972, on the same day i.e. Ekadasi," said the plea.

The plea said the non-performance of Udayasthamana pooja on the Shuklapaksham day in Vrishchikam M.E is against the established religious custom, ritual and usage followed in the Guruvayur Temple. It is believed by the devotees that the said act is a bad omen and may impair the manifestations of divine force or Chaitanya of the temple, it added.

The plea said the important religious decisions in temples are taken through astrological consultations, known as Ashtamangalyapreshnam (astrological consultations), and more than seven astrologers will participate in the Ashtamangalyapreshnam.

"It is conducted openly within the Temple premises in the presence of Ooralan, devotees, temple employees, kazhakam, general public, and all other stakeholders. Each and every point placed per consultation ought to be subjected to critical analysis by the astrologers based on planetary movements and other signs. Before taking such an important decision, the Respondents ought to have followed the said process," said the plea.

The temple administration recently decided not to conduct the ritual on Ekadasi, citing difficulties over crowd management and the desire to allow more devotees time for darshan.

on behalf of the state and expressed pride in the achievement. "Today, we have set a global benchmark for Gita recitation. It is a proud moment not just for Madhya Pradesh but for the entire country," said CM Yadav. He congratulated the Culture Department for organising the historic event and highlighted the significance of spreading the timeless teaching of the Gita worldwide.

The CM also transferred funds amounting to Rs 1,572 crore to over 1.28 crore 'Ladli Behans' under a welfare scheme, aligning the spiritual occasion with social empowerment.

Govt Removing Roadblocks In Path Of Youth By Introducing Reforms: PM Modi



New Delhi

The government is introducing reforms to remove roadblocks in the path of the country's youth, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told young innovators on Wednesday, asserting that the future of the world will be driven by innovation and knowledge.

Interacting with the innovators during the grand finale of the 'Smart India Hackathon (SIH)', the prime minister said the youth today is developing a feeling of ownership towards finding solutions for the country's challenges.

"India's strength is its innovative youth and technology power. We have introduced a new National Education Policy to nurture a scientific mindset. The government is removing roadblocks in the path of the country's youth by introducing reforms," Modi said while addressing more than 1,300 student teams via video conferencing.

"The future of the world will be driven by innovation and knowledge and India's youth today is developing a feeling of ownership towards finding solutions for the country's challenges," he added.

The seventh edition of the SIH concurrently began at 51 nodal centres nationwide on Wednesday. The Software Edition will run nonstop for

36 hours, while the Hardware Edition will continue from December 11 to 15.

Like past editions, the student teams will work on either the problem statements given by ministries, departments or industries or submit their ideas under the Student Innovation category against any of the 17 themes linked to sectors of national importance.

These sectors are - healthcare, supply chain and logistics, smart technologies, heritage and culture, sustainability, education and skill development, water, agriculture and food, emerging technologies, and disaster management.

According to the Ministry of Education, this year, more than 250 problem statements have been submitted by 54 ministries, departments, state governments, PSUs and industries.

"A 150 per cent increase has been recorded in internal hackathons at the institute level, growing from over 900 in the SIH 2023 to around 2,247 in SIH 2024, making this the largest edition so far.

"More than 86,000 teams have participated in the SIH 2024 at the institute level and around 49,000 student teams (each consisting of 6 students and 2 mentors) have been recommended by these institutes for the national level round," a ministry official said.

Bhopal Sets Guinness World Record With 5,000 Acharya Reciting Gita Verses; Kurukshetra Unites 1.5 Crore People Worldwide

Bhopal/Kurukshetra

Gita Jayanti was celebrated across India with grand events, marking significant milestones in religious and cultural history. Bhopal achieved a remarkable milestone on Gita Jayanti as over 5,000 Acharyas collectively recited 'Shlokas' or verses from the third chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, 'Karma Yog', creating a new Guinness World record.

The event, held at the Lal Parade Ground, brought Madhya Pradesh into the global spotlight. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav received the Guinness World Record certificate

Israeli strikes on Gaza kills at least 29, say Palestinian medics

Deir Al-Balah

Palestinians gather at the site of an Israeli strike on a house, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in Nuseirat, central Gaza Strip, December 11, 2024. Reuters

Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least 29 people overnight and into Wednesday. These included one that hit a home where displaced people were sheltering in the isolated north, killing 19, according to Palestinian medical officials.

This strike occurred in the northern town of Beit Lahiya near the border with Israel, according to the nearby Kamal Adwan Hospital, which received the bodies. Hospital records show that a family of eight was among those killed, including four children, their parents and two grandparents.

The Israel-Hamas war has raged on with no end in sight, even after Israel reached a ceasefire with Lebanon's Hezbollah, shifting attention to the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar Assad. Both the outgoing and incoming US administrations have said they hope to end the war before the inauguration. However, months of ceasefire

talks have repeatedly stalled.



The hospital said another strike near its entrance on Wednesday killed a woman and her two children.

Another strike in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza killed at least seven people, according to the Awda Hospital. The deceased included two children, their parents and three relatives, it said.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. The military says it tries to avoid harming civilians and accuses militants of hiding among them, putting their lives in danger.

Meanwhile, militants in central Gaza fired four projectiles

into Israel on Wednesday, two

of which were intercepted, the military said. The other two fell in open areas, and there were no reports of casualties.

The military ordered the evacuation of a five-block area of the built-up Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza, saying the rockets had been fired from there. The orders indicated that Israel would soon carry out strikes in the area.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 people, including children and older adults. Around 100 hostages are

still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 44,000 Palestinians in Gaza, according to local health officials. They say women and children make up more than half the dead but do not distinguish between fighters and civilians in their count. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Thousands more Palestinians have gone missing during the war, some after encounters with Israeli troops.

Israel has been waging a renewed offensive against Hamas in Gaza's isolated and heavily destroyed north since early October. Troops have surrounded Beit Lahiya, Beit Hanoun and the urban Jabaliya refugee camp, allowing in almost no humanitarian aid and ordering tens of thousands to flee to nearby Gaza City.

Israeli officials have said the three communities are mostly deserted, but the United Nations humanitarian office said Tuesday that it believes around 65,000 to 75,000 people are still there, with little access to food, water, electricity or health care. Experts have warned that the north may

be experiencing famine.

Sigrid Kaag, the senior UN humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, told reporters at the UN on Tuesday that civilians trying to survive all across Gaza face an "utterly devastating situation."

She pointed to the breakdown in law and order and looting that has left the UN and many aid organisations unable to deliver food and other humanitarian essentials to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in need.

Kaag said she and other UN officials keep repeatedly asking Israel for access for convoys to northern Gaza and elsewhere, to allow in commercial goods, to reopen the Rafah crossing from Egypt in the south, and to approve dual-use items.

The Israeli military says it allows in enough humanitarian aid and blames UN agencies for not distributing it, saying large amounts of aid have accumulated just inside Gaza's borders. UN officials say Israeli restrictions, the breakdown of law and order and ongoing fighting make it difficult to access the aid and distribute it, and have repeatedly called for a ceasefire.

Airstrikes aimed at stopping IS from re-establishing haven in Syria: US

New Delhi

The US has said the mission to defeat terror organisation ISIS in Syria is ongoing and aimed at preventing the armed group from re-establishing a base in the country.

US Department of Defence Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh detailed the US' mission at a press briefing on Monday. "We have continued the mission to prevent ISIS from re-establishing a safe haven in Syria," Singh said.

The US Central Command forces had conducted dozens of precision airstrikes within Syria, targeting ISIS camps and operatives in the Badiya desert to prevent the armed group from conducting external operations, and to ensure that they couldn't take advantage of the current situation to re-establish a base in central Syria, Singh added.

She said the operation struck over 75 targets using multiple US Air Force assets — including



B-52 bombers and F-15 fighter jets.

Yesterday, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin spoke with his Turkish counterpart, Minister of National Defense Yasar Guler, to discuss the developments in Syria.

A summary of the discussion, provided by Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Maj Gen Pat

Ryder, said, "Both leaders agreed that opposition groups must take steps to protect civilians, including ethnic and religious minorities, and follow international humanitarian norms."

Mohammed al-Bashir named caretaker PM

Mohammed al-Bashir, Syria's new interim leader, announced on Tuesday he was taking charge of the country as caretaker Prime Minister until March 1 with the backing of the former rebels.

Meanwhile, Israel carried out intense airstrikes targeting bases of the Syrian army, whose forces had melted away in the face of the lightning rebel advance that ousted Assad. Israel, which has sent forces across the border into a demilitarised zone inside Syria, acknowledged on Tuesday that troops had also taken up positions beyond the buffer zone, though it denied they were advancing towards Damascus.

New RBI Guv

REVENUE Secretary Sanjay Malhotra's surprise appointment as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor comes amid worries over a decline in economic growth, a weaker currency and an upturn in inflation. As he embarks on his three-year term, Malhotra has huge expectations to deliver, particularly concerning the monetary policy. Despite the several high points during his six years in office, the second longest for any chief of the central bank, Shaktikanta Das ends his tenure on a sombre note. His parting message about restoring inflation-growth balance being the most important task ahead is acknowledgement of the unfinished agenda. Political overtones have been dominating the clamour for a cut in interest rates, with both the Finance Minister and Commerce Minister flagging high bank interest rates as a growth dampener.

Das leaves behind a legacy marked by steady policymaking and deft crisis management. He steered the economy through the Covid pandemic which



prevented any economic activity for well over a year, and also oversaw its recovery, especially in the financial sector. Another achievement was to mend the difficult relationship between North Block and Mint Street that he had inherited from Urjit Patel. The generous out-of-record dividend to the Centre remains a contentious issue, raising concerns about weakening of the RBI's financial strength and independence.

While strengthening the banking system, Das prevented a build-up of risk, asking lenders to avoid all forms of exuberance. The Governor-headed Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) kept the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent for the 11th consecutive time last week. It signalled the RBI's cautious approach amid inflation and slowing growth. A review of the rate cut is likely by the Malhotra-headed MPC in its February meeting. It will be a tough call.

// satyasya paramam nidhanam //

We would like to hear from you. Please share your comments on editor.acrossstate@gmail.com

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking.

-Steve Jobs

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THE meeting between the foreign secretaries of India and Bangladesh in Dhaka on Monday marks a cautious attempt to mend ties strained since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's government. The political upheaval in Bangladesh and the ensuing asylum provided to Hasina by India cast a shadow over bilateral relations. This shift, compounded by rising tensions over minority harassment and diplomatic incidents, underscores the complexities of managing a relationship deeply rooted in shared history and mutual interests. The discussions in Dhaka focused on contentious issues, such as attacks on minorities, including Hindus, and the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das on sedition

Thawing the frost



charges. While New Delhi raised concerns over the safety of minorities, Dhaka argued that these incidents stem from political, not religious, factors. Such narratives reveal the challenges of bridging divergent perspectives, particularly when public sentiment and political optics are involved.

Interim leader Muhammad Yunus'

administration has emphasised the need for a pragmatic relationship with India, balancing dignity with cooperation. His call to "forget transient matters" highlights the urgency to de-escalate tensions and prioritise long-term goals, such as trade and border management. India's insistence on protecting minority rights, coupled with Bangladesh's call

for equity, underscores the need for nuanced diplomacy that respects each nation's sensitivities.

India, with its strategic commitment to a stable South Asia, must tread carefully. Overplaying its hand in domestic Bangladeshi politics risks alienating the current regime, potentially eroding trust. Meanwhile, Dhaka must recognise that India's concerns about minority safety and political stability are not merely rhetorical but reflect broader regional stability imperatives. This diplomatic reset is a crucial opportunity. By focusing on shared interests and maintaining open communication, the two neighbours can ensure that their relationship remains resilient amid political turbulence.

Assad's fall

THE downfall of Bashar al-Assad marks the end of over half a century of authoritarian rule in Syria, ushering in a fragile era of hope and uncertainty. Assad's hasty departure, following a swift rebel offensive led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), symbolises both the collapse of despotism and the challenges of rebuilding a fractured nation. For over 13 years, Syria endured a brutal civil war that claimed over 5,00,000 lives and displaced millions. Assad's regime, once propped up by Russia

but fears of ethnic and sectarian divides linger. The promise of democracy is clouded by the ghosts of Libya and Iraq, where transitions led to chaos rather than cohesion.

The US faces a critical moment in its West Asia strategy. Having supported Kurdish forces against the ISIS and maintained a military presence, Washington must now navigate the aftermath of Assad's fall. Its role could define whether Syria's future is one of peace or continued



and Iran, crumbled under the weight of its own corruption and violence. Yet, the victory of the HTS, an Islamist faction, offers no guarantee of stability. While its leader, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, has shifted the group's narrative toward national liberation, critics question the HTS' capacity to govern inclusively.

The immediate challenges are monumental. Syria's institutions lie in ruins and its economy shattered by war and sanctions. Internally displaced citizens and refugees yearn for a return to normalcy,

strife, balancing counterterrorism with humanitarian engagement. External forces further complicate Syria's path. Türkiye, the Gulf states and western powers have vested interests, while Israel and Iran remain wary of instability spilling across borders.

While Trump has said the Americans must keep off, the question is how the HTS was able to find the gunpowder to mount the final assault on Damascus, forcing even the Russians to withdraw. Who has this kind of military might?

THE Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in its December monetary policy review, upheld its steadfast stance on inflation control by keeping the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent. This is the 11th consecutive time that the central bank has decided to maintain the rate. It underscores the Monetary Policy Committee's emphasis on price stability over growth amid persistently high inflation and liquidity concerns. However, the upward revision of the FY25 inflation forecast to 4.8 per cent reveals enduring challenges. High food prices remain the culprit, with retail inflation spiking to a 14-month high of 6.21 per cent in October 2024. Yet, the RBI's nuanced response — cutting the Cash Reserve Ratio by 50 basis points to 4 per cent — signals its



A balancing act



A MEMBER of the parliamentary standing committee on railways earned accolades recently for returning a gold coin and a silver block that he had been gifted. The other MPs, who were part of the visiting team, apparently, did not consider it necessary to part with the gifts presented by the public sector undertakings. The CPI(ML)-Liberation MP from Arrah in Bihar, Sudama Prasad, argued — and convincingly so — that accepting such gifts was not only unethical, but also bordered on corruption to silence the MPs from raising public issues. For many conversant with the sarkari ways and means, the inquiry ordered by the Railway Minister to pinpoint who came up with the idea of such gifts would come as a surprise. Ingenuity in the selection of gifts is actually considered a special trait in government circles. It is the public exchequer who is paying after all, so why worry about the cost involved,

or the need of such offerings?

So forceful has been the imposition of the bouquet-and-shawl culture that even political parties now swear by it. An endless array of flowers and shawls is handed over with reverence at any public event, and tossed to the background within no time. One worries for the health of the flowers as much for the health of the State that is made to fund such meaningless stagecraft. Some Union ministers have thankfully lowered their welcome party to a rose. But, why even that? The MP's principled stand must trigger a serious debate on doing away with unnecessary frills that are wasteful and distasteful in equal measure.

Probity in public life has to be the norm and not an exception. It's a lofty thought, but that's one gift India is so desperately in need of.

cent reflects an acknowledgement of the growth slowdown. Das, whose tenure ends shortly, leaves behind a legacy of balancing inflation control with growth amid unprecedented global and domestic uncertainties. As debates on rate cuts to ease borrowing costs gain momentum, the RBI's commitment to "durable price stability" appears resolute, suggesting a cautious approach until inflation aligns with the 4 per cent target.

As policymakers prepare for the Union Budget and navigate a challenging fiscal landscape, this measured stance highlights the central bank's dual mandate of managing inflation and fostering growth — a delicate yet essential balancing act.

recognition of liquidity constraints and the immediate need for growth support. This decision frees Rs 1.16 lakh crore for lending by banks, bolstering liquidity at a time of tight conditions exacerbated by forex interventions and fiscal demands.

The Indian economy's resilience remains a key theme. Despite a seven-quarter low GDP growth of 5.4 per cent for July-September 2024, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das projected recovery driven by festive demand, robust rural consumption and anticipated capital expenditure revival. Nonetheless, the downward revision of the FY25 GDP growth forecast from 7.2 per cent to 6.6 per

Rumblings in INDIA

SIX months after its creditable performance in the Lok Sabha elections, the Opposition's INDIA bloc finds itself at a crossroads. The alliance did well in the Jharkhand and J&K Assembly elections, but the stunning losses in Haryana and Maharashtra have laid bare differences among its constituents. The knives are out especially after the drubbing suffered by the Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi at the hands of the BJP-helmed Mahayuti in Maharashtra. The grand old party's poor show has dented its predominant position in INDIA, prompting Trinamool Congress chief and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee to throw her hat into the ring. Dissatisfied with the bloc's functioning, Mamata has signalled her intention to



take charge of the alliance, if given the opportunity. She has found support from Nationalist Congress Party stalwart Sharad Pawar, who has called her a "prominent leader" of the nation.

It's apparent that Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the

Opposition in the Lok Sabha, is losing ground as the face of INDIA. There are three Gandhis in Parliament now — with Priyanka being the latest entrant — but this dynastic milestone has not enthused the Congress' allies. Though party president Mallikarjun Kharge is also the

chairperson of the bloc, it is no secret that the Gandhi family is calling the shots. But this arrangement is strengthening neither the Congress nor INDIA.

The Congress has no option but to pay heed to its partners. Overconfidence cost it dear in Haryana, where it chose to give short shrift to fellow INDIA members. Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena has not helped matters by hailing those who demolished the Babri Masjid, triggering a backlash from the Samajwadi Party, which has a sizeable Muslim vote bank in Uttar Pradesh. Mutual respect and accommodation must be the way forward if the bloc has to remain intact. Otherwise, this alliance might implode sooner or later, leaving the field open for the BJP and PM Modi.

Groundwater crisis

PUNJAB and Haryana are on the brink of a groundwater crisis that could jeopardise not only the region's agricultural backbone but also the nation's food security. Recent data from the Central Ground Water Board paints a grim picture: Punjab's Stage of Groundwater Extraction (SoE) stands at a staggering 163.76%,



while Haryana follows closely with 135.74%. These figures indicate that groundwater extraction in these states far exceeds natural recharge, pushing aquifers to critical depletion levels.

The crisis is primarily driven by the cultivation of paddy, a water-guzzling crop that dominates Punjab's agricultural landscape due to assured procurement and subsidies. Despite efforts to promote alternatives like maize or pulses, farmers remain hesitant, citing inadequate minimum support prices (MSP) and procurement guarantees. As groundwater

levels plummet — they are expected to drop below 300 metres by 2039 in Punjab — the quality of water deteriorates, rendering it unfit for both irrigation and drinking. In addition to agricultural practices, rapid urbanisation and industrial growth have exacerbated the crisis. Cities like Gurugram and Faridabad in Haryana have been drawing more than double their extractable groundwater, highlighting the unsustainable pressure on this vital resource. The state governments, along with the Centre, must urgently implement measures such as expanding canal-based irrigation, incentivising crop diversification and ensuring robust water pricing mechanisms to discourage over-extraction.

The Jal Shakti Abhiyan and Atal Bhujal Yojana have laid the groundwork for rainwater harvesting and aquifer management. But, unfortunately, their impact remains limited. It raises questions over the ability of the two states to reverse the alarming decline. Without immediate and concerted action, the groundwater crisis could spiral into a national emergency, threatening livelihoods and food security. It is time for policymakers to act decisively to protect this irreplaceable resource even as the affected states face impending barrenness.

Reviving Aravallis

THE Aravalli Green Wall Project, an eco-restoration initiative by the Union Environment Ministry, promises to be a turning point in combating land degradation and desertification. Covering over 1.1 million hectares across Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Delhi, this 1,400-km-long and 5-km-wide green corridor aims to restore the Aravalli hills' ecological vitality. Once a thriving ecosystem of hills, forests, fauna, aquifers and natural drainage, the Aravallis now bear the unfortunate distinction of being the country's most degraded forest range. Over 30 hillocks have already vanished, particularly in Haryana's Gurugram, Faridabad, Mewat, Mahendragarh and Rewari districts. Relentless urban expansion has replaced verdant landscapes with concrete jungles, disrupting the ecological balance. Within decades, habitats thriving for millennia now teeter on the brink of extinction. The cost of this development has been immense, with the loss of indigenous species, widespread deforestation and drying up of critical groundwater recharge zones.

Inspired by Saudi Arabia's green initiatives, the Green Wall Project aims to reverse this destruction. Indigenous species and community engagement lie at its core. Haryana's proactive measures, such as reviving 75 water bodies and restoring 35,000 hectares of degraded land, exemplify the potential of collaborative efforts among states to tackle this environmental crisis. The World Bank is supporting the Aravalli project with funding for initiatives like afforestation, water conservation and pollution control.

However, the project's success depends on enforcing conservation laws to prevent illegal mining and encroachments. Preserving legal safeguards, such as the Punjab Land Preservation Act, is crucial. The states must transcend political boundaries to protect these shared ecological treasures. The Green Wall Project is a fight to reclaim the Aravallis and reverse decades of destruction. With robust public-private partnerships and community involvement, the initiative offers hope to revive these ancient hills.

Restoring inflation-growth balance most important task ahead of RBI: Outgoing Gov Das

Mumbai

Outgoing Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Tuesday that restoring inflation-growth balance is the most important task ahead of the central bank.

Addressing a press conference on his last day as the central bank chief, Das said his successor will have to navigate the changing world order, effectively deal with cyber threats, and focus on harnessing new technologies.

New Governor Sanjay Malhotra, he hoped, would carry forward RBI initiatives like CBDC and ULI, besides promoting financial inclusion.

Listing out the issues before the central bank, Das said one of the most important tasks will be to restore the balance between

inflation and growth.

The Indian economy is resilient and robust with capacity to deal with global spillovers very effectively, he said.

The government has appointed Revenue Secretary Malhotra who will be taking over as the central bank chief on Wednesday.

Das, who will be demitting office after six years, said the coordination between the finance ministry and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been at its best in the last six years. He also noted that the perspective of the finance ministry and the RBI can differ at times, but during his tenure all such issues were resolved through internal discussions.

Replying to questions, Das said RBI governors keep in mind requirements



of wider economy and eventually it is a judgement call that every governor takes.

To a specific question, the governor

said everyone is entitled to their views but as he looks at it, growth is impacted by multiplicity of factors, not just the repo rate. He further said the RBI's effort has been to make monetary policy as appropriate as possible, given prevailing economic conditions and outlook.

India's economic growth slowed to near two-year low of 5.4 per cent in the September quarter of this fiscal year due to poor performance of manufacturing and mining sectors. The gross domestic product (GDP) had expanded by 8.1 per cent in the July-September period of the previous fiscal year.

The government has tasked the RBI to ensure that consumer price index (CPI)-based inflation remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

Who is Sanjay Malhotra, the new RBI governor?

Mumbai

The government on Monday appointed Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra as the 26th Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet cleared Malhotra's name, who has been appointed as the RBI Governor for three years, starting Wednesday.

Malhotra, a 1990 Batch Rajasthan Cadre IAS Officer, will replace Shaktikanta Das, whose tenure ends on Tuesday (December 10, 2024).

Malhotra is an engineering graduate in computer science from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, and has a Master's in Public Policy from Princeton University, US.

Presently, he is the Secretary (Revenue) in the Ministry of Finance. Malhotra took over the role in December 2022, succeeding Tarun Bajaj.

In his career of over 33 years, he has worked in multifarious sectors, including power, finance and taxation, information technology, and mines. Malhotra has an extensive experience in finance and taxation at the state as well as the central government levels. Throughout his career, he has held several key positions, including the Chairman and Managing Director of REC Limited (a government-



owned public sector undertaking) and Secretary in the Department of Financial Services.

Earlier, during his tenure as Chairman and Managing Director of REC Limited (a Maharatna company), he led the organisation through significant growth and modernisation phases.

As Secretary in the Department of Financial Services, he oversaw reforms in the financial and banking sectors. Malhotra became Secretary (Revenue) on December 1, 2022, after an eight-month stint as Secretary in the Department of Financial Services. As Secretary (Revenue), he has been at the forefront

of tax policy formulation for both direct and indirect taxes. Malhotra has played a pivotal role in driving robust tax collections, ensuring critical support for India's fiscal health, rationalisation of capital gains tax in this year's Budget, rationalisation of slabs in the new tax regime to encourage migration from the old tax regime, and removal of windfall gain tax.

In addition to his tax-related responsibilities, he has managed the government's non-tax revenue streams.

Malhotra also served as the ex-officio Secretary to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, where he played a key role in aligning the interests of states and the central government during discussions at the GST Council meetings.

Challenges

As the new RBI Governor, Malhotra will take charge during a challenging period amid rising inflation and lowering economic growth. The CPI inflation continues to exceed the RBI's target, reaching a 14-month peak of 6.21 per cent in October. Also, the RBI faces mounting pressure to reduce interest rates, particularly as GDP growth declined to 5.4 per cent in the July-September quarter, marking a seven-quarter low.

Govt gives additional charge of Revenue Secretary to Ajay Seth

New Delhi

The Union government has assigned the additional charge of Revenue Secretary to Ajay Seth, according to an official statement on December 10.



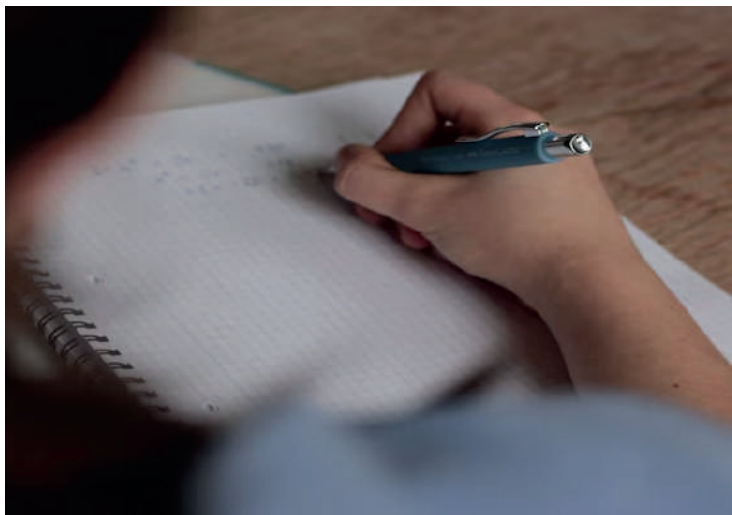
Seth, who is also the Economic Affairs Secretary at the finance ministry, has been assigned the additional charge with immediate effect till the appointment of a regular incumbent or until further orders, whichever is earlier, the statement added.

The additional charge for Seth comes after the government named Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra as the new governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on December 9.

Sanjay Malhotra, 56, will take over from Shaktikanta Das on December 11 as the 26th Governor of RBI. He was serving as the Revenue Secretary and is a 1990-batch IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre.

Meanwhile, Seth, is a 1987 batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Karnataka cadre. He assumed charge as Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance in April 2021.

Educated women have high unemployment in rural areas; schemes like Bima Sakhi can correct it



New Delhi

The prime minister's launch of LIC's Bima Sakhi scheme may only end up helping 2 lakh women with schooling up to class 10 in rural areas, but it does highlight an important problem festering in rural areas.

Educated women have been the biggest reason for high female unemployment in rural areas.

Data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey shows that women with secondary or above qualifications had an unemployment rate of 9 percent in 2023-24 compared with 0.1 percent for women who were not literate or had studied up to primary classes.

Although female unemployment levels had declined from around 17 percent in 2018-19 to 9 percent, the gap with male unemployment for similar categories increased to the highest level in five years.

Lack of employment opportunities and low wages for self-employed work compound the problem. On average, a self-employed woman earned Rs 4,908 per month in rural areas in 2023-24 (July-June).

The Bima Sakhi Yojana aims to provide Rs 7,000 per month to women enrolled as agents of Life Insurance Corporation of India in the first year, reducing to Rs 6,000 in the second year and Rs 5,000 plus commission in the third.

This marks a 43 percent increase in wages for self-

employed women. For context, women's wages have risen just 16 percent in the six years between 2018-19 and 2023-24.

Another issue that needs redressal is the growing inequality between male-female incomes in the self-employed category.

In 2023-24, the average earning of a male employee at Rs 13,907 per month was nearly threefold that of women. The gap has increased over six years, as men's wages have risen faster than that of women in rural areas.

Mehul Choksi fraud case: PMLA court allows assets worth Rs 2,566 crore to be monetized

New Delhi

The PMLA Court in Mumbai has given the go ahead to monetize properties worth Rs 2565.90 crore, seized by the Enforcement Directorate, in the Mehul Choksi fraud case. Shares of PNB reacted to the development sharply, rising close to 2% in the final hours of trade, in anticipation of recovery of dues in the long-pending case.

The ED, in collaboration with PNB and ICICI Bank, had filed an application seeking restitution of assets worth over Rs 125 crore to their rightful owners and victims.

The Enforcement Directorate posted on its social media handle X, on December 10, "Hon'ble Special Court (PMLA), Mumbai allowed "monetisation of properties" amounting to Rs 2565.90 Crore attached or seized by the ED, Mumbai in Mehul Choksi case (PNB fraud case)."

Choksi along with nephew Nirav Modi have been named in the Rs 14,000 crore fraud at Punjab National Bank, and charged for cheating, corruption and money laundering, among other crimes. A charge sheet by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) named Choksi as a person who



ran an organised racket to cheat customers and lenders across India, Dubai and US.

In 2017, Choksi had secured the citizenship in Antigua and Barbuda through an investment programme, and has since then being avoid arrest or extradition.

In 2018, the PMLA court had issued a non-bailable warrant against Choksi and other accused for colluding with Punjab National Bank (PNB) employs in an massive fraud. The Choksi family built the gems business starting mid-60s, but the business got a corporate makeover by Mehul Choksi. Choksi was instrumental in launching and establishing various successful jewellery brands of the group

in India's unorganised diamond and jewellery industry. In its 2016-17 annual report, the group called itself the largest integrated branded jewellery manufacturer-retailer in the world with annual turnover of \$2.5 billion, spread to brands like Gili, Nakshatra, Asmi and many others.

Diamantaire Mehul Choksi had told a special court that he hasn't been able to return to India due to reasons beyond his control and hence cannot be declared a fugitive economic offender. He claimed that he didn't leave India to avoid criminal prosecution nor is he refusing to return to the country. He said his passport has been suspended by Indian authorities.

Rate changes not a part of the Income-Tax Act review, says govt official

New Delhi

The income-tax review committee, tasked with overhauling the country's decades-old laws, will not suggest changes to tax rates and the focus will remain on simplifying the I-T act to make it more concise and user-friendly, a senior government official has said.

The review committee is aiming to submit all 23 reports on each chapter of the Income Tax Act of 1961 by mid-December, the official said.

"The review committee will not suggest any rate changes. They are reviewing each Act for the purpose of simplifying it, making it concise, user-friendly, and easier to read," the official told Moneycontrol on condition of anonymity.

The panel's sub-committees are working overtime to finalise all the reports. So far, eight reports have been submitted to the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT).

The Union Budget, which is normally presented on February 1, is likely to have a simplified IT Act.

"The reports are being submitted and are discussed in parallel by the CBDT. Once the review is complete, the final compilation will be sent to the finance minister," the official said.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the review of the I-T Act, which has 298 sections, in the budget she presented in July.

The review is not intended to alter the law's complexity or reduce its intricacies at this stage. Instead, it aims to rephrase convoluted provisions, remove outdated clauses, and eliminate redundancies. "Some provisions have lost their utility, such as deductions that are no longer relevant but remain on the statute. These will be addressed," the official said.

Chaired by chief commissioner of income tax VK Gupta, the committee comprises sub-committees and working groups, each focusing on a specific chapter of the act. These sub-committees are looking into areas such as compliance, exemptions under Section 10 (such as housing rent allowance and leave travel allowance), income derived from trusts (under Sections 11, 12, and 13), penalty provisions, redundancies, and TDS/TCS.

Each sub-committee is led by a principal commissioner of income tax and has over 80 officials.

The committee has also launched an online portal to invite suggestions from the public.

"This is about simplifying the text without altering provisions. We aim to make the law accessible and easier for taxpayers to comprehend," the official said.

Can the US monetise Bitcoin as a currency?

New Delhi

In the run-up to the US presidential elections, Donald Trump had advocated investing in Bitcoin in the government treasury and using the same to service sovereign debts (pay interest) and/or repay debt.

There are more Bitcoin enthusiasts who are in favour of such a move. What is more, the price of Bitcoin jumped to cross US\$ 100,000 for the first time after Trump's statement. Michael Saylor, a hardcore Bitcoin enthusiast and a Trump supporter on Bitcoin usage, went a step further. In an interview on Yahoo! Finance, he advocated selling all US treasury gold holdings and converting them to Bitcoin. Then the US could derecognise or demonetize gold, making it useless, which would boost Bitcoin prices sharply and take care of US sovereign debt.

How feasible is this plan of action?

In my opinion there is next to zero probability of this turning into a reality. The Institute of Indian Banking and Finance



(IIBF) recognises a legal currency which must have these three attributes:

Universal acceptability: To be used as a legal tender (currency) it must be universally acceptable. While Bitcoin can buy me a Tesla car I cannot buy myself a bottle of Coca Cola or a loaf of bread with a Bitcoin yet. This is where it fails.

Divisibility: Any legal tender when divided into parts must be a sum of all the parts without losing any value. For example two currency notes of ₹ 50 will buy the same goods and services

that a single ₹ 100 note can. This is where diamonds fail as a currency. When you break them into pieces, they lose value. Bitcoin is divisible. It passes the divisibility test.

Stability: The primary reason people trust any legal tender is because it is stable as a store of value. In the past when currencies have been too volatile, public confidence has been lost and alternate currencies have been adopted by people. The Deutsche Mark in the 1930s, the Zimbabwe dollar in the 2020s, the Venezuelan Bolivar currently,

Nigerian Naira currently and the Argentine Peso currently are prime examples. Many of these nations witness citizens either resorting to barter system, trading in the black market or seeking refuge in the US dollar.

Bitcoin is highly volatile. You can go to bed at night a billionaire thanks to your Bitcoin holdings and wake up next morning a millionaire. This kind of volatility will put an average citizen off Bitcoin.

There has been a lot of fascination about Bitcoin being an anonymous way to store your wealth from prying eyes, including Big Brother. But recent developments have shattered this myth as well.

In the case of a cyber hacking organisation "Dark Side" that held Colonial Pipeline (a US natural gas transporting pipeline company) to ransom, Bitcoins received by the perpetrators were tracked down by the US department of justice and arrests were made. Read about it here. Say goodbye to anonymity and black money storage in bitcoins.

The Downside

If the US administration should force the world to accept bitcoins as legal tender of the USA, there are chances the US dollar may witness a loss in market share as a global reserve currency. That will work to the detriment of the Trump administration.

The chaos that it would cause in global hard asset (commodities) prices would be an unknown unknown. The US dollar is the invoicing currency in the global commodity markets. If the dollar became too volatile, commodity prices would gyrate to counteract the dollar's volatility. Commodity buyers would have their supply economics thrown out of gear.

In 2023, Argentine presidential candidate Javier Milei promised to scrap the Argentine Peso and adopt the US dollar in his election speeches and political manifesto. One of the first things he deemed impossible after coming to office was scrapping the Peso in favour of the US dollar. Changing your official currency is not easy as making a speech.

Surat's garment sector set for 25% growth as Bangladesh faces strain: Report

Surat

Surat's textile industry is experiencing increased attention from both global and local brands as political instability and worker unrest in Bangladesh prompt companies to seek alternative garment suppliers. Industry experts in Surat report receiving a high volume of inquiries for ready-to-wear garment production, which could greatly enhance the sector's growth.

Surat's garment sector, currently expanding at 12 percent annually, is expected to see a 20-25 percent growth if these inquiries result in confirmed orders, experts suggest. Textile hubs in Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Noida are also poised to benefit from this shift, reports Times Now.

Bangladesh, the second-largest exporter of ready-made garments after China, heavily depends on fabric from Surat. However, due to ongoing political instability, law-and-order issues, and unrest among workers, many major brands are now seeking alternatives in Indian manufacturing.



"Surat traditionally produces ethnic wear, kurtis, low-priced women's clothing, and some denim. But we are now seeing a significant rise in queries from global brands, which could bring huge benefits to the sector," said Ashish Gujarati, former president of the South Gujarat Chamber of Commerce, reported Times Now.

Surat's textile industry currently generates a monthly turnover of Rs 600 crore, primarily from man-made fibres. Other textile hubs, including Tiruppur and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, Ludhiana in Punjab, and Noida in Uttar Pradesh, are also expected to benefit from this shift.

Gujarati emphasized that while short-

term growth is apparent, sustained long-term development will require government support. "With the right backing, India could greatly enhance its standing in garment manufacturing," he remarked.

Bangladesh's garment industry is facing pressure due to financial difficulties, resulting in widespread unrest in areas such as Dhaka, Chittagong, Gazipur, and Narayanganj.

A recent report from Swedwatch, a Swedish non-profit, shed light on the challenges faced by workers and called on European Union members to implement stricter regulations to safeguard workers' rights.

The report also recommended that global brands engage in constructive partnerships with stakeholders and trade unions to improve working conditions and ensure fair wages.

Additionally, it suggested implementing training programs to address worker concerns and boost productivity.

The fall of Assad and the battle for Syria's future: Regional and global ramifications

The Syrian civil war, in hibernation for many years, has come back with gusto as the long-standing government of Bashar al-Assad collapsed in an undramatic fashion. This ended the 60-year reign of the Assad family and the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party which took power following the 1963 military coup. A coalition of rebel militias, spearheaded by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)—an offshoot of Al Qaeda, led by 42-year-old Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, remains at the forefront of governing the current juggernaut. The country's armed forces have seemingly disintegrated, capitulated, or simply switched sides.

HTS has, ironically, conducted a shock-and-awe offensive of its own. The Syrian crisis has been rankled loose by regional instability over the past year, starting with the terror attack by Hamas against Israel in October 2023 and the subsequent geopolitical consequences in Gaza, Yemen, Lebanon, and Iran. The Syrian war never really went away, it was brushed under the carpet, managed, and even forgotten. Regionally, however, it has always been a potpourri of tussles between local groups and foreign powers, particularly between the Arab states, Türkiye, Iran, Israel, the United States (US), and Russia.

In essence, the conflict from 2011 onwards can be contextualised through three main strategic views: domestic, regional, and international.

Domestic

HTS and its figurehead Jolani have been taking on Assad's forces in a gambit of cities across Syria over the past few weeks. In the past years, HTS produced a quasi-state with its own governance structure, taxation and revenue system, and healthcare. HTS is, of course, not the first group to fine-tune this model. Al-Shabaab in Somalia has mobilised similar strategies for some time now. The Taliban in Afghanistan has continued to do so since 2021 as the only formal political power in the country. Furthermore, Jolani himself has also stated that he has no interest in furthering sectarian or ethnic fault lines while simultaneously hinting towards the establishment of an 'Islamic government'. He has advised his followers not to damage surviving public institutions (hospitals, healthcare, and police, among others).

The future of Syria's political order is up in the air. The country's dire economic situation has been pushed further into an abyss. If the HTS stakes claim, Jolani could be well on his way to becoming the next theocrat, opening a new chapter of uncertainty to a region that is already ablaze.

However, the HTS and various other rebel militias, including the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) lead euphoric scenes on the streets of Syrian cities, highlighting the mounting pressure against the former state's regressive system. Reports of the army's widespread abandonment of military positions sheds light on the tactical, strategic, and moral depletion of the security architecture which the Russians were supposed to help rebuild. On the other hand, the HTS was much better prepared, using military academies, hybrid weapons, and formalised command



and control structures, built with the help of former generals and commanders who previously worked under Assad.

The future of Syria's political order is up in the air. The country's dire economic situation has been pushed further into an abyss. If the HTS stakes claim, Jolani could be well on his way to becoming the next theocrat, opening a new chapter of uncertainty to a region that is already ablaze. The Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali's call to have free and fair elections, while also facing the reality of having to hand over the city's keys to Jolani could fracture internal views on how the country should proceed. While Jolani is unlikely to agree, if others such as the SDF give the idea of elections momentum, it could be seen as an opening by both regional and Western powers to influence impending outcomes.

Regional

Since the civil war started, Iran has played a critical role in making sure that Damascus remains close to Tehran. Over the years, Syria became ground zero for Iran-backed proxies while acting as a weapons trade route to arm Hezbollah in Lebanon. The former Iranian military general, Qasem Soleimani, who was assassinated in Baghdad by a US drone strike in 2020, was widely known to be the chief architect of this setup.

Assad himself was unpopular amongst most of the neighbouring countries. While his subservience to Iran (and Russia) in return for a retention of power was seen as problematic, a slow return to the Arab fold had been underway since 2023. In November 2011, Syria was suspended from the Arab League for being unable and unwilling to stop violence against protesters. For Arab states, support for the anti-Assad movement in its initial years became unavoidable as the country's Sunni Arab majority resisted the decades-long rule by the Assad family, which belonged to the Alawite minority—an ethno-religious group practising a branch of Shia Islam.

Now, with Assad seemingly destined for the annals of history, Jolani presents a big challenge. In his speeches, the HTS

leader has said that he wants to put an end to Iran and Russia's interventions.

Now, with Assad seemingly destined for the annals of history, Jolani presents a big challenge. In his speeches, the HTS leader has said that he wants to put an end to Iran and Russia's interventions. While all these overtures are strategically palatable to Arab capitals and Israel alike, his ideological opposition to what they have sided with remains a core challenge. Arab powers such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia have actively undermined the Muslim Brotherhood and its ecosystems across the Middle East, while Israel continues its fight against Hamas, which emerged from the Sheikh Ahmed Yassin-led Mujama al-Islamiya, a charity affiliated with the Brotherhood working in the West Bank and Gaza. In the long term, Jolani's candidature as the head of Syria will be an uncomfortable reality for almost everyone, albeit for diverse reasons.

Nevertheless, regional management via power rivalries is already underway. Russia, Türkiye, and Iran recently met in Qatar to discuss the developments in Syria where all three states have overlapping interests through various groups. Ankara, for example, has supported and honed the Syrian National Army, a coalition of anti-Assad organisations. Previously, Israel and Russia maintained a line of communication over the former's airstrikes inside Syria targeting Iran-backed proxies. With a minefield of groups and interests at play, mistakes by anyone could have consequences for many.

Global

If Syria does come under HTS rule, it will be the second state after Afghanistan to have had a successful militant takeover, an indictment of the two-decade-long 'War on Terror'. Jolani, much like Sirajuddin Haqqani, the Taliban interim government's Interior Minister in Kabul, continues to have a US\$10 million bounty on his head by the United States (US). Both have appeared on Western media off late, giving interviews as individuals in positions of power.

If Syria does come under HTS rule, it

will be the second state after Afghanistan to have had a successful militant takeover, an indictment of the two-decade-long 'War on Terror'.

The impact that the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan has had on Islamist groups cannot be understated. In 2021, HTS-held territories such as Idlib congratulated the Taliban through prayers aired across the geography on loudspeakers from mosques. During the same period, HTS ideologue Abd al-Rahim 'Atun gave a lecture on "the Taliban as a model". Their victory was seen as an aspirational blueprint for others. If the US can be defeated, then the likes of Assad can certainly be removed. The Taliban itself has congratulated the HTS and offered guidance on the path forward.

Russia and Iran's role in Assad's survivability, cannot be understated. In 2015, Damascus invited Moscow to intervene in the country's battle with the so-called Islamic State (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) or Daesh in Arabic). Though Moscow's support was existential, it arguably has changed since the war in Ukraine, where Russian military and economic capacities have been bogged down. While Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Syria cannot be allowed to fall into the hands of terror groups, he offered little to no practical support to Assad, much like Iran. That said, Russia's intervention could still have a second play, as it would look to maintain its air and naval bases in the country's Tartus and Latakia governorates—Moscow's only remaining tactical presence in both the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

Beyond the above-mentioned intricacies, a Jolani-led Syria would be one more blow to global counter-terrorist ambitions. With Somalia, Afghanistan, Yemen, and now potentially Syria as success stories, Islamist militant groups, specifically in the African Sahel, might feel emboldened to try and take over the slew of fragile states in West Africa. All these realities stand tall as the consequence of both global security failures and symptoms of American recidivism from actively playing the role of global policeman. The latter is further highlighted by incoming president Donald Trump's statement saying that the US should not intervene.

Conclusion

Whether it is Syria, Yemen, or the crisis in Gaza and Lebanon, the envisioned 'new' Middle East is at odds with the 'old'. The current events are not sudden, but a symptom of the past decade, with an undercurrent of the Arab Spring era. Beyond the country's own fate, a churn in both regional and international geopolitics is going to have a rupturing effect if the regional problems do not find regional solutions. The potential nuclearisation of the Middle East also remains an international worry. What happens in Syria going forward will have an impact much beyond the region, as its new political reality unfolds in the coming months.

Trump's return to power and the future of climate action

While the world anxiously awaits to learn what Donald Trump's second term in office might look like, climate experts seem to have accepted that his win is a "major threat to the planet". This is unsurprising given that, in his first term, Trump withdrew the United States (US) from the 2015 Paris Climate Accords and has made it a promise to do so again. During his campaign, Trump emphasised the importance of oil and claimed that his first term achieved the best environmental numbers, "the cleanest air ... [and] ... the cleanest water."

Trump's opinions are a stale reprise of the period in history when climate action was considered to be nothing more than an expensive inconvenience that slows down economic growth. His scepticism towards climate change is well-known; Trump has never been reluctant to make his explicit thoughts on social media being a platform for his candid thoughts explicit on social media. While the language around his position has evolved, his position remains unchanged.

In September earlier this year, he claimed that the effects of climate change in America are exaggerated and "not our problem", promising a swift return to fossil fuels. At a recent rally, Trump was asked about how he plans to tackle inflation. He replied that once energy costs are brought down, everything else will naturally follow. In another interview, Trump remarked: "There's never been [a] mess like this and it's all because of what they [the Biden administration] did with energy." The fix to rising energy costs, for Trump, is restoring the predominance of oil and burning fossil fuels.

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Chris Wright, Trump's newly appointed energy secretary has made this solution quite clear: to move away from "very expensive" green energy and back to old-school high-emission energy. A strong critic of the Democratic Party's recent decarbonisation policies, one of Wright's first points of action may be to end the pause on natural gas export permits that were put in place a year ago by President Biden's administration. The energy secretary appointee has previously denied the existence of the climate crisis, reiterating that environmental regulations need to be lifted to decrease costs. Wright also claimed that burning fossil fuels is the answer to rising costs, inflation, and poverty.

Repealing the IRA— "green new scam"

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has been a frequent point of discussion during the Trump campaign, but the name is by no means self-explanatory. The IRA was enacted by the Biden administration

in 2022, though it has little to do with inflation reduction, at least in the short term. It's a significant piece of legislation that is more concerned with climate policy, manufacturing, and trade. The act proposes a US\$1.2 trillion investment package in clean technology, including EVs, wind turbines, and solar panels. It was regarded as Biden's most successful action as president, which has proven to be an accelerating factor towards achieving emission reductions while also building a more resilient supply chain for clean energy. Trump has vowed to repeal the IRA, or the "green new scam", as he refers to it.



Trump might face resistance from Republican members of Congress, as 80 percent of the act's manufacturing investments have already flown to Republican districts

Repealing the act could cost the US billions and would require approval from the United States Congress. Trump might face resistance from Republican members of Congress, as 80 percent of the act's manufacturing investments have already flown to Republican districts. For instance, manufacturing plants for solar panels and electric vehicle (EV) components in Georgia and battery factories in South Carolina have received significant funding and generated thousands of clean jobs. Many of Trump's allies like Elon Musk and his company Tesla have also already benefited from tax credits provided by the IRA.

Deregulating drilling and fracking
"We will drill baby drill, expand all forms of Energy production to grow our economy, and create good-paying jobs," wrote Trump in a recent statement, naming Doug Burgum as the new head of the White House Council on Energy. Burgum will work alongside Wright in making key energy-related decisions and shaping policies. Trump's new slogan can be viewed as an explicit promise to further increase US emissions. The President-elect has also made clear his commitment to achieving "energy dominance", by reinstating oil and gas leases for American corporations that were previously removed

by the Biden administration. Some experts believe that Trump's strategy may not actually lower energy prices as promised; as merely pumping more oil may not decrease energy costs for several reasons.

With investment facilitated by the Biden administration's IRA, many Republican states have been given an "inconvenient gift", as one report describes it. It will prove costly and difficult to backtrack on climate finance that has already flown into red states like Georgia and South Carolina that benefited from the IRA. It would also cause thousands of jobs that were created as a result of the new legislation, to essentially disappear in these states. US\$250 million was pumped into Republican states; it will not be simple convincing a Republican Congress to repeal it.

The President-elect has also made clear his commitment to achieving "energy dominance", by reinstating oil and gas leases for American corporations that were previously removed by the Biden administration.

Some believe that the world will survive another American withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Climate Accords. Contrary to expectations, other countries did not follow suit and pull out from the agreement, and they may show their resilience once again.

Trump's decisions and new policies essentially absolves the US of its responsibilities, like multilateral cooperation and to even report on emissions, which are expected to further increase dramatically after the swearing-in of the 47th President. Furthermore, this also removes any obligation for America to provide billions of dollars in international climate finance, which would have been invaluable in the global climate effort. Whatever the outcome, Trump 2.0 is going to be inherently unpredictable - just as his recent creation of the new governmental entity, the "Department of Governmental Efficiency" (DOGE). DOGE is a non-governmental task force, created to fire federal employees, reduce government programs, and eliminate federal regulations. This is part of Trump's "Save America" initiative and he has appointed Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy to head the department.

In a domestic context, Trump's first term in office showed that progress was made in clean energy initiatives despite his rhetoric because companies and American states continued to proceed with renewables, even Republican states. In California, the private sector kept greening its energy choices in response to consumer demand. Despite Biden's nominal acceptance of climate change as a serious threat, however, little changed in practice. Biden promised "no more drilling" in the run-up to the 2020 election. In reality, the Biden administration did not live up to this promise. The US also did not deliver

on its commitments to global climate action and finance.

The time for a paradigm shift is now
For climate-vulnerable countries, inadequate climate finance is hardly surprising. Even with more progressive policies during Joe Biden's four years, the deficiency of climate finance in the Global South remains severe. Less than 3 percent of all climate finance flows to 'developing' countries, already a pitiable figure. Emerging economies should already realise that it is time to stop relying on an insular America. The walkout by climate-vulnerable nations from COP29 in Baku is the culmination of growing frustration with the current paradigm.

An important component of a more multi-centric world must involve renewed and strengthened leadership within the Indo-Pacific.

The rest of the world must move forward and persist with climate action while holding space for the US to rejoin whenever that time may come. Countries in the Indo-Pacific region are the primary drivers of the world's economic growth, and emerging powers must take the lead. This needs to be achieved with South-led action through bilateral and trilateral cooperation that reimagines the existing notions of multilateral cooperation. This is not to say that the Global South should insulate itself. Quite contrarily, it should prepare for scenarios where America's absence will be less pronounced. An important component of a more multi-centric world must involve renewed and strengthened leadership within the Indo-Pacific.

In light of growing uncertainties with the shifting balance of power, key regional players in the Indo-Pacific—such as India, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, are already taking proactive measures aimed at ensuring a just transition in the region. It is becoming increasingly clear that these nations must collaborate towards common goals without direct American involvement. To begin with, India, Japan, and Korea should scale up efforts to generate renewable energy through sources like solar power, wind turbines, biomass, and hydroelectricity. Moreover, these nations must also lead the way and take a step further in addressing hard-to-abate industries, namely steel, iron, and cement. The use of new alternative fuels like green hydrogen will be indispensable in the transition of these industries to greener pathways.

While the outcome of this election may feel like a palpable loss for the planet as a whole, other nations must seize the opportunity to fill in the vacuum that America may leave and provide strong leadership.

India's demographic dividend as a global public good

India's demographic dividend, adding 9.7 million potential workers per year through this current decade, has implications for its economic growth, socioeconomic structure, income distribution and broadly, its future. What has been largely neglected is how India's approach towards its demographic dividend will impact global labour markets. Given the magnitude of the dividend, its potential to affect global productivity and its concomitant ability to dictate international economic patterns needs to be incorporated into policy discussions.

The first step towards addressing this issue will entail treating labour as a global common—a resource that is shared universally and not owned by a particular nation. From a theoretical viewpoint, common goods are non-excludable and rivalrous, i.e., they can be used by all but are limited and exhaustive. Usually, the high oceans, the atmosphere, outer space, and other common-pool resources are treated as global commons. Curtailing constraints on international labour mobility will render labour a global common, too. However, it is distinct from a public good for two broad reasons: first, it is not global, and thus, is in limited supply due to legal impediments on mobility; second, it has a market-determined price.

The Indian demographic yield can remedy the problem of global labour shortages by facilitating the transition of labour from a global common towards a global public good. In an economist's ideal free market setting, if labour is allowed perfect international mobility, there will be a significant rise in the global supply of labour. Notwithstanding the orthodox neoclassical result of lower wages, this would cause a global rise in productivity and prosperity. With an appropriate framework for international skill-matching, the labour influx in labour-deficient economies will enhance productivity, adding to national income and net welfare. The magnification of welfare is the positive externality generated by migration, making labour a global public good.

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Unemployment and global labour shortage sound incongruous, even paradoxical. It is not just a numbers game; qualitative attributes play



a major role in labour markets. Europe and Australia were looking to fill 1 million and 400,000 jobs respectively in 2023, while also facing unemployment rates of 5.9 and 4.1 percent. This phenomenon of simultaneous vacancies and unemployment arises from labour market asymmetries in the form of skill or talent mismatch. Other drivers, like a declining share of working-age populations and inactivity in mature markets, are at play in the background. Industries like manufacturing, logistics and healthcare bear a disproportionate cost of this shortage.

While the European Union (EU) is facing the crisis of an ageing population and the US is experiencing a decline in its workforce, India is expected to have 1.04 billion working age individuals by 2030. India's dependency ratio (ratio of dependents to working age population) is on the decline, expected to reach a minimum by 2030. Even beyond 2030, India is estimated to add 4.2 million workers per annum for another decade. While the Indian economy is poised to grow substantially during this period, absorbing this quantum of workforce domestically is bound to lower labour productivity. Making the labour force globally accessible will spin these dynamics, and ensure greater productivity both in India and abroad.

India's growth since the 1990s, predominantly led by the services sector, boasts of a highly-skilled workforce. Information and communication technology (ICT) services and software services exports have grown, with India exporting around 4.6 percent of world services. This goes on to show India's comparative advantage in skilled-labour, delineating an opportunity to address the qualitative aspect of labour market inefficiencies. India's potential to deliver workers is abundantly clear from demographic features, but it can also ameliorate the skill-mismatch problem that ails the Global North. With the highest number of STEM graduates, India can provide medium-to high-skilled workers who can abate the supply-demand gap in emerging economies.

Making the labour force globally accessible will spin these dynamics, and ensure greater productivity both in India and abroad.

India, within its boundaries, also faces an identical problem of skill-mismatch, with workers lacking in-demand skill sets. This issue prevails across all skill categories, showcasing the need for vocational training, and amendments in curriculums to prepare more market-relevant workers. While this can be construed as excessive market-oriented-ness, i.e., moulding

workers according to business needs, it is quite the contrary. This will augment the human capital possessed by workers and enhance their productivity. With policies targeted at diminishing the skill divide, education, training, and human capital formation can take place in an organic manner which will provide individual liberties to persons, mostly absent in a fragmented market.

In light of these facts and figures, it is evident that this is not a zero-sum game. India creates a global workforce, supplies workers to the world, and restores global productivity. India secures livelihoods and enhances individual capabilities for its nationals, bags remittances as a major source of international income, and optimises domestic productivity. The alluring positives are, however, at policy distance. The window of opportunity is narrowing with each passing minute. Policies to develop a global workforce with market-ready skills and high human capital levels are the need of the hour. As the case is for any public good, institutional intervention is necessary to facilitate international labour mobility, in the absence of which, this is all but rhetoric.

The G20 turns New Delhi's eyes on Latin America



Before taking over as the rotating chair of the G20 (Group of 20), Brazil's president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva likened the grouping's annual summit to a diplomatic "World Cup". Given the sheer size and influence of the group's members, which make up some 85 percent of the global gross domestic product (GDP), the host of the annual G20 summit usually takes the limelight. The Brazilian presidency focused on three priorities, highlighted in the final declaration as "(i) social inclusion and the fight against hunger and poverty; (ii) sustainable development, energy transitions and climate action; and (iii) the reform of global governance institutions."

Yet, this year's G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro will be remembered as the backdrop to a metamorphosing global order, one where countries struggle to find consensus on the most urgent issues of our day, be it climate change, war or gender equality. The Summit took place under the shadow of the recently elected president of the United States, Donald Trump, who will likely overturn any consensus that the grouping arrives at, when he assumes power in January 2025. Some considered Argentina's libertarian president Javier Milei as Trump's stand-in at the summit, baulking at the G20 communiqué's

calls for "progressive taxation, gender equality and embrace of the United Nations' sustainable development goals." Despite its outsized influence as a grouping of the world's largest economies, the G20 has achieved little since they last came together in 2008-09 to address the global financial crisis. As one observer notes, the G20 is now a product of a bygone era of international politics, "where heads of state appear for photo opportunities while bureaucrats work furiously behind the scenes, dedicated to the proposition that the complex challenges that arise out of global economic interdependence can be solved, or at least ameliorated, if enough clever men and women put their minds to it."

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Although there was little global consensus at the G20 Summit, there was plenty of common ground between the host, Brazil, and the previous chair of the grouping, India. Modi's remarks at the summit paid heed to Brazil's priorities, echoing New Delhi's common interests in renewable energy,

eliminating poverty and hunger, and focusing on nutrition and food security. Modi took the opportunity to hold bilateral meetings with some of India's most important partners in the Latin American region, including Argentina and Chile. While Modi's meeting with Milei lays the groundwork for future ties, the bilateral meeting with Chile saw some progress in the expansion of the India-Chile Preferential Trade Agreement, which Chile's president Gabriel Boric has now termed as a CEPA or a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. If the India-Chile trade agreement is indeed alleviated to the level of a CEPA—equivalent to the comprehensive agreements India has signed with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), South Korea or Japan—it would signal an important development in New Delhi's priorities towards the Latin American region. For years, India's trade agreements with Chile and Mercosur, a regional bloc that includes Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, have been limited in scope, due in large part to New Delhi's reluctance to sign free trade agreements.

India and the apparatus of the Caribbean

Modi took the opportunity to extend his South American journey to Brazil's northern

neighbour, Guyana, in a two-day visit that also saw the second India-CARICOM Summit. CARICOM, short for the Caribbean Community, is a grouping of 15 Caribbean nations that displays an apt example of 'small state diplomacy'. As is customary for small states, CARICOM uses its regional integration network to level the playing field when meeting with large countries. More importantly, CARICOM maintains regular dialogue with all major global actors; after all, the India-CARICOM summit comes on the heels of the fourth China-Caribbean Forum in September 2024. India's deep cultural linkages with the Caribbean notwithstanding (the Caribbean is home to a large Indian-origin population), the economic linkages between India and the CARICOM countries remains at an incipient stage, with bilateral trade at US\$814 million in 2023.

Guyana has skyrocketed to become the world's fastest-growing economy and one of the world's newest oil producers, even overtaking neighbouring Venezuela which is home to the largest oil reserves on the planet.

Perhaps more intriguing than the India-CARICOM Summit is Modi's bilateral visit in Guyana, where he signed 10 agreements ranging from agriculture and defence to pharmaceuticals and financial payment systems. Yet, one single topic eclipses all others when it comes to Guyana: oil. Practically overnight, Guyana has skyrocketed to become the world's fastest-growing economy and one of the world's newest oil producers, even overtaking neighbouring Venezuela which is home to the largest oil reserves on the planet. Oil has been a topic of discussion between India and Guyana for many years now. Yet, so far, nothing has materialized. Despite multiple high-level visits between India and Guyana, Indian oil companies failed to submit any bids in Guyana's public auctions for offshore oil blocks. India's demand for large quantities of oil, which it seeks at some discount, has yet to find resonance in Georgetown, due in part to the fact that a large portion of Guyana's oil production is managed by international oil majors like ExxonMobil. For now, New Delhi must be content with obtaining heavily discounted Russian oil and paying a fair price to producers in West Asia that can swiftly export crude oil as per India's requirements.

Actor Mushtaq Khan Kidnapped, Tortured for Rs 1 Crore Ransom



Bollywood actor Mushtaq Khan, known for his roles in *Welcome* and *Stree 2*, has shared a chilling account of his kidnapping experience. Khan was allegedly lured to an award function in Meerut on November 20, only to find himself held hostage for nearly 12 hours.

According to Khan's business partner, Shivam Yadav, the actor was invited to the event and received flight tickets and an advance payment. However, upon arrival in Delhi, Khan was driven to a secluded area near Bijnor, where he was tortured and demanded a ransom of Rs 1 crore.

Khan's escape was nothing short of a Hindi film scene. Hearing the morning azaan, he realised a mosque was nearby and fled, seeking assistance from locals. With police help, he returned home safely. Khan was clear to file an FIR into the matter after he felt composed.

Sharing the ordeal, Khan's

business associate Shivam Yadav told a newswire: "The alleged kidnappers tortured Khan for almost 12 hours and demanded a crore as ransom. They eventually took more than Rs 2 lakh from the actor and his son's account. Early in the morning, when Khan heard the morning azaan, he realised a mosque would be close by and ran away from the place. He sought help from the people there and, with the help of the police, returned home."

Shivam Yadav filed an official FIR, providing proof of flight tickets, bank transactions, and CCTV footage. The police are investigating, and Khan is expected to share a detailed account soon. The incident has raised concerns about a possible syndicate targeting celebrities under the guise of event invitations to extort money. Recently, comedian Sunil Pal shared a similar experience.

Sonu Nigam expresses displeasure over Rajasthan CM, delegates walking out of his concert midway

Popular playback singer Sonu Nigam has expressed displeasure over Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma and other delegates allegedly leaving his musical concert held in Jaipur on Monday in the middle, calling such behaviour an "insult" to Saraswati, the goddess of music and arts. The show was organised as part of a cultural evening at Hotel Rambagh Palace for delegates attending the three-day Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit. Nigam, known for hit songs "Ye Dil Deewana", "Suraj Hua Maddham", "Abhi Mujhmein Kahin", and "Aisa Pehli Baar Hua Hai", in a video message shared on his Instagram account said if someone wants to leave the concert midway, they should not bother attending the show in the first place.

"I saw that CM sahab and others got up and left in the middle of the show. As soon as they left, all the delegates also left. This is my request to all these politicians that if you yourself do not appreciate your artist then what will the people outside do. What would they think? I have never seen such a thing," the 51-year-old said.

Pushpa 2 Box Office Collection Day 6: Rs 1000 Cr Worldwide, Rs 645.95 Cr in India



In *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, Allu Arjun is facing much higher stakes compared to the first part of the film. As the follow-up to the hugely successful *Pushpa: The Rise*, the film is burdened with immense expectations, with a lavish budget and a massive fan base to satisfy. It now needs to prove that the hype surrounding it is genuine. The film made a grand entry by breaking several records in its opening weekend, but like any big film, it has naturally seen a slight dip in collections as the days have gone by.

On its first Monday, *Pushpa 2* faced its first major drop, with collections falling by 54.31% in India. However, such a decline is a normal trend for any film. The following day, on its 6th day in theatres, the collections further dropped by 18.70%. Despite these drops, the film has become the fastest movie to cross Rs 1000 crore in gross earnings. In India alone, *Pushpa 2* has already amassed Rs 645.95 crore net in just six days. But if the early box office numbers are anything to go by, this high-stakes gamble is set to pay off in a big way.

On its sixth day, early estimate by industry tracker Sacnilk suggests that *Pushpa 2* earned Rs 52.50 crore net at the domestic box office. The Hindi dubbed version of the film has been a major driver of this success, contributing a massive Rs 38 crore to the daily earnings, while Telugu

added Rs 11 crore. The film also saw contributions from Tamil Nadu (Rs 2.60 crore), Kannada (Rs 0.40 crore), and Malayalam (Rs 0.50 crore). *Pushpa 2*'s craze in the Hindi market is impressive, especially considering that South Indian films often struggle to make a significant impact in the Hindi belt. But *Pushpa 2* has done just that, setting a new benchmark.

Despite the early dips in collections, *Pushpa 2* crossed the remarkable Rs 900 crore mark at the worldwide box office in just five days. The makers proudly announced that the film had officially crossed Rs 922 crore globally in just five days. The makers are yet to share update on film's worldwide gross, but the buzz in trade hints that *Pushpa 2* has entered Rs 1000 crore club on day 6. The Allu Arjun starrer has become the fastest Indian film to achieve such a milestone.

With a strong word of mouth steadily building, *Pushpa 2* is now the talk of the trade. Industry insiders are confident that the film will emerge as the highest-grossing Hindi film, surpassing the success of *Stree 2*, which raked in around Rs 598 crore net. Both *Pushpa 2* and *Stree 2* hit theatres on a Thursday, but the difference in their box office performance is hard to ignore. *Pushpa 2* made an explosive entry, crossing the Rs 100 crore net mark in just two days, setting a record

for the best opening two days in Hindi cinema. On the other hand, *Stree 2* reached the same milestone on its third day. It's only a matter of time before it leaves *Stree 2* behind in terms of overall earnings, making it a clear contender for the title of the biggest-grosser in Hindi cinema.

Pushpa 2 continues to captivate audiences with Allu Arjun carrying a significant weight on his shoulders. His portrayal of Pushpa Raj in the first film earned him a National Film Award in the Best Actor category, a first for any Telugu actor. The second part takes the stakes higher, focusing more on Pushpa's quest for power, respect, and stature, as he aims to claim his hold over the red sandalwood smuggling empire. While the hero elevation is a major element of the film, the intense showdown between Allu Arjun and Fahadh Faasil is being hailed as the highlight of the sequel, and it's clear that this battle will be remembered for years to come.

With the sequel, Sukumar takes audience on Pushparaj's journey, exploring whether he can truly rule the world he's built. The film asks a crucial question: Will his immense wealth from the red sandalwood business earn him the respect and power he desires? The 3-hour, 21-minute sequel is undoubtedly a treat that Allu Arjun fans will remember for long.

Sonam Bajwa to star alongside Tiger Shroff in 'Baaghi 4'



Punjabi sensation Sonam Bajwa has been signed for producer Sajid Nadiadwala's action-packed franchise 'Baaghi 4' after 'Housefull 5' starring Akshay Kumar.

Tiger took to his Instagram stories to welcome Sonam. He shared a picture of the actress and wrote: "Welcoming the new member of the Rebel Family! Thrilled to have @sonambajwa in the #Baaghi Universe #Sajid Nadiadwala's #Baaghi4"

The official X, formerly called Twitter, handle of Nadiadwala Grandson, announced the entry of Sonam and wrote: "From the laughs of the #HousefullUniverse to the action-packed #BaaghiUniverse, #SonamBajwa is here to steal the show! Welcome to the Rebel League #Baaghi4! #SajidNadiadwala's #Baaghi4 Directed by @NimmaAHarsha Releasing in cinemas on 5th Sept 2025 @iTIGERSHROFF @duttсанjay @rajatsaroraa @WardaNadiadwala @TSeries @PenMovies"

Filming for 'Baaghi 4' has begun and Sonam is expected to join the sets soon. On November 18, Tiger announced the fourth installment of his 'Baaghi'

franchise, which will be directed by A. Harsha, and that the actioner will hit the screens on September 5, 2025.

"A darker spirit, a bloodier mission. This time he is not the same! #SajidNadiadwala's #Baaghi4 Directed by @nimmaaharsha," he captioned the post. A. Harsha is known for making Kannada film 'Birugaali', 'Chingari', 'Bhajarangi', 'Anjani Putra', and 'Vedha' to name a few.

Talking about the franchise, 'Baaghi', an action thriller, first released in 2016 and was directed by Sabbir Khan. A partial remake of the 2004 Telugu film 'Varsham' with a climax inspired by the 2011 Indonesian film 'The Raid: Redemption'. The film had Tiger, Shraddha Kapoor and Sudheer Babu.

The sequel had Tiger alongside Disha Patani, Manoj Bajpayee, Darshan Kumar, Prateik Babbar, Randeep Hooda, Deepak Dobriyal and Arravya Sharma. The third installment of the movie, which was again directed by Ahmed Khan, was partially inspired from Tamil film Vettai, stars Tiger Shroff, Riteish Deshmukh and Shraddha Kapoor in lead roles.

Honoured to have been invited by Modi to commemorate our grandfather Raj Kapoor's legacy: Kareena



A day after Raj Kapoor's family met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bollywood star Kareena Kapoor Khan thanked him for inviting them to "commemorate the extraordinary life and legacy" of their grandfather ahead of the cinema icon's birth centenary.

The Kapoor family, including actors Ranbir Kapoor, Riddhima Kapoor Sahni, and Neetu Kapoor, met the prime minister on Tuesday and invited him to the Raj Kapoor Film Festival to be held to celebrate the occasion.

December 14, 2024 marks the 100th birth anniversary of Raj Kapoor, an actor, editor, a director, and a producer, known for classics such as "Aag", "Awara", "Barsaat", "Shree 420", and "Bobby".

According to Kareena's Instagram post, the PM invited the Kapoor clan to New Delhi ahead

of the milestone anniversary.

"We are deeply humbled and honored to have been invited by the Honourable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, to commemorate the extraordinary life and legacy of our grandfather, the legendary Raj Kapoor.

Thank you Shri Modi ji for such a special afternoon. Your warmth, attention, and support in celebrating this milestone meant the world to us," she captioned a series of pictures of the family with the prime minister.

The Kapoor kin, including Rima Jain, Karisma Kapoor, Alia Bhatt, Saif Ali Khan, Aadar Jain, Aarman Jain and Anissa Malhotra, met Modi in New Delhi on Tuesday to invite the prime minister for the Raj Kapoor Film Festival, a source earlier told PTL.

The family members expressed hope that Modi would

come for the film festival, they said. Spanning 101 cinemas across 34 cities from December 13 to 15, the film gala—organised by PVR INOX Limited and the Film Heritage Foundation—will be one of the most extensive retrospectives ever dedicated to Raj Kapoor's filmography.

In her post, Kareena said, "As we celebrate 100 glorious years of Dadaji's artistry, vision, and contribution to Indian cinema, we honour the timeless impact of his legacy, which continues to inspire us and generations to come."

"We are proud to showcase his iconic films and remember the impact he had on Indian cinema with the 'Raj Kapoor 100 Film Festival'. Dec 13-15, 2024 | 10 films | 40 cities | 135 cinemas. #100YearsOfRajKapoor," said the actor, who is the younger daughter of Raj Kapoor's eldest son Randhir Kapoor.

Hansal Mehta, Kiran Rao celebrate twin Golden Globe nominations for 'All We Imagine As Light'

Filmmakers Hansal Mehta, Kiran Rao, and actor Anil Kapoor congratulated director Payal Kapadia after her acclaimed film "All We Imagine As Light" secured two nominations at the Golden Globe Awards 2025.

The Malayalam-Hindi film, which marks Kapadia's feature directorial debut, is nominated for Best Motion Picture Non-English Language and the Best Direction - Motion Picture at the upcoming awards. "All We Imagine..." charted history by becoming the first Indian title from India to win the Grand Prix Award at the Cannes Film Festival in May. It follows two nurses Prabha (Kani Kusruti)

and Anu (Divya Prabha) from Kerala navigating life and love in Mumbai along with their friend and cook Parvati (Chhaya Kadam). Mehta, who has long supported the movie as India's "official selection for the Oscars", shared the Golden Globe nomination cards for the film on X soon after the announcement was made on Monday. In September, the Film Federation of India (FFI) selected Hindi film "Laapataa Ladies (Lost Ladies)", about two brides getting swapped on the day of their wedding during a train ride in 2001, to represent India at the 97th Academy Awards in the Best International Film category.

Afghanistan Extends Jonathan Trott's Tenure As Head Coach Till 2025



Former England batter Jonathan Trott will keep serving the Afghanistan national team as head coach till 2025. Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) extended his stint due to his successful two-and-a-half years with the team. The ACB conveyed the update through an official release.

"The decision comes in after his successful 2.5-year tenure,

during which he made significant contributions to the team's progress and development."

Under Trott's coaching, Afghanistan has been impressive in the International Cricket Council (ICC) events. The team secured significant wins over England, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the Netherlands in the marquee tournament. The team

also dished out impressive performances in the 2024 T20 World Cup scoring wins against the likes of Australia, Bangladesh and New Zealand to enter their first-ever semi-final.

Trott resumed his stint as head coach of the team from July 2022 till January 2024. He received an extension of 18 months afterwards and the stint will be extended one more time with the latest update from ACB. Under his coaching, Afghanistan played 34 ODIs and won 14 while played 44 T20Is and won 20. Before starting his first job as head coach for England, Trott worked as a consultant for Scotland in the T20 World Cup 2021.

Afghanistan will be up against Zimbabwe in a multi-format series starting from December 11. Trott will be with the team for the ODIs but will be unavailable due to T20I and Test legs. In Trott's absence, Hamid Hasan will take over the coaching role while Nawroz Mangal will serve as assistant coach.

Madhya Pradesh: Gwalior To Get India's Second Heated Swimming Pool For Para-Athletes



Gwalior

The Atal Bihari Vajpayee Para Sports Centre here in Madhya Pradesh is set to feature India's second heated swimming pool after Delhi. The Rs 5 crore heated swimming pool project aims to provide para-swimmers with warm waters for training during harsh winters, allowing them to maintain their practice schedules and compete more effectively.

Named after late Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the centre was established in Gwalior at a cost of Rs 170 crore as India's first training facility for para-athletes, and already boasts an Olympic-standard swimming pool.

According to officials, the upgrade, at a cost of 5 crore rupees, will ensure that swimmers can avoid challenges such as cold-water-induced hypothermia,

a significant risk during winter training. Also, it will provide athletes with favourable conditions to practice round the year. According to Deputy Director Pallavi Rai, the heating system will keep the water temperature at around 20°C, ideal for extended practice sessions. The only other pool with such a system is in Delhi's Talkatora stadium.

Satendra Lohia, an international para-swimmer, highlighted the health risks of cold-water swimming, especially strain on the heart and hypothermia. He emphasized the importance of maintaining water temperature for the safety and performance of the athletes.

According to officials, the upgraded facility will solidify Gwalior's status as a premier destination for para-sports training in India.

MS Dhoni Surpasses Amitabh Bachchan, Shahrukh Khan To Claim No.1 Spot In Brand Endorsements

MS Dhoni is one of the most popular names in the cricket fraternity and he is often in the headlines for one or the other reasons. His popularity is visible by the number of brand endorsements he has on his name. According to the data released by TAM Media Research, a joint venture between USA's Nielsen and UK's Kantar, the former Indian skippers' brand endorsement has seen a significant hike as compared to the previous year from January to June. According to the data, the 43-year-old had 32 brand endorsement deals in January-June 2023 which peaked at 42 this year.

Notably, Dhoni has more endorsement deals than Bollywood stars like Amitabh Bachchan,



Shahrukh Khan, and Akshay Kumar. Amitabh has 41 brand deals while Shahrukh is third in the list with 34 deals. Ace India batter Virat Kohli is at 10th place with 21



brand endorsements while Sourav Ganguly is at the 8th position with 22 endorsements. Kohli's brand endorsement deals took a massive hit from last year when he had 29



deals to his name. Dhoni's list of endorsements includes multiple reputed companies like Flipkart-owned Cleartrip, Citroën, EMotorad, drone startup

Garuda Aerospace, Lay's by PepsiCo, Mastercard, Gulf Oil, Orient Electric, and Explosive Whey. Also, his association with Eurogrip Tyres recently added another feather to his illustrious list of achievements.

The data by TAM Media Research includes only feature brands and commercial advertisements and excludes promos and social media advertisements.

Dhoni has led Chennai Super Kings (CSK) to five Indian Premier League (IPL) titles and his association with the franchise over the years has cemented his brand value in the market.

Ponting says 'he got worried for Siraj' after his fiery send-off to Head in Adelaide



Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting believes the incident between Travis Head and Mohammed Siraj during the second Border-Gavaskar Test in Adelaide was all down to a "misinterpretation" and said it was "accidental" the way the whole thing was played.

The incident took place in the 82nd over of Australia's first innings, when Siraj castled Head, on 140, with a crushing yorker and gave him a fiery send-off and aggressively gestured to walk back towards the direction of the stands. To this, Head replied back to the pacer before walking off to a standing ovation from his home crowd.

Afterwards, the Adelaide crowd made constant boos whenever Siraj was fielding in the deep or came on to bowl, to express their displeasure over how he behaved with Head.

"Looking back at it now, I

think it was accidental the way that whole thing played out. I don't think there was any malice meant at the start. Then the way it started and almost like the misinterpretation of what had actually gone on, I think, led to how it ended," Ponting said in the latest episode of the ICC Review.

While Siraj's reaction was swift and fiery, Ponting believes it was an expected response from a fast bowler under pressure, who had taken only one wicket at that point.

"I know Travis has gone and said that he said, 'Well bowled' at the start. Siraj obviously wasn't happy about being hit over the deep backward square for six the ball before," he said.

"Rohit (Sharma) I'm sure would expect these fast bowlers to react like that. When they're under the pressure and they're getting hit and then they've just got a wicket, you'd expect that

they'd be up and about."

However, when Siraj exchanged words back with Head following the dismissal, Ponting said he was worried for the Indian pacer. "Look, it wasn't that big a deal. I was in comms (commentary box) at the time. As soon as I saw the send-off, I actually got worried for Siraj. I know how the umpires react to those things. Umpires and referees don't like seeing the send-off, pointed in the direction of the dressing room," the Aussie great added.

However, the duo were seen having a friendly chat when Siraj came to bat during the second innings of the Test on Sunday, seemingly clearing the issue. Ponting was all praise for the duo for the swift manner in which they brought the matter to a close.

"Both players have now had their say on what they thought happened. It was great to see them actually chatting. When Siraj came out to bat and Travis was at short leg, they were actually clarifying what had happened out there. They were talking amongst themselves as to what had actually happened," he said.

Both Siraj and Head, however, had one demerit point added to their disciplinary code for breaching the ICC Code of Conduct, with the Indian pacer also being fined a 20 percent penalty on his match fee.

U19 Asia Cup: Batters falter as India lose title clash to Bangladesh



The batters could not capitalise on the good job done by the bowlers as India suffered a 59-run defeat to Bangladesh in a low-scoring U19 Asia Cup title clash here on Sunday.

After India produced a fine performance with the ball to keep Bangladesh to a mere 198 in 49.1 overs, it looked like the job was half done since the batters had played their roles to perfection since defeat in the tournament-opener to Pakistan.

However, in the final, India

lost wickets in a flurry on two occasions which broke the back of their chase, with Bangladesh's bowlers and fielders doing their part well in exerting further pressure.

Chasing 199, India were bundled out for 139 in 35.2 overs as none of their specialist batters could play an impactful knock.

Brief scores: Bangladesh: 198 all out in 49.1 overs (Hossain 47, Shihab 40; Guha 2/29, Raj 2/41); India: 139 all out in 35.2 overs (Amaan 26, Raj 24; Emon 3/24).

Afridi urges PCB to take firm stand on India tours

Former captain Shahid Afridi has advised the PCB to refrain from sending the national team to India for any cricket event, including ICC tournaments, unless India agrees to send its team to Pakistan.

Speaking at the Urdu conference at the Karachi Arts Council, Afridi emphasised the need for the Pakistan Cricket Board to adopt a firm stance on cricketing ties with India, asserting Pakistan must become self-reliant to make strong decisions, particularly regarding participation in ICC events such as the Champions Trophy.

"Pakistan cricket should be strong and self sufficient and take strong principled decisions. If India cannot come and play in Pakistan then there is no reason for us to go and play any event in India," he said.

Kambli needs to help himself, go back to rehab: Kapil Dev

The legendary Kapil Dev on Monday urged former India batter Vinod Kambli to address his health issues, saying he needs to make efforts to overcome the crisis.

Kambli, 52, has been struggling with alcohol-related and other health issues. He recently appeared frail during a public event, held in memory of legendary coach Ramakant Achrekar.

He was seen refusing to let go of his childhood friend Sachin Tendulkar.

Expressing sadness over Kambli's condition, Kapil

emphasised the need for self-help alongside external support.

"We should all try to support him. But more than us, he has to support himself. We can't look after anybody if that person can't look after himself," Kapil said.

"All the cricketers feel very sad about what we have seen. I wish his closest friends can try to get him some help, to look after himself, to go back to rehab. People do get this illness, but you have to get back to rehab."

Kambli, a former left-handed batter, has battled numerous health challenges over the years.

In 2012, he underwent



angioplasty to treat blocked arteries, followed by a heart attack in 2013. His struggles with alcohol addiction have led him to multiple stints in rehabilitation, significantly affecting his overall health and well-being.

Kambli boasts an impressive cricketing career, having represented India in 104 ODIs and 17 Tests, where he amassed 2,477 and 1,084 runs, respectively.

Notably, during his school days, he forged an iconic unbroken partnership of 664 runs with Tendulkar in a school-level cricket match.

Border-Gavaskar Trophy: Indian batters shift focus to red-ball preparations



New Delhi

Reeling from their humiliating 10-wicket defeat in the pink-ball Test, the under-fire Indian batters, led by Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, turned their attention to red-ball preparations with an intensive net session here on Tuesday, aiming to bounce back in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

While Australia moved to Brisbane for the third Test from Saturday, the Indian team chose to stay back, focusing on honing their red-ball skills, particularly their defensive techniques and judgment in leaving deliveries.

"It's time to look ahead. Preparations for the Brisbane Test starts right here in Adelaide," the BCCI posted on X, sharing a video of Team India's practice.

Struggling with poor form, having scored just 142 runs with only one fifty (52) in his last 12 innings, the Indian skipper, who rejoined the team after the birth of his son, aimed to quickly regain his rhythm as he faced both Indian spinners and pacers.

After dropping down to No. 6, Rohit had scores of three and six in Adelaide. He was adjudged lbw to a fuller delivery that nipped back, while in the second essay he was cleaned up by his Aussie counterpart Pat Cummins with a length ball that held its line and clipped the off stump.

Kohli, who ended his 16-month century drought with a hundred in Perth, fell cheaply in both innings, edging to second slip in the first innings and then to the wicketkeeper in the second essay. The star Indian batter

looked full of intent and had a watchful start to his net session before slowly finding his flow.

KL Rahul looked more subdued, focusing more on his defence, while Rishabh Pant played a few pick-up shots.

Young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, who starred with a 161 in India's massive 295-run win in the opening Test, was the aggressor, displaying his cheeky shots. He even stepped out to the Indian bowlers.

The bowling unit consisted of the likes of Harshit Rana, Akash Deep, Yash Dayal and the spin trio of Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin and Washington Sundar, while there were a few throwdown specialists as well.

The key Indian pace duo of Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj along with seam-bowling allrounder Nitish Kumar Reddy looked to have a lean day. India are scheduled to reach Brisbane on Wednesday.

Day 1 of Boxing Day

Test sold out

Melbourne: Tickets for the opening day of the fourth Test between India and Australia at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground have sold out, highlighting the public's strong interest in the prestigious Border-Gavaskar Trophy. The strong demand for tickets comes a couple of days after hosts Australia made a stunning comeback, handing India a 10-wicket defeat in

Adelaide to level the five-match series 1-1. The two rivals will head to the MCG for the Boxing Day Test, starting December 26 after the third Test in Brisbane starting Saturday. "All available public tickets for Day 1 of the Boxing Day Test have been sold," Cricket Australia posted on X on Tuesday. "There will be a possible final release of a small number of public tickets on December 24 for non-members to get their seats," it added. The pink-ball Test in Adelaide drew a crowd of 135,012 across three days, setting a record turnout during a five-day game featuring the two sides.

Australia were stung by criticism: Gilchrist

Adelaide: Legendary wicketkeeper-batter Adam Gilchrist believes Australia were "stung" by the criticism following their loss in Perth, but have returned to their best, driven by captain Pat Cummins' controlled aggression. "You could see just through his (Cummins) celebrations that... every wicket that he took he was more aggressive in his celebration," Gilchrist said. "Not in that lose control extent but you could just see that clearly they'd been stung by a bit of criticism after their performance (in Perth) and they internally would have been so disappointed with the way they played in Perth. So it (Adelaide celebrations) showed you what it meant to them and they knew that they were back at the level they want to play their cricket," Gilchrist added.

Funds being mismanaged in DDCA: MP Kirti Azad



New Delhi

World Cup winner Kirti Azad has raised the issue of mismanagement of funds in the run-up to the Delhi & District Cricket Association (DDCA) elections. Azad, who is the TMC Member of Parliament from Bardhaman-Durgapur, is fighting against sitting DDCA president Rohan Jaitley in the elections that will be held from December 13 to 15.

Speaking to the media ahead of the polls, the former all-rounder, who was a member of the 1983 World Cup winning team, alleged that funds have been mismanaged by officials. "It may cost Rs 1 crore maximum (on the outer side) to install a lift. But there is a request for Rs 29 crore," Azad said before questioning the DDCA officials for some lopsided selections of the Delhi teams.

He also highlighted that the DDCA needs a proper audit after suggesting grants and funds from the BCCI have been wasted.

"The members of the DDCA have long been denied their rightful status. The grants that the association has been receiving have been mismanaged. There is no proper auditing of the books of accounts. Members of the association have borne the brunt of facilities being denied which is rightfully theirs. More importantly, the DDCA, under Rohan Jaitley, has failed to upgrade the stadium infrastructure as was promised," he said. There are three groups fighting the elections this time. Apart from the Kirti Azad-Sanjay Hardwar panel and the one led by Jaitley, the other panel is being led by Vinod Tiara, who has not filed nomination for the president's post.

Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy: Mohammed Shami's fitness in focus in light of possible departure for Australia series

Will Mohammed Shami fly to Australia or not? It is the lingering question that nobody seems to have an answer to. In Adelaide, India captain Rohit Sharma said the door was open for Shami's return, without specifying when. But the more concerning takeaway was his revelation that the pacer has a swollen knee which is hampering his Test match preparations. And as the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy (SMAT) enters its business end in Bengaluru, all eyes are firmly on the Bengal star in a tournament that continues to reshape India's T20 batting.

Having undergone a fresh

fitness test and going by indications from the Bengal camp, it is certain that Shami isn't taking a flight to Australia anytime soon. At least not on Wednesday, with the bowler set to feature in Bengal's quarterfinal against Baroda at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in the morning. Since making his return after a year-long injury hiatus, Shami featured in one Ranji Trophy fixture in mid-November and thereafter has played in each of Bengal's seven matches so far in the SMAT, including the pre-quarterfinal against Chandigarh where he starred with both bat and ball.