

# Across State

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## Maharashtra Governor invites Fadnavis to form govt

Mumbai

Maharashtra CM-designate Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday met Governor CP Radhakrishnan to stake claim to form the government in the state.

The governor has invited him to take oath at 5.30 pm on Thursday.

Fadnavis accompanied by deputy chief minister-designate Eknath Shinde of Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar of NCP, handed over letters of support of NDA parties and MLAs to the governor who invited the alliance to form the government.

"We have met the Governor and handed over the letter of support to stake claim to form the government in the state. The Governor has invited us for the oath ceremony tomorrow at 5.30 pm," Fadnavis said after the meeting. He was flanked by Shinde and Ajit Pawar.

Earlier on Wednesday, Fadnavis, 54, was unanimously elected leader of the BJP legislature party in Maharashtra, paving the way for his return as the chief minister of India's richest state.

Fadnavis was elected by all 132 MLAs of the BJP in the presence of central observers of the party, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and former Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani.

Fadnavis was CM of the state from 2014 and 2019. In the 2019 state elections, the pre-poll alliance of the BJP and the undivided Shiv Sena got a mandate to rule



but Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray broke away from the pact to get the CM's chair.

Thackeray joined hands with Sharad Pawar-led NCP

Importantly, Fadnavis had the full backing of RSS, BJP's ideological mentor organisation. Fadnavis is an MLA from Nagpur

needed to be rewarded.

With the BJP winning 132 seats in a 288-member Assembly this time, the saffron forces staked claim to



and Congress and became the CM.

In 2022, Thackeray's right hand man, Eknath Shinde, broke away from the parent party and became the chief minister of the state with BJP support. Sharad Pawar's nephew split the NCP and joined the BJP-Sena government, with Shinde as CM, Fadnavis as deputy CM along with Ajit Pawar.

South, and represents the area of maximum influence of the RSS which has its headquarters in Nagpur's Resham Bagh.

The RSS and BJP strategists this time did not want to trade off the CM's post with anyone else. They thought Fadnavis, a former CM who had been pushed to become deputy CM against his wishes and who deferred,

CM position with Fadnavis leading the race.

Shiv Sena's Eknath Shinde and NCP's Ajit Pawar have been offered deputy CM ship in the new government that will take oath at Mumbai's Azad Maidan on Thursday in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

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# Shinde-Ajit exchange on oath-taking leads to laughter at Mahayuti presser

## Mumbai

The press conference of the Mahayuti allies here after they staked claim to form government in Maharashtra witnessed some banter thanks to Ajit Pawar, a 'veteran' deputy chief minister.

After it became clear that Devendra Fadnavis would be sworn in as chief minister, the question on everyone's mind was whether Eknath Shinde would agree to become his deputy, as the Sena chief has given enough hints that he was not happy after ceding the top post to the BJP.

Fadnavis said he called on Shinde, who was chief minister for the last two-and-half years, last evening and invited him to join the new government.

When Shinde, sitting between Fadnavis and



Pawar at the press conference, was asked whether he would take oath as deputy CM, he was evasive, saying, "Wait till evening."

Ajit Pawar, sitting

on his left, immediately cut in and said, "Don't know about him, but I am taking oath tomorrow." It drew laughter.

Not to be outdone, Shinde quipped, "Ajit

dada (as Pawar is called) has experience of taking oath in the morning as well as in the evening." It evoked a guffaw.

Pawar then said, "It was short-lived. This

time it would last for five years."

Ajit Pawar famously took oath as Fadnavis's deputy one early morning in November 2019 after the Shiv Sena broke off

its alliance with the BJP following the election results.

But the Fadnavis-Pawar government lasted only three days as Pawar failed to get the backing of enough MLAs of the Nationalist Congress Party, then headed by his uncle Sharad Pawar

Ajit, however, became deputy CM in the Sena-Congress-NCP government led by Uddhav Thackeray. After the Thackeray government collapsed due to Shinde's rebellion, Ajit Pawar once again sprang a surprise and joined the Shinde-led government as deputy CM.

Prior to 2014, when the Congress-NCP combine ruled Maharashtra for 15 years, Ajit Pawar was deputy CM twice. But the top post has always eluded him.

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## Maharashtra Cabinet swearing-in: Mumbai police to deploy extensive security measures around Azad Maidan

### Mumbai

For the swearing-in ceremony of the Maharashtra Cabinet ministers on Thursday, the Mumbai police have announced comprehensive security arrangements around the venue of Azad Maidan in South Mumbai. The police said a large number of citizens, dignitaries, and VIPs are expected to attend the event, prompting the authorities to ensure robust security and law enforcement protocols in the city. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Devendra Fadnavis is poised to become Maharashtra's chief minister (CM) for a third term, following a crucial consensus reached during the BJP core committee meeting on Wednesday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah are among the host of dignitaries expected to attend the oath-taking of Fadnavis and his Cabinet of ministers as the Mahayuti alliance of the BJP, Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party holds on to power in Maharashtra. According to the Mumbai police, at least five additional commissioners of police,

15 deputy commissioners of police, and 29 assistant commissioners of police will be deployed in and around the venue for the swearing-in ceremony scheduled at 5 pm on Thursday.

Additionally, 520 police officers and 3,500 constables will be mobilised for security. A dedicated team comprising one additional commissioner of police, three deputy commissioners of police, 30 police officers, and 250 other personnel will also be assigned to ensure the smooth movement of vehicles during the ceremony.

"Under the guidance of the Mumbai police commissioner and special commissioner of police, the city's joint police commissioner (law and order) has outlined a detailed security plan to maintain law and order during the event," a Mumbai police officer said. As part of the enhanced security measures, specialised units such as State Reserve Police Force (SRPF) platoons, quick response teams, riot-control squads, Delta, Combat, and bomb detection and disposal squads will also be deployed at key locations.

# FM Nirmala Sitharaman says new govt will make Maharashtra leading state, blames MVA for delay in crucial projects

**Mumbai**

The new BJP-led Mahayuti government “will make Maharashtra the number one state in India,” Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said Wednesday while blaming the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government for its failure in implementing crucial projects like the bullet train and the Aarey car shed. She was addressing a meeting of the state BJP legislative party at the Vidhan Bhavan.

Congratulating Devendra Fadnis on being unanimously elected as the leader of the state BJP legislative party, Sitharaman – who was a central observer for the meeting – said, “The mandate in the Assembly polls in the state is not a regular result. It was an unprecedented victory with a message for Viksit Bharat.”

Referring to the Congress-led government’s failure in pushing development, she said, “A deep draft Vadhyar port project with Rs 76,000 crore investment has been approved under the (Narendra) Modi government. It should have been done long ago. The bullet train, which was stalled during the MVA rule,



would have been completed by now. Even the Aarey car shed project was stalled during the MVA tenure, she pointed out.

“The Modi government is committed to bringing several mega projects, schemes in Maharashtra. As the Finance Minister I also closely monitor these schemes,” she mentioned.

The huge mandate for the Mahayuti shows that people are tired of uncertainty and non-development, she said, observing that they disapproved of the MVA which had thwarted development in Maharashtra.

“The double-engine government led by the BJP, at the Centre and in the state, will take

Maharashtra to greater growth and development ahead. It will ensure speedy growth across sectors and regions,” Sitharaman added.

“Mumbai is the financial capital of the country. There are startups and fintech (firms) which have placed the state on top. There are major investors

keen on making investments in Maharashtra,” she said.

The finance minister stressed that the Centre will fully support the state government in taking its developmental agenda ahead, including in the backward regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada.

## BMC's Coastal Road phase 2, DBLR projects worth Rs 20,000 crore get Union environment ministry nod

**Mumbai**

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) Wednesday announced that it has acquired Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) clearances for two of its major infrastructure projects — the Mumbai Coastal Road Project's second phase that will connect Versova in the western suburbs with Dahisar in north Mumbai; and the Dahisar Bhayander Link Road (DBLR), an elevated corridor which will connect the northern tip of suburban Mumbai with Mira-Bhayander in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

Issuing a public notice, the BMC

announced that the permissions have come through from the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) on November 13.

These two projects having a total valuation of Rs 20,648 crore are set to provide seamless connectivity between the island city and the northern end of suburban Mumbai and Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

Senior officials privy to these projects in BMC told the Indian Express that so far two of the three required environment clearances have come through from the state and central governments.

“The coastal regulation zone permissions have come through from both the central and state departments. We are waiting for the forest department’s permission which is expected to come through by year end considering the elections are over now. The civil work for these projects will start as soon as the permissions are in place,” said an official privy to this project.

The contract for these projects have been awarded to multiple agencies however, the on-ground work was yet to begin considering the environmental clearances were pending.

The second phase of the coastal road project will be 22.93-km long, which is set to originate from Versova in Andheri and extend till Dahisar at the northern tip of Mumbai. Pegged at a cost of Rs 16,621 crore, this project will include multiple bridges, flyovers and underground tunnels.

After the second phase of the Coastal road ends in Dahisar, the BMC said that the 5.6-km DBLR will extend further till Dahisar.

This elevated corridor is being considered as the final phase of the coastal road within the limits of Mumbai district.



## Uddhav gears up for BMC polls, tells party workers to take Hindutva agenda to every household

### Mumbai

After his party managed to win only 20 seats in the Maharashtra Assembly elections, Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray Tuesday met party's former corporators and instructed them to start preparations for the upcoming BMC polls and "take Hindutva agenda" to every household.

Sources part of the meeting said that Uddhav asked the former corporators to counter the BJP and Mahayuti's narrative that Sena UBT has abandoned the Hindutva ideology.

"He told us that Sena UBT has always been working for Hindutva and it will always be working. But the opponents have spread a fake narrative that we have abandoned Hindutva. He told us to convey the agenda of Hindutva to people," a former corporator said.

According to sources, most of the former corporators were



of the opinion that the Sena UBT should not be part any alliance in the civic polls. However, Uddhav asked the them to first the start the work on the ground. This comes days after party leaders told the top leadership to leave the MVA after the alliance faced a crushing defeat in the Assembly polls.

During the meeting, sources said, Uddhav told the corporators to begin their preparation across 227 wards across the 36 Assembly constituencies in Mumbai. He also appointed MLAs, leaders, secretaries, and coordinators for election-related responsibilities in Mumbai, the source said.

According a Sena functionary, 18 observers have been appointed for the civic polls who will oversee and start the preparations.

"Uddhav ji has asked us to prepare a detailed report within the next week. Based on the report, a classification of seats will be done, and a comprehensive election strategy will be formulated," a Sena functionary said.

Uddhav also accused Eknath Shinde of indulging in drama over government formation and claimed that BJP was behind it.

## First base slab cast in BKC's underground bullet train station

### Mumbai

The first concrete base slab of the Mumbai underground bullet train station was cast on November 30, 2024, at a depth of about 32 metres from the ground level, which is equivalent to a 10-storey building. The station is being built using the bottom-up method, which means that excavation work has commenced from the ground level and the concrete work has started from the foundation.

This slab is 3.5-meter-deep, measures about 30 meters in length and 20 meters in width. This is first of the 69 slabs that will be cast for the station that will form the deepest construction level for the bullet train station.

High-grade reinforced steel, 6200 rebar couplers, and 2254 cubic metres of M60 grade concrete along with 4283 MT (metric tonne) of aggregate concrete are being used for

casting of the slab.

Concrete pouring was temperature-controlled to below 25° Celsius, through in-situ ice and chiller plants. Sufficient waterproofing measures have been ensured before casting the slab.

Mumbai's bullet train station, located at Bandra Kurla Complex, is the only underground station on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail corridor.

The platform is planned at a depth of about 24 metres from the ground level. There will be three floors including a platform, concourse, and service floor.

Excavation is being done till a depth of 32 meters from the ground level. The station will have six platforms and the length of each platform is approximately 415 m (sufficient to accommodate a 16-coach bullet train).

## ISRO Postpones PROBA 3 Launch Minutes Before Liftoff After Anomaly Detected In Spacecraft PSLV-C59

### Sriharikota

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has rescheduled its Proba-3 mission launch to Thursday after it detected an anomaly in the spacecraft PSLV-C59.

Minutes before the scheduled launch at 4:08 PM on Wednesday, ISRO announced that it would postpone the Proba-3 launch for tomorrow (Thursday) at 4:12 PM IST.

The Proba-3 mission by the European Space Agency is an In-Orbit Demonstration mission designed to showcase "precision formation flying," where two small satellites launch together and then fly in a fixed configuration, acting as a single large structure in space. The Coronagraph and Occulter in Proba-3 will together form a solar coronagraph to observe the Sun's outer atmosphere, the corona.

Reaching temperatures of 2 million degrees Fahrenheit, the corona is essential to study as it influences space weather that can affect Earth. By positioning one satellite to cast a shadow on the other, mimicking a solar eclipse, scientists can study the corona for extended periods, up to six hours, compared to just ten minutes during a natural eclipse. This setup will allow detailed observation and photography of the corona, shedding light on its lesser-known features.

The Proba-3 mission on PSLV-C59 will be the 61st flight of PSLV and its 26th use of the PSLV-XL configuration. Among the five PSLV variants that ISRO possesses, this rocket is the most powerful. It surpasses the regular PSLV in strength, as it is equipped with six large boosters compared to the regular PSLV's four. The PSLV-C59 is set to launch into the sky.

## Rakesh Tikait detained by Aligarh Police on way to Greater Noida for farmers' protest

### New Delhi

BKU leader Rakesh Tikait was detained by the Aligarh Police on Wednesday while on his way to Greater Noida to participate in a meeting of farmer leaders, a police official said.

The Bharatiya Kisan Union's influential spokesperson and his associates were taken to the Tappal police station in a bus after they were stopped from proceeding on the Yamuna Expressway.

When contacted, an official spokesman of the Aligarh Police confirmed that Tikait had been "detained" but "not arrested".

Tikait told reporters that the police were preventing farmers from going to Noida in Gautam Buddh Nagar by forcing them to stay in their respective houses.

"How long will you detain us? If you keep us locked, then with whom will you talk to?"



he said.

He warned that if this approach of the authorities continued, the agitation of the farmers would intensify. The BKU had on Tuesday convened an emergency meeting at the Kisan Bhawan in Sisauli village of Muzaffarnagar under the leadership of its chief Naresh Tikait and resolved to extend support to the farmers in

Noida and Greater Noida who are agitating over the issue of land compensation and other demands.

The BKU had called on its workers and members from western Uttar Pradesh districts to gather at the Zero Point in Greater Noida on Wednesday, according to the union's youth wing president Anuj Singh.

# Sukhbir Badal Assassination Attempt: Who Is Narain Singh Chaura, Ex-Khalistani Terrorist Who Shot At SAD Leader

## Amritsar

The audacious attack on Shiromani Akali Dal leader and former Punjab deputy CM Sukhbir Singh Badal Wednesday morning has sent ripples through Punjab with police identifying the arrested shooter as a former Khalistani terrorist Narain Singh Chaura.

Chaura opened fire at Badal from a close range while the SAD leader was performing the duty of 'sewadar' outside the Golden Temple. A policeman in plainclothes, however, showed great agility, overpowering the attacker.

The attack was captured on cameras by media persons who had gathered outside the Sikh shrine to cover the second day of Badal's penance for "mistakes" committed by the SAD government in Punjab from 2007 to 2017.

Television footage showed the shooter slowly walking towards Badal, who was sitting in a wheelchair due to a fractured leg, and pulling out a gun from his pocket. A police official in plain clothes standing near Badal quickly intervened and grabbed the attacker's hands. In the melee, a bullet hit the wall behind Badal, who escaped unhurt. Soon Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) task force members also intervened. Badal is a Z+ protectee.

## Who is the shooter?

Chaura is a resident of Dera Baba Nanak and a former terrorist. After the attack, he was whisked away by security officials. Amritsar Police Commissioner Gurpreet Singh Bhullar said the attack on Badal was foiled because of the alertness of police.

A police official noticed Chaura first as he is a former terrorist and has a criminal history. When he whipped out his weapon, the police official grabbed his hands and as a result, the bullet went upwards, the



commissioner said.

"Narain Singh Chaura has been arrested and an FIR has been registered against him. The weapon used in the attack has been recovered," Bhullar said, adding that the case will be investigated from all angles.

The motive behind the attack will be ascertained after Chaura's questioning. He came alone to the Golden Temple, he said. Responding to a question, Bhullar said the security deployment at the shrine was sufficient. Police cannot carry out frisking because religious sentiments are involved, he said.

## Wife of the Accused

Meanwhile, Jasmeet Kaur, wife of Narayan Singh Chaura, who is accused of attacking

Sukhbir Badal, said that whatever her husband had done was wrong and that he had earlier served sentences in Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Ludhiana and Chandigarh jails. She said that she had no idea about the circumstances under



which he took such a step.

Sub Inspector Kailash Singh of Dera Baba Nanak Police Station came to the house of accused Narayan Singh Chaura as part of the probe into the attack on Sukhbir Badal.

Narayan Singh was born on 04 April 1956 in Chaura village of Dera Baba Nanak (Gurdaspur). This Gurmakhyali was allegedly associated with Gurmakhyali Liberation Force and Akal Federation. Chaura was arrested from Jalalabad village of Tarn Taran on 28 February 2013 and his associates Sukhdev Singh and Gurinder Singh were arrested from Pandori village of the district on the same day.

About a dozen cases were registered against him under the

Explosives Act at Civil Lines police station in Amritsar on 8 May 2010. He was also wanted in cases under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Ropar districts. An Amritsar court had

acquitted the accused in a case under the Explosives Act.

Chaura went to Pakistan in 1984 and played a key role in smuggling large consignments of arms and explosives into Punjab during the initial phase of terrorism. While in Pakistan, he reportedly wrote a book on guerrilla warfare and "anti-national" literature. He was also an accused in the Burail jailbreak case.

## Security deployment at Golden Temple

Detailed security deployment had been made at the Golden Temple complex. Around 175 police personnel led by an assistant inspector general have been deployed there, he said. Badal is undergoing religious

punishment announced by the Akal Takht. He continued his penance after the incident with a security ring thrown around him.

Holding a spear in one hand and dressed in blue 'sewadar' uniform, the SAD leader sat at the entrance of the Golden Temple. A small board hung around his neck, acknowledging his "misdeeds". The former deputy chief minister's wife and Bathinda MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal reached the Golden Temple to meet her husband.

Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Ragbir Singh and SAD leaders strongly condemned the attack on Badal. Senior SAD leader Daljit Singh Cheema, who is also undergoing religious punishment, demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann over the incident.

"For Punjab, this is a big incident. Where are we taking the state? I want to ask the Punjab chief minister where is Punjab headed. It is a 100 per cent failure of law and order. The chief minister should resign," he told reporters. "The attacker was nabbed at the spot. I thank the security personnel for acting swiftly," he said. Cheema demanded a judicial inquiry into the incident.

"We have been saying conspiracies are going on to finish the Akali leadership. The entire conspiracy needs to be unearthed," he said. Replying to a question, Cheema said if the accused had been roaming around since Tuesday, then what were the police and the administration waiting for? "I want to ask the Punjab DGP too. Someone will have to be held accountable," he said.

## Punjab CM condemns attack on Sukhbir Badal, lauds cops for prompt action

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann strongly condemned the attack on Shiromani Akali Dal leader Sukhbir Singh Badal, who was fired at while performing 'sewa' outside the Golden Temple on Wednesday morning, and directed police to investigate the incident.

The chief minister also lauded the promptness of the Punjab Police in nabbing the attacker.

The man missed Badal as he was overpowered by police. The audacious attack was captured on cameras of media persons who had gathered outside the Sikh shrine to cover the second day of Badal's penance for "mistakes"

committed by the SAD government in Punjab from 2007 to 2017.

"Punjab Police prevented a major incident from happening today. It is the result of the promptness of the Punjab Police that the conspiracy to defame Punjab and Punjabis has failed," Mann said in a post on X.

"The police achieved great success by arresting the assailant on the spot with their promptness... I strongly condemn the attack on Sukhbir Badal ji. I have issued strict instructions to the police to immediately investigate the incident and submit a report," he added. I have issued

strict instructions to the police to immediately investigate the incident and submit a report,

Police identified the shooter as Narain Singh Chaura, a resident of Dera Baba Nanak. After the attack, he was whisked away by security officials.

Television footage showed the shooter slowly walking towards Badal, who was sitting in a wheelchair due to a fractured leg, and pulling out a gun from his pocket. A police official in plainclothes standing near Badal quickly intervened and grabbed the attacker's hands. In the melee, a bullet hit the wall behind Badal, who escaped unhurt.



# LAC disengagement complete, de-escalation next priority: EAM

**New Delhi**

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday that the disengagement of troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has been completed, though managing the border areas will require further attention. He emphasised that peace and tranquility along the LAC remain critical for the future of India-China relations.

Providing details of the patrolling arrangements announced on October 21, Jaishankar said, "We remain committed to engaging with China through bilateral discussions to establish a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable framework for a boundary settlement."

He outlined the steps taken at



diplomatic and military levels to address the crisis that began in April-May 2020 and escalated with the Galwan Valley clashes in June 2020. Following counter-deployments by India, the priority was to ensure disengagement from friction points to prevent further clashes, a goal he confirmed has

been achieved.

He noted that patrols have resumed in traditional areas following verification of disengagement on the ground and subsequent regular activities as per agreed protocols.

Jaishankar highlighted India's firm stance on three principles —

strict adherence to and respect for the LAC, no unilateral attempts to alter the status quo and full adherence to past agreements and understandings.

Referring to the October 21, 2024, agreement regarding Depsang and Demchok, he said the focus was on resuming patrolling and grazing rights for civilians. He described the agreement as a step towards addressing the obstructions to long-standing patrolling activities in these areas.

The minister reiterated that the restoration of peace at the border is a prerequisite for broader bilateral relations. While acknowledging past government efforts to address border issues, including proposals for demilitarised

zones and troop withdrawals, Jaishankar stressed that India's approach over the last four years has been resolute, principled and aligned with national security interests.

He praised the armed forces for their professionalism and effectiveness during counter-deployments, stating, "Our stance has been resolute and firm, fully serving our national interest."

On future actions, Jaishankar said discussions will now shift to de-escalation and the effective management of border activities. He emphasised that India will adopt a calibrated approach to bilateral engagement with China, keeping national security paramount.

## CJI Khanna recuses self from hearing pleas against exclusion of CJI from selection panel

**New Delhi**

Chief Justice of India Sanjay Khanna on Tuesday recused himself from hearing PILs challenging a recently enacted law on appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners that replaced the CJI with a Union Cabinet Minister in the three-member selection panel.

Sitting on the Bench with Justice Sanjay Kumar, CJI Khanna told the petitioners' lawyers that he couldn't hear the petitions. "List the matter before a bench of which I am not a part," he said.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan and advocate Prashant Bhushan pointed out that the previous Bench headed by Justice Khanna had issued the notice and they had no objection if he continued hearing the matter.

However, Justice Khanna, who took over as the CJI last month, said the matter would now be listed before another Bench in the week commencing January 6, 2025. The Bench asked the Centre and the Election Commission to file their replies to the petitions.

Earlier, the top court had



on February 13 refused to stay the newly enacted law on appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.

The Bench had, however, issued notice to the Centre on Association for Democratic Reform's (ADR's) PIL challenging the validity of the Chief Election Commissioner and the other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Condition of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, notified in the official gazette on December 28, 2023.

The ADR has contended

that the law was contrary to the Constitution Bench verdict which directed the inclusion of the CJI in the three-member selection panel to pick the CEC and ECs.

In January, the Bench had issued notice to the Centre on another PIL filed by Madhya Pradesh Congress leader Jaya Thakur challenging the law on the grounds that it gave sweeping powers to the Centre by dropping the CJI from the three-member selection panel. Besides Thakur, Gopal Singh, an advocate, had also challenged the validity of the law.

Ending the 73-year-old system of the government appointing the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners, the Supreme Court had on March 2 last year ordered creation of a three-member panel comprising the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha or leader of largest opposition party and the CJI to select them.

In a unanimous verdict, a five-judge Constitution Bench led by Justice KM Joseph (since retired) had, however, said, "This norm will continue to hold good till a law is made by Parliament."

## In J&K, Omar Abdullah Led Govt Faces Quota Challenge

**Srinagar**

With unemployment touching record levels and quotas eclipsing opportunities for open merit aspirants in Jammu and Kashmir, the reservation is turning out to be a major challenge for the Omar Abdullah led government.

The heat is increasing from job-aspirants for revisiting the region's job-reservation policy, which stands at a staggering over 60 percent after the Bharatiya Janata Party led government increased the quotas by 14 percent in the run-up to the Lok Sabha election 2024, shrinking the opportunities for open merit population.

The ruling National Conference had vowed to review the policy in their poll manifesto with the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah setting up a cabinet sub-committee of three ministers last month.

But the aspirants for civil services like Sahil Parray, who has been vocal on the issue both on social media and beyond, are worried as no

official order has been issued so far which could have set a deadline to decide over the issue.

"We are still hopeful something positive will come out of the government panel," Parray said. "Even if it fails, we are going to fight against this policy tooth and nail. That includes knocking on the Supreme Court door."

The issue erupted when the BJP led central government in the Parliament amended the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation Act, paving way for quotas for newly inducted Pahari Speaking People and increasing 4 percent to Other Backward Classes (OBCs), squeezing the space for the general category in government employment and education institutions.

The total population of J&K as per the last census in 2011 stands at 1.25 crore (12.5 million). Of them, Scheduled Tribes comprise 14,93,299, about 11.90 percent of the total population while as Scheduled Castes are 9,24,991 in population, comprising about 7.37 percent.



# Why no dialogue with farmers? V-P to Centre amid Dallewal fast

New Delhi

Amid the ongoing farm agitation, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Tuesday sought to know from the Centre why it was not holding a dialogue with the protesting farmers. The Vice-President sounded a note of caution saying a nation that tested the patience of farmers paid a heavy price.

Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on stage at an Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) event in Mumbai, Dhankhar said: "Agriculture Minister Sir, every moment is critical for you. I urge you, and as the person holding the second-highest constitutional position in India, I request you to please tell me, was any promise made to the farmer, and why has it not been fulfilled? What are we doing to fulfil the promise? There was an agitation last year, and there is one this year as well, and time is passing, but we are doing nothing."

Addressing Chouhan, the Vice-President said: "You are the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. I am reminded of Sardar Patel, and his responsibility to unify the nation. This challenge is before you and it should not be considered any less than the unity of India."

Invoking Punjab farmer Jagjit Singh



Dallewal, who is on a fast-unto-death over legal backing to the minimum support price (MSP), Dhankhar said a dialogue with the farmers should happen immediately.

Dallewal, who heads the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Non-political), has maintained that the government, since the time of agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh, has made promises to farmers but not kept them.

"Honourable Agriculture Minister, did the previous agriculture ministers make

any written promises? If so, what happened to them?" said Dhankhar.

He drew the attention to the agitating farmers and said the government couldn't fight with own people or put them in a situation where they were left to fight on their own.

"We cannot hold the ideology that their struggle will be limited and they will eventually tire out. We should not disturb the soul of India, we should not hurt its heart. Can we create a boundary between

the farmer and the government? Those whom we need to embrace cannot be pushed away," Dhankhar said, referring to Dallewal. "This is your challenge. When any government makes a promise, and it is related to the farmer, we should never leave anything incomplete," he stressed.

Dhankhar also urged the government to consider farmers' requests regarding the MSP "positively". "Our mindset should be positive; we should not create obstacles by thinking that giving the farmer this price will have negative consequences. Whatever price we give to the farmer, the nation will benefit five times over... Those who say that giving our farmers a fair price for their produce would cause a disaster, I do not understand why," he said.

Reflecting on the broader impact of the farmer's movement, the Vice-President said it was a very narrow assessment to think that the farmer's movement only referred to those on the streets. "No. The son of a farmer is now an officer, the son of a farmer is now a government employee. Why did Lal Bahadur Shastri say, 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan'? With that 'Jai Kisan', our attitude should be the same as was envisioned by Shastri," he added.

## Packaged water in 'high-risk' food category

New Delhi

Apex food regulator, the Food Safety and Services Association of India, has put packaged

and get their business audited by FSSAI recognized third party food safety auditing agency every year.



drinking water and mineral water in the 'high-risk food' category mandating annual inspections and third party audits of the facilities manufacturing these products.

Notifying the order, the FSSAI said that facilities will get central licences to produce and sell packaged drinking and mineral water only if they subject themselves to yearly inspection

The inclusion of packaged water in high risk food category follows an October amendment when the government ended the requirement for BIS certification for packaged water.

Now, all makers of packaged water will need to do an annual risk based inspection as a pre requisite to get a licence or registration from the Centre.

At present, the high-risk food categories include dairy products and analogues, meat and meat products, including poultry, fish and fish products.

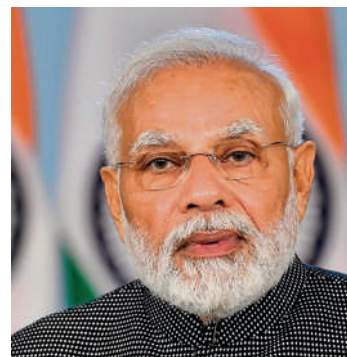
## 'Many policies formulated for welfare of divyangjans'

New Delhi

December 3 is a very important day. On this day, we mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This is a day to salute the courage, determination and achievements of persons with disabilities.

For India, this day is sacred. Respect for divyangjan is deeply embedded in our cultural ethos. Our scriptures and ancient texts teach us to respect everyone and their innate potential. This year, the occasion is even more special as we celebrate 75 years of the Constitution. Our Constitution inspires us to work for equality and to reach the person at the last mile.

Inspired by the values enshrined in our Constitution, we have laid a strong foundation for the progress of divyangjan over the past 10 years. In this period, numerous policies have been formulated, and several significant decisions have been taken for their welfare.



These decisions illustrate that our government is guided by the values of inclusion, sensitivity and commitment to all-round development. After becoming PM, I have worked to transform this spirit of service into a national mission. One of our first actions in 2014 was to replace the term "viklang" with "divyang". This was not merely a change in terminology; it ensured their dignity and recognised their contributions. Every year, numerous programmes are organised across the country

to mark Divyang Diwas. I still remember that nine years ago, on this day, we launched the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan. Over the years, the way this initiative has empowered divyangjan fills me with immense satisfaction. The policies of previous governments often left divyangjan lagging in accessing opportunities for government jobs and higher education. We changed that scenario. Reservation policies were reformed and over the past 10 years, the expenditure on the welfare of divyangjan has been tripled. I have witnessed the immense potential of young divyangjan in India. The honour our athletes have brought to the nation in the Paralympics reflects this incredible energy. To channel this energy into driving the nation's progress, we have connected our divyang friends with skill development programmes, aiding their potential to contribute meaningfully to India's growth.



## Assassination bid on Sukhbir Badal during sewa at Golden Temple in Amritsar



### Amritsar

Former Punjab Deputy Chief Minister and senior Akali Dal leader Sukhbir Singh Badal narrowly escaped an assassination bid when Khalistani militant Narain Singh Chaura opened fire at him at the entrance of the Golden Temple where he and his former Cabinet colleague Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa have been undergoing 'tankhah' (religious punishment) by working as a 'sewadar' while sitting on wheelchairs.

Chaura was arrested by the police from the spot.

Around 9.30 am, Chaura was only a few metres away from Sukhbir when he took out a pistol and before he could open fire, the security personnel deployed in 'mufti' around Sukhbir overpowered the terrorist and the bullet was fired into the open.

Police Commissioner Gurpreet

Singh Bhullar said everything was brought under control before any untoward incident could have occurred. "It was the efficiency and promptness of a policeman of the Amritsar police who gauged the situation and overpowered Chaura and the bullet was fired into the air. Chaura has been arrested. Everything is fine," he said.

Condemning the incident, Akali leader Daljit Singh Cheema called it a "major security lapse" and demanded a judicial inquiry into the incident. "Though I appreciate the policeman who took swift action, we have no faith in the government. The conspiracy behind this incident has to come out," he said.

Cheema claimed that Chaura was roaming around Golden Temple for the past two days. "What were the police waiting for?

Why was he not arrested then," he said.

Chaura has been booked in around 30 cases, including one under the Explosives Act on May 8, 2010, at the Civil Lines police station in Amritsar. He was also wanted in cases under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Ropar.

Chaura was arrested on February 28, 2013, from Jalalabad village in Tarn Taran and was out on bail.

According to the police, Chaura had crossed over to Pakistan in 1984 and was instrumental in smuggling large consignments of weapons and explosives into Punjab during the initial phase of militancy. While in Pakistan, he allegedly authored a book on guerrilla warfare and "seditious" literature. He was also accused in the Buraill jailbreak case.

## Baba Siddique murder: Lawrence Bishnoi's brother Anmol main conspirator, police tell court



### Mumbai

The name of Anmol Bishnoi, the younger brother of jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, has emerged as the main conspirator in the killing of NCP leader Baba Siddique, the Mumbai police told a special court here.

The police made the claim on Tuesday while seeking remand of eight accused in the case, citing provisions of the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA).

Special MCOCA court judge A M Patil remanded the eight accused, including the alleged main shooter Shivkumar Gautam, in police custody till December 7.

Former Maharashtra minister Baba Siddique, 66, was shot dead on October 12 by three assailants outside his son Zeeshan Siddique's office building in Bandra East here. He suffered two bullet injuries in his chest and was rushed to Lilavati hospital in Mumbai, where he passed away.

Anmol Bishnoi, who was recently detained in the US and lodged in a prison there, has been shown as a wanted accused in the case.

During the remand hearing, the Mumbai police told the court that Anmol Bishnoi's name has surfaced as the main conspirator in the case during their probe.

He was providing financial support to other accused and a probe was required to ascertain

the source and utilisation of funds, they said.

Anmol had contacted the co-accused via a communication app, the police said, adding they needed to gather information on this aspect and hence custody of the arrested accused was required.

The crime branch has so far arrested 26 persons, including alleged main shooter Shivkumar Gautam, in connection with the case.

All the accused had earlier been sent to judicial custody by a magistrate court.

On November 30, the police invoked provisions of the stringent MCOCA against all the 26 accused. Following this, all the accused were produced before the special court on Tuesday.

However, before the court proceedings began, the judge asked journalists present in the courtroom to leave after the prosecution raised an objection, saying the remand application has sensitive information.

The police sought remand of the eight accused, including Gautam, for further in-depth investigation into the matter.

Defence lawyers Roopesh Jaiswal, Ajinkya Mirgal and Dilip Shukla opposed the remand, saying the accused have already been in custody for over 40 days.

The lawyers contended the MCOCA provisions are not made out against the accused as they have no previous cases against them.

Moreover, there is nothing on record to show these accused were part of the gang, which had two charge-sheets (an essential requirement to invoke MCOCA) against them, they said.

After hearing both the sides, the court sent the eight accused in police custody till December 7. The other accused were sent in 14-day judicial custody.

Besides Anmol Bishnoi, Shubham Lonkar is also a wanted accused in the case.

## TMC, SP missing as INDIA holds protest on Adani row

### New Delhi

In a bid to strengthen unity within the INDIA bloc, Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday reached out to Trinamool Congress (TMC) leaders in the Lok Sabha after the party's conspicuous absence from the Opposition protest on the Adani bribery indictment issue.

Gandhi approached TMC leader Sudip Bandyopadhyay during the morning session to understand the reasons for their absence. Bandyopadhyay reportedly informed Rahul that the TMC was unaware of the protest. Sources suggest he also conveyed that the party prioritises Bengal-centric and public issues, such as price rise and attacks on minorities in Bangladesh, over the Adani controversy.

Meanwhile, the SP, another absentee from the protest, denied any rift within the alliance. A senior



SP leader said their party meeting on the Sambhal violence issue clashed with the Congress-led demonstration. "The Adani bribery issue is serious, and we will support it if raised again in Parliament," the leader stated. Several INDIA bloc partners, including the TMC, SP and the Left, had last week urged the Congress to highlight additional people-centric matters like the Sambhal violence and the Manipur ethnic crisis, which resonate more with the public.



# South Korean lawmakers call for impeachment of President Yoon after back-track on martial law

## Seoul

South Korean lawmakers on Wednesday called for the impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol after he declared martial law only to reverse the move hours later, triggering the biggest political crisis in decades in Asia's fourth-largest economy.

The surprise declaration late on Tuesday ignited a standoff with Parliament which rejected his attempt to ban political activity and censor the media, as armed troops forced their way into the National Assembly building in Seoul.

A coalition of lawmakers from Opposition parties said they planned to propose a Bill to impeach Yoon on Wednesday which should be voted within 72 hours.

"Parliament should focus on immediately suspending the President's business to pass an impeachment Bill soonest," Hwang Un-ha, one of the MPs in the coalition, told reporters.

Yoon's chief of staff and senior secretaries offered to resign en masse, a presidential official said.

Yoon told the nation in a TV address that martial law was needed to defend the country from nuclear-armed North Korea and pro-North anti-state forces, and protect its free constitutional order, although he cited no specific threats.

Chaotic scenes ensued as helmeted troops climbed into the parliament building through smashed windows and military helicopters hovered overhead. Parliamentary aides sprayed fire extinguishers to push the soldiers back, and protesters scuffled with police outside.

The military said activities by parliament and political parties would be



banned, and that media and publishers would be under the control of the martial law command.

But within hours of the declaration, South Korea's Parliament, with 190 of its 300 members present, unanimously passed a motion requiring martial law be lifted, including all 18 members present from Yoon's party. The President then rescinded the declaration.

Protesters outside the National Assembly shouted and clapped. "We won!" they chanted, and one demonstrator banged on a drum.

More protests are expected on Wednesday with South Korea's largest union coalition, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, planning to hold a rally in Seoul and vowing to strike until Yoon resigns.

The US embassy urged US citizens in South Korea to avoid areas where protests were taking place, while some major employers including Naver Corp and LG Electronics Inc advised employees to work from home.

Financial markets were volatile with

South Korean stocks falling around 2% early on Wednesday, while the won steadied to trade around 1,418 to the dollar, having plunged to a two-year low.

Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok and Bank of Korea Governor Rhee Chang-yong held emergency meetings overnight and the finance ministry promised to prop up markets if needed.

"We will inject unlimited liquidity into stocks, bonds, short-term money market as well as forex market for the time being until they are fully normalised," the government said in a statement.

South Korea's foreign exchange authorities were suspected of selling US dollars on the onshore market early on Wednesday to limit a decline in the won, two dealers said.

## DODGED A BULLET

The main opposition Democratic Party called for Yoon, who has been in office since 2022, to resign or face impeachment over the martial law declaration, the first in South Korea since 1980.

"Even if martial law is lifted, he cannot avoid treason charges. It was clearly revealed to the entire nation that President Yoon could no longer run the country normally. He should step down," senior DP member of parliament Park Chan-dae said in a statement.

The National Assembly can impeach the president if more than two-thirds of lawmakers vote for it. A trial is then held by the constitutional court, which can confirm it with a vote by six of the nine justices.

Yoon's party controls 108 seats in the 300-member legislature.

If Yoon resigned or was removed from office, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo

would fill in as leader until a new election was held.

"South Korea as a nation dodged a bullet, but President Yoon may have shot himself in the foot," said Danny Russel, vice president of the Asia Society Policy Institute think tank in the United States.

The crisis in a country that has been a democracy since the 1980s, and is a US ally and major Asian economy, caused international alarm.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he welcomed Yoon's decision to rescind the martial law declaration.

"We continue to expect political disagreements to be resolved peacefully and in accordance with the rule of law," Blinken said in a statement.

South Korea hosts around 28,500 American troops as a legacy of the 1950-1953 Korean War.

Planned defence talks and joint military exercises between South Korea and the United States were postponed, the Yonhap news agency reported.

Sweden's prime minister also postponed a visit to South Korea, a spokesperson said.

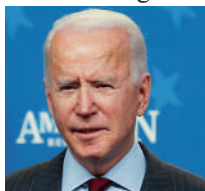
Yoon, a career prosecutor, squeezed out a victory in the tightest presidential election in South Korean history in 2022, riding a wave of discontent over economic policy, scandals and gender wars.

But he has been unpopular, with his support ratings hovering at around 20% for months.

His People Power Party suffered a landslide defeat at a parliamentary election in April this year, ceding control of the unicameral assembly to opposition parties that captured nearly two-thirds of the seats.

## US approves sale of helicopter equipment to India

India is set to upgrade its fleet of MH-60R multi-role helicopters, boosting its submarine-hunting capabilities. The outgoing Biden administration has approved the sale of advanced equipment and supplies to the Indian Navy at an estimated cost of \$1.17 billion (approximately Rs 10,000 crore), notifying the US Congress of its decision. India initially procured 24 MH-60R helicopters under a \$2.6 billion Foreign Military Sales deal, with the first batch inducted earlier this year. The new package includes advanced systems such as 30 multifunctional information distribution system-joint tactical radio systems, external fuel tanks, infrared systems, ammunition and data transfer systems. The proposed upgrades will also provide India with a joint mission planning system (JMPS), test equipment,



spare parts, depot-level repair capabilities and software development. Additionally, the deal includes US government and contractor engineering, technical and logistics support services. The US Defence Security

Cooperation Agency (DSCA) emphasised that the sale aligns with US foreign policy and security objectives by strengthening the strategic partnership with India. The equipment will enhance India's role as a stabilising force in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia regions, contributing to political stability, peace and economic progress. The Biden administration's approval comes weeks before its term ends, with President-elect Donald Trump set to take office on January 20, 2025. The deal reflects sustained US commitment to bolstering India's defence capabilities as a key partner in the region.

## Dhaka summons Indian envoy, suspends services at mission in Agartala

Bangladesh on Tuesday summoned Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma to the foreign affairs ministry office here, a day after Dhaka lodged a strong protest against the alleged vandalism of its mission in Tripura. Bangladesh also suspended all consular services at its Assistant High Commission in Agartala until further notice because of security reasons. Regarding summoning of the Indian diplomat, a Bangladesh foreign ministry official said, "Verma came as he was asked to come when we conveyed him our concerns." Foreign affairs adviser Mohammad Touhid Hossain earlier said the Indian envoy was asked to come to the foreign office after the

Agartala incident. Verma, on the other hand, said Delhi wanted to build a "constant stable, constructive relationship" with Bangladesh saying no single issue should stand a barrier for bilateral ties. "We are willing to engage with the interim government of Bangladesh," he told reporters emerging from the meeting with acting foreign secretary Riaz Hamidullah. India on Monday described as "deeply regrettable" the incident of the breach of the premises of the Bangladesh consulate in Agartala in the northeastern state of Tripura, bordering Bangladesh, by a group of people protesting the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das here.



# GDP hits a low

INDIA's economic growth in the second quarter of FY25 has decelerated to a disappointing 5.4%, the lowest in seven quarters. This figure, significantly below last year's 8.1% for the same period, underscores the mounting pressures on the country's economic resilience. The manufacturing sector, traditionally a growth driver, is at the heart of this slowdown, grappling with declining output and subdued demand. The decline in Gross Value Added (GVA) in manufacturing to 2.2% from 14.3% a year ago highlights the sector's vulnerability to inflation and weak consumer spending. While the Chief Economic Adviser has downplayed concerns, brushing off this dip as a "one-off", there is need to remain cautious. Private final consumption and gross fixed capital formation together shaved off 1.5 percentage points from the overall growth, signalling waning confidence in household



and business spending.

On the brighter side, the services sector expanded by 7.1% and the agriculture sector grew by 3.5%, driven by improved rural demand. However, these gains were not sufficient to offset the drag from manufacturing and exports, which slowed to 2.8%, reflecting global uncertainties and weaker petroleum exports.

The government's underwhelming capital expenditure — just 37% of the budgeted target for the first half — adds another layer of concern. Public spending is critical to kickstarting private investments, particularly when high borrowing costs stifle corporate growth. As India faces the dual challenge of sustaining growth while managing inflation, a robust fiscal push is imperative. Without increased public investment and strategic support for manufacturing, the risk of falling below the projected 6.5% annual

GDP growth looms large. The upcoming fiscal policy decisions will thus be crucial in steering the economy back on a stable growth trajectory.

// satyasya paramam nīdhānam //

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

*"You will face many defeats in life, but never let yourself be defeated."*  
-Maya Angelou

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RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has sounded the alarm. He has expressed concern over a paradoxical situation: population growth in the world's most populous country is on the decline. Painting an apocalyptic picture, Bhagwat has warned that a society whose total fertility rate (TFR) dips below 2.1 could disappear off the face of the earth. He has a solution: Hum Do Hamare Teen — every couple should have at least three children. Does the RSS Sarsanghchalak want members of every community in the country — majority as well as minority -- to produce more kids? That seems unlikely, going by what Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at an election rally in Banswara, Rajasthan, in April. In a thinly veiled attack on a

## Population push



particular community, the PM had equated 'infiltrators' with "those who have more children".

Bhagwat is worried most probably because of the findings of a working paper released by the Economic Advisory Council to the PM a few weeks after Modi's controversial speech. It says that the share of Hindus in India's population decreased by 7.82 per cent between

1950 and 2015, while that of Muslims increased by 43 per cent. The worst-case scenario for the RSS chief is the majority community being reduced to a minority. Ironically, Health Minister JP Nadda, while addressing a meeting on World Population Day (July 11), stated that 'smaller families' could help India achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat.

It's true that India's

fertility rate has fallen significantly, in part due to a laudable rise in the contraceptive prevalence rate. A low TFR has prompted Andhra Pradesh to do away with its two-child policy, while Telangana is keen to follow suit. However, various states would be well advised to take stock of the resources available while reversing time-tested family planning measures. Can they handle the additional demographic burden in terms of healthcare, education, job generation and poverty alleviation? It's tempting for political and religious leaders to play the numbers game and stoke communal fires, but they should not overlook the implications of such actions for India's long-term social and economic stability.



## AIDS burden

ACHIEVING the global goal of ending the AIDS pandemic as a public health threat by 2030 requires a significant contribution from India, one of the worst-affected

the National AIDS Control Organisation. The availability of free lifelong treatment is a big plus. Annual new HIV cases have seen a 44% drop in more than a decade, but the



countries outside Africa. It is worrisome that the total number of HIV patients in India reached 16.89 lakh in 2023-24, an increase of 7.3% over the previous year. In Haryana's case, the count of such patients under treatment has more than doubled in the past five years. States such as Punjab and Himachal Pradesh have also recorded an appreciable rise in the caseload from 2019-20 to 2023-24, while Chandigarh has witnessed a welcome decline.

It is apparent that the majority of the HIV-infected people are readily coming forward for treatment and the stigma associated with AIDS is becoming a thing of the past. India has done well to reduce AIDS-related deaths by around 80% since 2010. This is attributed to greater collaboration between the authorities and the community that has bolstered the 'test and treat' programme of

absolute numbers remain on the higher side. Haryana and other underperforming states must get their act together.

Spreading awareness about HIV/AIDS holds the key to the success of preventive measures. Sustained interventions are needed to protect vulnerable groups such as sex workers, migrants, drug addicts, long-distance drivers and transgender people. Community-led organisations are in the best position to reach at-risk populations. There should be no dearth of resources at their disposal, while red tape must not be allowed to impede their efforts. World AIDS Day, observed on December 1, underlines the integral link between combating this pandemic and ensuring universal health coverage as well as the right to health. Equitable healthcare access can help in reducing India's HIV burden.

AS Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah are poised to take to the skies en route to Chandigarh, the common commuters on the Delhi-Noida border found themselves mired in yet another gridlock. The irony is stark: while the leaders of the nation soar above the turmoil, the very people who till the land and feed the nation are left stranded, both on the roads and in negotiations. The farmers' protest, now approaching its fourth year, continues to simmer without a resolution in sight. Their demands, including a legally guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP), loan waivers and compensation for families of deceased protesters, remain unmet.

The government's silence has only deepened the mistrust, making

a peaceful resolution seem like a distant dream. Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar's appeal for dialogue rings hollow when juxtaposed against the government's

## Cost of freebies

BOTH Punjab and Himachal Pradesh are reeling under severe financial stress, a crisis stemming from populist promises made during electoral campaigns. In Punjab, the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) commitment to provide 300 units of electricity free of cost to the consumers has resulted in a subsidy bill of over Rs 20,000 crore for the current financial

little relief. With the state nearing its borrowing limit, the sustainability of the free electricity scheme is under question. Himachal Pradesh faces a similar plight. The restoration of OPS has inflated the state's financial obligations, requiring Rs 2,000 crore monthly to meet salary and pension commitments. Exhausting its loan limit of Rs 6,200 crore, the

state is now relying on future borrowings to manage day-to-day expenses. The situation is set to worsen as the Centre's revenue deficit grant is expected to be halved next fiscal year.

Both states accuse the BJP-led Centre of withholding



funds and showing a discriminatory attitude. Himachal's exclusion from the Special Assistance for Capital Investment Scheme has sparked a political outcry, while Punjab alleges bias in the allocation of development funds. However, the root cause lies in unsustainable fiscal policies driven by electoral populism. As state governments grapple with mounting debt and shrinking revenues, it is imperative to shift focus from doles to structural reforms. Fiscal prudence, efficient tax collection and targeted subsidies are the need of the hour.

year. Himachal, where the Congress is in power, revived the Old Pension Scheme (OPS), adding a significant burden to an already strained exchequer. Punjab's predicament is worsened by delayed subsidy payments, with the pending bill crossing Rs 4,500 crore. The Punjab State Power Corporation Limited is struggling with a dip in collection efficiency, dropping from 106% to 73%, and soaring transmission losses. Attempts to raise revenue, including recovering dues from defaulters and government departments, have yielded

hailed as the backbone of the nation, are treated as obstacles rather than stakeholders in India's development.

The Supreme Court's call for peaceful protests without public inconvenience is a fair point. Yet, one must ask: who is inconveniencing whom? The farmers' agitation is a manifestation of systemic neglect and the real inconvenience is the government's apathy towards their plight. As traffic jams paralyse the Capital's borders, they serve as a metaphor for the current state of affairs — progress stalled, voices unheard and grievances unresolved. The government must descend from its lofty perch and walk the ground with the farmers, for the road to a truly developed India runs through its farmlands.

## Stuck in traffic



actions — or lack thereof. While Dhankhar promises open doors, the roads leading to those doors remain barricaded, both literally and figuratively. Farmers, once



# Beyond bans

THE move by Australia to ban social media access for children under 16 has reignited global discussions on safeguarding young minds. While a similar ban in India might seem appealing, implementing it would be a logistical nightmare. Instead, a more balanced approach is essential to protect children from the psychological and social harms of excessive social media use. Studies, including those from the American Psychological Association, highlight the negative impacts of unregulated social media usage on adolescents, such as anxiety, depression and poor self-esteem. The rise in cyberbullying, body image issues and sleep disorders further exacerbates the problem, affecting millions of young users. However, imposing an outright ban may inadvertently push children towards unsafe,



unregulated platforms, as experts warn.

India must instead focus on promoting healthy social media habits. First, schools can play a pivotal role by incorporating digital literacy into the curriculum, teaching children to navigate the online

world responsibly. Second, Internet service providers should offer parental controls at the network level, making it easier for parents to manage their children's online exposure without constant supervision. Moreover, tech companies must be held accountable. Stricter

regulations should mandate social media platforms to enforce age verification and provide age-appropriate content. Partnerships between the government, civil society and technology providers can also create awareness campaigns highlighting the risks of excessive screen time and encouraging offline activities.

India can also learn from global examples by setting up an independent regulatory body to monitor and address digital safety concerns. Such a framework would not only protect children but also preserve their creative outlets and support networks, which are crucial for their development. In the face of rapid digital transformation, safeguarding India's youth from the ills of social media is not just a challenge — it is a responsibility that demands urgent, collaborative action.

## Targeting mosques

AS the 32nd anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition draws near, the all-too-familiar mandir-masjid conflict is straining India's secular fabric yet again. From Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh to Ajmer Sharif Dargah in Rajasthan, overzealous petitioners are claiming that there is much more to a mosque than



meets the eye. And they are being readily heard and obliged. Our lower courts are not exactly known for their speed and efficiency — their pendency has crossed 4.5 crore cases — but they have been quick to issue notices and order surveys. One such survey at the Jama Masjid in Sambhal led to the death of four persons in a clash on November 24.

Mosques where Hindu temples may

or may not have existed in the distant past find themselves under unwarranted scrutiny. They remain vulnerable even though the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, prohibits the conversion of any place of worship and has a provision for the maintenance of the religious character of such a place as it existed on August 15, 1947. The Act exempted only Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid from its ambit. The apex court put an end to the protracted dispute in November 2019, but that has not stopped mischievous litigants from targeting other mosques.

These people have conveniently forgotten what RSS Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat said in 2022 — why look for a Shivling in every mosque? This exercise, which can only spread communal hatred and disharmony, should be strongly condemned. Political leaders who sing paeans to the Constitution on November 26 should lead the way — they must remind themselves and the nation that this all-important statute guarantees freedom of religion and equality of all religions.

## Sewadar Sukhbir

A rap on the knuckles — that's what the Sikh clergy has given to Sukhbir Singh Badal and other Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leaders for the 'sins' committed by their government in Punjab from 2007 to 2017. The token punishment — washing dishes and cleaning shoes as well as washrooms at the Golden Temple — has been awarded nearly three months after the former Deputy CM was declared 'tankhaiya' (guilty of religious misconduct) by the Akal Takht. The five high priests have stopped short of taking drastic action, such as excommunication, despite the gravity of the misdeeds that Sukhbir and the others are accused of. Making them perform 'sewa' as atonement may not be enough to pacify the Panth, which continues to be angry with the Badals and the SAD over the tumultuous events of 2015.

While Sukhbir has been granted an opportunity to revive his political fortunes, the withdrawal of the Panth Rattan Fakhr-e-Quam title

— bestowed on then CM Parkash Singh Badal by the Akal Takht in 2011 — is a setback to the Badal family. With this extreme step, the clergy has done what it failed to do when the senior Badal was alive. The high priests have also asserted their authority by directing the SAD working committee to accept Sukhbir's resignation as party chief and form a panel to hold organisational elections. This indicates that the clergy won't desist from intervening in party affairs.

Both Sukhbir and his party are desperate to shed their ignominious baggage — the failure to punish the perpetrators of the sacrilege incidents and the pardon granted (later revoked) to Sirsa dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim in a blasphemy case. The SAD wants the Panth, its traditional vote bank, to forgive and forget. All is not lost for the Akalis — people of Punjab have repeatedly voted the Congress to power despite its role in the horrors of 1984. The key question is whether the SAD is open to reforms in a bid to regain





# Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill 2024: What's Changing?

New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, in the lower house of Parliament on Monday, aiming to reform India's banking sector. According to Sitharaman, "The proposed changes in the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, will enhance governance and customer convenience in the sector."

The Minister said a total of 19 amendments are being proposed to bring changes in the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, the State Bank of India Act, 1955, the Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act, 1970, and the Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act, 1980.

According to the Finance Minister, the proposed bill aims to improve governance standards, provide consistency in reporting by banks to the Reserve Bank of India, and ensure better protection for depositors and investors.

## Proposal to increase nominations for bank accounts

The Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill proposes to increase the number of nominations allowed per bank account from the current limit of one to four. This change applies to both deposits and bank lockers.

## Transfer of unclaimed assets

If the money in the account remains unpaid or unclaimed for seven years, it is transferred to the Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF). The Bill widens the ambit of the funds that can be transferred to IEPF. These include, the shares for which dividend has not been paid or claimed for seven consecutive years and any interest or redemption amount for bonds which is unclaimed for seven years. The bill allows individuals to claim these



unclaimed funds from IEPF.

## Access of Locker after holders' death

The Banking Regulation Act allows single or joint deposit holders to appoint a nominee for their deposit. Such a nominee can also be appointed for items left in custody of a bank or for a locker hired from a bank. The nominee can access the deposit, articles, or locker in case of death of the person who nominated him. The Bill allows the appointment of up to four nominees for these purposes.

## Substantial interest in a company

Under the Banking Regulation Act, substantial interest in a company refers to holding shares of over five lakh rupees or 10% of the paid-up capital of the company, whichever is less. This may be held by an individual, his spouse, or minor child, either individually or collectively. The threshold for substantial interest has been raised from Rs 5 lakh (a limit set in 1968) to Rs 2 crore.

## Remuneration of auditors

At present, the remuneration paid to the auditors of banks is fixed by the RBI in consultation with the central government. The Bill empowers banks to decide the remuneration of their auditors.

## Increasing the tenure of directors

The Banking Regulation Act prohibits the director of a bank (except its chairman or whole-time director) to hold office for more than eight years consecutively. The bill proposes to increase the tenure of directors (excluding the chairman and whole-time director) in cooperative banks from 8 to 10 years. Once passed, the Bill would allow a director of a Central Cooperative Bank to serve on the board of a State Cooperative Bank.

## Revised reporting deadlines for banks

The Bill also proposes new reporting deadlines for banks' statutory submissions to the RBI. Instead of the current Friday deadline, reports will now be due on the last day of the fortnight, month, or quarter.

# Govt scraps windfall tax on oil, fuel exports



New Delhi

The Central Government on Monday scrapped the windfall profit tax on domestically produced crude oil, diesel, petrol, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF), following a decline in international oil prices.

A windfall tax is levied by governments against certain industries when economic conditions allow those industries to experience significantly above-average profits.

The tax was introduced in July 2022 to tax supernormal profits of oil-producing companies, which they were earning because of rising global crude prices. Now, since the average prices are coming down, the government was not earning much in revenue, so it decided to withdraw the tax.

On Monday, the Union Minister of State for Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary, tabled

a notification in the Rajya Sabha, scrapping the levy on crude oil produced by firms like state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and exports of fuels done by companies like Reliance Industries Ltd.

The windfall profit tax has been a subject of controversy ever since it was levied. While it initially sought to balance government revenue amid fluctuating oil prices, industry players argued that it negatively impacted profitability and disincentivised production.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas had been lobbying for its removal for some time now.

The government also removed the Road and Infrastructure Cess (RIC) on petrol and diesel exports, further alleviating the financial pressure on the oil sector.

# Insurance cost to drop if GST Council lowers taxes: Finance Minister

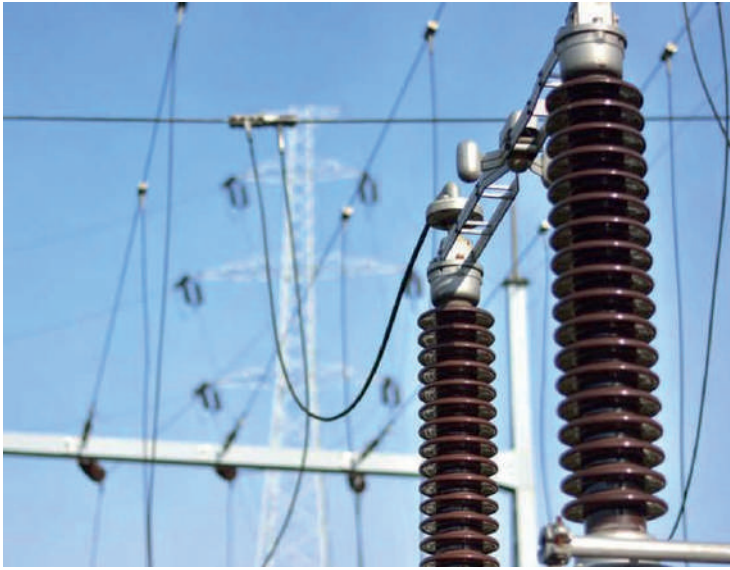
New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman today said the cost of insurance would come down if the GST (Goods & Services Tax) Council recommended a reduction in the GST rate on health and life insurance policies. This would benefit the policyholder directly, especially in a competitive market. Currently, an 18 per cent GST is levied on premiums paid for life and health insurance policies.

She said the issue was placed before the GST Council, which recommended constituting a group of ministers (GoM) to look into



## Bangladesh halves power import from Adani amid dispute over payment



### Dhaka

Bangladesh has halved imports from Adani Power, citing lower winter demand, government officials told Reuters on Monday, amid disagreements over dues running into hundreds of millions of dollars.

Adani halved supply to Bangladesh on October 31 over payment delays. Subsequently, Bangladesh told Adani to keep supplying only half the power for now. Md Rezaul Karim, chairperson of Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB)

said, "Winter demand is now down, so we have told them there is no need to run both units of the plant." He added Bangladesh owed Adani about \$650 million and paid about \$85 million last month and \$97 million in October. An Adani Power source, on condition of anonymity, said the dues had jumped to about \$900 million.

Bangladesh wants to lower prices under the deal unless it is cancelled by a court, which has called for an investigation into it.

## Every attack makes us stronger: Gautam Adani on US indictment



### New Delhi

Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani on Saturday responded to recent allegations and indictment in the US, saying that the conglomerate was committed to compliances and "every attack makes us stronger".

"Less than two week back, we faced a set of allegations from the US about compliance practices. This is not the first time we have faced such challenges. What I can tell you

is that every attack makes us stronger," he said addressing the 51st Gems and Jewellery Award here.

On November 20, 2024, the United States Department of Justice and the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued an indictment and a civil complaint in the New York district court against Gautam Adani, Sagar Adani and Vneet Jaain, key functionaries of Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL).

The charges relate to allegations of securities fraud, wire fraud and violation of the SEC guidelines that led to materially false and misleading statements in the bond offering documents of AGEL with respect to anti-bribery and anti-corruption policies.

Adani Group had denied all allegations as baseless, and said it would seek legal recourse to defend itself.

Speaking at the event here, Adani said: "The fact is, despite a lot of vested reporting, no one from Adani's side has been charged with any violation or any conspiracy to obstruct justice. Yet, in today's world, negativity spreads faster than facts."

"As we work through the legal process, I want to reconfirm our absolute commitment to compliance," he said, adding that over the years, he has come to accept that the roadblocks we face are the price of pioneering.

"The more bold your dreams, the more the world scrutinises. But it is precisely in that scrutiny, that you must find the courage to rise to challenge the status quo," he said.

## IndiGo airlines files trademark suit against Mahindra over '6e' branding

### New Delhi

Mahindra & Mahindra and InterGlobe Aviation, which owns IndiGo airlines, were on Tuesday locked in a tussle over infringement of '6e' trademark, despite the automaker claiming it is in discussions to find an amicable solution.

The automaker, which introduced two electric brands — BE 6e and XEV 9e — earlier this month, said its trademark 'BE 6e' differs from IndiGo's '6E', eliminating any risk of confusion. IndiGo, which uses 6E as the airline designator code, however refuted the claim by the Mumbai-based automaker.

"The 6E mark is an integral



part of IndiGo's identity for the past 18 years and is a registered trademark that holds strong global recognition. The "6E"

mark, whether standalone or in its variants and formative forms, is extensively used by IndiGo for its offerings and for goods and

services provided in collaboration with trusted partners," IndiGo said in a statement.

Any unauthorised use of the 6E mark, whether standalone or in any form, constitutes an infringement of IndiGo's rights, reputation and goodwill, it added.

IndiGo is committed to taking all necessary and appropriate steps to safeguard its intellectual property and brand identity, it said.

M&M in a statement said it was in discussions with InterGlobe Aviation to find an amicable solution regarding the issue. "We have taken on board the concerns that InterGlobe Aviation Ltd have to infringement

of their goodwill, which was not our intention. We are engaged in discussions with them to find an amicable solution," the auto major said in a statement.

Mahindra asserted that it has applied for trade mark registration under class 12 (vehicles) for "BE 6e", part of its electric origin SUV portfolio.

"We hence don't see a conflict as Mahindra's mark is 'BE 6e' not the standalone '6E'. It differs fundamentally from IndiGo's '6E', which represents an airline, eliminating any risk of confusion," it said.

The distinct styling further emphasises their uniqueness, it added.



## ATF price hiked 1.45 per cent, commercial LPG up Rs 16.5 per cylinder

New Delhi

Jet fuel, or Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF), price on Sunday was hiked by 1.45 per cent and rates of commercial LPG used in hotels and restaurants increased by Rs 16.5 per 19-kg cylinder in the monthly revision done in line with international oil price trends.

The ATF price was increased by Rs 1,318.12 per kilolitre (kl), or 1.45 per cent, to Rs 91,856.84 per kl in the national capital - home to one of the busiest airports in the country, according to state-owned fuel retailers.

This is the second straight monthly increase in jet fuel prices. Rates were increased by Rs 2,941.5 per kl (3.3 per cent) on November 1. That hike came after two rounds of reduction which had taken the rates to their lowest level this year. ATF price on October 1 was cut by 6.3 per cent (Rs 5,883 per kl) and by Rs 4,495.5 per kl, or 4.58 per cent on September 1.

The ATF price in Mumbai was increased to Rs 85,861.02 per kl on Sunday from Rs 84,642.91 previously.

Oil firms also increased the price of commercial LPG by Rs 16.5 to Rs 1,818.50 per 19-kg cylinder.



This is the fifth straight monthly hike in commercial LPG price. Rates were hiked by Rs 62 per 19-kg cylinder at the last revision on November 1.

In five price increases, commercial LPG rates have hiked by Rs 172.5 per 19-kg cylinder. Rates are now at their highest level in one year.

The increases negated the four monthly reductions prior to the current cycle that started in August. In the four rounds, prices had been cut by Rs 148 per 19-kg cylinder.

Commercial LPG now costs Rs 1,771 per 19-kg cylinder in Mumbai, Rs 1,927 in Kolkata and Rs 1,980 in Chennai.

Prices of ATF and LPG differ from state to state depending

on the incidence of local taxes including VAT.

However, the rate of cooking gas used in domestic households remained unchanged at Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder.

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd revise prices of ATF and cooking gas on the first of every month based on the average price of benchmark international fuel and foreign exchange rate.

Prices of petrol and diesel continue to remain frozen. Rates had been cut by Rs 2 per litre in mid-March ahead of the general elections. Petrol costs Rs 94.72 a litre in Delhi while diesel is priced at Rs 87.62.

## GST collection rises by 8.5% to Rs 1.82 lakh crore in November

New Delhi

Gross GST collections grew 8.5 per cent to over Rs 1.82 lakh crore in November on account of increased sales spurred by the festive season.

The Central GST collection stood at Rs 34,141 crore, State GST at Rs 43,047 crore, Integrated IGST (Rs 91,828

lakh crore.

During the month under review, GST from domestic transactions grew 9.4 per cent to Rs 1.4 lakh crore, while revenues from tax on imports rose about 6 per cent to Rs 42,591 crore.

Refunds worth Rs 19,259 crore were issued during November, registering an 8.9 per cent decline over the year-ago period.

After adjusting refunds, net GST collection increased by 11 per cent to Rs 1.63 lakh crore.

The projected GDP growth of 7 per cent in FY25 augers well for



crore) and cess (Rs 13,253 crore), according to government data released on Sunday.

The total gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue grew 8.5 per cent to over Rs 1.82 lakh crore in November compared to Rs 1.68 lakh crore in the same month a year ago, it said.

In October, the GST collection of Rs 1.87 lakh crore was the second-best GST mop-up with 9 per cent annual growth.

The highest-ever collection was in April 2024 at over Rs 2.1

GST collections in the remaining four months of the current fiscal year, considering the fact that the collections in the first eight months of FY25 have exceeded that of FY24 by more than Rs 1 lakh crore and are ahead of the budget estimates for FY25, said MS Mani, Partner, Deloitte India.

The net GST collection stood at Rs 12.9 lakh crore during the current fiscal so far against Rs 11.81 lakh crore collected during the April-November period last year.

## Zomato raises USD 1 bn via QIP; Motilal Oswal, ICICI Prudential among big domestic investors

Mumbai

Food delivery aggregator Zomato has raised Rs 8,500 crore by selling equity shares to qualified institutional investors, mainly domestic mutual fund houses, to fund its expansion and growth plans.

Zomato, which also owns quick-commerce firm Blinkit, had launched its Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) issue on November 25, which closed on Thursday.

In a regulatory filing on Friday, Zomato informed that it has raised Rs 8,500 crore through a Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) issue. This is the first major fundraiser since the company got listed on the stock exchanges in July 2021.

The Fund Raising Committee of Zomato's board approved the allotment of 33,64,73,755 (33.65 crore) shares to eligible qualified institutional buyers at an issue price of Rs 252.62 apiece, aggregating to Rs 8,500 crore.

These shares were allotted to investors at 5 per cent discount from the floor price, which was fixed at Rs 265.91 per share.

Four domestic mutual fund houses - ICICI Prudential, Motilal Oswal, HDFC and Kotak - were allotted over 5 per cent of the equity shares offered in the QIP issue.

Motilal Oswal emerged as the biggest participant picking up 21 per cent share of the allocation by investing around Rs 1,750 crore.

New Delhi

India's economic growth slowed to near two-year low of 5.4 per cent in July-September quarter of the ongoing fiscal against 8.1 per cent in the year-ago period, mainly due to poor show by manufacturing sector, according to official data released on Friday.

India remained the fastest-growing major economy as China's GDP growth in the July-September quarter this year was 4.6 per cent.

The previous low level of GDP growth at 4.3 per cent was recorded in the third quarter (October-December 2022) of financial year 2022-23.

The growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was lower than

## India's economy grows 5.4 per cent in July-September, well below expectations



the RBI's estimate of 7%.

As per the National Statistical Office (NSO) data, the GVA (Gross Value Added) of the agriculture sector accelerated to 3.5 per cent in the July-September quarter of 2023-24 from 1.7 per cent a year ago.

The GVA growth of the manufacturing sector decelerated to 2.2 per cent in the second

quarter of the current fiscal against 14.3 per cent growth registered a year ago.

The growth in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) during the April-September period in 2024-25 stood at 6 per cent compared to 8.2 per cent in the first half of the previous financial year.



# Space biotechnology: An emerging frontier in India's scientific endeavours

The plight of stranded NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Barry Wilmore on the International Space Station (ISS) and concerns about their health have brought space travel to the limelight. The astronauts had only planned an eight-day mission to the ISS but have spent five months on the station owing to malfunctioning in their Boeing Starliner. They are expected to return home aboard the SpaceX capsule in February next year. With India set to have its own space station by 2035, measures to strengthen India's space programme are a critical need. Unanticipated delays in return missions and long-term missions spark concerns over the health and well-being of astronauts. This paves the way for the research and development of technologies that can assist space explorers during their stays. The newly inked agreement between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) is an ideal opportunity for innovative commercial development in the life sciences sector.

## Why is innovative research needed?

Human space travel is in the midst of a revolution. National space agencies and commercial space companies, including SpaceX and Blue Origin, are advancing rapidly in this domain. Most space exploration has either been short-distance or short-duration missions, but long-duration and distant space exploration will likely be attempted in the near future. Concomitantly, the ISS—jointly operated by the United States (US), Canada, Russia and Japan—is likely to be decommissioned by the early 2030s. China already has its own space station (the Tiangong Space Station), and other countries, including India, are on their way to operationalise their own stations. Accordingly, ISRO plans to expand its space exploration programs and intends to include extended stays in space by humans.

Most space exploration has either been short-distance or short-duration missions, but long-duration and distant space exploration will likely be attempted in the near future.

The latest accounts of NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Barry Wilmore suffering from weight loss and muscle loss have brought attention to the considerable health challenges that human spaceflight presents and the need for unique solutions to manage space health. Loss of body weight, reduced muscle mass, diminished bone density, radiation exposure, vulnerability to infections, kidney stones, impaired visual acuity, and the stress accompanied by unplanned extended stays are some of the major obstacles faced by space explorers. Other challenges include bodily responses to new gravities in the spacecraft and the space station, limited access to specialised medical supplies and care, and behavioural changes in response to isolation and confinement. These physiological changes have been described by health experts from the US's Lunar and Planetary Institute as "natural stresses" of ISS exploration. There exists, however, a knowledge gap in understanding the long-term impact space



has on human health. There is also a need to develop innovative methods to address the overall health of space explorers and, in turn, to ensure the productivity of space missions. This represents an impetus to enhance our understanding of the effect of space on human health and to develop technologies that can mitigate the challenges posed by space travel.

## What can biotechnology do?

In light of India's space expansion programmes, including India's forthcoming indigenous space station—the Bharatiya Antariksha Station (BAS)—which is set to be built from 2028-2035, a multidisciplinary approach to addressing obstacles faced by astronauts is essential. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) marking the formal integration of space science with biotechnology, ushering in a new era of transformative research. The newly penned agreement between ISRO and DBT entails the design and conduct of experiments that will examine the dynamics of weightlessness on muscle atrophy and cardiovascular health, the impact of radiation on long-term health, the effect of altered microbiota on gut immunity, and the efficacy and stability of medicines used in space. In addition, biological experiments like determining the nature of algae that can be used as nutritional supplements for space travel, designing innovative methods for food preservation, utilising algae for jet fuel production, and developing methods to improve waste recycling are also in the pipeline. Experiments on these issues will likely be carried out on three uncrewed test missions, which are planned to take place before India's Gaganyaan mission.

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In addition to improving the well-being of space travellers, space biotechnology research has historically been utilised to understand the pathophysiology of disease states and has aided in the development of therapeutics. Collaborative studies between the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and the Italian Space Agency (ASI) have been used to study

the progression of Alzheimer's Disease (AD) after studies demonstrated that amyloid fibril formation—the structures that contribute to the onset of AD—could be effectively studied under microgravity or weightlessness conditions. Similarly, the European Space Agency's (ESA) Airway Monitoring experiments have aided in monitoring and diagnosing respiratory conditions, such as asthma and lung inflammation. Meanwhile, stem cell research in space is useful in regenerative medicine and the evolution of personalised medicine for neurodegenerative conditions such as stroke, dementia, and cancer.

In addition, space biotechnology promotes the biomanufacturing of commercially relevant products, particularly countermeasures to health issues. Notably, drug development studies have taken advantage of microgravity's unique conditions, which provide stability to protein structures. Proteins are typically employed as either drug therapies or drug targets and are analysed effectively in their crystalline form. Accordingly, protein crystal growth (PCG) studies have led to the development of drugs targeting tuberculosis, AD, cancer, and muscular dystrophy. In addition, microgravity triggers physiological changes, including vascular changes and immune dysfunction, which resemble ageing and chronic disease conditions. These conditions mark the need for addressing space health, but they also represent unique experimental conditions that mimic naturally occurring biological states that can be replicated, providing opportunities to study disease progression and the development of therapies to address them. For instance, biofabrication technologies, including 3-D bioprinting of tissues and organoids (in vitro human organ models), have contributed to advancing knowledge on tissue development and regeneration, specifically in the bone, cartilage, liver, and heart. This also has the potential to translate research work into tissue-engineered biomedical devices.

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Other commercial ventures include the development of water purification systems, led by an alliance between the Danish Aerospace Company (DAC) and Aquaporin Space Alliance ApS (ASA). Finally, space biotechnology and agriculture have contributed to the development of climate-resilient crops and space farming, chiefly in the Whole-Body Edible and Elite Plant (WBEEP) strategy, which aims to produce nutrient-dense, high-yielding edible parts.

## Way forward

Space travel by national space agencies and the recent surfacing of space tourism has opened up several new ventures for science, technology, and medicine. The new collaboration between DBT and ISRO is an exciting endeavour where the powers of biotechnology can be harnessed to improve the nation's human space programme, ushering in India's 'Second Space Age.' This also serves as a means for India to enhance its bioeconomy. Collaboration

between researchers in space technology, biotechnology, and allied sectors, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, can formulate a governance structure for the development of biomedical products. Multistakeholder engagement can aid in the prioritisation and development of commercially relevant products, primarily focusing on health, nutrition and water recycling. Public-private partnerships (PPP) have contributed to the expansion of India's space sector. Start-ups focusing on space have increased considerably, with over 300 contributing to innovation. More recently, biotechnology gained prominence in light of COVID-19 and the recent unveiling of the BioE3 (Biotechnology for Economy, Environment, and Employment) and Bio-RIDE (Biotechnology Research Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development) policies that aim to promote bio-manufacturing in India. The aim is to reach a US\$300 billion bioeconomy by 2030. In addition, as mentioned by ORF researchers earlier, India can engage in space diplomacy with other countries through the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD—a grouping of Australia, India, Japan, and the US) for the development of sustainable innovations that incorporate biotechnology into the agenda. Novelties centring on human health, pharmaceuticals, regenerative medicine, waste management and recycling are in demand. This demonstrates a rousing opportunity for Indian researchers to expand the nation's scientific temper and augment its commercial prowess.

Biotechnology gained prominence in light of COVID-19 and the recent unveiling of the BioE3 (Biotechnology for Economy, Environment, and Employment) and Bio-RIDE (Biotechnology Research Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development) policies that aim to promote bio-manufacturing in India.

India's forthcoming space station and expanding space programme are openings for the country to scale up and boost its capabilities. As India enters the 'Second Space Age' (which includes the incorporation of longer duration and protracted space missions), ensuring the health and well-being of space travellers remains essential. Investigations into the long-term impact of space on human health and the development of measures to mitigate deleterious health effects can be channelled through cooperation with biotechnology and allied sectors. In addition, distinctive microgravity conditions provide a unique platform for life sciences research, leading to the development of commercially viable health products that can be utilised by space explorers as well as people on Earth. With significant strides being made in space travel and tourism, India needs to grab onto the opportunities presented by the new ISRO-DBT agreement and contribute to the expansion of the bioeconomy for the future.



# What to expect in 2025: Looming talks for a brooding peace

In the vocabulary of grand strategy, 2025 will be a year in which great and rising powers will see no change in their 'ends' (core national goals), a continuing momentum in their 'means' (resources needed to achieve them), and a definite shift in global engagements around their 'ways' (actions to be taken to achieve national goals). Exhausted with physical wars, the related pain trickling down to average citizens and leading to humanitarian crises and the enfeebled International Criminal Court (ICC) ricochets, the instinct of warring leaders will be less confrontational, if not more collaborative. However, they will need strategic creativity to smoothen the wrinkles of aggression and salvage their positions in the face of military setbacks. The first quarter of the year will see positions harden before guns make way for butter, and by the second or third quarter, green shoots of peace will be visible. The last quarter will lay the foundations for a new normal focused on peace, economy, and trade.

The first quarter of the year will see positions harden before guns make way for butter, and by the second or third quarter, green shoots of peace will be visible.

Broadly, the year ahead will be a negotiation between four septuagenarians. As the president of the world's most powerful democracy in his second term, Donald J. Trump, 78, will break new ground domestically with an emphasis on jobs and growth riding a less regulated, more efficient economy while pushing for a less violent world outside. As the head of a resource- and weapons-rich country, Vladimir Putin, 72, serving his 20th year as president, will employ a complex strategy of territorial expansion and calculated concessions, redefining success through a blend of dominance and strategic withdrawal. As the president of the largest authoritarian regime

and the world's second-largest economy, Xi Jinping, 71, will tone down geopolitical and trade aggression globally, and pay

and seeking an end and will fill the vacuum of peace that the tired gladiators are desperately seeking. Trump's skills will be

the US becomes even easier to do business in, the world's largest market will attract the best minds, the capital, and the

to normalise aggression, for instance, in the South China Sea, have defined the past five years. A slowing economy, a festering real estate bubble burst, and the global shift to find alternatives to cheap manufacturing, like Vietnam or India, will impact China. Even the potential invasion of Taiwan will remain a rhetoric at best and an encirclement at worst. In a direct geoeconomics confrontation with Trump's potential tariff wars, Beijing is already seducing 33 African nations with a zero-tariff policy that grants duty-free access to 100 percent of their products. Nobody believes this will sustain, but over the first two quarters of 2025, this move will showcase globalisation with Chinese characteristics colliding with deglobalisation in the US.

Xi's military aggression in the South China Sea, particularly in the Philippines, will subside for now. Its grand strategy of world domination will change spots from unchecked attacks to timid accommodations, but its relentless pursuit of new areas of control, particularly in the oceans, will continue as it devours critical minerals in seabed mining and becomes a rule-maker. On the Indian border, Xi's recent overtures of disengagement seem to be the first steps towards peace and increased trade and direct flights. This has two tactical arms. First, an economic shift towards India as an alternative market to sell to and a manufacturing hub to export from. And second, to offset the political-strategic change in the US, which will see the two largest democracies get even closer once the lame-duck Joe Biden administration gives way to Trump's. The last quarter of 2024 is already witnessing disengagement. The first quarter of 2025 may be underwritten by de-escalation. If things remain steady and Xi's bipolar mood swings stay under control, this may be a precursor to direct India-China flights and greater trade and investments by 2026.



attention to the economy and internal confrontations. And Narendra Modi, 74, as the Prime Minister of the world's largest and fastest-growing democracy, will help build bridges of negotiation, nudging the three great powers towards greater civility using strategic autonomy while maintaining India's growth momentum.

Most world-changing ideas over the next 12 months will stream out of the White House, where Trump's presidency of the US is expected to end the country's extreme shift toward left-leaning domestic economic policies. He will also design a reversal from wars externally. Both will impact the world. His pronouncements around ending wars and "making America great again" may be bombastic, flamboyant, and high-pitched, but that's his negotiating style; it gives him room to manoeuvre. Trump will wade into the waters of warring actors, now exhausted

particularly tested in the Russia-Ukraine war, where he will need to end the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) expansions and in Israel's war with Iranian proxies where he will have to use a mix of persuasion and threat. It will be an uncomfortable, simmering peace in the short term, with a pathway to greater political stability ahead.

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In his aim to make America great again, Trump is leaning on Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy to make two big slashes—government expenditure and excess private sector deregulation. Both will serve the country well. Both will impact global capital. As

wealth creators. This will put pressure on emerging economies such as India to reform its archaic regulatory architecture at a faster pace, but perhaps more on the European Union (EU) which is even more reluctant to curb such excesses. He also plans to impose tariffs on China, Canada, and Mexico. India is ready to negotiate. Ceteris paribus, this will increase prices in the US economy, leading to higher prices over the next 12 months and preventing a reduction of interest rates. Unless Trump finds a way to put money in the pockets of Americans, this may lead to a disappointed electorate which is already reeling under high inflation.

Beijing, which has adopted a defensive posture over recent months, will have to restart its game of snakes and ladders with more of the latter. Its dreams of world domination by weaponising its growth, trade, and GDP and territorial lust by attempting



# Charting Africa's path to semiconductor leadership

From consumer electronics to electric vehicles, renewable energy, and defence systems, semiconductors power it all. The global semiconductor industry is set to see a decade of growth, with projections indicating it will become a trillion-dollar sector by 2030. Around 70 percent of this growth is expected to stem from three key industries: automotive, computing and data storage, and wireless. The automotive sector will likely see the fastest growth, with demand potentially tripling due to advances in autonomous driving and e-mobility.

The global semiconductor industry is set to see a decade of growth, with projections indicating it will become a trillion-dollar sector by 2030.

Currently, the United States (US), European Union (EU), and East Asian nations (particularly China, Taiwan, and South Korea) dominate the industry. Africa, home to almost one-third of the world's critical minerals, supplies materials like cobalt, copper, graphite, silicon, and tantalum that are vital for semiconductor production. However, Africa's involvement essentially stops at extraction, contributing less than 1 percent to the global market share. With its vast mineral resources, growing economies, and youthful population, Africa has significant potential to develop a more integrated and resilient semiconductor industry.

## *Africa's contribution at different stages of the value chain*

The semiconductor value chain is broadly divided into three stages—extraction, design and manufacturing, and Assembly, Testing, and Packaging (ATP)—each with its respective challenges and opportunities. Since the African continent lacks advanced design labs and large-scale fabrication plants, which limits access to critical technologies and processes essential for semiconductor production, its contribution significantly drops after the extraction stage. Thus, it contributes little to the subsequent design and manufacturing stage. Similarly, Africa has fallen behind in the ATP stage due to insufficient Research and Development (R&D), low investment, and a skills gap.

Africa's potential at different stages of the value chain:

### **Extraction:**

Africa already has a position of prominence in this stage due to its large mineral reserves and extensive mining operations. However, it can use its position better by:

Introducing export controls to better manage the flow of valuable raw materials: For example, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has designated cobalt as a "Strategic Mineral," enabling the government to enforce stricter regulations on its extraction and export.

Strengthening legal frameworks:

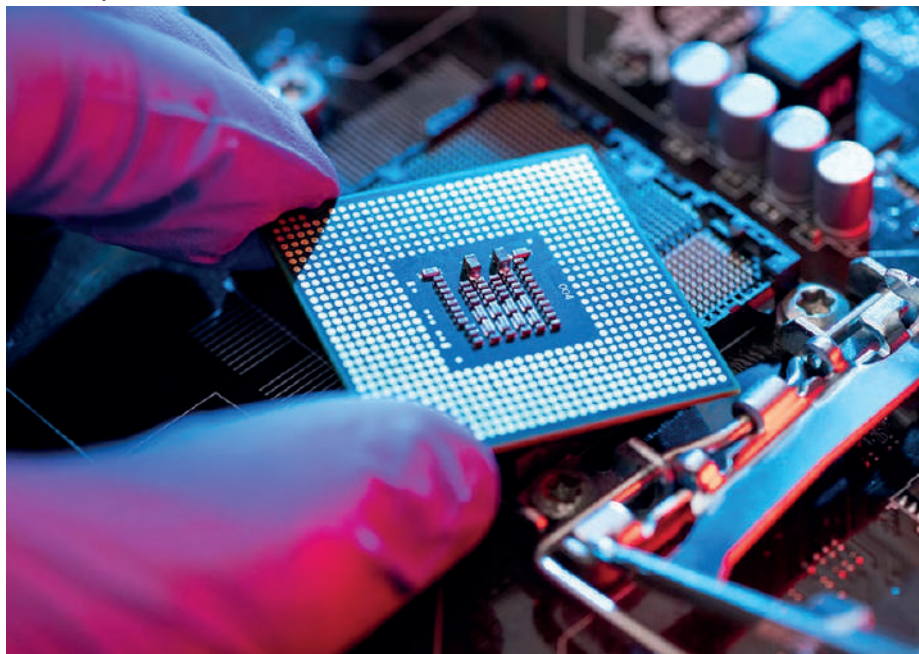
For example, Botswana's Mines and Minerals Act of 1999, requires the cutting and polishing of diamonds to occur locally instead of exporting them in their raw form.

Enhancing contract transparency to ensure greater accountability in mineral contracts and leases: The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is an excellent example in this regard. In West Africa, Liberia became the first African country to fully comply with EITI in 2009, committing to publish all mining contracts and revenues generated from natural resource extraction, enabling better scrutiny of deals between the government and foreign companies. Similarly, Ghana made the details of

of their profits into the local industry, African raw material suppliers could introduce a similar clause that puts a contractual obligation on the buyers of raw materials from Africa to invest a certain percentage of their profits into building up the indigenous capabilities of African semiconductor industry.

### **ATP stage:**

As the semiconductor value chain advances, the demand for specialised skills grows. To close this gap, Africa will need to invest more in R&D and align education with industry needs, producing more STEM graduates to strengthen the local value chain. Initiatives like Kenya's Konza Technopolis, popularly known as Africa's Silicon Savannah, and Rwanda's



all mining contracts publicly accessible since 2016 as part of its commitment to EITI standards.

Advocating for fairer compensation: This was demonstrated by the Simandou Iron Ore Project in Guinea. In 2020, Guinea renegotiated agreements with foreign mining companies to secure more favourable terms, including higher royalties and commitments to local infrastructure development, such as railways and ports.

Allocating some portion of the raw materials towards indigenous semiconductor production: Namibia, for example, has adopted a 'Minerals Policy' that prioritises local value addition and processing before export, especially for strategic minerals like uranium.

### **Design and manufacturing stage:**

At this stage, local African governments must enhance infrastructure and policies related to energy and technology investment. Some small but promising initiatives are already in progress, such as South Africa's establishment of the Microelectronics and Nanotechnology Centre at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

Similar to the Offset Clause in India's defence industry, which requires foreign companies to reinvest a portion

Kigali Innovation Smart City project offer promising platforms for skilled African job seekers to find local opportunities instead of migrating to East Asia or the US. For example, Konza Technopolis signed a US\$1.4 million deal with South Korean firms in 2023 to boost electronics manufacturing.

African nations should also establish legislation to support this growth. South Africa's Electronic Communications Act and Nigeria's National Information Technology Development Agency Act provide practical and effective frameworks for Information and communications technology (ICT) sector development.

Africa must design policies that reap benefits from this scientific diaspora, who would be keen to contribute to developing their home countries.

Further, Africa must also reap the rewards from its STEM diaspora. More than 30 million African Diaspora live in different parts of the world, working for the scientific development of their host countries. Africa must design policies that reap benefits from this scientific diaspora, who would be keen to contribute to developing their home countries. Further, Africa may take inspiration from India, particularly its Vaishvik Bhartiya Vaigyanik (VAIBHAV)

fellowship programme, which produces significant results for India.

### **International partnerships**

Africa could benefit from bilateral and multilateral partnerships with different countries and organisations in the semiconductor value chain. For example, the agreement on a feasibility study between the US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) and Semiconductor Technologies Limited (STL) Kenya, to boost semiconductor manufacturing in East Africa, could serve as a model for the continent. The US aims to establish more manufacturing hubs in East Africa to avoid future supply chain disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is too early to determine whether this will serve as a blueprint for future deals between countries at different levels of the value chain.

### **Way forward**

The global semiconductor value chain remains highly complex, strategic, and geopolitically significant. Despite its current challenges, Africa's unique combination of capabilities, from raw material extraction to emerging technology production, presents a significant global collaboration opportunity towards a comprehensive semiconductor ecosystem. With substantial investments in education, infrastructure, and technology, Africa has the potential to become a hub of innovation and manufacturing excellence. As costs rise in established markets, Africa's competitive pricing and untapped innovation potential offer a promising solution.

Africa could benefit from bilateral and multilateral partnerships with different countries and organisations in the semiconductor value chain.

Africa must move beyond being a mere supplier of critical minerals to becoming a hub for semiconductor innovation and manufacturing. It must forge partnerships with advanced economies and other countries in the Global South that offer favourable deals. For example, the US CHIPS and Science Act presents a valuable opportunity for Africa to attract investment. Similarly, with its leading role as one of the world's largest semiconductor design hubs, India can provide crucial support in the design stage.

In 2000, the Economist magazine called Africa a 'Dark continent'. Within 10 years, it changed its cover to 'Africa Rising'. As the continent marches ahead, it has the potential to transform into the "Silicon Savannah" of semiconductor design and testing. However, this will require sustained and proactive policy efforts to consolidate its position as a critical actor in the semiconductor industry. Ultimately, Africa's semiconductor ambition would depend on how well African leaders adopt a long-term vision, prioritising strategic investments and aligning local policies with international goals and investment.



# Climate Crisis and Children's Future: A Grave Challenge



Our irresponsible behavior towards the Earth raises a critical question: What kind of world are we leaving for the next generation? Issues like air pollution, severe water crises, depleting natural resources, and employment disparities make it clear that future generations will face an undeniably challenging life. This irresponsibility and lack of visionary leadership have compounded the risks posed by the climate crisis to children's futures, making it a matter of grave concern.

Recognizing these threats, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has emphasized the urgent need for strategic planning to address the challenges highlighted in its report, "The Future of Children in a Changing World." This report sheds light on the challenges, grim realities, and ominous futures facing children in India. According to the report, by 2050, over 350 million children in India will grapple with the impacts of climate crises, artificial intelligence, and technological transformations.

Children born during this period will encounter climate-related adversities, including heatwaves, floods, cyclones, and a range of climate-induced illnesses. Air pollution, acute water scarcity, dwindling resources,

climate change, and employment disparities will make their lives even more strenuous, perilous, and demanding.

In 2021, India ranked 26th out of 163 countries on the Children's Climate Risk Index, indicating a high vulnerability to extreme heat, flooding, and air pollution. The risks are particularly pronounced for children from rural and low-income communities. Projections show that by 2050, children could face eight times more heatwaves than in 2000.

The adverse effects of climate crises on children's health, education, access to essential resources like water, and healthcare services are inevitable. This calls for the immediate formulation of a sensitive, forward-looking, and effective action plan.

Recent data reveal stark inequalities in internet connectivity. While 95% of the population in high-income countries is connected to the internet, only 26% of the population in low-income countries has access. In India, despite the widespread penetration of the internet, children face numerous challenges. UNICEF advocates for comprehensive technological initiatives to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable and safe access to new technologies for all children.

Children are our future, and

placing their welfare and rights at the center of policy-making is essential for building a prosperous, sustainable, and balanced society. Our irresponsible actions towards the planet are jeopardizing future generations.

By 2050, children will face eight times more heatwaves, three times more floods, and double the risk of wildfires compared to today. Such alarming predictions underscore UNICEF's call for urgent strategies to tackle these challenges and safeguard children's futures.

Urbanization poses additional challenges. By 2050, half of India's population is expected to reside in urban areas. With rapid migration from rural to urban regions, overburdened urban services risk collapse. In this scenario, climate-resilient and child-friendly urban planning becomes a necessity.

Cities offer hope and opportunities for a better life, accounting for over 80% of global GDP and serving as engines of growth, innovation, and connectivity. They can provide the best possible environment for children to live, learn, and grow. However, approximately one-third of the 4 billion urban residents today are children, and by 2050, 70% of children globally are projected to live in urban areas, many in slums.

Urban areas can potentially provide better access to basic services like schools and hospitals. However, overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, unsafe housing, and limited transportation infrastructure remain significant obstacles, especially for poor urban children. These issues exacerbate the impact of climate change, making child-friendly urban planning imperative.

Globally, a billion children currently face high-risk climate hazards. Without immediate governmental action, the future will only worsen by 2050. Governments must act decisively to ensure a brighter, safer, and more inclusive future for the innocent faces and sparkling eyes that represent our nation's responsibility.

Reducing the digital divide and ensuring inclusive access to modern technologies are critical steps toward establishing an equitable society. Efforts must be made to make technology accessible and secure for all children, providing them with equal opportunities to thrive.

Children are undeniably the architects of a nation's future. Thus, every welfare-oriented government has a moral obligation to prioritize children's welfare and rights in its policies. Only then can we hope for a bright and promising future for them.



## Netflix announces 'The Roshans': An exclusive docu-series offering a deep look into the iconic film family



Netflix announced that they will bring to the world the captivating story of the illustrious Roshan family, a cornerstone of the Indian film industry.

In an exclusive docu-series, audiences will experience the rich tapestry of their multi-generational legacy through song and stories. For the first time, the Roshans offer an intimate journey through their lives, exploring three generations of passion, dedication, and outstanding contributions to Hindi cinema.

At the heart of this narrative stands the Maestro and Musical Extraordinaire, the late Roshan Lal Nagrath AKA Roshan Saab, the revered patriarch who laid the foundation of this artistic dynasty.

His indelible mark on the

industry resonates through his own work and blossoms in the achievements of his descendants — Rakesh Roshan, Rajesh Roshan and Hrithik Roshan — who have each uniquely shaped the landscape of Indian entertainment as directors, creators, musicians and actors.

Industry veteran, Shashi Ranjan has directed and co-produced the docu-series with Rakesh Roshan, featuring candid interviews with industry peers, friends, and colleagues who offer their perspectives on the Roshan legacy.

"We are incredibly excited to partner with Netflix and share previously untold stories that shaped our lives," said the Roshan family "The platform allows us

to reach viewers from across the globe, and it's an honor to showcase our journey to the audience."

Director Shashi Ranjan also shared his experience: "Directing this docu-series has been an incredibly rewarding journey. Being invited into the Roshan family's world and entrusted with their legacy is a privilege I am grateful for. It is an honor to bring their story of creativity, courage, and commitment to the world, and having Netflix house the legendary movie family's stories was undoubtedly the only way to go."

Monika Shergill, Vice-President Content, Netflix India added, "We are thrilled to present the story of a family that has touched the hearts of generations of cinema lovers with their timeless melodies and unforgettable tales—'The Roshans'. This heartfelt docu-series takes you on an emotional and nostalgic journey, uncovering the untold story of three generations of this iconic film family. We are deeply honored to share this beautiful and inspiring legacy with the world."

Docu series Roshans will premiere soon on Netflix.

## Malaika Arora reveals what she eats in a day: ABC Juice, khichdi to blueberries and more



Malaika Arora, the Bollywood fitness icon, is well-known for her disciplined lifestyle and dedication to health and wellness. Her diet reflects her focus on balance, detoxification, and wholesome eating, as she recently shared a glimpse of her daily food routine.

Malaika starts her day with a refreshing glass of ABC juice, made from apple, beetroot, and carrot, with a hint of ginger. This detoxifying drink is rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and fiber, making it the perfect way to kick-start her mornings. Known for its numerous health benefits, ABC juice supports digestion, boosts immunity, and promotes glowing skin. Malaika emphasizes the importance of beginning her day with something nourishing yet light.

Around mid-morning, Malaika enjoys a snack of avocado toast paired with eggs. This nutrient-dense combination provides a healthy balance of fiber, proteins, and healthy fats, helping her stay energized throughout the day. Avocado, often dubbed a superfood, is loaded with heart-healthy fats, while eggs offer essential amino acids that support muscle repair and overall health. For Malaika,

this meal is not just delicious but also essential for her fitness goals.

By lunchtime, Malaika opts for comfort food with a healthy twist—khichdi. A traditional Indian dish, khichdi is prepared with rice, lentils, and a variety of vegetables. Packed with carbohydrates, proteins, and essential nutrients, it is a wholesome and light meal that aligns perfectly with her wellness-focused lifestyle. She finds this dish comforting, especially during cooler weather, as it keeps her feeling satisfied and nourished.

In the evening, Malaika enjoys a fruit-based snack of blueberries and cherries. These antioxidant-rich fruits not only satiate her sweet cravings but also provide a natural boost of energy. Blueberries are renowned for their brain-boosting properties, while cherries aid in reducing inflammation and improving sleep quality.

Malaika's diet reflects her belief in the power of balanced nutrition. She combines detoxifying drinks, nutrient-rich snacks, and comforting meals to fuel her active lifestyle while maintaining her glowing health. Her choices serve as an inspiration for anyone seeking to adopt a clean,

## Chunky Pandey says the monkey was paid more in Aankhen, Govinda reveals: 'We didn't get paid'

Bollywood actors Govinda and Chunky Pandey who have worked together in many hit films, recently made an appearance together on The Great Indian Kapil Show.

On the show, during the chat with host Kapil Sharma, Chunky Pandey revealed that both he and Govinda were under paid for their roles in superhit Aankhen. And they also said that the monkey was paid more than them. Friends Chunky, Shakti Kapoor and Govinda shared many untold stories of their good old days. During the episode Shakti Kapoor began with saying: "We did this film together where these two were the heroes. Actually, no, there were three heroes. Govinda, Chunky, and a monkey. Ask them." Chunky then added: "Yes, he was paid more handsomely than us." Govinda said, "We didn't get paid." Shakti shared that the monkey was given a room at a star hotel in Mumbai. He added, "Whenever David would call for the monkey, Chunky would show up. Whenever he called for Chunky, the monkey would show up." During the course of the episode, Chunky told Kapil that he

would carry a bag of clothes with him on the sets of the show as he had to attend many functions. And during one such thing, his organiser called him one day and asked him to wear white clothes for a function. Chunky said he later realised that it was a funeral. Chunky said he was not only paid to attend it but was also offered extra money if he cried at the funeral. One morning, I got a call from an organiser. He asked, 'What are you doing today?' I told him, 'I am just leaving for a shooting.' He asked me where it is and I told him it's in Film City. He then said, 'Bhai, raaste mein ek chota sa event hai, 10 minute ke liye, aana, paise ache hai.' I said sure. He then asked me, 'If you're coming, wear white clothes and come.' I didn't think much, wore white clothes and landed at the venue," Chunky said. Chunky told Kapil that he thought that the organiser had died but soon was shocked to see the person standing next to him. The organiser then said 'you payment is with me but the relatives are saying it you cry more then they can pay you more.' Everyone was left in splits of laughter.



# As Sachin Pilagonkar clocks over six decades of acting, he credits the tolerance level of audiences for his survival

Bade achhe lagte hain... perhaps there is only one Sachin, the famous cricketer that India loves more than this gifted actor. Cherubic child actor of 65 films, disarmingly charming hero of lilting love stories like Geet Gaata Chal, Balika Badhu as Sachin Pilagonkar has clocked over six decades in the film industry, he lets us into his journey. On how he has survived in the competitive industry for so long, he smiles, "The credit goes to the tolerance of audiences."

In a free-wheeling interview his sense of humour and affable manners strike us as much as his performances onscreen. Back in time directors may have felt 'he can only make audiences cry,' today his funny bone manifests not only in his directorial signatures but also crackling one-liners.

Celebrating the success of his latest Marathi directorial Navra Maza Navsacha 2, sequel to his earlier superhit film of 2004, the actor-director producer shares sequels are no less no more challenging. But he adds, "Viewers are often ready to jump to conclusions and declare 'oh the first one was better.'"

While Marathi cinema is hailed all over the country and in this time and age when big ticket movies are flopping left, right and centre, his movie doing a theatrical run of over 50 days is no mean feat. But Sachin won't gloat or preach. Certainly, he has no piece of advice for Punjabi filmmakers, who he thinks are doing a very good job. You bet this Marathi has seen some Punjabi films. He listens to Bulle Shah and Baba Farid too and swears by the beauty of Punjabi 'an inimitable language with unique flavour and expressions.'

The idiom of love, many may feel, has changed in Indian cinema. But the lead of emotive films like Ankhiyon Ke Jharokhon Se, brimming with pure and virtuous love, has a different



take. He observes, "Love will always remain innocent. It is just the situation that changes. And, since filmmakers have to create something new each time, a new idea or story of looking at love crops up."

Indeed, he has also been a witness to days when audiences would give a standing ovation and make cinema halls come alive with their over-enthusiased responses. Today, much of the content is watched in the privacy of rooms, thanks to OTT. He believes, "Change is the only constant. There is no point in harping over woh zamaana aisa tha..." Thus he is willing to learn as much from his lovely daughter Shriya Pilgaonkar, an OTT star in her own right.

With so many talented actors in the family, his wife Supriya Pilgaonkar too is a noted actress, we wonder if their house doubles up as an acting school. He replies, "No, more than acting we discuss food." Ahem, looks like his love for Punjab translates into their foodie traits too.

With food figuring high on his agenda, how has he managed to

maintain himself? Well, for one it's his genes which he has inherited from his mother. Besides, he plays badminton regularly and eats everything, but in moderation.

In fact, it's his evergreen looks which ensured his transition from a National Award winning child actor to a grown-up actor was seamless. Imagine his last film as a child actor in Bairag was in the same year as Balika Badhu. To those who think the otherwise heartwarming film was socially incorrect and glorified child marriage he maintains, "It was made in 1976 but was a period film set in 1930s when child brides were a norm." Today he won't advocate the regressive custom. Nor is he a votary of violence and abusive language with which web shows are currently heavily loaded. Sure he throws in a caveat, 'unless script strongly

demands so.' Yes he has made an exception in City of Dreams where he turned a bad guy and in season three for the first time in his life abused in front of the camera. All praise for his director Nagesh Kukunoor for discovering this facet of his and that too sans any accoutrements, he admits to being 'a director's actor.'

The director in Sachin never interferes with other directors' vision for many reasons but also, "Since I am only being paid for acting."

Of course, it's not just his credo-line "the only way to be different is to be oneself" which makes him iconic but oodles of talent. Once an actor, always one, he has no intention of ever bidding adieu to arc-lights. Directing a Hindi entertainer is only one of his many dreams. "You can only quit if you have mastered it all..." six decades and still in learning mode. Now, you know the real secret behind the Sholay and Satta pe Satta actor's long, long innings.

## Massey says social media post misinterpreted, not quitting acting



'12th Fail' star Vikrant Massey on Tuesday said his social media post about going on a hiatus from movies is only a temporary break to focus on family and health and it should not be misinterpreted as his retirement.

Many publications ran stories around the actor's Instagram post stating Massey had hung his boots much to the shock of fans and the film industry.

Now Massey has issued a clarification, saying he owes everything to acting but needs some time away from the spotlight.

"My post has been misinterpreted. That I am quitting or retiring from acting. I want to take some time off to focus on my family and health. I would be back when the time feels right," the 37-year-old said in the statement.

"Acting is all I can do. And it has given me everything I have. My physical and mental health have taken a hit. I just want to take some time off, want to better my craft. I feel a sense of monotony at the moment," he added.

His announcement came weeks after the release of his latest movie 'The Sabarmati Report'. It has earned Rs 36.64 crore (gross) at the box office since its release on November 15.

His Instagram post read: "The last few years and beyond have been phenomenal. I thank each and every one of you for your indelible support. But as I move forward, I realise it's time to recalibrate and go back home."

"As a Husband, Father & a Son. And also as an Actor. So, coming 2025, we would meet each other for one last time. Until time deems right. Last 2 movies and many a years of memories. Thank you again. For

everything and everything in between. Forever indebted (sic)".

The same day Massey attended a special screening of the film in New Delhi with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other ministers at the Balyogi Auditorium in the Parliament Library Building.

At the screening, the actor told reporters that watching the film with the prime minister was the "highest point" in his career.

Massey was also asked to elaborate on his "break" announcement at the screening but he dodged the question

## Ranbir Kapoor will do complete justice to Lord Rama's role, says Gurmeet Choudhary

Actor Gurmeet Choudhary, who gained the spotlight by playing Lord Ram in Ramanand Sagar's "Ramayan", has expressed his confidence in Bollywood star Ranbir Kapoor's ability to excel in the same role in Nitesh Tiwary's "Ramayana" alongside Sai Pallavi.

Gurmeet said, "Ranbir is an exceptional actor who brings every role to life. Audiences loved me as Ram because they saw the essence of Ram in me. I am confident that Ranbir will also do complete justice to this role."

Gurmeet also reflected on playing the role in his early days.

"When I worked on Ramayan, I was just 23 years old. The show was produced by Ramanand Sagar, who also created the iconic "Ramayan" featuring Arun Govil sir. Before that, I was completely unknown to the audience and had never appeared on screen," Gurmeet said.



# KL Rahul: Changing batting positions no longer mental challenge, just want to play for team



Senior India batter KL Rahul on Wednesday said that he has overcome the "mental challenge" of being a floater in the line-up and is willing to bat at any position as long as he is able to play for the team. Rahul was superb in the first Test against Australia in Perth with scores of 26 and 77 while opening the innings in the absence of regular skipper Rohit Sharma, who was on a paternity break.

With Rohit walking back into

playing eleven for the day-night Test starting Friday, Rahul was asked the obvious question about his batting position. "Anything (opening or middle order)," the 32-year-old batter told reporters ahead of India's training session in Adelaide. "I just want to be in the playing XI, which means wherever. You go there and bat and play for the team," said the batter with 3000 plus runs in 54 Tests. Rahul started his Test career in Australia exactly a

decade back as a middle-order batter, who later opened. His batting slot in both the Test and ODI set-up was far from steady all these years and this affected him mentally.

"I have batted in many positions. Earlier it was a bit of a challenge, not technically but mentally about how to play those first 20-25 balls," he opened about his apprehensions. "How early can I attack? How much do I need to be cautious? Those were things that were tricky early on. But now that I have played in Tests and ODIs all over the place, it has given me an idea of how I want to manage my innings," said the stylish stroke-maker, who has two hundreds in South Africa, one in Australia and a couple of more in England among his eight Test tons. In his mind, he has simplified the process of Test batting. "Whether I am batting top of the order or in the middle order. If I can manage the first 30-40 balls at start, everything then seems like regular batting, that's what I try to focus on," he explained.

## Border-Gavaskar Trophy: Rohit puts in double shift during India's 4-hour net session

India skipper Rohit Sharma did a double shift in the nets with plenty of fans adding colour to the visitors' near four-hour net session at the Adelaide Oval here on Tuesday.

With strong indications of Rohit coming down the batting order to let the in-form pair of Yashasvi Jasiwal and KL Rahul continue opening the Indian innings, the captain did show a lot of resolve while facing the pink Kookaburra.

During the session, the Indian team had four nets at the practice arena. In one such net, Jasiwal and Rahul took turns to bat while Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli were in the second net.

It was the third net where Rohit was clubbed with the inimitable Rishabh Pant while the final net was occupied by Nitish Kumar Reddy and Washington Sundar.

If one goes by popular perception, this is India's batting line-up from No. 1 to 8 but then the Indian skipper came at least one hour earlier along with Pant and other support staff.

As is his wont, Rohit faced a lot of side-arm throwdowns from Nuwan Senewiratne along with usual stuff from the right-arm specialist Raghavendra and Dayanand Garani.

The skipper made a conscious effort to leave deliveries on length but whenever anything short was dug in, he would pull effortlessly.

For the Australia-based Indian fans, the open session was like kids being in a candy store considering their proximity to the nets.

The Bengal fast bowling duo of Akash Deep and Mukesh Kumar (reserve pacer) looked impressive during the session.

While Mukesh got his deliveries to move in the air creating some sort of a challenge for Virat Kohli, Akash did ask probing questions to Gill, who looked comfortable.

India's new pace sensation Harshit Rana also bowled briskly which must have impressed both Gautam Gambhir and bowling coach Morne Morkel.



# Chess World Championship: Slipping through fingers



"You can't win a fight if you don't throw a punch," former world chess champion Magnus Carlsen had remarked, slamming the contestants for the world chess title, Ding Liren and Gukesh D, for playing passively in the first six games.

Taking that to heart, both players showed their mettle in Game 7 today in Singapore, where Gukesh unleashed plenty of punches but faltered to win in the face of excellent defensive moves by the defending champion.

The result notwithstanding, it was an edge-of-the-seat thriller where Ding had just seven seconds to make a decisive move, and Gukesh had barely two seconds on the clock. The longest game of the championship so far, with 67 moves played over 5 hours and 20 minutes, received befitting applause from the audience of Grandmasters and sports journalists from all over the world. Gukesh came across as better prepared in the opening, but Ding managed to find breathing space on the board whenever he was pushed to the corner. "Fighting for another day. I am extremely lucky not to have been knocked down today," Ding said in the post-match conference, with his trademark smile that has won many hearts in the championship. Gukesh opened with the Grunfeld Defence instead of 1.e4, which would have allowed Ding to respond with his strong weapon, the French Defence. Gukesh delivered the first punch on move 7 when he moved his rook to the d1 square. This move was a novelty and was played for the first time at this level in the 4,666 occurrences of the same position at the world level in chess.

Ding admitted later, "When I saw this move, I had just returned from a toilet break. It was a

shocker."

The FIDE analysis of the game said, "The champion Ding Liren dodged a bullet this afternoon. After a huge blunder on move forty, it looked like the challenger was about to make his claim to become the new FIDE World Champion. The champion defended accurately but at a huge time cost and with only a few moves to go, he was under acute time pressure. With only seven seconds left on his clock, Ding Liren blundered on the last move before the time control. Instead of 40...Ke5, he should have played 40...Nc8-b6, with a blockade and very good chances to draw."

A disappointed Gukesh tried to remain positive, saying, "It is never pleasant to miss a winning position, but I am happy about the fact that I outplayed my opponent quite easily in the opening. I thought I should have been winning before and after the winning continuation. I missed some moves." Gukesh set the tone for the second half of the championship when he said he was taking positives from the missed win too. "He also missed some chances earlier in the match, so it is fair that we are here — the second half will, of course, be crucial," he said.

The players are tied at 3.5 points each at the halfway stage of seven games. The first player to score 4 points out of the remaining seven games will win the match.

Meanwhile, Gukesh was spotted playing puzzle rush on a chess website before the match. "I always play puzzles before a key match. It warms up my mind," he said. Ding, who was seen eating ice cream (a Chinese brand has named an ice cream after him) after the match, said he usually takes a hot shower before the game.



# Gilchrist asks Australian batters to stay longer at crease against Bumrah



The legendary Adam Gilchrist has advised the beleaguered Australian batters to stay longer at the crease to nullify the threat posed by the Jasprit Bumrah-led Indian bowling attack in the pink-ball second Test. The swashbuckling former keeper-batter also backed the out-of-sorts Marnus Labuschagne to regain form. After Bumrah scythed through the Australian batting line-up, taking eight wickets including a five-for in the first innings at Perth, Gilchrist advised the hosts to "weather the storm". Steve Smith and Labuschagne, the

team's two batting mainstays, flopped in the series opener and that did not help Australia's cause. "Marnus had the onus to do that (stay at crease) and tried at good effect to nullify 50-odd deliveries. So, if you face an average of 50 deliveries every Test innings, you're probably going to be on the right side of the ledger more than you're on the wrong side of it," Gilchrist said. "He just couldn't find a way to score and maybe that's what (the Australians) as a collective will look to try and do. It will bring with it risk, for sure, but it is a risk for reward."

## Fire still burns, says Woods as he targets 2025 comeback



Tiger Woods still has the passion to compete and is working to get his body back in shape for next year, he said on Tuesday at the Hero World Challenge in Albany, Bahamas, after another injury curtailed his 2024 season.

Woods has not played since July and he underwent surgery for nerve impingement on his lower back in September, an injury that he said took him by surprise and caused him tremendous pain. He was widely expected to take one of three exemption spots for the tournament he has hosted since 2000, an unofficial event that features 20 of the world's top players, but said late last month that he would not compete.

"This year was kind of — I had to toss it away and I wasn't as sharp as I needed to be and I didn't play as much as I needed to going into the major championships and I didn't play well at them," said Woods, who missed the cut at the PGA Championship and US Open.

He withdrew from February's Genesis Invitational after the first round due to illness and in April finished 60th at the Masters, where he claimed his 15th major title five years ago. "Hopefully next year will be better, I'll be physically stronger and better. I know the procedure helped and hopefully that I can then build upon that," he told reporters.

## Messi, Ronaldo only World XI nominees from clubs outside Europe as voted by players

Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo are still popular and respected by their fellow players even though they no longer play for European clubs.

The 37-year-old Messi and 39-year-old Ronaldo were the only players not with clubs in Europe to be voted on a 26-man shortlist for the world team of the year organised by global players' union FIFPRO on Monday.

The other 24 nominees played in the past year with clubs in England, Germany, Spain and France, though Kylian Mbappé was the only French connection after spending last season at Paris Saint-Germain.

No player from any Italian club was selected, nor from any club in South America or Africa.

Eight players from Real Madrid, including Mbappé, Vinícius Júnior and Jude Bellingham were on the shortlist, plus seven from Manchester City including Ballon d'Or winner Rodri, Kevin De Bruyne and Erling Haaland.

Lamine Yamal, the 17-year-old from Barcelona who was the breakout star of Spain's European

Championship title, also made it in polling by union members worldwide.

Messi, in Major League Soccer with Inter Miami, and Ronaldo, in Saudi Arabia with Al-Nassr, will find out on December 9 if they are in the World XI



lineup.

FIFPRO said the final team will include the highest-polling goalkeeper, plus each of the top three vote-getters among defenders, midfielders and forwards. The final place goes to the outfield player with the next highest votes total.

The Netherlands-based union said 28,000 players from 70 countries sent votes.

Goalkeepers: Ederson (Manchester City, Brazil), Emiliano Martínez (Aston Villa, Argentina), Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich, Germany).

Defenders: Dani Carvajal (Real Madrid, Spain), Rúben Dias (Manchester City, Portugal), Virgil van Dijk (Liverpool, Netherlands), Jeremie Frimpong (Bayer Leverkusen, Netherlands), Antonio Rudiger (Real Madrid, Germany), William Saliba (Arsenal, France), Kyle Walker (Manchester City, England).

Midfielders: Jude Bellingham (Real Madrid, England), Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City, Belgium), Phil Foden (Manchester City, England), Toni Kroos (Real Madrid, Germany), Luka Modric (Real Madrid, Croatia), Jamal Musiala (Bayern Munich, Germany), Rodri (Manchester City, Spain), Federico Valverde (Real Madrid, Uruguay).

Forwards: Erling Haaland (Manchester City, Norway), Harry Kane (Bayern Munich, England), Kylian Mbappé (Paris Saint-Germain/Real Madrid, France), Lionel Messi (Inter Miami, Argentina), Cole Palmer (Manchester City/Chelsea, England), Cristiano Ronaldo (Al-Nassr, Portugal), Vinícius Júnior (Real Madrid, Brazil), Lamine Yamal (Barcelona, Spain).



# PV Sindhu set to tie the knot on December 22



Two-time Olympic medallist shuttler PV Sindhu will tie the knot on December 22 in Udaipur.

The former world champion, who ended a long title drought with victory at the Syed Modi International in Lucknow on Sunday, will marry Hyderabad-based Venkata Datta Sai, who is an executive director at Posidex Technologies.

"The two families knew each other but it was only a month ago that everything was finalised. This was the only possible window as her schedule will be hectic from January," Sindhu's father, PV Ramana, told PTI.

"So that is the reason the two families decided to have the marriage ceremony on December 22. The

reception will be held in Hyderabad on December 24. She will start her training soon after as the next season is going to be important."

The wedding-related events will begin on December 20.

Sindhu is regarded as one of India's greatest athletes with five world championship medals, including a gold in 2019, besides her silver and bronze at the Olympic Games.

The champion badminton player won back-to-back Olympic medals at Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020, and achieved a career-high world ranking of No. 2 in 2017.

# Shah takes over as new ICC chairman



Indian cricket administrator Jay Shah on Sunday took charge as the chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC) with an immediate goal of ending the impasse surrounding the Champions Trophy and a broader vision of making cricket a commercially viable Olympics sport.

The 36-year-old Shah, who headlined the BCCI as its secretary for the last five years, is the fifth Indian and the youngest ever to head the global cricket body.

He was the unanimous choice of the ICC's Board of Directors and replaced New Zealand attorney Greg Barclay, who didn't wish to continue for a third consecutive term. Before Shah, businessman late Jagmohan Dalmiya, politician Sharad Pawar, lawyer Shashank Manohar and industrialist N Srinivasan have all headed the

world cricket body.

Shah, the son of India's Home Minister Amit Shah, will have his task cut out as the ICC looks to find an acceptable solution to implement the 'Hybrid Model' for the Champions Trophy originally scheduled in Pakistan.

As of now, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has decided to accept the 'Hybrid Model' under which India play their matches in Dubai. But the PCB also wants the same courtesy to be accorded to Pakistan in all four ICC tournaments till 2031 that will be co-hosted or singularly hosted by the Indian cricket board. As the head of the global body and with less than 100 days left for the tournament, Shah will have to co-ordinate with both the PCB and his former colleagues at the BCCI for an "acceptable solution" in order to organise a hassle-free event.

# Virat Kohli's U19 World Cup-winning teammate retires from cricket, joins SBI

Siddharth Kaul, a key member of India's triumphant 2008 Under-19 Cricket World Cup team, recently announced his retirement from Indian cricket on December 3. The 34-year-old fast bowler, who represented India in three ODIs and three T20Is during the 2018-19 season, shared the news on social media. A prominent figure in domestic cricket, Kaul has now transitioned to a new role with the State Bank of India (SBI), a development he also revealed on X (formerly Twitter).

"The time has now come to call time on my career in India and announce my retirement," wrote Kaul on X.

"I want to thank God for the path that has been made for me; the fans for the endless support; my parents and family



for the sacrifices and confidence you have given me, especially during the injuries and lows. My teammates over the years for the dressing room memories and friendships; the BCCI for fulfilling a young child's dream to represent India and win the 2008 Under-19 World Cup and receive my T20i and ODI caps in 2018," (sic) he said.

As per the post, he is currently employed at SBI branch at Sector 17, Chandigarh. Kaul was part of the celebrated U-19 squad led by Virat Kohli, which included notable names like Ravindra Jadeja, Manish Pandey, Pradeep Sangwan, and Saurabh Tiwary. Over his domestic career, Kaul played 88 First-Class matches for Punjab, taking 297 wickets. In 111 List A games, he claimed 199 wickets, and in 145 T20 matches, he secured another 182 dismissals. Kaul holds the distinction of being the leading wicket-taker in both the Vijay Hazare Trophy (155 wickets) and the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (120 wickets in 87 matches). In the Indian Premier League, he represented multiple teams, including Delhi Daredevils, Kolkata

Knight Riders, Sunrisers Hyderabad, and Royal Challengers Bangalore.

"(I want to thank) Kolkata Knight Riders, Delhi Daredevils, Sunrisers Hyderabad and Royal Challengers Bangalore IPL franchises for giving me memories of a lifetime; and last but not least, the @pcacricicketassociation for giving me an opportunity to make my First Class debut in 2007 and supporting me throughout my career," he added.

Kaul's final competitive match was a Ranji Trophy game for Punjab against Haryana in Rohtak earlier this month. While stepping away from Indian cricket, he remains open to playing in overseas leagues, marking a new chapter in his cricketing journey.