



AN ALLIANCE RETURNS
Mahayuti's winning sweep in Maharashtra
LOKNITI-CSDS SURVEY » » PAGE 7



BREAKING THE BANK
LSG buys Pant for a record ₹27 crore
SPORT » PAGE 17



BAKU TALKS
Climate deal a mere illusion, says India
NEWS » PAGE 5

M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI AWARD
Celebrating a legend, a singer-awardee
A court verdict and the questions around it
EDITORIAL » PAGE 6



TAKING CONTROL
Jaiswal, Kohli tons give Australia 534 to chase
SPORT » PAGE 16

INSIDE



Opposition calls for debate on Manipur, Adani

NEW DELHI
Pointing at a frosty Winter Session of Parliament, the Opposition at an all-party meeting held on Sunday laid down its demands for a detailed debate on the Manipur conflict and its impact on neighbouring States and a JPC probe into Gautam Adani's business interests. » PAGE 4



Bengal Governor 'unveils' his own statue, draws flak

KOLKATA
West Bengal Governor C. V. Ananda Bose found himself embroiled in a new controversy on Sunday after photographs of him unveiling his statue emerged on social media. The Governor has launched elaborate celebrations to mark two years in office. » PAGE 2

Viksit Bharat dialogue will be held in Jan.: PM

NEW DELHI
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue would be organised in New Delhi in January as part of efforts to connect youth to politics. The event will mark the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda celebrated as Youth Day. » PAGE 5

Iran plans to hold nuclear talks in Europe

TEHRAN
Iran said on Sunday that it would hold nuclear talks with the three European countries, France, Germany, and the U.K., that initiated a censure resolution adopted by the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency denouncing Iran for what it called a lack of cooperation. » PAGE 14

Ceasefire called after clashes kill 82 in Pakistan

PESHAWAR
Pakistani officials announced a seven-day truce on Sunday after days of bitter sectarian gunfights in Kurram district killed at least 82 people. The truce came after a delegation from the provincial government held talks with the Shia community and met the Sunni community. » PAGE 14

Mahayuti yet to take a call on its choice for Maharashtra CM

Decision likely only after BJP observer intervenes; no hurry, says NCP leader Praful Patel; Shinde, Ajit Pawar appointed NCP, Shiv Sena legislature party leaders; each party of the Mahayuti alliance has expressed its desire for its leader to be the CM

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

Even as the Election Commission presented its notification and the Gazette with the names of candidates elected in the Assembly election to the Governor of Maharashtra on Sunday, government formation in the State may take time, sources indicated to *The Hindu*. While speculation is rife about the formula and the probable Chief Minister, a decision will be made only after the intervention of the BJP-appointed Central observer, BJP sources said.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Shiv Sena elected Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar as their group leaders, respectively, at meetings of



Election Commission officials hand over the names of MLAs-elect to Governor C. P. Radhakrishnan in Mumbai on Sunday. ANI

their party legislators on Sunday. The BJP is yet to appoint its group leader.

"There is no need for us to form the government before November 26, is my understanding. In 2004, both the Congress and the NCP had taken three to four weeks to clear their differences and form a go-

vernment. There are no differences in the Mahayuti, but there is no hurry," senior NCP leader Praful Patel told presspersons here.

Each party of the Mahayuti expressed its desire for its leader to be the next Chief Minister. Several BJP leaders said they wanted to

see Devendra Fadnis as the next Chief Minister, as he was the sculptor of the Mahayuti's landslide victory.

At the same time, prominent leaders of the Shiv Sena expressed the desire for Mr. Shinde to be named the next Chief Minister. NCP leaders said they hoped the same for Mr. Ajit Pawar. But everyone unequivocally added that the decision will be the sole prerogative of the top three leaders.

Cabinet berths
Speculation continued about the formula for distribution of Cabinet berths. "It is likely that the BJP will get 21 or 22 berths, Mr. Shinde 12 and Mr. Ajit Pawar 10. But this will be finalised only after a meeting with the top leadership

in Delhi," a senior leader said. Meanwhile, it is anticipated that the three leaders might meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah in the coming days. The possibility of the top BJP leadership being in attendance at the swearing-in ceremony in Mumbai was not denied.

"But it doesn't look like it will be anytime soon. There is no need for any hurry anyway," a BJP leader said.

As per the internal communication of the legislature secretariat sources, the swearing-in and the Assembly session may take place on November 27 or 28.

MAHA VICTORY
» PAGE 6
MORE REPORTS ON
» PAGE 4

Soren to take oath as Jharkhand CM on November 28

Amit Bhelari
RANCHI



Hemant Soren

A day after securing a grand victory, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha leader Hemant Soren on Sunday submitted his resignation as Jharkhand Chief Minister to Governor Santosh Gangwar and staked claim to form a new government. He will take charge on November 28. He was elected INDIA bloc leader in the Assembly by the MLAs-elect.

Before visiting the Raj Bhavan, Mr. Soren held a meeting with the new MLAs of INDIA bloc where he was unanimously elected leader of the legislature party.

Out of the 81 Assembly seats in the State, the INDIA bloc bagged 56 seats in the election, whereas the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won 24 seats, and one seat has gone to the kitty of the Jharkhand Loktrantik Krantikari Morcha (JLKM) led by Jairam Tiger Mahto.

In Jharkhand, the INDIA bloc consists of the JMM, Congress, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, whereas the NDA comprises the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU) and Janata Dal (United).

Soon after the meeting, Mr. Soren, along with the leaders of the INDIA bloc, reached the Raj Bhavan and submitted a letter of support from the elected MLAs.

He was accompanied by Jharkhand Congress in-charge Ghulam Ahmad Mir and RJD leader Jay Prakash Narayan Yadav.

The Governor accepted his resignation and appointed him as nominated Chief Minister, asking him to continue discharging duties till a new government was formed.

"The Governor has invited us to form the government and the oath-taking ceremony of the new

government will be on November 28. All the representatives of our allies were present while submitting the letter of support of MLAs to the Governor. Following the resignation, I also staked the claim to form the government," Mr. Soren told the media.

He, however, did not name anyone when asked about his new Cabinet colleagues, saying it would be shared soon.

The numbers

However, informed sources said talks had been held on Cabinet Ministers and that the JMM would get six, the Congress four and one Minister each for the RJD and the CPI (ML). There can be a maximum of 12 Ministers in the Jharkhand Cabinet.

As per sources in the JMM, Chaibasa MLA Deepak Birua, Ghatsila MLA Ramdas Soren and Madhupur MLA Hafizul Hasan are likely to become Ministers, while Sarath MLA Uday Shankar Singh alias Chuna Singh from upper caste is likely to replace Mithilesh Thakur, who lost in Garhwa.

From the Congress, Lohardaga MLA Rameshwar Oraon and Mahagama MLA Deepika Pandey Singh are the frontrunners in the race for Cabinet Minister.

In the last Assembly election, the RJD's Satyanand Bhokta had won one seat and he was given Cabinet post. In this election, the RJD had won four seats.

VOTE AGAINST HATE
» PAGE 6

Dance with fire



Stage ablaze: An artist performs *Kandakarnam Thirra*, a traditional ritual art form, in Kozhikode district of Kerala on Sunday. PTI

Hezbollah fires barrage of rockets into Israel

Associated Press
BEIRUT

Hezbollah fired at least 185 rockets and other projectiles into Israel on Sunday, wounding seven persons in the militant group's heaviest barrage in several days. The move came in response to deadly Israeli strikes in Beirut while negotiators pressed on with ceasefire efforts to halt the all-out war.

Meanwhile, an Israeli strike on a Lebanese Army centre killed one soldier and injured 18 others, Lebanon's military said. Israel's military expressed regret and said the strike occurred in an area of combat against Hezbollah.

FULL REPORT ON
» PAGE 14

Three killed during clash triggered by survey of Sambhal mosque

The Hindu Bureau
LUCKNOW

Three people were killed and nearly 20 police personnel injured in a clash during a survey of the 16th century Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal of Uttar Pradesh on Sunday.

Hundreds of protesters had gathered since morning, and stones were pelted at the survey team.

A local court has ordered the survey on a petition by a priest saying the mosque was built by the Mughals over the ruins of a temple.

The police said they used "mild force" and tear gas shells, fired shots in the air to control the crowd, and deployed additional

forces in the area. They said miscreants from the crowd fired shots. Three people died from bullet wounds, and over 20 police personnel were injured, they added.

"So far, three people - Naeem, Bilal and Nimman - had died. Some 20 to 22 police personnel, including the CO, have been injured," Anjaneya Kumar Singh, Divisional Commissioner, Moradabad, said.

Despite the violence, the team carried out the survey, with the process being videotaped and photographed.

The head of the mosque had urged the crowd to disperse in the morning.

Some people, including two women, were arrest-

ed. Women were throwing stones from the roof, the police said.

Another police officer said 16 people had been detained, and a drone survey was conducted to trace other protesters. The police said "some anti-social elements" from the crowd threw stones at the police team.

"The situation is under control. Top district officials are keeping a close watch," a police officer from Sambhal said.

The Superintendent of Police and the Lok Sabha member for the area, Zia Ur Rehman, were unavailable for comment.

The mosque was first surveyed on November 19 after court orders.



Police and paramilitary personnel at the site of the protest near the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, on Sunday. ANI

Opposition parties slammed the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh for the violence.

'Shifting focus'
Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav alleged that the survey team was sent

by the government to shift focus from "malpractices" during the byelection.

"The Supreme Court should take immediate cognisance of the conspiracy to spread tension in the name of survey, and a case of disturbing peace and

harmony should be registered against those who took sloganeers with the aim of disturbing social harmony," Mr. Yadav said in Lucknow.

"Violence in Sambhal over the survey of a mosque was orchestrated by the BJP, the government and the administration to divert attention from electoral malpractice which took place in bypolls. The government failed in maintaining law and order which was its primary duty," he said.

The Congress said the violence erupted because of an "anti-constitutional attitude" of the State government. "The entire drama is being done to weaken the Places of Worship

Act, 1991. The suspicious silence of the Supreme Court on this also puts it in the dock.

The acceptance of the petition claiming the historical Jama Masjid as a temple was an illegal step," Shahnawaz Alam, Congress secretary, said.

Nagina MP Chandra Shekhar Azad demanded a judicial inquiry. "In India, under the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, the nature of any religious place as it was on 15 August 1947 cannot be changed... The incident of stone-throwing and subsequent police firing during an ongoing survey in Sambhal, resulting in the death of three people, is extremely sad," he said.

IN BRIEF



Two more infants die, toll in Jhansi hospital fire rises to 17

Two more infants rescued from a fire that ripped through the government-run Maharani Laxmi Bai Medical College Hospital in Uttar Pradesh's Jhansi have died, taking the toll to 17, a senior official said on Sunday. Thirty-nine newborns were rescued from the fire that broke out in the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit on the night of November 15. Congress sources said the party's State chief Ajay Rai and Barabanki MP Tanuj Punia would travel to Jhansi and visit the hospital and meet the victims' kin. PTI

Don't hold civic polls during martyrdom fortnight: SAD

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Sunday urged the Punjab government not to hold civic body polls during the fortnight of the martyrdom of the sons of the tenth Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh, from December 15 to 31. "The SAD urges the Punjab government and the State Election Commission not to fix local bodies elections during the annual martyrdom fortnight of four 'Sahibzadas' (four sons of Guru Gobind Singh) and Mata Gujriji (mother of Guru Gobind Singh)," SAD leader Daljit Singh Cheema said. PTI

Liquor permit cancelled for Diljit's concert in Pune

Press Trust of India
PUNE

The Maharashtra Excise Department on Sunday cancelled the permit for serving alcohol at actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh's concert at Kakade Farm in Pune's Kothrud later in the evening, an official said.

The permit was cancelled after several people, including Kothrud's newly elected BJP MLA Chandrakant Patil, objected to plans to serve liquor at the programme.

"Such shows are not part of the city's culture. This will create a major disturbance for residents of the area. Hence, I have urged the city police commissioner to cancel the programme," the BJP leader said in a statement.

Rajinikanth recalls being overwhelmed by advice over his bid to enter politics

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Looking back at his unsuccessful attempts at entering politics, actor Rajinikanth on Sunday recalled how he was overwhelmed upon being bombarded with advice.

The actor lauded former Chief Minister Janaki Ramachandran for not having listened to any advice, and for making a decision on her own to endorse Jayalalithaa's leadership of the AIADMK (following the divided AIADMK's defeat in the 1989 Assembly election).

"I had said in 2017 that I will enter politics. After that, I met so many people, and many came to advise me. If I had to listen to all of them, that was it, I would have lost my peace. I do not know if they actually knew what they were talking about," Rajini-



Actor Rajinikanth lauded Janaki Ramachandran for not having listened to any advice and taking her own decision. FILE PHOTO

kanth said in a video, which was played at the birth centenary celebrations of Janaki, organised by the AIADMK here.

Quoting spiritualist Ramakrishna Paramahansa that decisions should be made for one's good as well as others' welfare, Mr. Rajinikanth said the decision that Janaki had taken was in line with this ideal. He recalled various anecdotes to underline the lives of AIADMK founder M.G.

Bengal Governor is chided for 'unveiling' his own statue

Raj Bhavan media cell issues statement saying the bust was presented to Bose and he did not unveil it; political parties criticise him for the act; Trinamool, CPI(M) and Congress slam Governor

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose found himself embroiled in a new controversy after photographs of him unveiling his statue emerged on social media. The Governor has launched elaborate celebrations to mark two years in office.

As the photograph went viral, Raj Bhavan's media cell issued a statement saying that the statue was presented to the Governor and he did not unveil it.

"In some media reports it has come out that HG (Honourable Governor) has 'unveiled his own statue' at Raj Bhavan on 23.11.2024. The fact is as follows: many artists submit their artistic creations to HG. Many painters made HG's portraits and presented them to him. Similarly, a creative sculptor had created a sculpture of HG and presented it to HG. This has unfortunately been described as 'unveil-



Self-appreciation: West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose unveils a bust of himself at Raj Bhavan in Kolkata. PTI

ing his own statue," Raj Bhavan said on social media.

Calls it 'megalomania'

The development, however, sparked criticism in political circles with the ruling Trinamool Congress and Left parties criticising the Governor. Trinamool Congress spokesperson Jayprakash Majumdar described the act as "megalomania".

"Governor C.V. Anand

bose has inaugurated his own statue, which is something unheard of. He did it because he wanted some kind of publicity. But the point is, what is the next step? Will he garland his own statue? It's a sign of a megalomania," Mr. Majumdar said.

'Matter of shame' Communist Party of India (CPI(M)) central committee member Sujan Chakra-

borty said the act of the Governor was "disgraceful and unfortunate".

West Bengal Congress spokesperson Soumya Aich Roy said it was a "matter of shame".

This is not the first time that the Governor has found himself at the centre of a controversy. During the Lok Sabha election, Mr. Bose was accused by the Trinamool of running a "parallel electioneering system".

Earlier this year, a woman employee of Raj Bhavan had accused the Governor of "sexual harassment" and had lodged a complaint with the Kolkata police.

Since the Governor enjoys constitutional protection with respect to criminal charges, the matter could not be taken up by the police.

The Governor and the Chief Minister have also been at loggerheads with the former approaching the Calcutta High Court alleging defamation by the Chief Minister.

Haryana CM thanks deprived SCs for support in State polls

The Hindu Bureau
GURUGRAM

Expressing gratitude towards the Deprived Scheduled Castes (DSCs) for supporting the BJP in Haryana in the recently concluded Assembly election, Chief Minister Nayab Saini on Sunday said his government had fulfilled its poll promise of classification of reservation for Scheduled Castes (SC). The government has set aside 10% quota for SCs for direct recruitment in government services. He was speaking at the State-level function at Haryana's Jind to commemorate the birth anniversary of Maharishi Valmiki.

"Out of the 20% quota reserved for SCs in direct recruitment in government services, 10% has been reserved for candidates from DSCs. If suitable candidates from DSCs are not available, the remaining vacant posts will be filled from among candidates from Other Scheduled Castes. Similarly, if suitable candidates from other Scheduled Castes are not available, candidates



Nayab Singh Saini

from DSCs will be considered to fill the remaining vacant posts," said Mr. Saini.

The Haryana government had in 2020 enacted the Haryana Scheduled Castes (reservation in admission in educational institutions) Act to set aside 50% of the 20% seats reserved for the SCs in higher education institutions of the State for the DSCs.

The Chief Minister also said the government will establish 'Samrasta Virasat Kendras' in major cities to propagate the thoughts of great saints such as Maharishi Valmiki.

In the first Cabinet meeting after returning to power, the BJP government announced to give half of the 20% reservation for the SCs in government jobs to the DSCs.

For BJP ally, Assam bypoll win a boost for 2025 Bodoland Territorial Council polls

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

A record bypoll win for its candidate in the Sidli Assembly seat has boosted the confidence of the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) ahead of polls to Assam's Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in 2025.

The win has also made the UPPL, one of two regional allies of the ruling BJP, believe that its "peace-driven development model" has more takers to help it retain power in the BTC straddling 40 constituencies.

The Sidli contest was a major challenge for UPPL candidate Nirmal Kumar Brahma. He not only had to retain the seat vacated by Joyanta Basumatary but also win convincingly enough to give a message that the party was better



UPPL president Pramod Boro. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

than its rivals for the multi-ethnic Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) that the BTC governs.

Mr. Basumatary vacated Sidli after winning the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha seat for the UPPL this year. His win ended a two-term drought for any registered political party in Kokrajhar.

Mr. Brahma not only defeated Suddho Kumar Basumatary of the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) but his margin of victory -

37,016 votes - was one of the highest for the 12 Assembly constituencies across BTC ever. Nine of these seats are with NDA (UPPL eight and BJP one) while the BPF, which ruled the BTC for 17 years until the UPPL assumed power in 2020, has three.

'Unprecedented peace'

UPPL president Pramod Boro, who is also the chief executive member of the BTC, attributed the Sidli victory to the dividends the party reaped for ensuring "unprecedented" peace across the BTR.

Mr. Boro was one of the architects of the BTR Accord the Centre signed with now-disbanded extremist groups and the All Bodo Students' Union in January 2020. He said the pact ended decades of violence, first for the quest for State-

hood for the Bodo tribal people and then through the "reign of fear" under the BPF.

"There was a time when people were afraid of setting foot in the BTR. Today, a peaceful atmosphere prevails in the region. People supported us after they were convinced that only the UPPL-BJP coalition can ensure permanent peace," Mr. Boro told *The Hindu* after the party's win.

"The voters realised that supporting the UPPL and BJP will strengthen democracy and ensure development in all sectors riding on the peace model we have created," he said.

"The Sidli result has fuelled our hopes of doing very well in the 2025 BTC elections. I feel the by-election result will help us win most of the 40 seats in the council," he said.

Naga village in Manipur seeks action against 'encroacher' poppy planters

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

A Naga village in Manipur's Kuki-dominated Kangpokpi district has set a four-day deadline for the State government to take action against "armed encroachers" growing poppy for opium.

In a public statement on Saturday, the authority of Makhnan village said "some Kuki groups and individuals" have been giving the Liangmai Naga landowners a difficult time through "pervasive encroachment".

The village authority said residents accompanied a team of some 30 police personnel led by an Additional Superintendent of Police to destroy illegal poppy plantations on November 20.

"Poppy planters wielding guns and other wea-

pons confronted our village volunteers and the police team," the authority said, adding that aggressive poppy growers had damaged implements to destroy poppy plants, and forced the volunteers and police to retreat.

The operation to destroy the poppy plantation was in line with the government's "war on drugs", said to be one of the factors behind the prolonged ethnic conflict in Manipur that has left more than 260 people dead since May 2023.

The authority said the villagers had tried in vain to make the poppy planters leave the land peacefully but they had chosen the path of confrontation, which "shall not be tolerated".

"We give the government four days (from November 23)... to destroy the poppy plants from our

Makhnan Liangmai Naga land and arrest those Kuki poppy cartel groups and individuals who brandished their arms and weapons on the young volunteers and damaged the equipment," the village authority said.

It threatened to drive the encroachers out if the government failed to take any action against them.

Memos to global agencies Seven Imphal Valley-based organisations have submitted a memorandum to the United Nations Secretary General, international human rights bodies, and the Government of India, demanding immediate action over the "massacre" of women and children in the Jakuradhor area of Manipur's Jiribam district. The organisations described the massacre as a "deliberate and calculated act".

Former T.N. CM urges AIADMK cadre to take the path laid down by MGR and Jayalalithaa

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Pointing out that only 15 more months were left for the 2026 Tamil Nadu Assembly election, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Sunday called upon his cadre to tread the path laid down by former Chief Ministers M.G. Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa for the party to return to power.

"In these 15 months, we have a good opportunity to carry forward the legacy left behind by our late leaders Puratchi Thalavai [MGR] and Puratchi Thalavi [Jayalalithaa]..." Mr. Palaniswami told his party cadre.

Delivering an address at the birth centenary celebrations of late AIADMK leader and former Chief Minister Janaki Ramachandran, Mr. Palaniswami said no party had won or lost elections continuously. "Victory and loss come in turns..."



AIADMK leader Edappadi K. Palaniswami at the birth centenary celebrations of Janaki Ramachandran on Sunday. M. VEDHAN

On the remark that the AIADMK had been suffering consecutive electoral defeats, Mr. Palaniswami asked: "Has the DMK not suffered defeats consecutively...? Hasn't the party come to power now?..." The AIADMK leader recalled that in 1991, the DMK had won only two Assembly constituencies.

He further said that though the DMK and the AIADMK were "family-parties", there was a difference between them.

and the AIADMK."

Comparing the achievements of the erstwhile AIADMK governments with those of the DMK, Mr. Palaniswami recalled that his party was in power for more years than the DMK.

Welfare initiatives

The welfare initiatives implemented by the AIADMK government have helped Tamil Nadu maintain the *numero uno* position in the country.

Lauding the gesture of Janaki Ramachandran for donating her private property, which continues to remain the AIADMK's head office, Mr. Palaniswami said the premises was like a "temple". Without elaborating, he recalled attempts by some people to vandalise it, and said, "God will look after them..."

Recalling the split in the AIADMK after the death of MGR, Mr. Palaniswami underlined how late leaders Janaki Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa came together

to strengthen the party. After getting the 'Two Leaves' symbol back, the AIADMK won the elections that followed.

After having taken up the party leadership, Jayalalithaa too had faced several challenges, Mr. Palaniswami said, adding that to this day, the AIADMK had been facing challenges. "But, whenever it has faced challenges, it has emerged victorious."

Earlier in the day, he unveiled Janaki's portrait and paid floral tributes. He also inaugurated a photo exhibition, and released a souvenir to mark the birth centenary of Janaki.

To enthuse the cadre, an artificial intelligence-resurrected video of MGR, addressing them was played. MGR was seen saying he always remained in the hearts of his followers.

He also addressed Mr. Palaniswami as *anbu thambi* (beloved younger brother), much to the joy of the party cadre.

Post bypoll results, Kerala's parties begin internal stocktaking

G. Anand
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Kerala have commenced their post-bypoll internal reckonings.

As the election results tumbled out on Saturday, the BJP arguably appeared less of a force than predicted, given the significant erosion of its formidable support base in the Palakkad Assembly bypoll. The BJP could perhaps eke out some dismal consolation in having avoided the third place.

The party sensed a fighting chance in Palakkad, where it controlled the local municipality and had in past elections pushed the Left Democratic Front (LDF) to the second-runner-up position. However, the LDF improved its vote share notably and narrowed the margin between the second and third positions, to the BJP's chagrin.

Surendran criticised

When the BJP top brass convenes on Tuesday for a close-door stocktaking, its State leadership might have only a few wispy straws to grasp to decode the causes for the significant loss of traditional votes, arguably to the Congress primarily, in its urban strongholds in the Palakkad municipality.

BJP State president K. Surendran might find it punishing to blint the daggers of his party critics.



Pinarayi Vijayan

Notably, a section of the rank and file had tacitly expressed dissatisfaction with the State leadership's alleged failure to present a united face during candidate selection and stymie the arguably damaging defection of party's high-profile spokesperson Sandeep Varier to the Congress in the waning days of the bypoll campaign.

Chelakkara result

In contrast, the CPI(M)'s strong showing in the Chelakkara Assembly bypoll has brought a glimmer of cheer to the ruling LDF. For one, the party's "robust defence" of its Chelakkara stronghold and "improved" showing in Palakkad appeared to belie the Congress-BJP assumption that the LDF was on an irreversible course for defeat in the 2026 local body and 2027 State Assembly election.

In some measure, the CPI(M)'s win in Chelakkara has arguably cast doubt on the Congress and the BJP's assertion that a "palpable anti-incumbency anger" against the Pinarayi Vijayan government would drastically lower the LDF's winning odds in future elections.

Channapatna win due to support from JD(S), BJP leaders, says Shivakumar

BJP's C.N. Ashwath Narayan said he knew about Congress candidate's victory beforehand, he knew people's pulse, says Deputy CM; he adds that Karnataka government will fulfil all promises

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Attributing his party's victory in the Channapatna byelection to "direct and indirect" support from JD(S) and BJP leaders and workers, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar on Sunday said people from across parties helped the Congress in this election.

"If the BJP and JD(S) leaders had not supported us directly or indirectly, we would not have got so many votes. I congratulate them," Mr. Shivakumar, who is also the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president, told reporters in Kanakapura.

"Many people from across parties have helped us in this election (Channapatna). The Congress had polled only 16,000 votes in the previous Assembly election. The number increased in the Lok Sabha election and it has further gone up now," he said.

"BJP leader C.N. Ashwath Narayan said on Saturday that he knew about our party candidate C.P. Yogeshwar's victory beforehand. He knew the pulse of the people," Mr. Shivakumar said.

Referring to JD(S) leader G.T. Deve Gowda's remark that he would join the Congress if people desired so,



Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar addressing the media in Bengaluru on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

he said, "It is not just his (Mr. Gowda's) opinion. A lot of people want him to do it. Many in the BJP have the same thoughts. Could we have won this election if BJP leaders had not supported us?"

Asked about Union Minister and JD(S) leader H.D. Kumaraswamy's statement that money power defeated his son Nikhil Kumaraswamy in Channapatna, he said, "Then what do you call D.K. Suresh's defeat in the Lok Sabha election? Mr. Yogeshwar was still in the BJP then. Mr. Kumaraswamy got his brother-in-law elected. How do you explain this?"

He assured the people of Channapatna that all promises made before the byelection would be fulfilled. "The Congress government will fulfil the aspirations of the people of Channapatna. We listened to the problems of the peo-

ple of Channapatna after the seat was vacated. The people have blessed us now and we will repay that debt through development works," he said.

"District in-charge Minister Ramalinga Reddy has undergone a leg surgery. Before we go for the Winter Session of the Legislature, we will hold a meeting to initiate all our promises," he said.

'Credit goes to all'

Asked about who gets the credit for the victory, he said, "This is not a victory that belongs to one or two individuals. This is a result of concerted efforts by all."

Replying to a query on whether Ramanagara district has become "JD(S)-free" now, he said, "It is not important for us to make Ramanagara JD(S)-mukt. Their tally will go down from 19 to 18 in the Assembly now."

DMK, AIADMK can't win without allies' support, says CPI(M)

The Hindu Bureau
MADURAI

The DMK or the AIADMK cannot win elections without the support of allies. Yet, they have taken a position not to share power, CPI(M) State secretary K. Balakrishnan said on Sunday.

Addressing presspersons on the occasion of the party's 24th Madurai district conference on Sunday, Mr. Balakrishnan said, "Though I am sure that bigger parties cannot win elections without allying with smaller parties, I cannot point out the exact reason for their hesitancy in sharing power."

On whether the CPI(M) agreed with the VCK's opinion, favouring power-sharing, he said that the Marxists had a different understanding on the subject as they did not consider the posts of an MLA or MP as recognition. Instead, the party was keen on aligning with those sharing similar ideologies, he said.

Hitting out at the BJP, Mr. Balakrishnan said that while the party vehemently opposed "freebies" in Tamil Nadu and schemes such as the ₹1,000 monthly aid to women, it won in Maharashtra on the promise of providing ₹1,500 a month for women.

He further said that with the Parliamentary session approaching, "secular parties" had decided to oppose the BJP's 'One nation, One election' proposal. "It is worrying to encounter a situation where we are set to celebrate the 75th Consti-



CPI(M) leader K. Balakrishnan at the party's conference in Madurai on Sunday.

stitution Day, but the actions of the BJP are directly inflicting danger on the Constitution itself..." he added.

As for Tamil Nadu, the DMK government, which had completed three years, should introspect on its governance as most of the promises made to people were yet to be fulfilled, he said, adding: "Though we appreciate the welfare measures, those alone are not enough to resolve people's issues..."

Workers' union

As the Samsung workers' union was still not registered by the State government, there arises a question whether it acceded to the request of the corporate company, he further said.

On the sidelines of the event, Madurai MP Su. Venkatesan said he had written to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to change the date of the Chartered Accountants Foundation exam, as it was coinciding with the Pongal festival.

Munambam dispute: judicial panel to invite land owners, other stakeholders for meeting

K.S. Sudhi
KOCHI

The C.N. Ramachandran Nair Judicial Commission, which is looking into the Munambam land issue in Kerala, will invite the representatives of land owners in Munambam and other stakeholders for discussions shortly.

It will submit its recommendations to protect the interest of the settlers. The mandate of the commission is to submit recommendations to protect the homesteads and holdings of long-time settlers in Munambam.

The State government had made clear its intention to protect the interests of the legitimate occupants of Munambam while ap-



IUML leaders P.K. Kunhalikutty and Sadikali Shihab Thangal with Bishop Varghese Chakkalakkal to discuss the Waqf issue recently. FILE

pointing the commission, Mr. Nair told *The Hindu*.

Representations

All the stakeholders would be heard after issuing them notices. They could represent themselves personally or through lawyers. Though the stakeholders

would be evicted. The rights of all long-time settlers would be protected, and there would not be any displacement of those who had been living there for a long time. The commission would have to verify the veracity of the claims of various stakeholders and scrutinise the documents to understand the nature of the ownership of the holdings and to submit its recommendations, he said. The State government appointed the commission after a high-level meeting convened by the Chief Minister on November 22.

Residents of two wards of Munambam have launched an indefinite stir demanding that they shall not be evicted from the holding, which they had

could approach the commission individually, group representations would be preferred as they would save time and help in completing the job on time, said Mr. Nair, a former judge of the Kerala High Court.

No legitimate settlers

reportedly purchased from Farook College, the Muttavally of a reported Waqf deed executed by Siddique Sait on November 1, 1950.

The closing date for the tenders is December 27. The pre-bid conference will be held at 11 a.m. on December 2, and bidding will start on December 13. The GM's office complex

reportedly purchased from Farook College, the Muttavally of a reported Waqf deed executed by Siddique Sait on November 1, 1950.

Advice on legal matters

The modus operandi of the commission would be decided after the government released its Terms of Reference. The commission could not interfere with the legal proceedings that were pending before the Waqf Tribunal and the Kerala High Court. It would also have to abide by the decisions of the judicial bodies. However, the commission would advise the government on the legal stand to be taken in various courts, said Mr. Nair.

The commission will visit Munambam later.

Tender floated for bids to build South Coast Railway office in Visakhapatnam

B. Madhu Gopal
VISAKHAPATNAM

The long-pending proposal for establishment of the South Coast Railway (SCoR) Zone, with headquarters in Visakhapatnam, is likely to materialise soon. The East Coast Railway (ECOR) headquarters in Bhubaneswar has invited e-tenders for construction of the General Manager's office complex and other associated works in Visakhapatnam.

The closing date for the tenders is December 27. The pre-bid conference will be held at 11 a.m. on December 2, and bidding will start on December 13. The GM's office complex

The announcement of the South Coast Railway (SCoR) zone was made by Piyush Goyal in 2019

will have 12 floors, including two basement floors, ground floor and nine floors, which will be constructed at an estimated cost of ₹149.16 crore.

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw posted the tender notice on X on Sunday. On November 19, the Railway Board said that the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the South Coast Railway 'is under review' in response to a query from K. Eswar, under the

RTI Act. It was mentioned in the RTI reply that 52.2 acres of land at Mudasarlova in the city was handed over to the Railways by the State government.

The announcement of the South Coast Railway (SCoR) zone, with Visakhapatnam as the headquarters, was made by then Railway Minister Piyush Goyal in 2019.

The feeling of alienation among the people of north Andhra, in combined Andhra Pradesh, began when South Central Railway (SCR) zone was formed in 1966 to meet the aspirations of the people, but Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam were not included in it.

Mulugu residents protest killing of two tribals in Telangana

The Hindu Bureau
MULUGU

Tribal people from different parts of Mulugu district of Telangana took out a rally in Eturnagaram, the revenue division headquarters, on Saturday, in protest against the killing of two Adivasis in the State.

Peruru Gram Panchayat secretary Uika Ramesh and a tribal youth Uika Arjun were allegedly killed by Maoists in the Wazedu mandal on Thursday.

The protesters, comprising Adivasis from several remote tribal hamlets in the State, marched through the main streets of

Eturnagaram village, displaying banners denouncing the brutal killing of the two Adivasis allegedly by ultras after branding them as "State police informers".

Condemn attacks

The rally started at the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) office and wound its way through the Y-junction before reaching the bus stand.

The demonstrators raised slogans unequivocally condemning the double murder and sought State government support for the bereaved families of the deceased duo.

Telangana Deputy CM stresses need to maintain data quality in household survey

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka on Sunday underscored the importance of maintaining quality in the data entry phase of the ongoing "comprehensive household survey", stating that any errors at this stage could undermine the extensive efforts undertaken so far.

He made these remarks while chairing a video conference with the Principal Secretaries of Finance and Education, the Commissioner of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) and all District Collectors from



Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka

Ranchi in Jharkhand. The Deputy Chief Minister highlighted that while the survey has reached the final stages in most districts, challenges persist in urban areas such as GHMC, Ranga Reddy and

Medchal districts, where survey work is still ongoing.

'Address various issues'

He directed officials to address issues like locked houses and unavailability of residents by contacting them through phone to ensure their participation.

"In rural areas, challenges such as migration need to be carefully managed to ensure accurate data collection," he said, adding that enumerating officers who gathered household data must assist Data Entry Operators (DEOs) to avoid discrepancies.

He emphasised the government's commitment to high-quality data, noting

that mistakes at the data entry stage could jeopardize the entire effort.

During the meeting, the Deputy Chief Minister also discussed the recent food poisoning incidents reported in some residential school hostels. He announced plans for a separate meeting to devise an action plan to improve food quality and hygiene standards.

"The government, under the leadership of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, is deeply committed to ensuring the well-being of students in residential schools. This is reflected in the recent increase in diet and cosmetic charges," he added.

Airline leaves flyer's wheelchair behind at Ahmedabad airport

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

A 35-year-old passenger who took a connecting flight from Bengaluru to Delhi, via Ahmedabad, on Sunday faced inconvenience upon her arrival at the Delhi airport as her wheelchair was left behind in Ahmedabad.

Kadam Khatun took an IndiGo flight, which departed from Bengaluru at 1.08 a.m. and arrived in Ahmedabad at 3.12 a.m. From Ahmedabad, she boarded her connecting flight and departed for Delhi. Upon arrival at the Delhi airport at 6.05 a.m., it

came to her notice that her wheelchair was left behind.

Khatun said she faced some difficulty due to the non-availability of the wheelchair. She got her wheelchair back at 2.30 p.m.

In a statement, the airline said, "A passenger's wheelchair was left behind at the transit station, Ahmedabad. The wheelchair was promptly connected on the next flight to Delhi, while our team at Delhi airport provided all the support and assistance with a spare wheelchair, prioritising the passenger's comfort and well-being."

Opposition seeks debate on Manipur, Adani in Winter Session of Parliament

Opposition leaders lay down the demands at an all-party meeting; Trinamool Congress and both factions of Shiv Sena and NCP were absent at the meeting; Minister Kiren Rijiju says the government is prepared for discussion on any subject, and urges Opposition to maintain peace in the House

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Pointing at a frosty Winter Session of Parliament, the Opposition at the all-party meeting held on Sunday laid down its demands for a detailed debate on the Manipur conflict and its spillover impact on neighbouring States in North-east India and a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into industrialist Gautam Adani's business interest in the wake of a recent indictment by a U.S. court.

While the Opposition is preparing to attack the government, there are indications of cracks within its ranks. Congress president and Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge has invited the floor leaders of the INDIA bloc parties for a meeting at 10 a.m. on Monday to take a call on whether the group should attend the November 26 joint parliamentary session to commemorate the 75th anni-



Fired up: Kiren Rijiju, Arjun Ram Meghwal, Jairam Ramesh and others leave after an all-party meeting in New Delhi on Sunday ahead of the Winter Session of Parliament. PTI

versary of the adoption of the Constitution. As per sources, several Opposition members have expressed reservation on following the Congress's lead on the issue, especially after the party's Maharashtra debacle. The roll call on Monday's meeting will indicate the strength of the INDIA bloc.

Both factions of the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party and also the Trinamool Congress were absent at the all-party meeting. Briefing reporters, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said 42 leaders from 15 parties attended the meeting. "The government is prepared for discussion on

any subject. Our only request is that the House should peacefully run," Mr. Rijiju said.

Seeks probe on Adani

The Congress, which is the largest Opposition party in Parliament, began the discussion. The party's Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi, pressed the

government to institute a JPC probe against Mr. Adani considering the recent indictment and earlier revelations of the Hindenburg Research group.

He also urged the government to immediately register a case with the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on allegations of stock market manipulation that could impact several retail investors. On Manipur, Mr. Gogoi asked the government to come up with a statement detailing the steps they are taking to resolve the conflict and also to contain its impact.

"Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Health Minister and BJP president J.P. Nadda heard us out very patiently at the meeting. But we all know that the decisions are not made by this G-2 but other G-2," Congress general secretary and Congress chief whip in the Rajya Sabha Jairam Ramesh said at the end of the meeting.

In a notable omission, the Congress, unlike the other Opposition parties,

did not speak about the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024. The Samajwadi Party, the DMK, and the Left parties raised the issue, and urged the government not to rush through the controversial legislation, till all members of the joint committee are on board.

The Samajwadi Party flagged recent "irregularities" in the recent Uttar Pradesh bypolls, where they have filed several complaints with the Election Commission. The party has demanded a detailed discussion on "need to ensure fully free and fair elections" where each Opposition party is allowed to speak about its recent experiences.

CPI MP P. Sandosh Kumar said while the Opposition had presented its case, usually such meetings end up being a customary exercise for the government to mouth a few platitudes. "Democracy runs on dialogue. We hope that the government allows space for this rather than indulging in a monologue," he said.

U.P. CM's slogan and Ladki Bahin scheme led to defeat: Pawar

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI



Sharad Pawar

Commenting on the defeat of the Maha Vikas Aghadi in the Maharashtra Assembly election, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) supremo Sharad Pawar said on Sunday that the Ladki Bahin Yojana and "Yogi Adityanath's slogan" were responsible for the votes his party had lost.

Describing the election result as unexpected, Mr. Pawar told presspersons in Satara that the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's "Baatenge toh katenge (divided we fall)" slogan polarised votes. The Mahayuti campaign that the Ladki Bahin scheme, which offers direct cash transfers to women, would be discontinued if it were not to be voted back to power.

Mr. Pawar's party could secure only 10 of the 87 seats it contested, its strike rate falling to 11.49% from the 80% clocked in the Lok Sabha election in May. This election was the first straight Assembly battle between Pawar senior's party and the NCP led by his nephew, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

"A possible reason for the increase in voting percentage could be an upsurge in female voters by 1% to 2%," Mr. Pawar said. "I respect the verdict of the people. With years of experience in public life, I will reflect, analyse, and return to the people with renewed zeal," he said.

He said the results from various Maratha-OBC constituencies would be analysed as well.

Mr. Pawar reiterated that Yugendra Pawar's candidacy against Mr. Ajit Pawar was not wrong. "Baramati results were expected. Besides, I have a direct connection to that constituency, and not fielding a candidate would have sent a different message."

Raut blames former CJI for MVA's defeat in election

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

A day after the landslide victory of the Mahayuti alliance in the Maharashtra election, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut blamed former Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud for the defeat of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance.

"Delay in ruling on the disqualification petition by Shiv Sena (UBT) caused our defeat. Had he [Mr. Chandrachud] given a timely verdict, the scenario would have been different," said Mr. Raut.

He was referring to the disqualification pleas against the MLAs who sided with Eknath Shinde in 2022 after the split in the Shiv Sena.

Mr. Raut slammed Mr. Chandrachud for removing the "fear of law" from rebellions and keeping "doors open for defections" by not deciding on the disqualification petitions.

'How can the Jarange factor fail when I did not endorse anybody'

Press Trust of India
JALNA

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange Patil on Sunday refuted talk of his stir not being a factor in the Maharashtra Assembly polls, which were swept by the Mahayuti comprising the BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP.

The Mahayuti won 40 out of 46 seats in the Marathwada region, including all five in Jalna, the epicentre of Jarange's stir for quota for the Maratha community in jobs and education. Poll observers attributed the success to schemes like 'Ladki Bahin' scheme and a robust campaign.

The ruling alliance's poor show in the Lok Sabha polls earlier this year was largely credited to Jarange's opposition, especially his strident remarks against Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

"How can one say the Jarange factor failed in the Assembly Polls when I did

not contest nor did I endorse anybody? I liberated the Maratha community from the clutches of these political parties. The community was free to vote as per its choice. My focus is on empowering the Marathas," he said.

Expressing satisfaction at the results, he pointed out that 204 Marathas were elected to the 288-member Maharashtra Assembly. Jarange, ahead of the polls, had routinely spoken about fielding candidates or ensuring those who opposed the community's quota demands were defeated.

Senior journalist Raju Ghule said voter polarisation and the support of the OBC community, who rallied behind the Mahayuti after its poor show in the Lok Sabha elections, ensured victory of BJP's Banarao Lonikar from Paratur, Narayan Kuche from Badnapur, and Santosh Danve from Bhokardan in Jalna district.

Meticulous planning helped Ajit retain Baramati

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

"It will be Supriya Sule for the Centre and Ajit Pawar for the State. This is what Baramati has decided. That's why, Supriyatai won during Lok Sabha, and Ajit Pawar will win in the Assembly election," a resident of Baramati city had told *The Hindu* just days before the Maharashtra Assembly election.

On Saturday, after the counting got over, Mr. Ajit Pawar was declared victorious against his nephew, Yugendra Pawar, by a massive margin of 1,00,899 votes.

The margin, though lower than in the previous election, is significant due to the political situation in the State, where several candidates have won or lost by very narrow margins.

In many ways, it indicates a decisive mandate by the people of Baramati, the home bastion of the Pawars in the sugar-rich belt of western Maharashtra for decades now.

It is also important as the entire Pawar family, in-



Victory bash: NCP supporters celebrate the party's win in the Assembly election in Baramati on Saturday. PTI

cluding Mr. Ajit Pawar's brother Shrinivas Pawar and the politically inactive Pratibha Pawar (Nationalist Congress Party founder Sharad Pawar's wife), had hit the ground to campaign against Mr. Ajit Pawar.

In fact, Mr. Sharad Pawar had fielded Mr. Ajit Pawar's nephew, Yugendra Pawar, against him.

So, the success has personal and political significance.

On Sunday, Mr. Sharad Pawar said the Baramati result had been anticipated. Mr. Yugendra Pawar told *The Hindu* that it had always been an uphill fight.

The strategists in Mr.

Ajit Pawar's team heaved a sigh of relief after the success of their plan against a veteran of Maharashtra politics, Mr. Sharad Pawar, in a constituency where unfavourable reports on Mr. Ajit Pawar were seen till the Lok Sabha election.

Behind the victory was a meticulous strategy put in place by a core team of loyalists, after microscopically studying the constituency, both at the community level and the village level.

Separate manifestos were put in place for each village and for each community group, highlighting the work done by Mr. Ajit

Pawar over his long tenure and what he promised to do once voted to power. This is his eighth straight term as Baramati MLA.

Another important strategy was the assessment of the reasons for the backlash during the Lok Sabha election, and working on the image-building aspect, particularly among a few communities, including the Scheduled Castes and the Muslims.

"Additionally, we made sure that the 20,000 outstation voters came to Baramati to vote that day. If it had been a close fight, these 20,000 votes would have played a decisive role. The booth committee workers were activated to take the work of Ajit Pawar till the last voter," Kiran Gujar, a close aide and strategist for Mr. Ajit Pawar, said.

With respect to the discontent against the non-performing local leadership that was perceived to be close to Mr. Ajit Pawar, they were moved aside and Mr. Ajit Pawar himself communicated this to the electorate. "This helped people believe that *Dada* lives by his word," a Ma-

hayuti leader said.

It further helped Mr. Ajit Pawar that Mr. Sharad Pawar did not express a negative opinion about him in the last rally held in Baramati on November 18, a party leader said.

"There are 117 villages. There are 1,000 votes in each village. We targeted them. Moreover, 70% of the Muslim community voted for *Dada*. We showcased how *Dada* had done work worth ₹65 crore for them. In the last election, only 10% [Muslims] had voted for us. So this was a clear gain," a Mahayuti leader said.

The younger generation chose Mr. Ajit Pawar over Mr. Yugendra Pawar, Mr. Gujar said.

When contacted, Mr. Yugendra Pawar said he was assessing the reasons for his defeat. "He has been in power for 30-35 years. So we knew this was difficult. Does it mean that you just give up? We used to think that there is a wave for *tutari*, that the MVA will come to power. I am young and new. I can again start from scratch and rebuild everything," he said.

Several Indians still missing in Russia, families petition govt., Russian Embassy

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Several Indian men who were fraudulently enlisted in the Russian Army and forcibly sent to the war zone on the Russia-Ukraine border are still said to be missing, months after Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised the issue with President Vladimir Putin, according to a communication from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) with the family members of two missing persons.

Mohammad Amin Sheikh, 65, a resident of Kupwara in Tangdhar in Jammu and Kashmir, said that his son Zahoor Sheikh, 27, had last spoken with the family on December 31, 2023. "He said that he was going for training and would not be available for the next three months



Mohammad Amin Sheikh (centre) whose son Zahoor has been missing in Russia for the past one year in Delhi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

on phone. But when we started getting news about the deaths of Indians in Russia in January, we got worried and called on his number. We could not reach him. We are yet to hear from him," Mr. Sheikh, a retired Inspector in the Public Health Department, J&K, said.

Embassy in Moscow several times and failing to get a positive response on the whereabouts of his son, Mr. Sheikh and his two other sons arrived in Delhi last week to seek answers from MEA and the Russian Embassy here.

"He travelled to Russia after he came across a YouTube video promising the

job of a security helper. Instead, he was deceived into joining the Russian Army," Aijaz Amin, 31, Zahoor's older brother, said.

Jagdeep Kumar, a resident of Jalandhar in Punjab, has also arrived in Delhi, seeking answers from the government regarding his brother Mandeep, 30, who has been missing since March.

"We last spoke on March 3. He initially went to Armenia and was supposed to go to Italy from there in search of work. Instead, he was tricked by an agent to go to Russia and was forced to join the Russian Army. He was sent to the war zone after a few days of training," Mr. Kumar said.

Mr. Kumar met MEA officials in Delhi, who told him that at least 25 Indians were said to be missing in Russia.

Some have become used to branding the Union government anti-Tamil: Nirmala

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday alleged that some people had become accustomed to spreading propaganda against the Union government, calling it "anti-Tamil".

Her remarks, posted on social media, came against the backdrop of objections raised by Madurai MP Su. Venkatesan and DMK functionary R. Rajiv Gandhi to a notification issued by The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI).

The notification pertained to conducting Business Laws and Quantitative Aptitude tests of the Chartered Accountants Foundation exam on January 14 and 16 respectively, coinciding with Pongal. Mr. Venkatesan blamed



The Minister's remarks came against the backdrop of objections raised to a notification issued by the ICAI. DINESH KRISHNAN

the Centre as the exam would be conducted during Pongal.

Insult to culture He called the schedule an insult to the Tamil culture, and urged Ms. Sitharaman and the ICAI to change it immediately. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, too, criticised the schedule.

DMK MP Kanimozhi said the ICAI's decision to hold the exams during Pongal was a deliberate attack on Tamil identity and heritage. "This gross insensitivity reflects the disregard for Tamil traditions, and regional autonomy. I demand an immediate postponement of the exam date..." he posted on social media.

If the Union government

truly respected Tamil sentiments, it must direct the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, under which ICAI operates, to reschedule the exam.

It should also stop imposing decisions that undermine cultural diversity, she added.

BJP functionary S.G. Suriah said that Pongal was celebrated as Makar Sankranti and Lohri in the north; Khichdi in Uttar Pradesh; and Uttarayani in Gujarat and Rajasthan. It was a national festival celebrated by the entire country, and not just Tamil Nadu, he added.

He further questioned "Is the BJP anti-all States according to your funny theory?..." The dates for the CA exams are decided by the ICAI, an independent statutory body not the Finance Ministry, he added.

IN BRIEF



Fresh plea in SC for probe into U.S. indictment of Adani

A fresh plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking a probe into the U.S. indictment of industrialist Gautam Adani for alleged bribery and fraud, saying the move “unveiled malpractices carried out by the conglomerate”. The plea has been filed by advocate Vishal Tiwari as an interlocutory application in the batch of pleas in the Adani-Hindenburg row over allegations of stock price manipulation by the Indian corporate giant. In his plea, Mr. Tiwari contended that the allegations against Mr. Adani are of a “serious nature” and should be investigated by Indian authorities.

Attorney-General bats for global environmental Bar

Attorney-General R. Venkataramani has proposed to establish a global environmental Bar to facilitate cross-border legal collaboration and knowledge exchange. He was speaking at a round-table conference organised by the All India Lawyers Forum along with the University College London on global environment laws in New Delhi recently. Reflecting on India's diversity, Mr. Venkataramani stressed the importance of framing policies that respected cultural and regional variations. He said legal education should emphasise social justice missions over monetary incentives in litigation.

Climate deal a mere illusion, says India

Amid opposition and protests, a deal was agreed upon to ‘aim to mobilise’ \$1.3 trillion a year by 2035, with developed countries agreeing to ‘lead efforts’ to pool in \$300 billion a year as a base figure; India rejects proposal, says it does not address the magnitude of the challenge the world faces

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

After running into overtime, the Conference of the Parties (COP29) at Baku in Azerbaijan, hosting 198 countries for nearly a fortnight, finally adopted a “road map”, or a weaker form of an agreement to say in traditional climate-talks parlance.

While setting the stage for kick-starting UN-approved carbon markets, the conference failed to deliver on the main goal: a New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance (NCQG). Amid opposition and protests, a deal was agreed upon early on Sunday to “aim to mobilise” \$1.3 trillion a year by 2035, with developed countries agreeing to “lead efforts” to pool in \$300 billion a year as a base figure.

The NCQG refers to money that will be given to developing countries by developed countries to help the former meet their goals to transition away from the continued use of fossil fuels and to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Developing countries were insisting on mobilising \$1.3 trillion annually. To this end, developed countries

have mobilised and transferred \$115 billion in 2021-22 – though not all countries agree – but as per the Paris Agreement, a new target higher than \$100 billion had to be agreed upon by 2025.

“This new finance goal is an insurance policy for humanity amid worsening climate impacts hitting every country,” said Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of UN Climate Change. “But like any insurance policy, it only works if premiums are paid in full and on time... It will keep the clean energy boom growing, helping all countries to share its huge benefits: more jobs, stronger growth, cheaper and cleaner energy for all.”

‘Optical illusion’

However, this conclusion did little to placate several countries who were expecting much more money. A member of the Indian delegation publicly voiced her objections at the closing plenary of the summit. This was acknowledged by the President of the COP, Mukhtar Babayev, only after he had ceremoniously slammed the gavel declaring the end of discussions on the finance aspects. The objection will,



Winding up: COP29 President Mukhtar Babayev applauds during the closing plenary session in Baku on Sunday. AP

however, make it to the written COP records.

“I regret to say that this document is nothing more than an optical illusion. This, in our opinion, will not address the enormity of the challenge we all face. Therefore, we oppose the adoption of this document,” Indian delegation representative Chandni Raina told the closing plenary. India said its request to speak before the adoption of the climate finance package was ignored.

“We had informed the Presidency and the Secretariat that we wanted to make a statement before any decision on the adoption. However, and this is for everyone to see, this has been stage-managed, and we are extremely dis-

appointed with this incident,” Ms. Raina said.

“We have seen what you have done. However, we would want to say that gawling and trying to ignore parties from speaking does not behove of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) system, and we would want you to hear us and also hear our objections to this adoption. We absolutely object to this,” she said.

Ms. Raina said that only trust and collaboration can drive meaningful action against climate change, which is one of humanity's greatest existential challenges.

“It's a fact that both (trust and collaboration) have not worked today and

we are deeply hurt by the actions of the presidency and the (UNFCCC) Secretariat,” she said.

India said the new climate finance package was “too little and too distant” and it did not accept it in its present form.

Nigeria backed India's stance and termed the finance deal a “joke,” Press Trust of India reported. COP29 also reached an agreement on carbon markets – which several previous COPs had not been able to achieve. These agreements will help countries deliver their climate plans more quickly and cheaply, and make faster progress in halving global emissions this decade, as required by science, a UN Presidency statement noted.

‘Redouble efforts’

“No country got everything they wanted, and we leave Baku with a mountain of work to do,” Mr. Stiell said. “The many other issues we need to progress may not be headlines but they are lifelines for billions of people. So this is no time for victory laps, we need to set our sights and redouble our efforts on the road to Belem.” The finance agreement at COP29

comes as stronger national climate plans (Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs) become due from all countries next year. These new climate plans must cover all greenhouse gases and all sectors, to keep the warming limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius within reach. COP29 saw two G20 countries, the UK and Brazil, signal clearly that they plan to ramp up climate action in their NDCs 3.0 because they are entirely in the interest of their economies and peoples.

“The goal of \$300 billion adopted yesterday by COP29 in the face of categorical objections of countries including India, Nigeria, Bolivia, Cuba and walk-outs...bodes ill for the future of the NCQG and the collective efforts to address climate change. The multi-lateral process has not emerged in good light in this event,” said R. Rashmi, former Environment Secretary and Distinguished Fellow, The Energy Resources Institute. “The declared goal is clearly a prisoner of the geopolitics of the present times and is paltry compared to the financing needs of mitigation and adaptation faced by the developing world.” (With PTI inputs)

Viksit Bharat dialogue will be held in Jan. to connect youth to politics: PM

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue would be organised in New Delhi on January 11 and 12 as part of efforts to connect youth from non-political backgrounds to politics. The event will mark the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda on January 12, celebrated as Youth Day.



Narendra Modi said that many special campaigns will be run to connect 1 lakh youth to politics. PTI

“Crores of youth from all over India will participate. Two thousand such youth selected from villages, blocks, districts, and States will gather at Bharat Mandapam (Delhi) for the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue,” said Mr. Modi during his *Mann Ki Baat* address. He said to connect one lakh youth to politics, many special campaigns would be run.

“Today is NCC Day... I myself have been an NCC

cadet, so I can say with full confidence that the experience gained from it is invaluable for me. NCC instils a spirit of discipline, leadership and service in the youth... Whenever there is a disaster, be it a flood, an earthquake or an accident, NCC cadets un-faillingly make themselves available there to help,” Mr. Modi said.

The Prime Minister said the number of girls in NCC,

just around 25% before 2014, now stood at almost 40% and the campaign to connect more youth residing along the border with the NCC was under way.

Praising youngsters working selflessly for society and engaged in finding solutions to various problems, he cited the example of Virendra from Lucknow who helps the elderly in getting digital life certificates. “Mahesh from Bho-

pal has taught many elderly people of his locality to make payments through mobile... Rajiv from Ahmedabad warns people about the risk of ‘Digital Arrest’ scam,” he said.

Recounting his visit to Guyana, Mr. Modi talked about a “Mini India” of those who were taken there around 180 years ago to work in the fields and for other tasks. “Today, people of Indian origin in Guyana are leading the country in every field. The President of Guyana, Dr. Irfaan Ali, is also of Indian origin and is proud of his Indian heritage,” he said, urging people to be on the lookout for, and share, stories of how Indian immigrants made their mark in different countries.

He said in order to conserve and promote Indian culture in Slovakia, the Upanishads have been translated into the Slovak language.

Autopsy reports reveal Manipur victims were shot multiple times

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The autopsy reports of three of the six members of a Meitei family who were allegedly abducted by armed militants during an encounter with security forces in Jiribam district of Manipur on November 11 reveal that they were shot multiple times before their bodies were dumped in a river.

One of the victims, a three-year-old boy, had a bullet wound on his chin and his right eye was “missing”. The body had several lacerations, indicating injuries by a blunt object, and was infested with maggots when brought for post-mortem examination, the autopsy report said.

The boy's 25-year-old mother had two bullet wounds on her back, while his 60-year-old grandmother had five bullet wounds.



Graves dug for members of a family who were abducted and killed after an encounter in Jiribam of Manipur on November 11. REUTERS

The highly decomposed bodies were found floating in a river in Lakhimpur district of neighbouring Assam on November 15, 17, and 18.

A photograph of the victims huddled together in a forested area circulated on social media on November 12, confirming the abductions. The photograph was first posted on Facebook. The police or the investigating agencies are yet to

reveal who the account belonged to. The probe was handed over to the National Investigation Agency on November 18. An NIA team visited Jiribam last week.

The autopsies were done at the Silchar Medical College in Assam. The victims, who were abducted by the militants during an encounter with the Central Reserve Police Force and the police in Jiribam district on November

11, were likely killed the same day. A resolution passed by the ruling MLAs in Manipur on November 18 called for “mass operations against the Kuki militants” responsible for the killing of the women and children in Jiribam within seven days. The militants are yet to be identified and arrested by the agencies.

A police official said around 35 armed militants, split in three groups, attacked the CRPF camp and the adjacent Borobekra police station as they came looking for “Meitei people”. Several Meitei families had taken shelter in the camp and the police station since June, when violence erupted in the State on May 3, 2023.

Ten armed militants were killed in “retaliatory fire” by the CRPF, the police said.

THE CROSSWORD+ 14339 (set by Dr. X)

To solve this puzzle online, get across to our crossword site. @ <https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn>

Across

- Small amount of money keeps individual tense in period of inactivity (8)
- Yearned to embrace associate getting upset (6)
- Influential acquaintances who live on the mountains? (7,2,4,6)
- Secured new contracts (7)
- Native New Zealander in trek around island (5)
- Bringing back cover charge pinches - customers essentially disappear (9)
- See 10
- Broadcast a bulletin about rebellious fellow virtually (2,3,3,4)
- Surprises criminal ring in capital (9)
- Analysed value of eye layer (5)
- Inattentive without lithium - that's undeniable (7)
- Fantastic gal, nice and virtuous (7)
- Conscript and oriental lady involved in immorality around Thailand (6)
- Be weakened by fighting in the war (4,4)
- Run down - fine morning to enter river (6)
- Attend to captain of Windies getting excellent century (4,2)
- Due to strain, model is alone, intoxicated around noon (9)
- Disorder of system with neurosis resulting in incomprehensibility (14)
- Sound in German car, ordinary (5)
- Hong Kong actor involved in revolting electronic fraud? Impossible! (2,6)
- Distribute and throw seeds in park (8)
- Opportunity to relax, swilling beer as nightcap (9,5)
- Son consumed lean meat patty and cheese (9)
- Show by lady in nightclub, extremely seductive (8)
- Four erotic films in festival (8)
- Condition of student overwhelmed by fever and bit of headache (6)
- Fine deception to pinch the French scent bottle (6)
- Musical instruments with round holes need bit of repair (5)

Down

- Run down - fine morning to enter river (6)
- Attend to captain of Windies getting excellent century (4,2)
- Due to strain, model is alone, intoxicated around noon (9)
- Disorder of system with neurosis resulting in incomprehensibility (14)
- Sound in German car, ordinary (5)
- Hong Kong actor involved in revolting electronic fraud? Impossible! (2,6)
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- Fine deception to pinch the French scent bottle (6)
- Musical instruments with round holes need bit of repair (5)

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

T	R	A	N	S	A	C	T	P	A	R	T	O	F
E	F	L	R	P	N	O	J						
M	A	R	T	I	N	I	E	X	T	R	O	S	
P	A	N	M	R	I	T	I						
L	Y	I	N	G	E	F	F	E	C	T	I	A	L
E	D	S	O										
T	H	E	F	E	R	N	I	T	I	R	E		
S	R	O	P	M	A	T	E	S	R				
C	L	E	F	T	P	A	L	A	T	E	S		
R	S												
E	X	T	R	I	N	I							
A	O	D	I	E	I	N	G						
M	O	R	E	L	L	O							
E	E	E	N	R	A	C	O	A	L				
R	A	D	I	S	H								

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Ravana's ego hits army hard

There are some people who attach importance to prestige and to public opinion. They want to be thought of as rich people, while in actual fact, they may be just middle class persons. In the past, it was customary to eat on plantain leaves. So, when such people with false pride threw away the plantain leaves on which they had eaten, they would coat them with castor oil. This was because they wanted others to believe that they were wealthy. Anyone who saw the leaves glistening with oil, would assume that the family had eaten food rich in ghee. Such false pride serves no purpose.

Ravana was a person with a giant-sized ego, said V.S. Karunakarachariar in a discourse. During the battle against Rama, Ravana's forces killed many monkeys. Even Rama and Lakshmana were hurt. Alarmed at the situation, Hanuman approached Jambavan. Jambavan instructed Hanuman to go to the Himalayas and fetch some herbs, which would heal wounds and would bring the dead back to life. Hanuman was unable to identify the herbs mentioned by Jambavan. So he brought an entire mountain so that Jambavan could take the herbs from them. By inhaling the herbs, Rama and Lakshmana were revived, and the monkeys were brought back to life.

If by inhaling the herbs monkeys could be revived, why didn't the dead asuras rise too? Ravana's ego had prevented such a revival. Ravana had ensured that every asura body that fell on the battlefield was cast into the sea. He did not want the monkeys to know how many asuras were dead, for that would have been a blow to his ego. So Ravana's ego prevented his own soldiers from recovering.



Maha victory

Welfare schemes and identity politics propelled the BJP to power

The alliance of the BJP, the NCP Ajit Pawar faction and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena faction – the Mahayuti – has scored a comprehensive victory in the Maharashtra Assembly election. The alliance got nearly 50% of the vote share; in the Konkan, North Maharashtra and western Maharashtra regions, its vote share crossed the halfway mark. While the Mahayuti increased its vote share across all regions, the Maha Vikas Aghadi – an alliance of the Congress, the Shiv Sena Uddhav Thackeray faction and Sharad Pawar's NCP – saw its support decline across the State. The BJP alone got 132 seats, which is nearly a majority in the 288-strong Assembly, and the tally of the alliance is nearly five times that of the MVA which was limited to 50 seats for all its partners combined. The Maharashtra outcome settles several questions and opens new ones for all the players concerned, and for democracy and pluralism. The Maharashtra victory, close on the heels of that in Haryana, has restored the BJP's dominance, which appeared shaken by the outcome of the 2024 general election. The party has no immediate challenger as it has managed to mobilise religious, regional, caste and class sentiments in its favour, decimating opponents and rendering its partners irrelevant. Whoever becomes the Chief Minister, the dynamics of the alliance has been decisively transformed in the BJP's favour.

The victory in Maharashtra will reinforce the authority of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah in the BJP, notwithstanding the party's loss in Jharkhand. The marginal gains made by the Congress in the general election were not indicative of any substantive turn in politics, and the party is at a loss yet again. The Congress's clamour for a caste census and its line about the Constitution being in danger were effectively countered by the BJP. The BJP's call for Hindu consolidation had more takers, and it could paint the MVA as a platform of dominant Marathas and for Muslim appeasement. Welfare schemes, particularly cash doles for women, also worked in the Mahayuti's favour. Uddhav Thackeray has been harshly punished by the electorate for splitting with the BJP and aligning with the Congress and NCP. Sharad Pawar's political base has been eroded and his party is staring at an uncertain future. Maharashtra's provincial politics has yielded to the BJP's overarching Hindutva platform, which also has a strand of Maratha language pride and a regional iconography, for instance, in the invocation of Shivaji and V.D. Savarkar. The BJP needs to show wisdom and statesmanship in this moment of triumph.

Vote against hate

Coherent coalition, tribal unity and welfare measures help the JMM

The victory in Jharkhand is an encouraging triumph not just for the ruling Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) but also the INDIA bloc parties led by the Congress, which are reeling after a massive loss in the bigger State of Maharashtra. Fashioned by the efforts of the JMM, which remains the premier party of choice for the State's tribal electorate, the victory was also made possible by the coalition partners, the Congress, the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the CPI(ML)-Liberation pitching in with good performances. The cumulative adding up of the bases of these respective parties helped the JMM-led alliance earn the confidence of voters beyond seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes, as the coalition defeated the Bharatiya Janata Party in seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and non-reserved ones as well. Clearly, the arrest and subsequent release on bail of Chief Minister Hemant Soren played a role in the consolidation of support for the ruling party as the electorate did not buy into the allegations of corruption and the BJP's narrative about the government. Mr. Soren belied expectations of the BJP building on its success in the 2024 general election where its alliance won nine of the 14 constituencies in the State. The BJP had also stitched a coalition with the All Jharkhand Students Union Party (AJSUP) – which eluded it in the 2019 Assembly election – and managed to rope in former Chief Minister Champai Soren through a defection from his parent JMM. These efforts to negate the JMM's sway over tribal voters came a cropper as Mr. Champai Soren's influence was limited to his constituency and the AJSUP won only one of the 10 seats it contested.

More importantly, the JMM and the INDIA bloc were successful in negating the shrill campaign led by the BJP on the manufactured issue of "infiltration of Bangladeshi immigrants" into the Santal Pargana region of northeast Jharkhand. This was a thinly veiled attempt at mobilising tribals using the agenda of Hindutva, which includes the pernicious "othering" of Muslims, and to drive a wedge between them and religious minorities. Santal Pargana decisively voted for the JMM and its allies – 52% of the electorate favoured the ruling coalition, the highest among all regions in the State. Mr. Soren and the JMM's ploy to negate this rhetoric as being divisive and manufactured and, instead, focusing on tribal unity, worked well. The Jharkhand victory also marks a rare triumph for a non-BJP alliance or a party in North India while being an incumbent in power. Yet, the JMM's challenges in governing one of India's poorest States in terms of per capita income, despite being a mineral rich one, will remain. The JMM government sought to focus on welfare to retain its support but it must now focus on job creation and utilising its mineral wealth efficiently.

Celebrating a legend, celebrating a singer-awardee

In March 2024, The Music Academy, Madras announced T.M. Krishna as the recipient of the prestigious Sangita Kalanidhi award, which is given annually to outstanding musicians. But over the past seven to eight months, there has been an ongoing wave of criticism and backlash directed at Mr. Krishna, posing a challenge to the freedom of expression.

Beyond his profession as a musician, Mr. Krishna actively voices his views on social issues such as politics, caste, language, and the role of music, in his speeches and writing. His views have sparked anger among dominant groups, who lack the openness and the tolerance to engage in meaningful dialogue on these topics. They seek to suppress his freedom of expression, employing various tactics to silence his anti-hegemonic perspectives and remove him from the public sphere.

The recipient of the Sangita Kalanidhi award also receives the M.S. Subbulakshmi Award instituted by *The Hindu*. Mr. Krishna had previously written an in-depth article on M.S. Subbulakshmi, "MS Understood", which has since drawn criticism, with some accusing him of defaming her, leading to questions about how he could be awarded the honour named after her. M.S. Subbulakshmi's grandson, Shrinivasan, took the matter to court, stating that the person who insulted his grandmother should not be given an award in her name. The Madras High Court has now delivered its judgement.

An insightful article

The article written by Mr. Krishna is a rare and insightful study of a musician. One approach in literary criticism is to explore the relationship between a writer's life and their work, and Mr. Krishna applies this brilliantly to music. There is no doubt about M.S. Subbulakshmi's remarkable personality, but the article delves into whether she was able to fully express it through her music. Her songs serve as the primary evidence. By continuously listening to her songs, the article seeks to uncover whether the artistic excellence in her music was a result of her creative freedom or a compulsion to conform, and seeks reasons in her life for this dynamic.

The article divides M.S. Subbulakshmi's life into three phases, describing how she sang during each period, the kinds of songs she chose, and the reasons behind these choices – all conveyed with a blend of logic and beauty. It also explores various opinions within the inner world of Carnatic music, presenting them as oral evidence.

As a singer himself, Mr. Krishna has been able to gather these perspectives, examine them, trace



Perumal Murugan

a writer

The recent Madras High Court verdict on the conferment of a prestigious honour has reinforced a dimension of M.S. Subbulakshmi's personality – of her wish as expressed in her will

the reasons behind their emergence, and offer his own insights.

The family of M.S. Subbulakshmi may take issue with the passages in the article that address her caste and her husband, but there is no transgression in them. Mr. Krishna presents his thoughts in a cultured language. In our society, while religion can be changed, caste remains unalterable. How can the Devadasi background, in which M.S. was born and raised, be concealed? It is a widely acknowledged fact in the public sphere that she was under the influence of her husband, who played a significant role in determining the composition of her concerts.

This article is a profound commentary on M.S. Subbulakshmi, a widely admired public figure. Listening to her songs with the understanding offered by this article allows for a deeper experience of her music. Beyond general interest, one can explore the variety of songs she performed. "Some people feel that this article insults her memory. In fact, I have celebrated her in the best possible way," says Mr. Krishna in the preface to the Tamil translation. Those who have read it carefully can understand it better.

The Madras High Court verdict

The Madras High Court did not address whether Mr. Krishna insulted M.S. Subbulakshmi in its verdict. It raised no objections to the conferment of the 'Sangita Kalanidhi' award by the Music Academy on Mr. Krishna. Instead, the High Court focused on the Sangita Kalanidhi M.S. Subbulakshmi Award, which is presented by *The Hindu* to the recipient of the Sangita Kalanidhi award and includes a prize of ₹1 lakh.

In her will, M.S. Subbulakshmi has stated that she did not want any award to be given in her name. Based on this, the judgment ruled that to respect her wishes, a cash prize could be awarded without using her name. The award presented by *The Hindu* is titled the 'Sangita Kalanidhi M.S. Subbulakshmi Award.' However, the Tamil media, which confused the 'Sangita Kalanidhi' award given by the Music Academy with the 'Sangita Kalanidhi M.S. Subbulakshmi Award' presented by *The Hindu* to the awardee, misrepresented the verdict.

The media mistakenly understood that the Sangita Kalanidhi award is given in M.S. Subbulakshmi's name. Tamil newspapers, television channels, and social media have wrongly reported that there is a ban on conferring the Sangita Kalanidhi Award in her name. There have also been reports claiming that the High Court has stayed the conferment of the Sangita Kalanidhi award on Mr. Krishna.

When the High Court took up the case, it was

reported with the same confusion. Some English media outlets also misunderstood the situation. The judgment was not clearly understood due to a lack of basic knowledge about the background of the award. This raises questions about the credibility of the news published by the media.

The verdict stated that *The Hindu* should not use the name of M.S. Subbulakshmi. This raises a few questions. In previous years, the winners of the Sangita Kalanidhi Award were presented with the award in M.S.'s name. What will happen to those instances? The High Court did not provide a judgment on that matter, possibly choosing not to interfere in such past decisions.

In the future, when *The Hindu* awards the ₹1 lakh prize to the recipient of the Sangita Kalanidhi Award, M.S. Subbulakshmi's name cannot be used. This means that either the name of the award must be changed or it will need to be presented under a different name.

Another question arises. Awards are given in the name of M.S. Subbulakshmi not only by *The Hindu* but also by other organisations. For example, the 'Eyal Isai Nataka Manram' of the Government of Tamil Nadu presents the 'M.S. Subbulakshmi Award' every year. Singer S. Janaki received the award for 2016 and Vani Jayaram won it in 2020. Will the High Court ruling apply to such awards as well? The judgment lists several issues named after her but does not address these awards. If someone were to challenge these awards in court, citing the judgment, it could result in them being halted.

A wish fulfilled

As in the verdict, Mr. Krishna is not affected. He can still receive the Sangita Kalanidhi award. And the cash prize offered by *The Hindu* can also be awarded. However, M.S. Subbulakshmi's name can no longer be used for any award. In her will, M.S. Subbulakshmi stated: "After my death, no trust or memorial should be erected in my name. No funds should be raised or given in my name."

If M.S. Subbulakshmi's wish is to be respected, her name should be removed from all awards and recognitions, in line with this judgment. In the context of conferring the Sangita Kalanidhi on Mr. Krishna this year, and the subsequent court battle, it can be said that her wish has been fulfilled. Mr. Krishna, who celebrated MS through his article, has now honoured her wish.

Until now, it was not publicly known that she had written such a thing in her will. The information in the will, written over 25 years ago, has now come to light, reinforcing a dimension of her personality wherein she refrains from placing herself at the forefront. T.M. Krishna has paved the way for this. Both deserve to be celebrated.

India's urban infrastructure financing, needs and reality

India's urban population will increase from 400 million in the last decade to 800 million over the next three decades. While this offers an opportunity to transform India's urban landscape, there are significant financial challenges that must be overcome to get there. A recent World Bank report estimates that India will require about ₹70 lakh crore by 2036 to meet its urban infrastructure needs. Current government investment (2018 figures) in urban infrastructure stands at around ₹1.3 lakh crore annually. This is just a little over one-fourth of the required ₹4.6 lakh crore per year. Broadly, about 50% is estimated for basic urban services, with the other half for urban transport.

Issues at the local level

Municipal finances, a crucial component of urban infrastructure funding, have remained stagnant for decades. Since 2002, municipal finance has stayed at just 1% of GDP. Municipal bodies contribute 45% of urban investments, while the remainder is managed by parastatal agencies. Despite an increase in central and State transfers from 37% to 44%, the financial health of municipalities remains precarious. Tax revenue grew by only 8% between 2010 and 2018, grants by 14%, and non-tax revenue by 10.5%. However, the share of municipalities' own revenue sources has declined from 51% to 43%, reflecting a diminishing capacity for self-sufficiency.

Collection inefficiencies also exist in urban local bodies (ULB). For instance, data from 2017-18 reveals that ULBs in Bengaluru and Jaipur collect only 5%-20% of their potential tax revenue. Nationwide, property tax collection stands at a paltry ₹25,000 crore, which is only 0.15% of GDP. Further, cost recovery for services ranges from 20% to 50%, highlighting the significant gap between the costs of urban services and the revenues generated from them.

Indian cities also struggle with low absorptive capacity, further complicating the urban infrastructure landscape. According to the Fifteenth Finance Commission report, about 23% of total municipal revenue remains unspent, indicating a surplus in the municipal system that



Madhav Pai

Chief Executive Officer, WRI India

With the urban population set to rise exponentially, urban India's future depends on the ability to address the key financial and structural challenges

is not being effectively utilised. Even major cities such as Hyderabad and Chennai only managed to spend 50% of their capital expenditure budgets in 2018-19. The utilisation of central scheme funds also leaves much to be desired, with the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) achieving 80% utilisation and the Smart Cities Mission reaching 70%.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs), another crucial avenue for urban infrastructure financing, have seen a marked decline over the past decade. PPP investments in urban infrastructure peaked at ₹8,353 crore in 2012 but plummeted to just ₹467 crore by 2018. The viability of PPP projects is often dependent on the availability of payments or viability funding for ensuring bankability; but due to the lack of project-specific revenues, these projects further diminish commercial attractiveness.

The next step is reform

Given the myriad of financial challenges outlined, it is imperative to adopt a dual-pronged approach with specific long-term and medium-term measures. In the long term, carrying out structural reform would be critical. These reforms should include strengthening State finance commissions to enhance autonomy and capacity for better financial management at the municipal level. Additionally, empowering municipal governments with greater financial and administrative autonomy will be critical in enabling them to manage and allocate resources more effectively for urban development. This can then attract the much-needed private capital, through mechanisms such as debt borrowing, and municipal bonds.

In the medium term, the following measures can significantly transform the development of sustainable urban infrastructure.

First, develop a robust pipeline of projects. The High-Powered Expert Committee and 12th Plan Working Group have developed a financing framework to meet the ₹70 lakh crore urban infrastructure investment requirement over the next 20 years. About 15% of this total investment

could potentially come through PPPs, translating to roughly 250-300 PPP projects annually. To achieve this, a pipeline of 600-800 projects must be in place.

Second, decouple project preparation from financial assistance. The last two decades have shown that investments in urban infrastructure have not advanced to the extent required, often due to hurried project preparation. As new national programmes are conceived, it is essential to decouple project preparation from financial assistance. Ensuring that these projects are designed for financial, social, and environmental sustainability is vital, especially given India's vulnerability to climate change.

Third, leverage Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for improved operations. Urban service delivery, particularly in public transport, remains hampered by outdated practices. Embracing DPI can revolutionise the management and the operation of public services, positioning India as a global leader in this domain.

Fourth, capture land value in transport projects. With half of the ₹70 lakh crore investment by 2036 earmarked for urban transport, particularly metro rail projects, there is a unique opportunity to harness land value. Metro and rail projects should be integrated with urban development, ensuring that they bring jobs closer to transit hubs and contribute to the overall efficiency and design of cities.

The need for collaboration

To conclude, India's urban future hinges on the ability to address these financial and structural challenges head-on. The stakes are high, and this is the window for action. By pursuing both immediate and long-term strategies, India can build urban infrastructure that meets the demands of its growing cities, thus ensuring sustainable and inclusive development for the decades to come. The path forward will require collaboration across government levels, private sector participation, and a relentless focus on innovation and governance efficiency.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Maharashtra result

The blame for the crushing defeat of the Maha Vikas Aghadi in the Maharashtra election fall squarely on the Congress party. On the contrary, the MVA's rival, the Mahayuti Alliance, promptly reconciled itself to the situation after its lacklustre performance in the 2024 general election. Its fine-tuning of the

organisational machinery and spirited campaigns fetched it the result. The victory of the INDIA bloc in Jharkhand has more to do with the strong connect established by the JMM. The Congress needs to undertake an in-depth review of its many political shortcomings.

V. Johan Dhanakumar, Chennai

On a legend

Singer T.M. Krishna, in a lecture in Hyderabad, made a reference to the legend, M.S. Subbulakshmi, and how she gained acceptance in the broader society. Mr. Krishna would have been better understood had he attacked the devadasi system instead and not the Brahmanical order in the context of MSS's great

emergence in the world of music and humanity at large. The greatness of MSS was that despite her roots, she emerged as a great musician and a fine person. For Mr. Krishna to make such statements is doing injustice to the great soul and striking discordant notes in the world of music.

N.G.R. Prasad, Chennai

No textbooks

The introduction of four-year undergraduate courses in the University of Calicut this academic year was a welcome move. However, their implementation has been marred by a glaring lapse: the non-availability of textbooks for all subjects. With examinations scheduled next week,

students are facing hardship due to the lack of study material. Despite repeated requests, the university authorities have failed to provide students with the textbooks. This oversight is not only causing undue stress to students but also undermining the very purpose of education.

El Varith Shuaib Shafia, Kasaragod, Kerala

LOKNITI-CSDS SURVEY

The Mahayuti's sweep in Maharashtra

The voters' favourable assessment of the incumbent government, Narendra Modi's leadership, and the Mahayuti's appeal for Hindu unity helped the alliance retain power

Suhas Palshikar
Sandeep Shastri
Sanjay Kumar

In the past five years, there have been dramatic twists and turns in Maharashtra politics. After the 2019 Assembly elections, one coalition got dissolved and a new three-party coalition was formed. Two State-level parties went through bitter splits and a new three-party coalition was formed mid-way through the term of the Assembly. Such fluidity is seldom settled by just one round of electoral contests. Therefore, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s setback in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections was unlikely to signify a settled equation among the political players. The results of the Assembly elections testify to this ongoing process of reconfiguration of politics in the State.

Given the setback received by the BJP and its allies in the Lok Sabha elections, the performance of the Mahayuti, and specifically the BJP, in the Assembly elections is historic. The BJP has not only emerged as the single largest party, but also a party that might have hugely contributed to the impressive performance of its allies, the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). What explains this dramatic turnaround?

Two factors

Two elementary points need to be noted at the outset. First, between the two alliances – the Mahayuti and the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) – managing and ironing out differences in seat-sharing appeared to have been handled better by the Mahayuti than the MVA. Further, during the campaign, the BJP and the



Savouring a win: (from left): Devendra Fadnis, Eknath Shinde, and Ajit Pawar celebrate the Mahayuti's victory, in Mumbai. EMMANUAL YOGINI

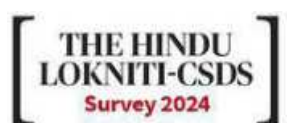
Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena appeared to speak in a single voice, though the NCP, led by Ajit Pawar, departed at times from the main script. On the other hand, the three parties of the MVA had separate campaigns with few common elements. There was no cohesive campaign theme in the MVA.

Second, as data from the survey conducted by the Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) show, the Mahayuti outdid the MVA among most social sections. When a winning party or coalition garners nearly half the votes polled, it is evident that it has won support from different social sections in terms of gender, class, and community. The Mahayuti received more votes among women than

among men, though this might not have been the key factor in shaping its victory. Among the poor voters, the support that the Mahayuti got was somewhat less strong (44%), but among the lower income group, it got 52%. Similarly, the Mahayuti received less support from Dalits and Adivasis and even less support from Muslims. Most important, after almost three decades, we witness the consolidation of both the Maratha and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) vote. The Mahayuti succeeded in getting a very large chunk of the votes from both these blocs. These two factors facilitated its victory.

Economy and welfare

In analysing the victory of the Mahayuti, five factors may be worth noting. First,



in the run-up to the election, most field reports had said voters were acutely aware of the worrying economic condition. This was reflected in our survey as well. Voters mentioned poverty, unemployment, and inflation as the key issues.

However, these issues did not necessarily make a difference to voter choices. Voters who believed that unemployment is the key issue were more likely to vote for the MVA.

But otherwise, voters who mentioned inflation or farmers' issues as the key issues were still inclined to vote for the Mahayuti in larger numbers. This suggests that the mere

existence of economic issues and the awareness about these was not enough to shape the voting choice against the incumbent.

Second, the Mahayuti's campaign formally sought to focus on welfare schemes. The Congress, too, promised many welfare measures and argued that its governments in Karnataka and Telangana were already implementing similar schemes. A lot of attention got drawn towards direct cash transfers, subsidies, and welfare schemes – either promised or actually implemented.

This has given the impression that the Mahayuti's victory was an outcome of the government's welfare measures. Survey data, however, caution that there is no easy or clear relationship between being a be-

neficiary of a welfare scheme and voting in favour of the Mahayuti government. The reach of the State's schemes was abysmal. Even Central schemes did not translate into any extra benefits for the Mahayuti. Beneficiaries of a few schemes did vote for the Mahayuti more than non-beneficiaries did, but this hardly helps explain the alliance's victory.

What worked?

What then helped the Mahayuti? Three factors stand out: a favourable assessment of the incumbent government, Narendra Modi's leadership, and an appeal for Hindu unity.

Overall, the voters were favourably disposed towards the performance of the Mahayuti: both the Central and State governments were viewed favour-

Methodology

These findings are from the Maharashtra Assembly election study 2024, conducted by the Lokniti programme of CSDS, Delhi. The survey was conducted between November 13 and 18. A total of 3,959 respondents were interviewed across 40 Assembly constituencies and 160 polling stations of Maharashtra.

We adopted the multi-stage random sampling design. This procedure ensures that the selected sample is fully representative of the cross-section of voters in the State. The Assembly constituencies where the survey was conducted were randomly selected using the probability proportional to size method (adjusting the probability of choosing a particular constituency according to the size of its electorate). Thereafter, four polling stations were selected from within each of the sampled Assembly constituencies using the systematic random sampling method. Finally, 40 respondents were randomly selected using the systematic random sampling method from the electoral rolls of the sampled polling stations. Of these 40, we set a target of 25 interviews per polling station.

Once we identified our sample, trained field investigators were sent to the field to conduct face-to-face interviews using a pre-designed mobile App. The questionnaire for the survey was translated into Marathi.

Though the sample is relatively small, it is truly representative of the social composition of the State. In order to correct for under-representation of any social groups, weights were applied. Weights were also applied based on the actual result.

The study was directed by Sanjay Kumar, Suhas Palshikar and Sandeep Shastri

Even those who were not very impressed with Mahayuti's performance voted for it



Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde during a public meeting before the Maharashtra Assembly election. The Mahayuti alliance registered a massive victory. PTI

Suhas Palshikar
Vivek Ghotale

While a reasonably large proportion of the respondents in the Lokniti-CSDS survey were satisfied with both the State and Central governments, support for the Mahayuti went much beyond that.

Levels of satisfaction

As Table 1 shows, there were more or less similar levels of satisfaction with both the Central and State governments with more respondents expressing limited satisfaction (somewhat satisfied). But clearly, the Mahayuti was able to receive the support of this cohort too, which paved the way for its impressive victory. Among the 'somewhat dissatisfied', at least

one-third still voted for the Mahayuti.

Moreover, the assessment of the actual performance of the State government on various parameters was only moderately favourable. On most issues, more respondents tended to say that the situation had remained the same except in matters of drinking water and construction of roads and bridges (Table 2). Thus, the Mahayuti secured votes even from those who were not very impressed by its performance.

Corruption

Even on the usually sensitive issue of corruption, the Mahayuti government did not fare very well: one in every three respondents believed that corruption

Table 1: Similar levels of satisfaction (%)

Level of satisfaction with the:	Fully satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Fully dissatisfied
BJP-led NDA government at the Centre	21	34	18	18
Eknath Shinde-led Mahayuti government in Maharashtra	22	34	20	15

Note: Rest did not respond.

Table 2: Mixed assessment of government's performance (%)

	Improved	Remained the same	Worsened
Supply of drinking water	42	42	12
Condition of roads and bridges	35	41	19
Security of women	30	39	25
Law and order	26	45	22
Flood management	23	46	18

Note: Rest did not respond.

Table 3: Opinion on corruption

In the last five years corruption has	Overall	Party/alliance you voted for:		
		MVA	Mahayuti	Others
Increased	34	43	32	24
Remained the same	38	28	53	19
Decreased	11	12	80	7

Among the 'somewhat dissatisfied', at least one-third still voted for the Mahayuti

had increased during its tenure. This sentiment did help the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) but those who

said that corruption had remained the same as before were willing to vote for the Mahayuti (Table 3).

Attracting investments

Before the elections were announced, the inability of the Mahayuti government to attract industries and investments had been at the centre of political

Table 4: Movement of industries

	Percent
Heard that many industries had moved to Gujarat	50
Not heard that many industries had moved to Gujarat	50
Who is responsible for this?	
Shinde-led Mahayuti government	32
Central government	29
Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA government	9
State's industrialists	8
It is a political rumour	7

controversy.

The MVA alleged that this inability was due to the BJP's partisan attitude towards Gujarat and that many industries preferred Gujarat to Maharashtra. While this issue was raised during the campaign, only half the respondents were aware of it. Though a majority of them held the State and Central governments responsible for this (Table 4), it did not become a critical issue in the elections and did not hurt the Mahayuti. In all likelihood, a choice in favour of the Mahayuti drove respondents' assessment of the performance of the Mahayuti rather than the other way round.

Suhas Palshikar has taught political science and is chief editor of Studies in Indian Politics; and Vivek Ghotale works with the Unique Foundation, Pune, and is associated with Lokniti Team in Maharashtra

Which alliance governed Maharashtra better: Maha Vikas Aghadi or Mahayuti?

Sanjeev Alam

In the past five years, the MVA and the Mahayuti have governed Maharashtra for two-and-a-half years each. In this context, how people evaluated the performance of the two alliances in running the government may have influenced the electoral outcome.

More people believed that the Eknath Shinde-led Mahayuti government was better than the Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA government. The higher positive rating for the Mahayuti government appeared to cut across demographic, regional, and economic divides. Even so, its popularity was higher among young and old voters. Compared with male voters, women were more likely to appreciate the work done by the Mahayuti government (a difference of 12% points, as shown in Table 1).

The two alliances fared equally among urban voters. But among rural voters, the Mahayuti was much more popular (43% versus 29%). Similarly, the Mahayuti fared much better than the MVA across Maharashtra's socio-economically differentiated regions. With the notable exception of the Konkan region, the MVA fell way behind the Mahayuti in popularity in other regions. The Mahayuti did

Table 1: Voters' evaluation of the Mahayuti and MVA governments

Voter's background	Which government was better? (%)				
	MVA	Mahayuti	Neither	Both equally good	Both equally bad
Overall	30	39	10	6	6
Age group (years)					
18-25	31	40	10	4	5
26-35	33	38	9	7	5
36-45	33	39	7	5	7
Gender					
Men	32	39	10	5	5
Women	27	39	10	6	5
Locality					
Rural	29	43	9	5	3
Urban	30	34	11	6	8
Regions					
North Maharashtra	28	40	5	5	7
Vidarbha	23	42	18	5	5
Marathwada	29	37	10	6	4
Mumbai-Thane	26	39	10	5	8
Western Maharashtra	35	41	6	8	3
Konkan	51	26	5	3	3
Economic Class					
Poor	24	36	11	4	6
Lower	28	42	11	6	3
Middle	30	43	10	6	5
Rich	36	34	9	7	7

Note: Rest had no opinion.

really well in Vidarbha and Mumbai-Thane. It also did better than the MVA in the Marathwada and North Maharashtra regions.

The Mahayuti had a significant edge over the MVA among those occupying the bottom and middle rungs of the economic structure. Interestingly, the MVA was more popular than the Mahayuti among the rich despite its concerted efforts of reaching out

to the poor in particular.

We can therefore conclude that the Mahayuti managed to significantly improve its image on the governance front and reach out to voters across the socio-spatial spectrum. The Mahayuti's broad-based popularity seems to have helped it handily in the Assembly polls.

Sanjeev Alam is Associate Professor at Lokniti-CSDS

LOKNITI-CSDS SURVEY

Maharashtra's mandate: the role of issues and candidates

Voters saw the Mahayuti alliance as more likely to deal effectively with the key issues; the outcome highlights its strong performance, scoring over the competition; some voters focused more on the candidates than the political parties

Vibha Attri

This Maharashtra Assembly election result marks a significant shift from the Lok Sabha elections, held earlier this year where the Mahayuti trailed behind the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) by a considerable margin. The Assembly outcome highlights Mahayuti's strong performance, clearly scoring over the competition and securing a clear mandate. Given this decisive victory, it is important to examine key voting issues that shaped the electorate's choices and contributed to the election outcome.

THE HINDU
LOKNITI-CSDS
Survey 2024

The survey conducted by Lokniti-CSDS reveals that inflation emerged as the dominant concern for voters, with a quarter of voters identifying it as the key issue influencing their vote. Close behind, two of every 10 (21%) voters pointed to unemployment as a major factor. Agricultural issues also played a significant role, with a little over one of every 10 (13%) citing them as a critical concern. Other noteworthy issues highlighted included the lack of development, which was flagged by one of every 10, and the question of reservation, was mentioned by 5% (Table 1).

The Mahayuti was the leading choice among voters prioritising any of these five key issues. This implied that voters saw the alliance that won as being more likely to effectively

Table 1: Top five issues influencing vote choice

Single-most important issue	Top five issues influencing vote choice (%)		
	MVA	Mahayuti	Others
Inflation (25%)	35	53	12
Unemployment (21%)	39	42	19
Agricultural or farmers' issue (13%)	32	56	12
Lack of development (10%)	31	49	20
Issue of reservation (5%)	32	42	26

Table 2: Voters held both State and Union governments responsible for price rise and shrinking of job opportunities

	Who is responsible for... (%)			
	State government	Union government	Both	Neither
INFLATION				
Increased (72%)	18	22	50	2
Decreased (4%)	8	32	35	17
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES				
Increased (20%)	24	28	41	2
Decreased (35%)	13	18	60	4

Rest did not respond

Table 3: Voting decision

Party loyalty or candidate preference	(%)
Party	36
Candidate	50
CM candidate	6

Rest did not respond

deal with these issues or prioritised others. While it lost some support on the unemployment front, where MVA was a close contender (Table 1).

Shared responsibility

Although around three-fourths of voters acknowledged that inflation had risen in the State, it did not significantly harm the Mahayuti alliance. When asked who was responsible, half of these respondents blamed both the State and Union governments, while over one in

Table 4: Voting consideration and party choice

Party loyalty or candidate preference	Party voted for (%)		
	Maha Vikas Aghadi	Mahayuti	Others
Party	38	42	20
Candidate	31	54	15
CM candidate	27	63	10



Inflation emerged as the dominant concern, with a quarter of voters identifying it as the key issue influencing their vote. PTI

five pointed to the Union government alone. A similar trend was observed with unemployment, where one third voters felt job opportunities had decreased. However, a clear majority—three-fifths of

them—blamed both the State and Union governments for the decline (Table 2). This shared responsibility on key issues like inflation and unemployment helped prevent these concerns from becoming decisive factors against the ruling alliance in the State. Further, it could well be an expression of the level of confidence of the people in the winning alliance to resolve these issues.

Candidate choice

The choice of candidate emerged as a significant consideration in the voting choice. An interesting aspect of Maharashtra elections was the focus on the candidates, rather than the political parties, when it came to voting decisions. Nearly half of the voters said that their choice was primarily influenced by the candidate, while around four in 10 considered the party affiliation. Only 6% cited CM candidate as the main factor in their decision-making (Table 3).

There was a noticeable difference in the voting patterns of those who preferred a party or a candidate. Among those who preferred a candidate, over half voted for the Mahayuti alliance, compared to nearly one in three for the MVA. This suggests that candidates played a key role in the voter support for the Mahayuti alliance. (Table 4). The Mahayuti's ability to appeal to voters across multiple concerns, combined with a focus on leadership, played a crucial role in securing this decisive mandate.

Vibha Attri is a Research Associate at Lokniti-CSDS



A strong tilt of voters who support the 'double-engine government' worked in favour of the Mahayuti. PTI

Are voters swayed by the concept of 'double-engine government' in elections?

Sanjay Kumar

Given the strong presence of regional parties in the State politics of Maharashtra, it is not surprising to note that there is a divided support for the idea of 'double-engine government'. This is in contrast to the opinion expressed by voters on this issue in the BJP-ruled States. What worked in favour of the Mahayuti is a very strong tilt of those voters who support the 'double-engine government' idea, and tilt in favour of the Mahayuti alliance even amongst those who are not in support of this idea.

Findings of the survey indicate that close to four of every 10 (38%) voters supported this view and a little more than four of every 10 (42%) felt that 'double-engine government' is not necessary for the development of Maharashtra. One in every five voters expressed no opinion on this issue. These voters were also more inclined to vote for the Mahayuti.

Table 1: Opinion on double-engine government

Is double-engine government necessary for Maharashtra's development	(%)
Double-engine government is necessary	38
Double-engine government is not necessary	42
No response	20

Question asked: Some people think that for the development of Maharashtra, it is necessary that the same party should rule at both the Centre and the State. Others think it is not necessary. What do you think - Is it very necessary, or not necessary?

Table 2: Voters favouring 'double-engine govt.' preferred Mahayuti

Double-engine govt. necessary for Maharashtra's development	Party voted for (%)		
	Maha Vikas Aghadi	Mahayuti	Others
Double-engine govt. is necessary	26	60	14
Double-engine govt. is not necessary	37	40	22
No response	40	42	18

four of every 10 (40%) voted for the Mahayuti alliance while a little less than four of every 10 (37%) voted for the MVA. One in every five voters expressed no opinion on this issue. These voters were also more inclined to vote for the Mahayuti.

Sanjay Kumar is a Professor and Co-Director at Lokniti-CSDS

Table 3: Slight edge for State government

	(%)
State government	27
Union government	18
Both	40
Neither	7

Rest did not respond

National vs State-level choices: the role of leadership in alliance politics

Sandeep Shastri

While Assembly elections are about State issues and State-level leaders, it is often that national-level leaders play a critical role in State-level choices. In the recently-concluded Maharashtra Assembly elections, more than four voters mentioned that their vote choice was shaped by considerations of national leadership (Table 1).

Prime Minister Modi's role in boosting the Mahayuti performance was evident in over one-third of the respondents mentioning the Prime Minister as an important influence in their voting decision. Close to two of every 10 mentioned Rahul Gandhi as the national leader who influenced their voting choice. It is important to highlight that three of every 10 respondents said that their vote choice was influenced by local issues and not national leaders.

Of late, Assembly elections are also often centred around the question as to who will be the next Chief Minister. In the recent elections in Maharashtra, neither the Mahayuti nor the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) projected a Chief Minister face. The compulsions in the two alliances were distinctly different. In the Mahayuti, the dominant party (BJP) had conceded the Chief Minister position to the leader of a junior partner in the coalition

Table 3: Preferred Chief Minister choice for MVA and Mahayuti voters (%)

	Eknath Shinde	Devendra Fadnavis	Uddhav Thackeray	Ajit Pawar	Sharad Pawar
Maha Vikas Aghadi	10	5	38	2	13
Mahayuti	41	31	3	8	1

Rest gave other names or did not respond

Table 2: Voters' top picks for Chief Minister

Chief Minister choice	(%)
Eknath Shinde	25
Uddhav Thackeray	18
Devendra Fadnavis	16
Sharad Pawar	5
Ajit Pawar	5
Nana Patole	2

Rest gave other names or did not respond

Even though BJP was contesting a majority of seats, it preferred to face the poll with existing arrangement with no clear picture of the post-election choice of leadership

tion government they were running. Even though the BJP was contesting a majority of the seats in the elections, it preferred to face the poll with the existing arrangement with no clear commitment to the post-election choice of leadership if they came to power. For the MVA, the

Table 1: Which national leader influenced your vote the most

Which national leader influenced your vote the most	(%)
Narendra Modi	35
Rahul Gandhi	18
Neither, I will vote based on State issues	29
Others	3

Rest did not respond

leadership issue was more complex. The Shiv Sena (UBT) was keen that their leader Uddhav Thackeray be named as the CM candidate. The Congress and the NCP(SP) wanted the choice to be made after the elections.

In the Lokniti-CSDS survey, one fourth of the respondents favoured the incumbent Chief Minister as their preferred choice. The incumbent invariably has greater visibility and recognition. Mr. Uddhav Thackeray was endorsed by close to one of every five respondents and Devendra Fadnavis was mentioned as the preferred Chief Minister choice of a little over one-sixths (Table 2).

Among those who voted for the Mahayuti, Eknath Shinde had a 10 percentage

point lead over Mr. Fadnavis. This implies that even among BJP supporters, there seemed to be greater support for Mr. Shinde as compared to Mr. Fadnavis. Given the performance of the BJP in the elections, it is now likely that the party favours someone from BJP to lead the coalition government.

Within the MVA, close to four of every 10 favoured Mr. Uddhav Thackeray and over one of every 10 favoured Sharad Pawar. The differences within the MVA were evident with one in every 10 even favouring Mr. Shinde as the preferred Chief Minister (Table 3).

Sandeep Shastri is the Director-Academics at NITTE Education Trust and the National Coordinator of the Lokniti Network

Amid weak execution, welfare may not have influenced most voters



The survey finds that those who did not benefit have also voted for the ruling alliance. PTI

Rajeshwari Deshpande
Krishangi Sinha

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Mahayuti in Maharashtra relied on welfare-driven politics for securing the voter support, a tactic that the BJP has successfully implemented in other States.

In Maharashtra, however, State-level welfare initiatives have performed unevenly, with the Union government schemes reaching slightly higher number of beneficiaries.

The Lokniti-CSDS survey looked for the extent of penetration of these schemes and their impact. Except the PDS, even the Union schemes have a limited reach in Maharashtra compared to many other States. The State government tried to duplicate many of those

Table 1: Beneficiaries of welfare schemes and their voting patterns

		Party voted for... (%)		
		Maha Vikas Aghadi	Mahayuti	Others
UNION GOVERNMENT SCHEMES				
MGNREGS	Beneficiaries (16%)	33	45	22
	Non-beneficiaries (65%)	33	49	18
Awas Yojana	Beneficiaries (20%)	31	49	20
	Non-beneficiaries (67%)	34	49	17
PDS	Beneficiaries (60%)	33	51	16
	Non-beneficiaries (27%)	34	45	21
Ayushman Bharat	Beneficiaries (13%)	36	50	14
	Non-beneficiaries (72%)	33	48	18
Ujjwala Yojana	Beneficiaries (27%)	30	49	21
	Non-beneficiaries (60%)	35	48	17
STATE GOVERNMENT SCHEMES				
Balasaheb Thackeray Aapla Dawakhana	Beneficiaries (4%)	36	39	25
	Non-beneficiaries (54%)	33	48	20
Mahasamridhi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana	Beneficiaries (3%)	40	48	11
	Non-beneficiaries (54%)	34	47	19
Mahatma Phule Vaidyaki Bill Paripurti Yojana	Beneficiaries (5%)	27	43	30
	Non-beneficiaries (58%)	34	48	18
Anandacha Shidha Yojana	Beneficiaries (52%)	36	50	14
	Non-beneficiaries (28%)	31	45	24

schemes during the past three years. However, as indicated by the data here, most of these schemes have remained on paper. The only exception is the recently announced Mukhyamantri Ladki Bahin Yojana which guarantees monthly ₹1,500 to eligible women.

In the Lokniti-CSDS survey, more than 80% women respondents said that they have applied for these

benefits. Given the overall weak and uneven implementation of the welfare schemes, there is hardly any connection between welfare and vote in the Maharashtra Assembly elections. Although the Mahayuti got a slight advantage among beneficiaries of schemes such as PM Awas and Ujjwala, those who did not benefit have also voted for the ruling alliance.

Obviously, despite the official manifestos of parties promoting welfare schemes on a large scale and despite the material anxieties of several social sections, issues of welfare do not seem to have influenced the vote in Maharashtra this time.

Rajeshwari Deshpande teaches at Savitribai Phule Pune University and Krishangi Sinha is a researcher at Lokniti-CSDS

LOKNITI-CSDS SURVEY

Mahayuti reaps the benefits of Centre's schemes for farmers

Despite the prevailing agrarian crisis in Maharashtra, a large population of farmers still opted for the ruling coalition thanks to schemes such as PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi, Fasal Bima Yojana, Kisan Maan Dhan Yojana, and Shetkari Sanman Yojana

Devesh Kumar
Kirti Sharma

Farming, though with limited contribution to the State's economy, is critical to Maharashtra as it engages a large population in the labour force. However, for the State's farmers, it has become a source of constant struggle. Mounting debts, dwindling income, erratic weather conditions such as unseasonal rains and restrictive export bans have pushed countless farmers into precarious situations. Tragically, Maharashtra also has one of the highest rates of farmer suicides in the country. Caught in this bleak scenario, farmers were looking for a political future that offered practical solutions and hope. It now appears that the Mahayuti alliance successfully tapped into this sentiment, made compelling promises and earned the trust of a significant population of the farming community. Through Lokniti-CSDS data, we examine how farmer-centric issues influenced the State Assembly election and which political parties resonated most with the State's farmers.

Farming as poll plank
This election was critical for farmers as their livelihood took centre stage during campaigns. However, this concern didn't resonate as strongly with other communities. Among the households surveyed, nearly half of them (46%) were engaged in farming activities - about one-third full time and another one-seventh (14%) part time. Among full-time farmers, nearly three in 10 (28%) considered farming the most important electoral issue.

Among part-timers, it was two in ten (17%). Farmers' issues barely echoed as a concern among non-farmers (Table 1).

Welfare schemes designed to support farmers, especially those introduced by the Central government, played a crucial

Table 2: Welfare schemes for farmers produced positive results



Welfare schemes	Among farming households	Party voted for (%)		
		Maha Vikas Aghadi	Mahayuti	Others
PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana (PM-KISAN)	Beneficiaries (76%)	35	51	14
	Non-beneficiaries (19%)	38	44	18
Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojana (PMFBY)	Beneficiaries (55%)	31	57	12
	Non-beneficiaries (38%)	41	38	21
Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maan Dhan Yojana (PM-KMY)	Beneficiaries (37%)	33	54	13
	Non-beneficiaries (51%)	38	45	17
Shetkari Sanman Yojana	Beneficiaries (40%)	35	53	12
	Non-beneficiaries (47%)	38	45	17



Table 1: Nearly one-third of the Marathi voters (households) fully engaged in farming

Is household engaged in farming?	Overall	Identified farmers' issue as the most important electoral issue
Yes, full-time	32	28
Yes, part-time	14	17
Not engaged	45	3

Rest did not respond

Table 3: How farmers voted?

	Preference (%)		
	Maha Vikas Aghadi	Mahayuti	Others
Overall	34	48	18
Full-time farming households	36	48	16
Part-time farming households	35	54	11
Household not engaged in farming	32	46	22
Fulltime farmers who identified farmers' issue while voting	31	53	16

the alliance. Conversely, non-beneficiaries leaned towards the Opposition, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) (Table 2).

While welfare schemes did lay a strong foundation for the victory of the Mahayuti alliance in the election, the farmers' voting

numbers revealed a nuanced pattern. Among full-time farming households, a little less than half (48%) supported the Mahayuti, while over one-third (36%) backed the MVA.

Part-time farmers showed an even stronger preference for the Mahayuti, with 54% of them voting for the alliance compared to 35% for the MVA. Even among the households not engaged in farming, the Mahayuti had an edge, with 46% support compared to 32% support for the MVA.

Among full-time farming households which prioritised agriculture as their top concern, nearly half (53%) supported Mahayuti, while a little less than one-third (31%) backed the MVA (Table 3).

Overall, agrarian distress was there but it did not hurt the Mahayuti as a bulk of the farmers still voted for the alliance.

Devesh Kumar and Kirti Sharma are researchers at Lokniti-CSDS

Digital and door-to-door campaigns, along with late deciders, shaped outcomes

Jyoti Mishra

In recent years, political parties have increasingly adopted diverse modes of communication as part of their election campaigns, ranging from traditional door-to-door canvassing to innovative digital outreach. In the Maharashtra Assembly election, where the contest was primarily bipolar between the Mahayuti alliance led by the BJP and the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), understanding how parties reached voters is crucial to analysing their impact on electoral outcomes. Central to this discussion is the question: were voters predetermined in their choices, or did they remain open to persuasion during the campaign or at the last minute?

The Lokniti-CSDS survey data suggest that political parties employed a mix of strategies. While door-to-door canvassing allowed candidates to establish personal connections and address local issues, digital platforms emerged as powerful tools for reaching voters in this digital era.

The BJP spearheaded the digital campaign, engaging one-third of voters through digital platforms. In addition, the BJP also led in door-to-door canvassing, approaching three in ten voters in Maharashtra. The Shiv Sena (Shinde faction) actively engaged in digital campaigning compared with other parties. However, other parties adopted an approach that involved utilising both digital and traditional modes of campaigning (Table 1).

One of the most interesting factors in the Maharashtra election was the timing of voter decision-making.

Approximately half (46%) of voters made their choices late in the campaign, while three in ten (30%) decided during the campaign, reflecting an electorate that remained undecided until the campaign began. It also underscored the importance of campaigns in influencing voter decisions. Only one-fifth (18%) of voters were early deciders.

Table 1: Party outreach and campaign visits for votes in the last month (%)



Parties	Digital campaign	Door to door canvassing
BJP	34	28
Shiv Sena (Shinde)	27	24
Congress	23	24
NCP (Sharad Pawar)	24	24
Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray)	22	22
NCP (Ajit Pawar)	22	20

Table 2: Timing of vote choice and voter preferences

	Overall (%)	Party vote for (%)		
		Maha Vikas Aghadi	Mahayuti	Other parties
Late decider	47	31	51	19
During campaign	30	33	50	16
Early deciders	18	38	47	15

Rest did not respond

Late deciders played a crucial role in determining the election's outcome. A closer analysis reveals that the Mahayuti alliance outperformed the MVA among this group, securing support from half (51%) of late deciders and also among those voters who decided during campaigning.

This edge can be attributed to the BJP's strategic focus during the campaign, which resonated strongly with undecided voters in the critical final stages.

The Maharashtra Assembly election showcased

the evolving nature of electoral campaigns, where traditional and digital strategies intersect to shape voter behaviour. The BJP's ability to integrate digital outreach with grassroots mobilisation positioned it as a dominant force. As the high proportion of late deciders indicates, voters increasingly weigh their choices during the campaign period, making effective communication strategies crucial.

Jyoti Mishra is a Research Associate at Lokniti-CSDS

Women sided with Mahayuti for Ladki Bahin Yojana's monthly dole

Rajeshwari Deshpande

Women moved to the centre stage of the Maharashtra Assembly elections with the ruling Mahayuti trying to woo them with direct benefit transfer schemes. The Mahayuti had already implemented the much discussed Mukhyamantri Ladki Bahin Yojana (Chief Minister Beloved Sisters Scheme) after the alliance's poor show in the Lok Sabha elections this year. It promised to increase the monthly dole from ₹1,500 at present to ₹2,100 on returning to power.

The Ladki Bahin Yojana became a buzzword during campaigns as the ruling coalition parties appealed to women to elect their 'real' brothers from the Mahayuti and not the 'step' brothers from the Maha Vikas Aghadi.

The appeal seems to have worked as indicated by the Lokniti-CSDS data which show that more than 80% of women had applied to avail the scheme (Table 1). Similarly, more

Table 1: Four-fifths households applied for Ladki Bahin scheme

Women centric welfare scheme	(%)
Aware about 'Ladki Bahin' scheme	88
Women members have applied for the scheme	83
Women members have applied for the scheme in rural Maharashtra	91
Women members have applied for the scheme in urban Maharashtra	73

Table 2: Women expressed a preference for Mahayuti; support was stronger among rural women

	Party voted for (%)		
	Maha Vikas Aghadi	Mahayuti	Others
Men	34	47	19
Women	33	50	17
Women applied for 'Ladki Bahin' scheme	33	54	13
Women not applied for 'Ladki Bahin' scheme	25	43	32
Rural women	32	55	13
Urban women	34	44	22

women than men seem to have preferred the Mahayuti in the election. The support to the ruling alliance is even higher among rural

women and those who applied to avail the scheme (Table 2). As per ECI data, this election also witnessed a large turnout of

women voters and bridging of the gender gap.

Earlier studies of the Lokniti indicate that so far women's vote in Maharashtra, both in the LS as well as Assembly elections, has been influenced by the overall regional political dynamics and social identities such as caste and class rather than women voting essentially and independently as women.

It is interesting to see whether the recent election has changed the pattern and whether a new constituency of women essentially as welfare beneficiaries is emerging in the State.

With a limited increase in support among women (3% more than men), it may be too early to arrive at such a conclusion, and it might also be an exaggeration to say that the victory of the Mahayuti was shaped by women's vote—although women surely seem to have contributed to that victory.

Rajeshwari Deshpande teaches at Savitribai Phule Pune University

BJP builds a broad caste coalition, garnering Maratha and OBC votes

Suhas Palshikar
Nitin Birmal

For the past three decades, Maharashtra has seen continuous fragmentation of various caste groups, but notably the Maratha-Kunbi caste cluster. The idea of 'vote bank' is always employed in discussing the close connection between the Maratha community and the Congress. That vote bank was practically dissolved in the 1995 Assembly election. As the Congress in the State went on declining, its base among Other Backward Classes (OBCs) too became invisible. Since then, the BJP and the Shiv Sena together and separately kept trying to win a larger share of both the Maratha and the OBC vote. In 2014, the BJP emerged as a major player in State politics and began attracting both the Marathas and the OBCs.

In the latest election, the process of coming together of the Marathas and OBCs as supporters of the BJP has gone one step further. In the Lokniti sur-

Table 1: Community support

	Party vote for (%)		
	Maha Vikas Aghadi	Mahayuti	Others
Upper caste	25	63	12
Maratha-Kunbi	32	54	14
Other OBCs	26	60	14
SC	25	34	41
Adivasis	56	39	5
Muslims	55	22	23
Others	31	51	18

vey, almost three of every 10 Marathas (including the Kunbis) and a little less than four of every 10 OBCs have indicated their preference for the BJP. The rest of the Marathas and OBCs were divided among the Congress, and the Shiv Sena and NCP factions. With one-fourth of the Adivasi respondents and one-fifth

of the Scheduled Caste (SC) respondents supporting the BJP, the party has managed to craft an invincible Hindu umbrella.

In the process, these social sections have also supported the other two partners of the Mahayuti, making its community-based support quite wide—except among Muslims and

somewhat among the SCs and Adivasis (Table 1).

With most social sections turning to the Mahayuti, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) was left with only skeletal support across social sections. Even among SCs, the larger share went to 'Others' rather than the MVA. In particular, almost half of the Buddhists and former Mahar respondents among SCs vote non-MVA and non-Mahayuti parties.

Trends of caste-community voting in this election are in a sense a continuation of the process that started with the election of 2014 – a consolidation of upper castes, Marathas, and OBCs behind BJP, and a somewhat divided political support of SCs, Adivasis and Muslims, who vote less for the BJP but do not necessarily operate as a vote bank supporting any single party.

Suhas Palshikar taught political science and is chief editor of Studies in Indian Politics; Nitin Birmal is Lokniti's State Coordinator, Maharashtra

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Bid on Rishabh Pant becomes the costliest buy in IPL's history

27 In ₹ crore. Rishabh Pant pipped Shreyas Iyer to become the costliest buy in IPL's history with a ₹27 crore winning bid from Lucknow Super Giants as teams went the extra mile for marquee Indian players at the mega auction. Iyer captained the Kolkata Knight Riders to the title earlier this year. PTI

The number of Lebanese troops killed by Israel so far

40 The Hezbollah meanwhile fired barrages of rockets into northern and central Israel, wounding at least five people. Israeli strikes have killed over 40 Lebanese troops since the start of the war between Israel and Hezbollah, even as Lebanon's military has kept to the sidelines. AP

Investment proposals received at 2023 Bihar Business Summit

50,000 In ₹ crore. Bihar Industries Minister Nitish Mishra on Sunday said the upcoming global business summit in Patna will be a huge success. The 2nd edition of 'Bihar Business Connect' will be held from December 19-20 in Patna. PTI

India's total electronics exports for the fiscal year 2023-24

29.1 In \$ billion. Mobile phone players want Indian airports to ramp up their existing cargo handling capacity to support a projected eight-fold increase in device exports to \$180 billion by 2030, industry body ICEA said. Electronics is India's largest export in air cargo. PTI

The number of criminal cases against Imran Khan

150 Pakistan on Sunday suspended mobile and internet services "in areas with security concerns" as supporters of imprisoned former premier Imran Khan geared up for a protest in the capital. AP

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Why has Gautam Adani been indicted?

Under which laws have federal prosecutors in New York brought charges against Adani Group Chairman Gautam S. Adani, his nephew Sagar Adani, and six others? Why did Adani Green executives allegedly bribe Indian government officials of various States?

EXPLAINER

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

On November 21, federal prosecutors in New York indicted Adani Group Chairman Gautam S. Adani, his nephew Sagar Adani, and six others on multiple counts of fraud. The charges stem from an alleged multibillion-dollar scheme to bribe Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms on solar power contracts, which were projected to generate over \$2 billion in profits. "This indictment alleges schemes to pay over \$250 million in bribes to Indian government officials, to lie to investors and banks to raise billions of dollars, and to obstruct justice," a press release issued by the U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York, said quoting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Lisa Miller.

Who are the defendants?

The defendants named in the case, alongside Gautam Adani and his nephew Sagar Adani (executive director of Adani Green Energy), include – Vneet Jaain, former CEO of Adani Green Energy; Ranjit Gupta, who served as CEO of Azure Power Global from 2019 to 2022; Rupesh Agarwal, who headed Azure Power Global from 2022 to 2023; Cyril Cabanes, former managing director of Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec (CDPQ) which is a majority stockholder of Azure Power; Saurabh Agarwal, former managing director of CDPQ India; and Deepak Malhotra, former executive of CDPQ.

What is the heart of the indictment?

A novel tender floated by the state-owned Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) in 2019 forms the heart of the indictment that has accused the Adani Group Chairman and his associates of paying over \$250 million in bribes to Indian government officials. The manufacturing-linked solar tender was eventually awarded to Adani Green Energy and Azure Power with the former claiming in a press statement at the time that it had won "the world's largest solar award". According to the indictment, the \$6 billion investment was projected to yield over \$2 billion in post-tax profits over 20 years. However, the project encountered an unexpected setback – SECI was unable to sign power supply agreements (PSAs) with State electricity distribution companies (DISCOMs) due to "high energy prices". At this point, Adani Green executives allegedly bribed government officials in several States, including Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, and Jammu and Kashmir, to pressure their power distribution companies into agreeing to purchase solar power at above-market rates. The U.S. case is based on the premise that this is where the corruption took place, and that Adani Green failed to disclose this information to its investors in the U.S., constituting fraud under federal securities law.

The U.S. prosecutors have further alleged that Gautam Adani personally met with an unnamed "high-ranking government official of Andhra Pradesh" in August 2021 to expedite the execution of a PSA between SECI and the State's DISCOMs, during which approximately ₹1,750 crore (85% of the alleged bribe) was purportedly offered to the official.

What are the charges?

The indictment accuses Adani and his associates of conspiring to bribe Indian



In rage: Congress members stage a protest against Gautam Adani over his role in an alleged multibillion-dollar bribery case, in Patna on November 24. ANI

officials to secure energy contracts in a purported violation of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). Although enacted in 1977, the law has been more stringently enforced in recent decades resulting in substantial fines for major companies, including Germany's Siemens, Brazil's state-owned Petrobras, and a subsidiary of Halliburton, the oil services giant.

President-elect Donald J. Trump reportedly wanted to strike down the legislation in his first term since he considered it "unfair" to American companies. Another prominent critic of the law, Jay Clayton, whom Trump appointed as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, contended in a 2011 paper that U.S. anti-bribery policies disproportionately burdened American companies in international transactions, thereby undermining U.S. competitiveness.

The prosecutors have alleged that the defendants meticulously tracked their bribes and offers to Indian officials using messaging apps, phones, and PowerPoint presentations, often employing "code names" in their communications. It was further claimed that two of the defendants even engaged in discussions to delete "incriminating electronic materials, including emails, electronic messages and a PowerPoint analysis."

The defendants also stand accused of engaging in securities and wire fraud to fund the operations of Adani Green Energy and its subsidiaries. They allegedly concealed FCPA violations to secure over \$3 billion in bank loans from international financial institutions and U.S.-based asset management firms. "Gautam and Sagar Adani were engaged in the bribery scheme during a September 2021 note offering by Adani Green that raised \$750 million, including

approximately \$175 million from U.S. investors. The Adani Green offering materials included statements about its anti-corruption and anti-bribery efforts that were materially false or misleading," the indictment said. Additionally, Adani and his associates have been accused of withholding information from U.S. investors as well as Indian stock exchanges regarding ongoing federal investigations into their business practices in 2023 and 2024.

Former employees of CDPQ – Cyril Cabanes, Saurabh Agarwal, and Deepak Malhotra – have been accused of obstructing an investigation into the bribery scheme by deleting emails and agreeing to provide false information to the U.S. government. In response to the indictment, CDPQ issued a statement saying, "CDPQ is aware of charges filed in the U.S. against certain former employees. Those employees were all terminated in 2023 and CDPQ is co-operating with U.S. authorities. In light of the pending cases, we have no further comment at this time."

What about the civil lawsuit?

The U.S. Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) has filed a parallel civil lawsuit against Adani and his associates "for conduct arising out of a massive bribery scheme". The complaint alleges that they engaged in a scheme that involved "paying or promising to pay the equivalent of hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes to Indian government officials to secure their commitment to purchase energy at above-market rates". This was reportedly done while simultaneously raising \$175 million from U.S. investors, based on "materially false and misleading" statements. If proven, the charges could invite hefty financial penalties and a ban on the defendants

from holding directorial or executive positions in companies that fall under U.S. exchange regulations.

What happens next?

The U.S. prosecutors have sought the forfeiture of properties or proceeds derived directly or indirectly as a result of the offences. The case will now proceed to the "arraignment" stage where the concerned judge will formally communicate the charges to the defendants and decide whether to grant bail or not. The defendants will then be required to enter a plea – either guilty or not guilty. If they plead not guilty, the case will move forward to a jury trial. However, there is also a possibility of a deal being struck between the Indian tycoon and U.S. authorities following which the billionaire could seek a dismissal of the indictment.

As soon as news of the indictment broke, Adani Green Energy Ltd, the company at the heart of the allegations, cancelled a \$600 million bond sale, the proceeds of which were intended to refinance a foreign-currency loan. Several Adani Group shares, including those of the flagship firm Adani Enterprises, also suffered massive losses and hit their lower circuits in early trade. An Adani Group spokesperson, however, dismissed the allegations as baseless, asserting that the conglomerate remains fully compliant with all applicable laws. In a notable fallout, Kenyan President William Ruto has announced the cancellation of a procurement process expected to hand over control of the country's main airport to the Adani Group. A 30-year, \$736-million public-private partnership deal the Kenyan energy ministry had signed with a unit of the Adani Group last month to construct power transmission lines has also been cancelled.

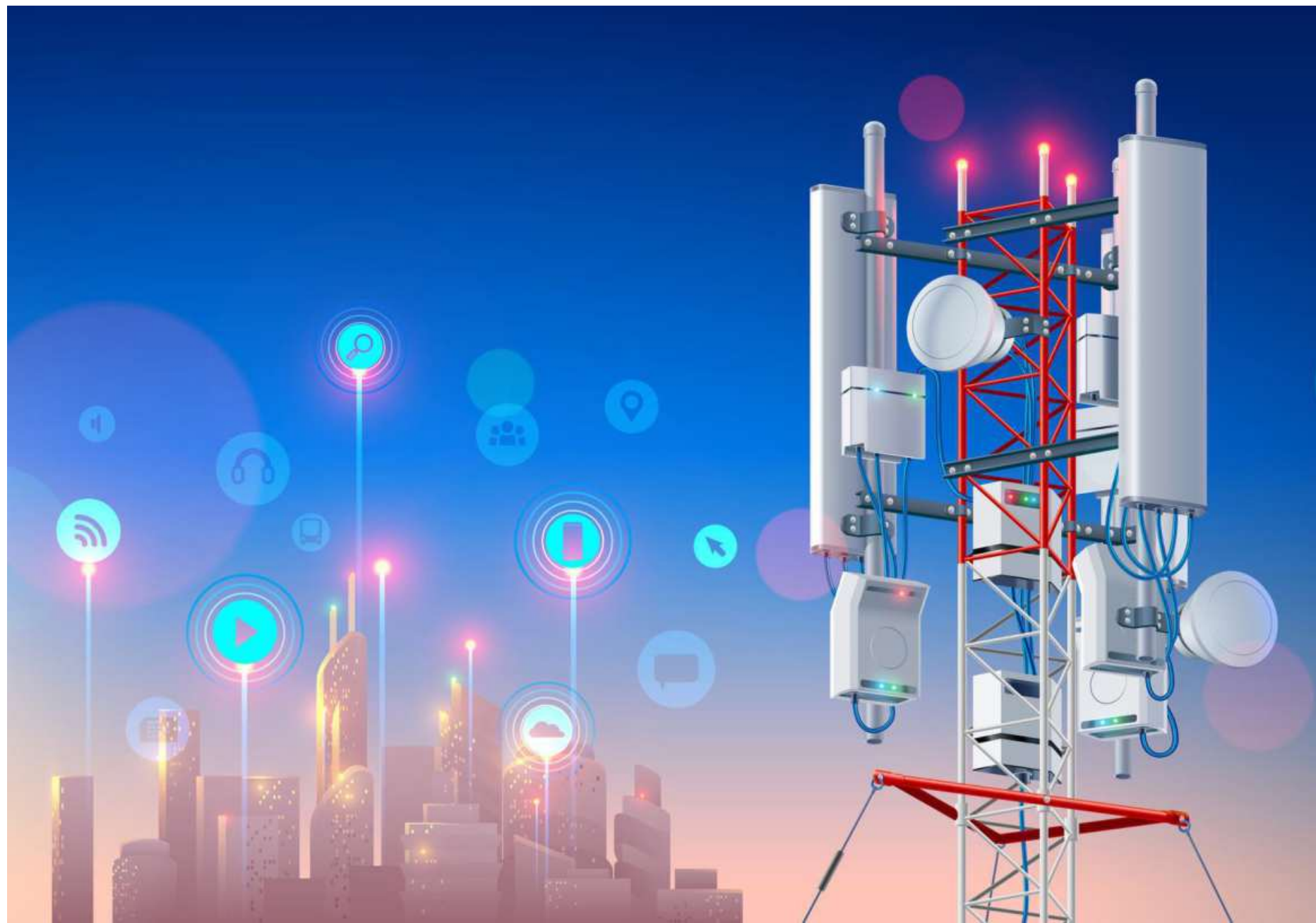
THE GIST

A novel tender floated by the state-owned Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) in 2019 forms the heart of the indictment that has accused the Adani Group Chairman and his associates of paying over \$250 million in bribes to Indian government officials

The indictment accuses Adani and his associates of conspiring to bribe Indian officials to secure energy contracts in a purported violation of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA).

As soon as news of the indictment broke, Adani Green Energy Ltd, the company at the heart of the allegations, cancelled a \$600 million bond sale, the proceeds of which were intended to refinance a foreign-currency loan.

CACHE



ISTOCKPHOTO

Why India's 6Ghz spectrum dilemma is affecting PS5 Pro console launch in India?

In India and throughout the world, WiFi has mainly used two key bands of frequency – 2.4GHz and 5GHz. By 2021, several regulatory authorities around the world began de-licensing a third band of spectrum for WiFi. However, India and China have not yet allowed the use of 6GHz spectrum

Aroon Deep

The story so far:

Earlier in November, the PlayStation 5 Pro console was released in key markets around the world, but no announcement was made regarding India. On November 8, Sony said, "PS5 Pro will not be available in some countries (which presently includes India) where 6GHz wireless band used in IEEE 802.11be (Wi-Fi 7) has not yet been allowed."

What's the history on WiFi bands?

In India and throughout the world, WiFi has mainly used two key bands of frequency – 2.4GHz and 5GHz. Home broadband users may recognise these frequencies as separate transmissions from the same router – 2.4GHz has limited data bandwidth, but can blanket a larger area with coverage. 5GHz is significantly faster, but covers a shorter distance. The frequencies for the spectrum used by these WiFi bands was de-licensed for indoor and outdoor use separately in India starting in 2002.

This state of WiFi technology remained the same well into the introduction of WiFi 6 in 2020. That technology uses both 2.4GHz and 5GHz frequencies

simultaneously, with greater efficiency, resulting in better speeds. But in 2021, WiFi 6E was introduced, splitting the world into two regions: those who allowed the use of 6GHz spectrum, and those that didn't.

What is 6GHz spectrum and what does it have to do with WiFi?

By 2021, several regulatory authorities around the world, including Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, the U.K., and the U.S. began de-licensing a third band of spectrum for WiFi. The WiFi 6E standard was introduced that year, allowing the creation of routers that broadcast on this frequency, bringing up theoretical maximum speeds to 9.6Gbps. This relied on the band of spectrum between 5,925MHz and 7,125MHz, known as 6GHz spectrum.

But in several countries, that is not yet the case. India and China have not allowed the use of 6GHz spectrum for WiFi yet. While the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) generally tries to keep wireless frequencies for telecom, WiFi, satellite and other use cases uniform around the world, several countries have not yet agreed on a standard division of the 6GHz band.

Who has the 6GHz band in India, and who wants it?

The 6GHz band is currently with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for satellite use cases. However, satellite communications over 6GHz are unlikely to interfere meaningfully with WiFi-like use cases; at any rate, at the World Radiocommunications Conference last year, India and some other countries were able to get an extension till 2027 on what to do with some or all of the spectrum.

Around the world, and certainly in India, telecom operators have expressed intense interest in getting 6GHz spectrum for 5G and 6G, a demand that India may be poised to entertain. Tech companies, such as those represented by the Broadband India Forum – Google, Meta, Amazon, and others – have argued for a U.S.-like allocation for this spectrum to WiFi. Both camps seem to be pushing for the entire 6GHz band to be used for either telecom or WiFi. The government may follow the lead of countries like Australia, which have de-licensed half the spectrum, while considering what to do with the other half.

What comes next?

While the 6GHz debate is complex in its own right, it is not entirely clear that the

consumer electronics' interests are significantly impacted by India's decision.

Apple and Samsung phones sell in India with the exact same support for 6GHz WiFi, for instance, but the WiFi feature is programmed to avoid connecting to 6GHz spectrum. Presumably, Sony could do the same, by making consoles sold in India incompatible with this band of spectrum until regulatory clarity emerges.

If and when Sony decides that this is worth the work, or if they decide to invest in manufacturing a separate variant of the PS5 with older WiFi hardware, it will release in India.

At any rate, WiFi 7 as a technology does not need 6GHz to work in India. Advances in WiFi technology are based not (just) on newer bands of wireless spectrum, but in greater efficiency and using these bands simultaneously. Even without the 6GHz spectrum, WiFi 7 routers can be sold in India that make the maximum wireless speed faster than any home broadband plans that are even sold here in the first place.

In response to a query from *The Hindu*, the Department of Telecommunications said that if "a router or device's operating frequency is restricted to ... de-licensed bands, they are permitted to be used in the country."

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

With Ding Liren set to defend his crown against D. Gukesh, a quiz on World chess champions

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1

Who is considered the first official World Chess Champion with his triumph in 1886?

QUESTION 2

What is common to Alexei Shirov, Vladimir Kramnik, Veselin Topalov and Boris Gelfand?

QUESTION 3

Who holds the record for being the youngest World Champion?

QUESTION 4

Which player was crowned champion in 1975 because the

defending champion defaulted?

QUESTION 5

Which German was the champion consecutively from 1894 to 1921, the longest reign for a World Champion?

QUESTION 6

What unfortunate distinction does Alexander Alekhine, champion from 1927 to 1935 and again from 1937 to 1946, hold?

QUESTION 7

In which city and year did Carlsen dethrone Anand as World champion?



Visual question:

Name this maverick legend considered the greatest of all time by many chess aficionados. GETTY IMAGES

Questions and Answers to the November 22 edition of the daily quiz: 1. The meaning of the Greek genus name of the King Cobra. **Ans: Snake-eating from ophis (snake) and phagos (eater)**

2. Apart from the Northern and Western Ghats species, the other two species of the King Cobra. **Ans: Sunda and Luzon**

3. This snake holds the record for being the longest in the world. **Ans: Reticulated python**

4. The reason why the Black Mamba is so named. **Ans: It is named after the blue-black color of the inside of its mouth, which it displays when threatened**

5. The only snake that can retract its fangs. **Ans: The viper with its hinged fangs**

6. The common name for 'Crotalus cerastes'. **Ans: Sidewinder**

7. Snakes smell through their tongues and pass it on to this structure on the roof of the mouth. **Ans: Jacobson's organ**

8. The speciality of the Brahminy blind snake. **Ans: It the only snake species made up solely of females**

Visual: Identify this species. **Ans: Inland Taipan**
Early Birds: Jose Jojji Prashant Nain| M. Suresh Kumar| Sanjukta Das| Sneha Borah



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Opposing him is not worth the candle

The council is a toothless wonder. It can't even implement the sanitation drive

S. Upendran

What is the meaning of 'toothless wonder'? (Yadvinder Bahudur)

The expression was first used to refer to a child or an adult who had a front tooth missing. Later, the number of missing teeth no longer mattered. A child missing two teeth could be called 'toothless wonder', and so could an old man who had no teeth at all.

My son is now a toothless wonder. He lost his first tooth this morning.

With the passage of time, the expression began to be used with other entities as well. For example, when you refer to a company as a 'toothless wonder', what you are suggesting is that the once powerful company is a shadow of its former self. It is no longer seen as a leader, and is incapable of getting others to do its bidding. It has been reduced to a paper tiger.

The newly created committee is a toothless wonder. It cannot take action against the offenders.

What is the meaning and origin of 'the game is not worth the candle'? (J. Kailash, Lucknow)

The idiom is mostly used when you wish to dissuade someone from doing something. When you say 'the game is not worth the candle', you are suggesting that what one is likely to gain from an undertaking is not going to be worth the effort the individual will have to put into it – in other words, the returns are likely to be far less than the time and money the person has invested. It is also possible to say 'not worth the candle'.

After trying to get the movie rights from the author for over a year, the company decided the game wasn't worth the candle.

The expression has been around since the 16th century; some scholars believe that it is a translation of a term used by the French essayist, Michel de Montaigne. The game referred to in the idiom is cards, and in the past, if people wished to play the game at night, they had to spend money on candles. The item did not always come cheap. Therefore, before playing a game of cards at night, the host had to ask himself if he was feeling lucky; lucky enough to win sufficient money to pay for the candle, at least. If not, there was no point in playing.

How is the word 'couth' pronounced? (L. Vasudevan, Trichy)

The word rhymes with 'youth', 'booth' and 'tooth'. Most of us are probably familiar with the much more common 'uncouth', which comes from the Latin 'uncunna' meaning 'not known'. It is from 'uncouth' that we get the word 'couth' which is mostly used nowadays to mean someone who is polite and well mannered – the very opposite of an uncouth individual.

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Word of the day

Moot:

think about carefully; weigh; open to argument or debate; of no legal significance

Synonyms: consider, debate, deliberate, turn over, arguable, disputable

Usage: *The court ruled that the issue is now moot.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/mootpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /mu:t/

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

After a health emergency, toxic air foretells an economic one

Air pollution is also an economic crisis for the nation because it raises healthcare costs and lowers productivity, and communities from low-income groups bear the heavier burden. "The poorest are most exposed yet least equipped to mitigate these effects," Dr. Soumya Swaminathan said

Vijay Shankar Balakrishnan

In his 36 years as a thoracic surgeon, Dr. Arvind Kumar has literally heard and opened tens of thousands of chests. According to him, the human lung, a pristine pink at birth, tells the tale of each breath taken over a lifetime.

"For years, I could trace the pattern of urban pollution on lung tissue as black deposits – a few spots here, larger stains there. Now it's everywhere," Dr. Kumar said from his office in Medanta Medicity Hospital, Gurugram. He is disturbed by the harrowing effects of air pollution on lungs, and not just in people with lung diseases or the elderly. "The lungs of teenagers now look like the lungs of lifelong smokers. Pollution isn't just in our cities – it's inside us."

This transformation of chest health is an invisible epidemic affecting millions across India, now underscored by the findings in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Emissions Gap and Adaptation Gap reports for 2024. Emissions are increasing worldwide, but the rise is exceptionally high in India, more than 6% from last year. The data is unequivocal: pollution is now more than an environmental issue. It's a national health emergency.

An unseen health crisis

India's poor air quality has been silently affecting communities for decades, with lethal results. "Air pollution is the biggest environmental risk to health, even the leading cause of premature death in India," Dr. Pallavi Pant of the Health Effects Institute said.

According to her research, nearly 2 million lives were cut short in India in 2021 alone due to pollution-related diseases. Among the most affected are pregnant women, children, the elderly, and those already facing health challenges. "For these populations, the risk of respiratory infections, impaired lung function, and even cardiovascular conditions due to pollution is devastating and far-reaching," she said.

Exposure to air pollution can permanently impair lung development, leading to chronic respiratory issues and asthma in children. "These aren't just minor inconveniences," according to Dr. Pant. "This is a fundamental health crisis where children grow up with a lifetime of diminished health and quality of life." To her, the real tragedy is that risks fall heaviest on the most vulnerable. "Those with fewer resources are the hardest hit. They often live closest to pollution sources and lack the means to protect themselves. This is a crisis of inequality as much as [of] health."

Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, former chief scientist at the World Health Organisation (WHO) and chairperson of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai, said, "The impacts of poor air quality are systemic. High pollution levels are linked to non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and stroke. We're talking about lifelong health impairments that are often invisible but devastating."

According to her, early and prolonged exposure to pollutants during critical periods like pregnancy and early childhood can predispose individuals to lifelong illnesses. "Children are growing up with a fundamentally compromised baseline for health," she added.

A fractured response

India launched the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) in 2019 to reduce particulate matter pollution by 20-30% by 2024, before adjusting the target to a 40% reduction by 2026.

According to experts, the NCAP has significant room for improvement. "The NCAP has become, for many, a symbol of intent without effective action," Dr. Kumar said. "We have policies, but where we're faltering is in ground-level implementation."

Dr. Kumar argued health must be a central focus of environmental policies, whereas current efforts are "piecemeal and lack teeth." He described the NCAP's measures as "band-aid solutions" and called for stricter enforcement and a shift toward health-centric policies and ground-level action.

Dr. Pant commended the NCAP's role in raising awareness and enhancing air quality monitoring but also called out its shortcomings in sustained, source-specific emission reductions. She suggested instead that a regionalised approach could allow for more targeted, impactful solutions. "The NCAP needs localised strategies focused on specific emission sources," she said.



Women riding a vegetable truck cover themselves as early morning smog engulfs a street in Chandigarh on November 13. AFP

Dr. Swaminathan also urged the NCAP to go beyond monitoring pollutants to focus on reducing emissions and prioritising health outcomes. "The NCAP's goals need to integrate public health directly. Pollution control isn't just about air quality. It's about people's lives," she said. "The program must shift from mere monitoring to actively reducing emissions with health as its primary focus."

Vaibhav Chaturvedi, an environmental economist at the Council on Energy, Environment, and Water, stressed that the NCAP's targets are unrealistic if it doesn't pivot towards clean energy and reduce India's dependence on fossil fuels. "To make the NCAP effective, we need a structural overhaul, particularly in how we produce and consume energy," he said.

Sophie Gummy, a technical officer with the WHO's Air Quality and Health Unit, said that the NCAP lacks the comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach required to achieve meaningful progress. She also said it needs to be accompanied by policies that protect vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by air pollution.

"NCAP is a beginning, but a whole-society approach that spans sectors and prioritises the vulnerable is essential," she said.

Economic and social costs

"Poor air quality isn't just costing lives; it's costing livelihoods," Gummy added.

Dr. Swaminathan also called air pollution an economic crisis because it raises healthcare costs and lowers productivity (through lost work and school days). "Poor air quality leads to increased hospitalisations and higher healthcare costs, adding a financial burden on families and the health system," she said.

Vulnerable, low-income communities bear the heaviest burden: "The poorest are most exposed yet least equipped to mitigate these effects," according to Dr. Swaminathan – a situation reminiscent of the effects of climate change. "The burden of non-communicable diseases linked to pollution continues to rise" even as climate-related challenges like heat waves exacerbate health and productivity losses.

Dr. Kumar's 'My Solution to Pollution' campaign, under his foundation and the Doctors for Clean Air initiative, encourages communities to take small but meaningful action. "People can't wait for

Emissions are increasing worldwide, but the rise is exceptionally high in India, more than 6% from last year. The data is unequivocal: pollution is now more than an environmental issue. It's a national health emergency

government solutions alone," he said. "If 140 crore people commit to small actions, like reducing idling cars outside schools or limiting waste-burning, we can significantly reduce the local pollution load." A pilot program to prevent idling vehicles near school zones showed improved air quality, a potential model for broader change. "If each of us does our part, we can reduce pollution at the ground level."

The clean energy caveat

Despite increasing public awareness, India's heavy dependence on fossil fuels remains a significant obstacle to change. While the government promotes electric vehicles, Dr. Kumar warned their benefits would be limited if their batteries were charged with coal-fired electricity. He contended that an overhaul of energy infrastructure is required, including a complete transition away from coal. "We're tackling the problem from the wrong end," Chaturvedi, the environmental economist, said. "We're addressing symptoms – dust suppression, controlling stubble burning – but not the root cause, which is our reliance on fossil fuels and inadequate clean energy infrastructure."

"True progress in air quality will require a pivot from coal to renewables, coupled with a robust national investment in sustainable infrastructure."

Dr. Pant also pointed out that people in rural locales bank extensively on biomass and also need access to cleaner energy. "For many rural families, wood and animal dung are the only affordable options for cooking fuel," she said, adding that the health impact of household pollution, particularly for women and children, is as important as urban air quality.

Reforms and accountability

Experts said it could be critical for the NCAP to adopt a regional approach rather than presume one size can fit all. Dr. Pant suggested localised targets could allow India's diverse regions to address their

most pressing pollution sources – industrial emissions, agricultural burning, or urban vehicle congestion – differently. "Air pollution is deeply complex. By prioritising interventions at the state and local levels, we can tailor strategies to where they're needed most," she said.

Second, while experts have mixed reactions to listing pollution as a cause of death on death certificates, Dr. Kumar said this explicit acknowledgement could increase public awareness.

"When you add pollution to the death certificate, you're making people see the cause-and-effect link in their lives," he says. Dr. Swaminathan agrees: "Having an official link on death records could push more serious health and policy actions against pollution."

She also proposed establishing a regulatory body akin to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to enforce environmental standards and integrate interdisciplinary policymaking. "India lacks a comprehensive body to regulate air, water, and other pollutants that threaten public health," she said. Dr. Pant echoed her, saying "a unified regulatory body could streamline and strengthen India's fragmented environmental policies."

But Dr. Kumar was wary of bureaucratic hurdles: "We don't need more agencies; we need stronger enforcement."

Toward lasting solutions

The UNEP reports called for systemic changes in the transportation, energy, and health sectors to curb pollution effectively.

Experts agreed a national clean air strategy should prioritise public health, climate mitigation, and community engagement. For Dr. Kumar, the urgency can't be overstated.

"Pollution is now in our lungs, and it's not going to leave on its own. Each breath we take is a reminder of how much needs to change."

"This isn't only about the environment," Dr. Pant added: "it's about every person in this country having the right to breathe without fear."

India stands at a crossroads, and its choices today will determine the health of generations to come. As Gummy said, "Investing in clean air today is investing in India's economic and social future."

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Titan Cement's Alexandria Portland Cement Company factory in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, Egypt. REUTERS

Countries vulnerable to climate tense over 'exported emissions'

Reuters

Fossil fuel exports have been a hot topic at the United Nations climate conference in Baku this year, with activists and delegates from some climate-vulnerable countries arguing nations should be held accountable for the pollution they send overseas – often to poor developing nations – in the form of oil, gas and coal. Some are seeking to get the question of how to do this onto the agenda at future climate summits.

A landmark agreement reached in Paris in 2015 to fight climate change requires countries to set targets and report on progress in reducing national levels of planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions. But it does not impose such requirements for emissions generated from fossil fuels they drill, mine, and ship elsewhere.

That has allowed countries like the United States, Norway, Australia, and others to say they are making progress toward international climate goals while also producing and exporting fossil fuels at breakneck pace, said Bill Hare, co-founder of Climate Action Tracker, an independent scientific project that tracks government climate action.

U.S. fossil fuel exports – including coal, oil, gas, and refined fuels – led to over 2 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions in other countries in 2022, according to Climate Action Tracker. That is equivalent to about a third of U.S. domestic emissions, the data showed.

A years-long drilling boom has made **The Paris Agreement of 2015 requires that nations set targets to cut levels of greenhouse gas emissions. But there are no such strictures on emissions from fuels drilled, mined, and exported**

the U.S. the world's top oil and gas producer, while robust demand has lifted its coal exports for four years running.

Incoming president Donald Trump, a climate change sceptic, has said he wants to further boost the nation's fossil fuel production.

For other producers, greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel exports sometimes outweigh domestic emissions, Climate Action Tracker said.

That was true for Norway, Australia and Canada in 2022, the most recent year for which data is available for all countries analysed. Norway's Ministry of Climate and Environment said it is up to other nations to manage their own carbon footprints. "Each country is responsible for reducing its own emissions," the ministry said in a statement.

Officials at the environment and climate ministries of Canada and Australia did not comment.

Addressing the summit in Azerbaijan, host President Ilham Aliyev accused some Western politicians of double standards for lecturing his government about its oil and gas use, saying, "They better look at themselves."

Most U.S. gas exports now go to European countries seeking to reduce dependence on Russia, while China has become one of the top buyers of U.S. crude and coal. America's biggest growth market for coal, however, is North Africa.

U.S. coal mines exported around 52.5 million short tonnes globally in the first half of 2024, up nearly 7% from the same period a year ago, the data showed. Much of the increase was driven by cement and brickmakers in Egypt and Morocco, which together took in more than 5 million short tonnes over the period.

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

Nurturing pet parents



Money spinner: India's pet food and nutrition market is estimated to be about \$800 million. AP

Chitra Narayanan

"We want to be the most pet-parent-centric organisation in the world," declares Salil Murthy, managing director of Mars Petcare India, as he shares findings from a global survey the petcare giant undertook. Among other things it shows how the nature of pet parenthood has evolved — no longer are pets seen as functional companions kept in the yard. "Today, pets are fully integrated into our lives, treated as family members," points out Mr. Murthy.

"Our study highlighted this transformation, particularly among Gen X and millennial pet parents," he says. Nearly 47% of global Gen Z dog owners and 43% of cat owners said their pets were the most important part of their lives. In India, this number was a remarkable 66%.

The survey was conducted across 20 countries, including India, engaging around 20,000 pet parents, and Mr. Murthy, who has experience in the consumer packaged goods segment (P&G and General Mills), says it helps the company gather insights into the needs, preferences, and aspirations so as to innovate and develop products, services, and experiences to meet them.

Currently India's pet food and nutrition market is estimated to be around \$800 million. It could potentially reach \$1.8 billion in the next seven years at a CAGR of 15-18%. The growth, he says, is driven by rising disposable incomes, nuclearisation of families and shift to packaged pet food. To meet this growth (as well as tap into exports), Mars Petcare is investing in expanding capacity at its pet food factory in Telangana. "We announced the expansion of our pet food factory in 2021 at an investment of ₹500 crore. However, we intend to double our capacity in the next five years," he says.

(The writer is with *The Hindu businessline*)

Fast-moving goods seeing a slowdown

FMCG companies have flagged concerns about an urban slowdown, primarily due to food inflation pressures, even as rural demand seems to be on the recovery path; slight channel shift happening in top cities with the growth of quick commerce, while general trade channel is under pressure

NEWS ANALYSIS

**Meenakshi Verma
Ambwani**

Late last month, Nestle India's chairman and managing director Suresh Narayanan set the cat among the pigeons when he said at a media roundtable that fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies were facing muted demand due to an urban slowdown led by metros and mega cities.

The growth in the F&B sector, which used to be in double digits a couple of quarters ago, is now down to 1.5-2%, he had explained. "Food inflation has been a cause of concern due to sharp uptick in prices of fruits and vegetables and oil prices. This could lead to an increase in prices if raw material costs become unmanageable for companies. We are ourselves facing a difficult situation as far as coffee and cocoa prices are concerned."

Mr. Narayanan is not alone with this view. Leading FMCG companies have flagged concerns about an urban slowdown led by mega and metro cities in the country even as rural demand seems to be on the recovery path. This comes amid rapidly evolving consumer shopping behaviour in urban regions with a marked shift towards online shopping for groceries and essentials led by quick commerce platforms. At the same time, there are concerns that demand on emerging

channels such as quick commerce platforms is not being captured in urban regions. However, the top management of these companies remain bullish on the long-term growth fundamentals of the industry.

According to NielsenIQ (NIQ), rural regions reported 2x faster volume growth at 6%, year-on-year in the September quarter than urban regions. In fact, in rural regions FMCG volume growth surpassed urban areas for the third quarter in a row this year.

Overall, India's FMCG industry posted volume growth of 4.1% in the September quarter over the year-earlier period, with price growth being flat at 1.5% while value growth stood at 5.7%.

Urban region volume growth was pegged at 2.8% y-o-y in the September quarter, 2.1% in the June quarter and 6.4% in the March quarter.

In comparison, rural volume growth was pegged at 5.2% in the June quarter year-on-year and 7.8% in the March quarter.

In a recent earnings call, Varun Berry, vice-chairman and managing director, Britannia Industries, noted that FMCG market growth, according to NIQ data, was the lowest in metros in the September quarter amidst a tough environment of heightened food inflation pressures. "Metro regions' contribution to the total FMCG business is... let's say... about 30%, but what it contributes to the slowdown is almost 2.4x that. So, metros are the ones where the slowdown is the maxi-



Delivering growth: For most FMCG companies, quick commerce has emerged as the fastest growing channel and is leading the online channel growth. REUTERS



Overall, India's FMCG industry posted volume growth of 4.1% in the September quarter over the year-earlier period, with price growth being flat at 1.5%

mum," he added. Nestle's Narayanan also raised concerns about the pressure points coming from mega cities and metros and the fact that middle income households are under stress. "At the same time, a little bit of channel shift is also happening in top cities with the growth of quick commerce while the general trade channel is under pressure," he added. Saugata Gupta, MD & CEO, Marico pointed to a combination of factors that is shaping the FMCG industry currently. "Last year, there was a slight bit of a slowdown in rural and urban regions were doing

well. I think in the last two quarters, we have seen some rural green shoots of recovery. In urban regions, there has been a slowdown. It's due to food inflationary pressures. Whenever there is food inflation, people tend to tighten or downgrade as far as FMCG is concerned," Mr. Gupta told *businessline*.

He further pointed out that at the same time premium or the top-end segment of the FMCG industry is growing. "So I guess, what's happened is, while the economy is growing, it's not that all the sections are growing. It becomes a little bit of a yo-yo in terms of the three segments of growth," he added.

Zydu Wellness CEO Tarun Arora told *businessline* that urban consumption is under pressure as consumers are making alternative spending choices and there is a shift in purchasing behaviour amidst inflationary pressures.

"Meanwhile, rural consumption has improved,

but not enough to cover up for urban consumption gap," he added.

With new channels growing ahead of general trade, there is a growing debate around whether the consumer behaviour shift is being captured by industry syndicated data.

"At the end of the day, in the last three years there has been significant growth at the top end through digital brands across personal care, in hair care, skin care, male grooming, nutraceuticals, food. Other than a few companies like us, traditional FMCG companies haven't participated in that growth. Now that growth obviously doesn't get captured technically. And, of course, a significant disruption as far as channels are taking place especially in the top 5 to 10 urban cities where earlier it was modern trade and e-commerce driven and now it is much more quick commerce driven. It's a lot of churn and a lot of things

taking place out there. So, you can't brush it off to say there is structural slowing down," Mr. Gupta said.

"Overall, FMCG urban is under pressure because of food inflation; that is understood. But this urban demand is getting catered through e-commerce and quick commerce because the consumer behaviour is changing as they are shopping online. And what Nielsen does is syndicated data that the entire industry refers to is that it generally tracks the modern trade, general trade and the mom-and-pop stores and not so much quick commerce or the e-commerce players. So a lot of demand, which is there on e-commerce and quick commerce channels is perhaps not getting captured by the data. So that is also an issue," Dabur India CEO Mohit Malhotra said in an earnings call earlier this month.

Meanwhile, players like Dabur India believe that the urban consumption has likely now "bottomed out". Nestle's Narayanan too had pointed out that it is not an "endemic" issue and other town classes except mega and metro cities were doing well. For most FMCG companies, quick commerce has emerged as the fastest growing channel and is leading the online channel growth. However, some of the companies have also begun taking measures to manage slower growth in their biggest distribution channel, which is general trade.

(The writer is with *The Hindu businessline*)

Student loans surge, PM Vidyalakshmi scheme to add further boost

G. Naga Sridhar

Education loans have been growing at a notable pace in recent years and a further boost is expected with the newly launched 'Pradhan Mantri Vidyalakshmi scheme'.

Given the RBI report that education loan growth touched 17.6% year-on-year (yoy) for the fortnight ending September 20, Bibekanda Panda, senior economist, SBI, points out that it has outpaced the overall credit growth of 13% and personal credit growth of 13.4%.

The PM-Vidyalakshmi scheme is designed to offer collateral-free, guarantor-free education loans through a simple, transparent, student-friendly, and

fully digital application process, backed by a credit guarantee from the government. Mr. Panda expects such a loan structure to incentivise banks to expand their coverage.

By reaching financial support to nearly 22 lakh meritorious students annually, the scheme will directly benefit those who gain admission to the nation's top 860 higher educational institutions, he says. In addition to the government's credit guarantee, the scheme includes an interest subvention of 3% on loans up to ₹10 lakh for students with annual family income of up to ₹8 lakh, and full interest subvention for students with annual family income of up to ₹4.5 lakh.

"The new initiative aims to brighten the future of meritorious students from lower income strata. This approach is expected to encourage banks to expand in this segment and contribute to building human capital for a Viksit Bharat," the SBI economist says.

Role of NBFCs

The push from non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) is also driving the growth in education loans. For NBFCs, education loans, especially for overseas study, will remain one of the fastest-growing segments, given the rising demand for higher education, according to analysts.

"After robust growth of over 80% and 70% in fiscals 2023 and 2024, respective-



Full throttle: The push from non-banking finance companies is also driving the growth in education loans. AFP

ly, NBFCs' education loan assets under management (AUM) rose to about ₹43,000 crore as on March 31, 2024. Their AUM is expected to grow at a healthy clip of 40-45% to cross ₹60,000 crore this fiscal," says Ajit Velonie, senior director, CRISIL Ratings.

In terms of asset quality, the metrics are expected to remain stable despite country-specific concerns. The number of Indian students studying abroad is estimated to have doubled in the past five years to around 13.4 lakh. Only a tenth is funded by NBFCs,

and even after including education loans from banks, the financed quantum is not much higher, according to Velonie.

"What that indicates is that a large portion of overseas education is being funded through alternative means — informal financing, self-funding, or perhaps other forms of loans. That shows that education loan companies have significant headroom for growth. Rising ticket sizes — due to ascending tuition fees, inflation and living expenses — are also tailwinds," he adds.

Drivers for growth

Demand for education loans is driven by a range of factors. The growing interest in pursuing higher stu-

dies in the US or Europe, especially for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses, is generating big-ticket loans of ₹30-74 lakh, and leading to a growth in the total portfolio outstanding.

Apart from loans with collateral, which is the norm at public sector banks, students have access to collateral-free education loans from some private sector banks and NBFCs based on their academic record, parents' financial standing, and credit bureau score. HDFC Bank, for example, offers such collateral-free education loans up to ₹50 lakh.

Lenders' caution

Amid the robust growth in

the education loan segment, banks are also turning cautious owing to the recessionary trend in the US and Europe, and the attendant challenges in the job market in these geographies.

"We are watching the situation and our insights show there have been concerns in the US and UK regarding internships and jobs over the last two quarters. There is a need to keep a vigil over non-performing assets (NPAs). We also expect some dip in demand for overseas education loans if the current downward trend in the global economy continues," says an executive director of a public sector bank.

(The writer is with *The Hindu businessline*)

NBFCs face funding challenges as RBI insists on risk management

Umesh Revankar

A combination of factors, including rising interest rates, regulatory action and funding scarcity, could moderate growth in the non-banking finance company (NBFC) sector from 18% in 2024 to 13-15% in the coming year, according to rating agency ICRA.

NBFCs are a vital component of India's financial sector and the overall economy. In a country where more than three-fifth of the population lives in rural and semi-urban settings, NBFCs have thrived thanks to their greater reach than banks, easier processes, faster loan disbursements, and doorstep services.

NBFCs' total share of credit grew nearly 50% in the last decade, powered

mainly by capital inflows. Traditionally, banks have been the largest financiers of NBFCs, accounting for 50% of their borrowings, either through direct funding and by buying the non-convertible debentures (NCDs) issued by them.

This, however, is fast changing.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is nudging NBFCs to grow prudently and focus on long-term sustainability to avert stress in any segment. In November 2023, it increased the risk weights for loans to NBFCs by 25 basis points, making bank borrowing more expensive for them. Thereafter, bank funding to NBFCs reduced to 15% in April this year, as against 22% in the year-ago period. The RBI also asked NBFCs to focus

on compliance, risk management and redressal of customer grievances.

Additionally, large NBFCs are expected to refrain from lending to smaller NBFCs and fintechs to help avert systemic risks.

The challenges

The assets under management (AUM) in the NBFC sector is seen surging from ₹47 lakh crore in March 2024 past the psychological milestone of ₹50 lakh crore in FY25. In the first half of the current financial year, NBFCs, including State-owned finance companies and refinance institutions, raised ₹3.23 lakh crore, a tad higher by 3.11% year-on-year (YoY).

Private-sector NBFCs mopped up ₹1.91 lakh crore, nearly unchanged



Regulator's caution: The RBI is nudging NBFCs to focus on long-term sustainability to avert stress in any segment. PTI

YoY. Smaller NBFCs and those with lower credit ratings have been hit more by the rise in borrowing rates and shortage of funding avenues. Growth in the sector has significantly moderated. The fund squeeze from banks and

the need for incremental growth capital is forcing NBFCs to explore diversified funding sources, both domestic and overseas.

In the domestic market, NBFCs raise funds through NCDs, commercial papers, securitisation, equity mar-

kets, co-lending, and external commercial borrowings. However, while India's vibrant equity market offers a good source of funding for NBFCs, it is a long-drawn process that not every NBFC can afford to sustain.

That said, if India can develop a strong bond market then the interest seen in the equity market could be replicated in the debt market too.

A vibrant domestic debt market can move a crisis outside the banking system, making it more manageable for the government. However, India continues to suffer from a shallow bond market with little liquidity, keeping away investors, especially the retail category. This makes it harder for NBFCs

to raise funds from this segment. The challenges include market regulator SEBI's restriction on the issuance of International Securities Identification Number (ISIN) in year to nine.

Second is the absence of active market makers — providers of liquidity as an intermediary between buyers and sellers.

Mutual funds, pension funds, provident funds and corporate treasuries, too, invest in NBFCs — cumulatively pegged over ₹5 lakh crore. However, they largely stick to AAA-rated NBFCs. The cut in US Federal Reserve rates, coupled with lower hedging costs, makes overseas borrowing attractive for NBFCs, but it is still early days.

A large section of India's

population is involved in agriculture and related activities, which fall in the unorganised sector. This segment needs priority sector lending (PSL), where NBFCs can play an important role. Yet, worryingly, for NBFCs and microfinance institutions (MFIs) the credit costs are expected to rise from 2.6% in March 2024 to 4% by March 2025. On the other hand, NBFCs that are in asset acquisition financing and micro-enterprise financing can become great sources of PSL assets for banks.

To bring down costs, co-lending by NBFCs and banks can be a win-win for both.

(The writer is executive vice chairman, *Shriram Finance Ltd.*)

AMMAN

Police in Jordan kill gunman in shootout near the Israeli Embassy



REUTERS

Police in Jordan shot and killed a man after he opened fire near the Israeli Embassy early on Sunday. Three troops were wounded in the shootout in the capital. Authorities did not identify the shooter or say what his motive was. Jordan has a large Palestinian population and has seen repeated protests outside the Israeli Embassy. AP

MONTEVIDEO

Uruguayans cast ballots with the Left alliance hoping for comeback



REUTERS

Uruguayans headed to the polls with the leftist alliance of celebrated former President Jose "Pepe" Mujica hoping to reclaim the country's top job five years after a right-wing victory. Yamandu Orsi of the leftist Frente Amplio (Broad Front) is going head-to-head with Alvaro Delgado of the National Party in the polls. AFP

BUCHAREST

Romania goes to the polls with focus on living costs, Ukraine war



AFP

Romanians started voting in the first round of a presidential election that may give hard-right politician George Simion a chance of winning, with voters focused on high living costs and the country's support for Ukraine. Opinion surveys show leftist Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu moving to the run-off with Mr. Simion. AFP

KYIV

'Ukraine lost over 40% of Russia's Kursk region to counter-attacks'



AFP

Ukraine has lost over 40% of the territory in Russia's Kursk region that it seized in a surprise incursion in August as Russian forces have mounted waves of counter-assaults, a senior Ukrainian military source said. Kyiv controlled only 800 sq. km now as opposed to the 1,376 sq. km it possessed before Russia's counter-attacks. REUTERS

Rabbi's killing in UAE is an 'anti-Semitic' attack: Israel

Agence France-Presse
JERUSALEM

Israel condemned on Sunday the murder of a rabbi in the United Arab Emirates, calling it an anti-Semitic "terrorist attack" and vowing to use all means to deal with his killers.

The body of Tzvi Kogan, who had been missing since Thursday, was found by security services in the Gulf Arab state, the Prime Minister's office and the Foreign Ministry said in a joint statement.

The Israeli-Moldovan national was living and working in the UAE as a representative of the Chabad Hasidic movement, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish group known for its outreach efforts worldwide.

"This murder was carried out in the UAE. The murder of an Israeli citizen and a Chabad emissary, is an abhorrent anti-Semitic terrorist attack," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said at the start of a Cabinet meeting.

"The State of Israel will use all means, and will deal with these murderers, and those who dispatched them, to the fullest extent of the law. None of them will get away," he added, without elaborating.

Israeli officials did not provide any details about the circumstances of Kogan's murder.

The UAE, which normalised relations with Israel in 2020 alongside other countries including Bahrain and Morocco, confirmed his death.

Mr. Netanyahu's office said on Saturday that Israel was investigating Kogan's disappearance in the UAE and treating it as a "terrorist incident".

Hezbollah fires 250 rockets as Israeli strike targets Lebanese Army centre

One soldier killed and 18 others injured in Tel Aviv's attack; rockets and projectiles launched by Hezbollah wounds seven persons in Israel; EU's top diplomat meets Lebanon PM, calls for ceasefire and announces €200 million for military

Associated Press
BEIRUT

Hezbollah fired at least 250 rockets and other projectiles into Israel on Sunday, wounding seven persons in the militant group's heaviest barrage in several days, in response to deadly Israeli strikes in Beirut while negotiators pressed on with cease-fire efforts to halt the all-out war.

Meanwhile, an Israeli strike on a Lebanese Army centre killed one soldier and injured 18 others on the southwestern coastal road between Tyre and Naqoura, Lebanon's military



Field day: Officials gather at the scene of an Israeli air strike that targeted a Lebanese Army post in Amriyeh on Sunday. AFP

said. Israel's military expressed regret and said the strike occurred in an area of combat against Hezbollah, adding that its opera-

tions are directed solely against the militants. The strike was under review. Israeli strikes have killed over 40 Lebanese troops

since the start of the war between Israel and Hezbollah, even as Lebanon's military has largely kept to the sidelines.

Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister, Najib Mikati, condemned the latest strike as an assault on U.S.-led cease-fire efforts, calling it a "direct, bloody message rejecting all efforts and ongoing contacts" to end the war.

The Israeli military said some of the projectiles fired on Sunday were intercepted.

Israeli airstrikes without warning on Saturday had pounded central Beirut, killing at least 20 people

and wounding 66.

The European Union's top diplomat called on Sunday for more pressure on Israel and Hezbollah to reach a deal, saying one was "pending with a final agreement from the Israeli government."

Josep Borrell spoke after meeting with Mr. Mikati and Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, a Hezbollah ally who has been mediating with the group.

Mr. Borrell said the EU is ready to allocate €200 million to assist the Lebanese military, which would deploy additional forces to the south.

Fire in Manila



A man watches houses on fire at Tondo in Manila on Sunday. Close to 1,000 homes were destroyed when fire ripped through hundreds of houses in a closely built slum area of the Philippine capital. However, no casualties were reported in the Isla Puting Bato village. AFP

Bangladesh to review Adani Group's power project

Press Trust of India
DHAKA

A review committee formed by Bangladesh's interim government on Sunday recommended an investigation agency to examine power agreements signed by deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with different business groups, including one with the Adani Group.

The statement said the committee was currently reviewing seven major energy and power projects, including the Adani (Godda) BIFPCL 1,234.4 MW coal-fired plant. The six other agreements include one with a Chinese company.

Meanwhile, Bloomberg News reported that the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation that agreed to lend more than \$500 million to a Sri Lanka port development backed by the Adani Group said it is conducting due diligence on the project in the wake of bribery charges against Gautam Adani and other top executives.

Pakistan police arrest thousands of PTI supporters ahead of rally

Associated Press
ISLAMABAD

Pakistani police arrested thousands of supporters of Imran Khan ahead of a rally in the capital to demand the former premier's release from prison, a security officer said on Sunday.

Mr. Khan has been behind bars for more than a year and has over 150 criminal cases against him. But he remains popular and his political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf or PTI, says the cases are politically motivated.

Shahid Nawaz, a security officer in eastern Punjab province, said the police have arrested more than 4,000 supporters of Mr. Khan. They include five parliamentarians.

Pakistan has sealed off Islamabad with shipping containers and shut down



Marching ahead: PTI supporters in Peshawar who are headed towards Islamabad for an anti-government rally on Sunday. REUTERS

major roads and highways connecting the city with PTI strongholds in Punjab and northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

Tit-for-tat teargas shelling between the police and the PTI was reported on the highway bordering Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Earlier on Sunday, Pa-

kistan suspended mobile and Internet services "in areas with security concerns."

The government and Interior Ministry posted the announcement on X, which is banned in Pakistan. They did not specify the areas, nor did they say how long the suspension would be in place.

Truce called after 82 killed in Pakistan sectarian clashes

Agence France-Presse
PESHAWAR

Pakistani officials announced a seven-day truce on Sunday after days of bitter sectarian gunfights in the country's northwest Kurram district that have killed at least 82 people and wounded 156 more.

Pakistan is a Sunni-majority country, but Kurram — in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, near the border with Afghanistan — has a large Shia population and the communities have clashed for decades.

"Both sides have agreed to a seven-day ceasefire, during which they will also exchange prisoners and return bodies to one another," said Muhammad Ali Saif, spokesperson for the

A local official said 16 victims were Sunni, while the remaining 66 belonged to the Shia community

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government.

A second local official said efforts were being made to return up to 20 people who were missing on both sides.

"Among the deceased 16 were Sunni, while 66 belonged to the Shia community," he said.

The ceasefire deal came after a delegation from the provincial government held talks with the Shia community on Saturday and met the Sunni community on Sunday.

24 dead as two boats capsize in the Indian Ocean, says Somalia

Agence France-Presse
MOGADISHU

Twenty-four people died after two boats capsized off the Madagascar coast in the Indian Ocean, Somalia's government said Sunday.

Somalia's Foreign Minister Ahmed Moalim Fiqi said 46 people were rescued.

"We are working tirelessly to ensure the survi-

vors are brought back home safely and provided with the necessary care," he said.

Most of the passengers were young Somalis, and their intended destination remains unclear. Many young Somalis embark every year on dangerous journeys in search of better opportunities abroad.

A delegation led by the Somali Ambassador to Ethiopia is scheduled to travel

to Madagascar on Monday to investigate the incident and coordinate efforts to help survivors.

Stranded in Morocco

Mr. Fiqi also said that Somalia's Ambassador to Morocco will look into a separate report of Somali youth stranded on Morocco's coastline. It is not clear when the Morocco incident took place and Mr. Fiqi did not provide details.



Everyday items like cups and bowls have often been lost, broken, or left behind to perish in war-ravaged Gaza. AFP

Palestinian pottery sees revival in war-ravaged Gaza

Agence France-Presse
DEIR EL-BALAH

Traditional clay pottery is seeing a resurgence in the Gaza Strip, where Palestinians are forced to find solutions for a shortage of plates and other crockery to eat from in the territory ravaged by more than a year of war.

"There is an unprecedented demand for plates as no supplies enter the Gaza Strip," 26-year-old potter Jafar Atallah said in the central Gaza city of Deir el-Balah.

The vast majority of the Palestinian territory's 2.4 million people have been displaced, often multiple times, by the war that began with Hamas's attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023.

Fleeing bombs amid Israel's devastating retaliatory military offensive, which has destroyed large amounts of civilian infrastructure, everyday items like cups and bowls have often been lost, broken, or left behind to perish.

With imports made increasingly difficult by Israeli restrictions, Gazans have had to find resourceful ways to meet their needs since the war began. To keep up with demand, Mr. Atallah works non-stop out of a bare-bones workshop set up under a thin blue plastic sheet, producing around 100 pieces a day, mainly bowls and cups.

He carefully shapes the clay into much-needed crockery, then leaves his terracotta creations to dry in the sun – one of the few things Gaza still has plenty of. Each object is sold for 10 shekels, the equivalent of \$2.70 – nearly five times what it was worth before the war led to widespread shortages and sent prices soaring.

Gazans have said they are struggling to find all types of basic household goods.

Trump Jr.'s turn to help pick the most 'controversial' Cabinet of modern times

Donald Trump, who fiercely prizes loyalty, has long relied on family members for political advice; this time, it is the U.S. President-elect's son who has helped Cabinet contenders sink or rise and will provide advice in the White House while staying away from daily deliberations, say sources

Reuters

As U.S. President-elect Donald Trump builds the most controversial Cabinet in modern U.S. history – elevating inexperienced loyalists over more qualified candidates for top positions in his administration – his son Donald Trump Jr. has emerged as the most influential Trump family member in the transition, according to a half dozen sources with knowledge of his role.

Mr. Trump, who fiercely prizes loyalty, has long relied on family members for political advice, but which relative has his ear is known to vary.

This time, it is Mr. Trump Jr., who has helped Cabinet contenders sink or rise to the fore – from championing Senator J. D. Vance as Mr. Trump's running mate to blocking former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo from joining the Cabinet, according to the sources, who include donors, personal friends, and political allies.

Mr. Trump Jr. is due to join conservative venture capital fund 1789 Capital, although one of the sources said he will continue to host his politics-focused podcast and support candidates that espouse Mr. Trump's brand of politics.

He will provide advice to his father in the White House, the source added, although they cautioned



Warm bond: U.S. President-elect Donald Trump approaches to embrace his son Donald Trump Jr. at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania in the run-up to the presidential election. REUTERS

that Mr. Trump Jr. was unlikely to be involved in day-to-day deliberations.

Mr. Trump Jr. and the Trump-Vance transition team did not respond to a request for comment.

Vetting candidates

In addition to ensuring candidates are loyal to his father, Mr. Trump Jr. typically seeks out contenders who embrace an anti-establishment worldview, including protectionist economic policies, and a reduction in military interventions and overseas aid, according to a handful of the sources and Mr. Trump Jr.'s own comments on social media site X and in public.

Two of the candidates Mr. Trump Jr. championed may face a rocky confirmation process in the Senate: Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who Mr. Trump plans to nominate as the top U.S. health official, and Tulsi Gabbard, who Mr. Trump plans to nominate as intelligence chief.

Mr. Kennedy Jr. is an environmental activist who has spread misinformation on vaccines. Ms. Gabbard, a former Democratic Congresswoman, implied that Russian President Vladimir Putin had valid grounds for invading Ukraine and stirred controversy when she met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the midst of his bloody crack-

down on dissidents in 2017.

Mr. Trump Jr. was also instrumental in lobbying his father to pick the former's close friend Mr. Vance as running mate for the presidential election held this month.

Mr. Vance was popular with Mr. Trump's base, but his anti-corporate rhetoric, opposition to Ukraine aid, and past comments paning some Democratic women as "childless cat ladies" gave some donors and supporters pause.

Mr. Trump was ultimately happy with Mr. Vance, giving Mr. Trump Jr. extra political capital as an adviser during the transition, one of the sources added.

Not all of Mr. Trump Jr.'s picks have landed jobs.

He was keen on Ric Grenell, a personal friend and former Ambassador to Germany, getting Secretary of State, according to a separate source familiar with the matter. His father ended up picking Senator Marco Rubio, whose views are deemed by Mr. Trump's core supporters as too traditional and internationalist.

No big roles

Two of the sources close to Mr. Trump Jr. said he does not weigh in on all personnel decisions and is not working on the transition process or at Mar-a-Lago full time. He is also not expected to play a big role in vetting candidates for lower-level jobs, one of the sources close to him said.

"The reality this time is we actually know what we are doing," Mr. Trump Jr. told Fox News earlier this month. "And it is about surrounding my father with people who are both competent and loyal."

Mr. Trump's daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner were prominent in his 2016 presidential campaign, the subsequent transition, and throughout his first term.

This time, they are far less active, although Mr. Kushner, formerly Mr. Trump's senior adviser who focused on West Asia, said that he is briefing real estate investor Steve Wit-

koff on his new job as special envoy to the region.

"I have been working with Witkoff to get him up to speed on Trump's past efforts," Mr. Kushner said through a spokesperson.

A half-dozen sources close to Mr. Kushner said they expect him to be involved in West Asian policy in an unofficial capacity, with the goal of normalising relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia under an expansion of the 2020 Abraham Accords. Mr. Kushner helped broker the accords, a series of normalisation agreements between Israel and Arab nations.

Mr. Kushner, Ms. Ivanka and her sibling Eric Trump, who runs the Trump Organization business, do not plan to join the new administration, according to their representatives as well as sources.

One source close to the transition said Mr. Trump does not appear to need his family for advice as much as in the past because of aides like Susie Wiles, who helped run the most disciplined of his election campaigns to date. Mr. Trump has named Ms. Wiles as his Chief of Staff, a powerful position in Washington.

"Stuff is really buttoned down," the source said of Mr. Trump's current team. "He may not need the family this time like he used to."

Fashioning a future



Afghan women sew clothes at a handicrafts workshop in Kabul. Many women have launched small businesses in the past three years to meet their needs and support other women, whose employment sharply declined after the Taliban regime returned to power in 2021. AFP

Bangladeshi tolerance music festival scrapped after threats from Islamists

Agence France-Presse
DHAKA

A Bangladeshi mystic sect promoting religious tolerance has cancelled their popular music festival after Islamist threats, the latest victim of turbulent religious relations since the student-led revolution in August.

The overthrow of long-time Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has seen a spate of protests in Muslim-majority Bangladesh, including a surge in Islamist groups emboldened to take to the streets after years of being suppressed.

In the immediate chaotic days following Ms. Hasina's ouster, there were a string of reprisals on Hindus – seen by some as disproportionate supporters of her government – as well as attacks on Muslim Sufi shrines by Islamic hardliners.

Devotees of Lalon Shah,



Devotees of social reformer Lalon Shah on the MuktiDham Ashram and Lalon Academy premises in Narayanganj on Friday. AFP

a 17th-century Bengali social reformer whose moving songs of religious tolerance remain hugely influential, had organised a two-day festival in the city of Narayanganj later this month.

More than 10,000 people attended the event last year, listening to musicians promoting the sect's philosophy – a mix of Hinduism and Sufism rather than one specific religion – which

angered some Islamic hardliners.

Narayanganj Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Mahmudul Hoque said city authorities had not approved the programme due to concerns about potential violence after assessing security risks.

"This area is a stronghold of groups with opposing views," Mr. Hoque said.

Festival organiser Shah Jalal said it was the first

time he had to cancel.

Abdul Awal, a committee leader of Hefazat-e-Islam – a coalition of Islamist organisations with significant influence – led marches earlier this month demanding the festival be stopped. "We cannot allow activities that contradict the true spirit of Islam," Mr. Awal said.

Lalon's followers, ascetic "Baul" singers who wander on foot from town to town singing and begging for alms, are branded heretics by some Islamists.

"The cancellation of Lalon Mela is a bad omen for all of us," cultural activist Rafiur Rabbi said.

"It is disheartening that the government is yielding to majority pressure. Does this mean minorities will no longer have a voice?"

But the interim government's cultural affairs adviser, Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, said they were doing what they could.

Edinburgh's alternative 'homeless' tour guides shine light on different side of city

Agence France-Presse
EDINBURGH

Edinburgh, one the most visited cities in Europe, is offering tourists the chance to see it from a different angle – through the eyes of tour guides who have slept on its streets.

"When you are homeless, people do not look at you. They look through you," the founder of the Invisible Cities initiative, Zakiya Moulouli Guery, said.

Sonny Murray, 45, knows this only too well. He came to Invisible Cities after a spell being constantly in and out of prison.

"It was brutal, to be

honest. Because I was addicted to drugs and stuff," he said.

"I was shoplifting ... when I was not in prison, I was coming back out and I was homeless on the streets, just like a revolving door," he said.

Now as Invisible Cities' lead tour guide, he trains others, helping them to turn their life around just as he did. All the tours are unique and devised by the guides themselves, he said.

Mr. Murray's tour, which starts at the site of a former gallows, focuses on crime and punishment.

One of the highlights of his itinerary, however, is

the Edinburgh Support Hub run by Scotland's leading homeless charity, The Simon Community.

'Horrible feeling'

When he was homeless, it was "literally the only place in Edinburgh where homeless people could come and have a shower or wash their clothes and stuff," he said.

"It is a horrible feeling going about and not being able to have a shower and wash your clothes and that after a couple of days. So I used to come here all the time," he added.

Homelessness is on the rise in Scotland, with an



Right direction: Invisible Cities guide Sonny Murray, right, during a walking tour in front of Cannongate Kirk, Edinburgh. AFP

8% rise this year in those either assessed as homeless, who were in temporary accommodation, or had made homelessness

applications.

French-born Ms. Moulouli Guery said she hoped Invisible Cities' work was helping to tackle the sense

of being unseen experienced by homeless people.

"All of a sudden, to empower people to be visible and the centre of attention and lead a tour, I think that is really, really important," she said.

There are currently 18 guides helping visitors discover aspects of the city they would not normally encounter.

Similar tours are also run in a number of other U.K. cities, including Glasgow, Manchester, Cardiff, and Liverpool.

Ms. Moulouli Guery, who set up the initiative in 2016, said it was good for

tourists to get a chance to scratch beneath the city's picture-postcard surface.

"You can talk about the castle and Victoria Street and Harry Potter and all the different things that make it magical, but you can also talk about real topics," she said.

Positive environment

With a lack of support networks and relationship breakdown among the leading causes of homelessness, Invisible Cities tries to "recreate community and a positive environment", she said.

"It is about training more people and having

the current guides move on so we can create more opportunities for others to become guides," she added.

So far, around 130 people have undergone the training which aims at acting as a stepping stone to other training or employment opportunities.

But Mr. Murray said the benefits were not a one-way street.

Tourists benefit from a broader view of the place they were visiting, he said.

Not only that, he added, it also offered them the satisfaction that they were helping the city's "homeless down the line".

BIG SUPPORT

Rahul kept telling me to be calm and watch the ball: Jaiswal



GETTY IMAGES

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal praised K.L. Rahul's contribution to their 201-run partnership that deflated Australia during the course of the Perth Test. "We talk a lot in the dressing room. He made me feel really comfortable whenever I had something going on. He kept telling me to be calm, breathe and watch the ball," Jaiswal said.

LEGEND'S BACKING

Kohli doesn't have to prove to anybody, says Kapil



AP

The legendary Kapil Dev said Virat Kohli doesn't have anything to prove and his contribution is "unparalleled" after the Indian batting star made his 30th Test hundred against Australia in the first Test at Perth on Sunday. "One has to see his ability and talent. He's a big, big player. He doesn't have to prove to anybody..."

ROARING START

Nitish has silenced the naysayers, says former chief selector Prasad



AFP

There were apprehensions about Nitish Kumar Reddy's fast-tracking into the Indian Test team based on his stellar T20 performances, but his fearless batting in Perth has silenced naysayers, feels former national chairman of selectors M.S.K. Prasad, who has seen the all-rounder since the age of 12.

TOUCHDOWN

Skipper Rohit lands in Perth after taking paternity break



AFP

India's Test captain Rohit Sharma arrived in Perth on Sunday afternoon. The skipper, who took a paternity break, missed the first Test at the Optus Stadium. After this contest, expected to conclude on Monday, Rohit will play an active role with the squad, primed to take on the Prime Minister's XI at Canberra from November 30.

Australia left gasping after India's avalanche of runs

The visitors dominate the day to pile up a massive score of 487 for six on the back of Jaiswal's 161 and Kohli's unbeaten 100 before Bumrah strikes early blows to reduce the hosts to 12 for three in pursuit of a daunting target of 534.

INDIA IN AUS

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
PERTH

Sunday turned hot in tune with summer in the Southern hemisphere. And out in the middle, Yashasvi Jaiswal (161) and Virat Kohli (100 n.o.) dished out their own version of heat as India took a firm grip over the first Test here at the Optus Stadium.

At the third day's close, pursuing 534, Australia mustered 12 for three in its second innings after India declared at 487 for six. Jasprit Bumrah scalped Nathan McSweeney and Marnus Labuschagne, and Mohammed Siraj prised out Pat Cummins to leave the host gasping.

Mind-boggling shot

In the morning with the venue bathed in bright sunlight, Jaiswal perhaps felt he was at the Mumbai maidans. He reached his century with two scoring shots, deflecting Mitchell Starc over slips for four followed by a mind-boggling upper-cut six off Josh Hazlewood. The helmet was removed, bat placed on the ground, arms flung towards the skies, and Jaiswal soaked in the moment.

Senior partner K.L. Rahul embraced the centurion and for many at the ground, memories of Sachin Tendulkar's 114 at the nearby WACA Ground in 1992, swirled around. Such was Jaiswal's effect and the unfettered southpaw motored on. A run-out seemed possible, a few shots were streaky but importantly Jaiswal survived and watched Rahul essay some crisp drives.

Once the new ball was



Record-breaker: Kohli returned to form with his seventh century on Australian soil, the most by an Indian batter surpassing Tendulkar. ANI

taken, a change in fortunes was inevitable. Rahul edged Hazlewood and departed for a fine 77 and by then the opening alliance yielded 201 runs. Next man Devdutt Padikkal proved to be an apt foil while Jaiswal tucked into Nathan Lyon and India sat pretty on 275 for one at lunch.

After the break, Padikkal offered a catch to slip and Kohli strode in. He bided his time while Jaiswal went past the 150 mark. However, against the run of play, the opener found a close-in fielder with a slash off Mitchell Marsh.

Two quick wickets

Soon Rishabh Pant gave the charge to Lyon and was left stranded while Dhruv Jurel got trapped in front of his stumps and India had moved to 321 for five.

It was left to Kohli and

Washington Sundar to enhance the lead. Sharp runs were pocketed, Kohli upper-cut a six off Starc, Washington smote Travis Head over the ropes as Bumrah's men moved to 359 for five at tea. In the day's last session, Kohli reached his 50 while Washington hung around.

Shades of the vintage Kohli were evident as he punched on the off-side, knelt to sweep, and remained quick between the wickets. There was variable bounce too and when Lyon slipped one past Washington, it was a moment that ended the 89-run sixth-wicket partnership.

Kohli, though, found an aggressive partner in Nitish Kumar, who drilled three consecutive fours off Marsh. The youngster's chutzpah rubbed off onto his idol too as Kohli picked

his spots and a reverse hit off Lyon, revealed the kind of mood he was in. Soon the 30th Test hundred was

etched, a declaration was effected and Australia was left with a mountain to climb.

SCOREBOARD

INDIA — 1ST INNINGS

150 in 49.4 overs

AUSTRALIA — 1ST INNINGS

104 in 51.2 overs

INDIA — 2ND INNINGS

Yashasvi Jaiswal c Smith b Marsh 161 (297b, 15x4, 3x6), K.L. Rahul c Carey b Starc 77 (176b, 5x4), Devdutt Padikkal c Smith b Hazlewood 25 (71b, 2x4), Virat Kohli (not out) 100 (143b, 8x4, 2x6), Rishabh Pant st. Carey b Lyon 1 (4b), Dhruv Jurel lbw b Cummins 1 (6b), Washington Sundar b Lyon 29 (94b, 1x6), Nitish Kumar (not out) 38 (27b, 3x4, 2x6); Extras (b-22, lb-15, nb-11, w-7); 55; Total (for six wickets, decl. in 134.3 overs): 487.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-201 (Rahul, 62.6 overs), 2-275 (Padikkal, 84.1), 3-313 (Jaiswal, 93.5), 4-320 (Pant, 95.1), 5-321

(Jurel, 96.3), 6-410 (Washington, 125.5).

AUSTRALIA BOWLING

Starc 26-2-111-1, Hazlewood 21-9-28-1, Cummins 25-5-86-1, Marsh 12-0-65-1, Lyon 39-5-96-2, Labuschagne 6.3-0-38-0, Head 5-0-26-0.

AUSTRALIA — 2ND INNINGS

(Target: 534)

Nathan McSweeney lbw b Bumrah 0 (4b), Usman Khawaja (batting) 3 (9b), Pat Cummins c Kohli b Siraj 2 (8b), Marnus Labuschagne lbw b Bumrah 3 (5b); Extras (b-4); Total (for three wickets, in 4.2 overs): 12.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-0 (McSweeney, 0.4), 2-9 (Cummins, 3.1), 3-12 (Labuschagne, 4.2).

INDIA BOWLING

Bumrah 2.2-1-1-2, Siraj 2.0-7-1.



Hazlewood. GETTY IMAGES

It was hard work out there, says Hazlewood

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
PERTH

If Indian batters were all guns blazing here at the Optus Stadium, Josh Hazlewood was about quelling the fire in whatever manner he could. Hazlewood's overall spell in the Indian second innings was a staggering 21-9-28-1 with an economy rate of 1.30!

There is nothing more a speedster could have done on a tiring Sunday for Australia while India wrested control of the first Test. Asked about his impressions about a long day in the park, the Aussie spearhead replied: "India piled on the runs, had a couple of really big partnerships. It was hard work bowling out there. The new ball probably does a little bit, but if you get through that then it's a bit easier to bat. We saw a little bit of up and down on the pitch towards the end of the day and that will be something the batters will be watching."

Hazlewood also praised centurion Yashasvi Jaiswal and said: "He batted really well and is a good player. We tried a lot of things but he negated everything, credit to him."

The lanky pacer equally lauded Virat Kohli and K.L. Rahul besides stressing that captain Pat Cummins "kept his pace up the whole game and the bouncers were on track."

All centuries are amazing, but this is special: Jaiswal



Blazing away: Jaiswal shrugged off his first innings failure to punish Australia with a superb century in the second. ANI

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
PERTH

Yashasvi Jaiswal speaks like the way he bats. There is an eagerness to respond quickly and move ahead. Often he nods his head while waiting for a question to conclude and then he replies in a direct manner.

The centurion met the media at the Optus Stadium here on Sunday evening and there was an air of quiet confidence about him.

The opener's 161 set India on a strong platform in the first Test and Jaiswal was happy with his effort: "For me, all the centuries are amazing, but this will be special because I really wanted to do it."

"I always wanted to come to Australia and do well here. We all knew that the ball will bounce here

and I prepared for it."

Jaiswal was thrilled about batting in tandem with Virat Kohli and said: "Today, I was playing and running with him. It was a very special moment. I try to develop my own game by talking to senior players and by understanding how I can add certain things to my game. I still have a lot to learn."

He was clear about his mindset too: "I am going to go and enjoy and be fearless. I will go and take a brave decision. I will try and do what is required for my team. It is amazing to play against such great bowlers."

Asked about the six that got him his hundred, Jaiswal said: "I knew he (Josh Hazlewood) was going to bowl a bouncer and I was ready for that ball. Luckily, he did and I played that shot and I enjoyed it."

Verstappen wraps up fourth successive title; Russell wins Las Vegas GP

FORMULA ONE

Reuters
LAS VEGAS

Max Verstappen clinched his fourth consecutive World Drivers' Championship with a fifth-place finish at the Las Vegas Grand Prix late Saturday night, while George Russell led all 50 laps to complete a dream weekend for Mercedes.

Russell finished 7.093 ahead of teammate Lewis Hamilton for his second Grand Prix victory of the season and the third of his career. Russell led by a wide margin for a majority of the race, but Hamilton was able to make a significant dent in that margin

over the last 20 laps. Mercedes ended the weekend having swept all three practice sessions, the pole, and the top two spots on the podium. Ferrari's Carlos Sainz rounded out the podium.

Verstappen finished Sunday's Grand Prix a spot ahead of Lando Norris in sixth, which put him an insurmountable 64 points ahead of Norris in the title chase and allowed him to clinch the championship in the season's 22nd Grand Prix.

Verstappen became the third driver to clinch the WDC in Las Vegas. He joins Nelson Piquet (1981) and Keke Rosberg (1982), who did so in the only two editions of the Caesars Palace Grand Prix.

Max Force

Max Verstappen became the sixth driver to win four World titles after finishing fifth in the Las Vegas Grand Prix on Saturday. A statistical highlights of the Dutchman's career:



■ Verstappen is joint third on the all-time list behind Michael Schumacher (7), Lewis Hamilton (7) and Juan Manuel Fangio (5)

■ The Red Bull driver is tied with Sebastian Vettel and Alain Prost on four crowns. Vettel also won his four titles with Red Bull

■ Verstappen is

the fifth driver after Fangio, Schumacher, Vettel and Hamilton to win four consecutive titles

■ At 27, Verstappen is the second youngest after Vettel (26 years) to clinch four championships

■ Verstappen has led the F1 drivers' standings since the 2022 Spanish GP, a remarkable reign

"What a season. Four times. Thank you guys. Thank you to everyone," Verstappen said over team radio after taking the che-

quered flag and being congratulated on becoming a four-time champion. "It was a little bit more difficult than last year but we

pulled through and we gave it all."

Pierre Gasly suffered the first misfortune of the night as he lost his engine

on the 16th lap. It was a heartbreaking end to a promising weekend for Gasly, who started third on the grid.

▼ Russell finished 7.093 ahead of teammate Lewis Hamilton for his second Grand Prix victory of the season and the third of his career

It was a rough night for McLaren, which lacked pace in both cars from the opening lap owing to a rear wing issue. It was a costly performance in terms of clinching the Constructors' Championship, which will have to be decided in the final two races after Ferrari was able to get within 24 points.

Red Bull also made a dent in that margin and now sits within striking distance, 53 points out going into Qatar.

The results: 1. George Russell (Mercedes) 1 h, 22:05.969s, 2.

Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) + 7.313, 3. Carlos Sainz (Ferrari) 11.906, 4. Charles Leclerc (Ferrari) 14.283, 5. Max Verstappen (Red Bull) 16.582, 6. Lando Norris (McLaren) 43.385, 7. Oscar Piastri (McLaren) 51.365, 8. Nico Hulkenberg (Haas) 59.808, 9. Yuki Tsunoda (Racing Bulls) 1:02.808, 10. Sergio Perez (Red Bull) 1:03.114, 11. Fernando Alonso (Aston Martin) 1:09.195, 12. Kevin Magnussen (Haas) 1:09.803, 13. Zhou Guanyu (Saubert) 1:14.085, 14. Franco Colapinto (Williams) 1:15.172, 15. Lance Stroll (Aston Martin) 1:24.102, 16. Liam Lawson (Racing Bulls) 1:31.005; + 1 lap: 17. Esteban Ocon (Alpine), 18. Valtteri Bottas (Saubert); DNF: Pierre Gasly (Alpine), Alexander Albon (Williams).

Standings (top three): Drivers: 1. Verstappen 403 pts., 2. Norris 340, 3. Leclerc 319.

Constructors: 1. McLaren 608 pts., 2. Ferrari 584, 3. Red Bull 555.

Super Sunday for Pant, Shreyas and Venkatesh

The dashing wicketkeeper-batter becomes the costliest buy in the history of the league as Super Giants shell out ₹27 crore for him while the other two go for ₹26.75 crore and ₹23.75 crore

Who went where on day one

The list of players bought on Sunday



Shreyas Iyer
(26.75)

Venkatesh Iyer
(23.75)

Chennai Super Kings
Noor Ahmad (10), R. Ashwin (9.75), Devon Conway (6.25), Khaleel Ahmed (4.80), Rachin Ravindra (4, RTM), Rahul Tripathi (3.40), Vijay Shankar (1.20)

Slots remaining: 13 (4 overseas);
Purse remaining: 15.60

Delhi Capitals
K.L. Rahul (14), Mitchell Starc (11.75), T. Natarajan (10.75), Jake Fraser-McGurk (9, RTM), Harry Brook (6.25), Ashutosh Sharma (3.80), Mohit Sharma (2.20), Sameer Rizvi (0.95), Karun Nair (0.50)

Slots remaining: 12 (4 overseas);
Purse remaining: 13.80

Gujarat Titans
Jos Buttler (15.75), Mohammed Siraj (12.25), Kagiso Rabada (10.75), Prasidh Krishna (9.50), Mahipal Lomror (1.70), Kumar Kushagra (0.65), Anuj Rawat (0.30), Manav Suthar (0.30), Nishant Sindhu (0.30)

Slots remaining: 11 (5 overseas);
Purse remaining: 17.50

Kolkata Knight Riders
Venkatesh Iyer (23.75), Anrich Nortje (6.50), Quinton de Kock (3.60), Angkrish Raghuvanshi (3), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (2), Vaibhav Arora (1.80), Mayank Markande (0.30)

Slots remaining: 12 (3 overseas);
Purse remaining: 10.05

Lucknow Super Giants
Rishabh Pant (27), Avesh Khan (9.75), David Miller (7.50), Abdul Samad (4.20), Mitchell Marsh (3.40), Aiden Markram (2), Aryan Juyal (0.30)

Slots remaining: 13 (4 overseas);
Purse remaining: 14.85

Mumbai Indians
Trent Boult (12.50), Naman Dhir (5.25, RTM), Robin Minz (0.65), Karn Sharma (0.50)

Slots remaining: 16 (7 overseas);
Purse remaining: 26.10

Punjab Kings
Shreyas Iyer (26.75), Yuzvendra Chahal (18), Arshdeep Singh (18, RTM), Marcus Stoinis (11), Nehal Wadhwa (4.20), Glenn Maxwell (4.20), Vyshak Vijaykumar (1.8), Yash Thakur (1.6), Harpreet Brar (1.50), Vishnu Vinod (0.95)

Slots remaining: 13 (6 overseas);
Purse remaining: 22.50

Rajasthan Royals
Jofra Archer (12.50), Wanindu Hasaranga (5.25), Maheesh Theekshana (4.40), Akash Madhwal (1.20), Kumar Kartikeya (0.30)

Slots remaining: 14 (4 overseas);
Purse remaining: 17.35

Royal Challengers Bengaluru
Josh Hazlewood (12.50), Phil Salt (11.50), Jitesh Sharma (11), Liam Livingstone (8.75), Rasikh Dar (6), Suyash Sharma (2.6)

Slots remaining: 16 (5 overseas);
Purse remaining: 30.65

Sunrisers Hyderabad
Ishan Kishan (11.25), Mohammed Shami (10), Harshal Patel (8), Abhinav Manohar (3.20), Rahul Chahar (3.20), Adam Zampa (2.40), Simarjeet Singh (1.5), Atharva Taide (0.30)

Slots remaining: 12 (4 overseas);
Purse remaining: 5.15



Vignettes from Jeddah: The Super Kings camp strikes a happy pose while Bravo makes his presence felt at the KKR table. RCB will have a busy day on Monday. SPORTZPICS/IPL



Golden boy: Pant, the biggest gainer on day one, is now a Super Giant. AFP



IPL AUCTION

Amol Karhadkar
JEDDAH

Two most expensive signings. 72 players sold. 12 unsold. And a combined total of ₹467.95 crore spent. That was the gist of the proceedings at the Al Johar Abadi Arena on the first day of the IPL auction on Sunday.

Rishabh Pant and Shreyas Iyer hogged the limelight as expected, the two walking away with a bag of riches. While the former was bought by Lucknow Super Giants for ₹27 crore, the latter went for ₹26.75 crore to Punjab Kings. Venkatesh Iyer (23.75 crore, Kolkata Knight Riders), Arshdeep Singh (18 crore, Punjab Kings) and Yuzvendra Chahal (18 crore, Punjab Kings), too, raked in the moolah.

Pant saw LSG bid for him right from the start till Sanjiv Goenka indicated the incremental Right to

Match (RTM) bid of 27 crore, which was beyond Delhi Capitals' reach. It meant that LSG, which had latched on to him for 20.75 crore before Capitals tried to use the RTM card, had the most expensive IPL signing ever.

Minutes earlier, Punjab Kings – which entered the auction with the largest purse of ₹110.50 crore – had outbid Capitals to sign Shreyas – last season's IPL-winning captain – for a whopping sum.

Both buys eclipsed last year's record of 24.75 crore for Mitchell Starc by Knight Riders. But the Kolkata franchise had its share of the limelight when it forced Royal Challengers Bengaluru to withdraw from the bidding war for Venkatesh, one of the star performers during its triumphant run last year.

Venkatesh's price tag may have surprised many but KKR was clear in retaining its core. It went all the way to keep Angkrish Raghuvanshi (3 crore) and Rahmanullah Gurbaz (2

crore) too. Arshdeep, meanwhile, was the first player who came up for bidding. There were seven franchises in the fray before Kings exercised their RTM option despite Sunrisers Hyderabad inflating the incremental bid from 15.75 to 18 crore. Chahal, the veteran leggie, earned a jackpot of 18 crore as Kings went all the way to secure his services.

While Mumbai Indians signed the least number of players on the opening day, Chennai Super Kings – just like KKR – adopted the retain-the-core policy. The team in yellow, which exercised the RTM option to snare Rachin Ravindra (4 crore), had started its signing spree by buying back Devon Conway (6.25 crore).

The five-time champion revived its association with R. Ashwin (9.75 crore) after a decade. The offie will team up with Afghanistan left-arm wrist spinner Noor Ahmad, CSK's most expensive signing (10 crore) of the day.

Ponting welcomes new rule on overseas players' participation in the IPL

Amol Karhadkar
JEDDAH

Jofra Archer was added at the last minute ahead of the Indian Premier League's 2025 player auction. And on Sunday, of the three players that remained unsold in the first six sets, two – David Warner and Jonny Bairstow – were overseas cricketers.

These two events are interlinked, possibly due to the amended rule vis-a-vis overseas cricketers' participation in IPL. In a bid to curb overseas cricketers registering for the auction and then withdrawing before the season citing personal reasons, the IPL authorities have introduced a new rule.

According to the rule, except for a justifiable medical reason, an over-



In the game: Punjab Kings head coach Ponting and co-owner Ness Wadia at the IPL auction in Jeddah. SPORTZPICS/IPL

seas player will be disallowed to enter the IPL auction for the next two years if he withdraws between the auction and the beginning of an IPL season.

While Shashwat Goenka, the Lucknow Super Giants owner, has welcomed the rule, Punjab Kings head coach Ricky

Ponting said. "The personal reasons, the injury stuff, that is all still there, obviously, and it needs to be, because the players need some protection as well. But it's just so important that the players understand what investment the teams are making in them."

Ponting was referring to Harry Brook withdrawing after being Delhi Capitals' big signing last year. Similarly, Mark Wood (Lucknow Super Giants) and Wanindu Hasaranga (Royal Challengers Bengaluru) pulled out without justifiable reasons in the recent past.

"It's a big investment that we, as coaches or as team owners, are making. And one false move in the auction can bring you undone for three or four

years, and if that's because someone doesn't turn up, then I think what they brought in with the two-year ban is a great way to ensure that when the players put their name in, that they are committed for that period of time."

The fallout of the new rule has been that the England and Wales Cricket Board and Cricket Australia have assured the BCCI full availability of their contracted cricketers. As a result, Archer was asked to be added at the eleventh hour only after the franchises were assured of his availability for the whole season. And the lanky pacer earned a hefty paycheck, taking home ₹12.50 crore before Rajasthan Royals outbid Lucknow Super Giants and Mumbai Indians.

Sinner leads Italy to Davis Cup glory



Reign continues: Sinner raises the coveted Davis Cup following Italy's successful defence. AFP

Agence France-Presse
MALAGA

Jannik Sinner completed his sensational year by leading Italy to a successful defence of the Davis Cup with victory over the Netherlands in the final on Sunday. The World No.1 eased to a 7-6(2), 6-2 triumph against Tallon Griekspoor for the winning point after Matteo Berrettini had put

the champion ahead with a convincing 6-4, 6-2 win against Botin van de Zandschulp. Sinner ends 2024 with titles at the Australian Open, US Open and the ATP Finals.

Italy became the first team to defend the title since the Czech Republic in 2013, and the fifth nation to win it along with the Billie Jean King Cup in the same season.

Liverpool pulls clear at the top; Spurs drubs Man City

EURO LEAGUES

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

Mohamed Salah fired Liverpool eight points clear at the top of the Premier League as the leader survived a scare from lowly Southampton thanks to the Egypt star's second half double on Sunday.

Later Ruben Amorim was given a stark illustration of the size of his task at Manchester United after his uninspiring team was held 1-1 by struggling Ipswich in his first match in charge.

Manchester City collapsed to its fifth straight defeat on Saturday, hammered 4-0 by Tottenham in another huge blow to its Premier League title hopes.

LaLiga leader Barcelona



Two-goal hero: Salah pokes home Liverpool's second against Southampton. AFP

suffered a dramatic collapse in a 2-2 draw at Celta Vigo on Saturday.

The results: Premier League: Southampton 2 (Armstrong 42, Fernandes 56) lost to Liverpool 3 (Szoboszlai 30, Salah 65, 83-pen); Ipswich 1 (Hutchinson 43) drew with Manchester United 1 (Rashford 2).

Serie A: Como 0 lost to Fiorentina 2 (Adli 20, Kean 68).
LaLiga: Osasuna 2 (Budimir 8, 20-pen) drew with Villarreal 2

(Baena 67, Moreno 90+3-pen).
On Saturday: Premier League: Manchester City 0 lost to Tottenham 4 (Maddison 13, 20, Porro 52, Johnson 90+3).
LaLiga: Atletico Madrid 2 (Griezmann 76-pen, Sorloth 86) bt Alaves 1 (Guridi 7-pen); Celta Vigo 2 (Gonzalez 84, Alvarez 86) drew with Barcelona 2 (Raphinha 15, Lewandowski 61).
Serie A: AC Milan 0 drew with Juventus 0; Parma 1 (Cancellieri 49) lost to Atalanta 3 (Retegui 4, Ederson 39, Lookman 75).

Sadaoui sparkles as Blasters end the losing streak

ISL

Stan Rayan
KOCHI

Noah Sadaoui's sparkling show and Kerala Blasters' second-half surge helped the Kochi side pull off a stunning 3-0 win over the high-flying Chennaiyin FC in the ISL at the Nehru Stadium here on Sunday.

The Morocco-born American scored a goal and came up with an assist as Stahre's boys raised their game when they desperately needed to after three straight losses. Spaniard Jesus Jimenez and substitute K.P. Rahul also scored as the Blasters climbed two rungs and moved to eighth spot.

Blasters took the lead in the 56th minute with captain Adrian Luna starting the move with his run into



Firing it in: Sadaoui nets Blasters' second goal. R.K. NITHIN

the box through the left. There was a bit of confusion and a moment later, Korou Singh sent a pass to Jimenez in the front and the Spaniard tapped it in. Sadaoui, who came close to scoring a couple of times earlier, increased the margin making the most of the Luna's cross and finding the far corner of the net with a left-footed shot.

And in the injury pe-

riod, Sadaoui made a nice run into the box from the right. With the goalkeeper Mohammed Nawaz blocking him, he smartly sent a cross to Rahul, who had entered a few minutes earlier, and the latter finished the job neatly.

The result: Kerala Blasters 3 (Jesus Jimenez 56, Noah Sadaoui 70, K.P. Rahul 90+2) bt Chennaiyin FC 0.

'World Championship match not a foregone conclusion'

Carlsen feels the Gukesh-Ding face-off is quite even, reckons the rhythm of a title showdown is different; says both players deserve the opportunity; feels excited about freestyle format



DEBASISH BHADURI

P.K. Ajith Kumar

Much of the chess world may be in a hurry to write Ding Liren off, but Magnus Carlsen, who knows a thing or two about World championships, isn't. The World No. 1 also believes D. Gukesh is the favourite in the World title match that starts in Singapore on November 25, but he doesn't think it is a foregone conclusion.

"Based on current form, Gukesh is a significant favourite, but based on peak chess ability, I think it is quite even," Carlsen said at Kolkata, where he took the both the rapid and blitz titles at the Tata Steel Chess India tournament in style. "So if Ding can regain that form, he has a good chance. Also, Gukesh was quite vulnerable in the last tournament that he played."

He stressed that he still favoured Gukesh. "If I was to make a prediction at this point, I would go with the guy who has played by far the best chess of these two players over the last couple years, which is Gukesh," said the World No. 1. "But, each World championship sort of has its own rhythm. It is something he hasn't experienced before, so I think he might take some time getting into it. Ding probably justifiably feels that he is the underdog, so maybe he doesn't have that much to lose. But overall, it is not a foregone conclusion. Some people think that this match is almost a formality at this point, but I think there is more than a 50% chance that this match is quite even."

Not tempted

Even if Gukesh emerges as the champion, Carlsen said he would not be tempted to play a match with him. "A long classical match really doesn't interest me – against anybody," he said. "So whoever wins the World championship I think that will be a tremendous achievement, but a match with the champion is not something that I will be seeking to get in on."

Carlsen has been staying away from the World championship cycle since 2021, when he won his fifth World title, beating Russia's Ian Nepomniachtchi. His first World championship had come in India in 2013, after beating Viswanathan Anand in Chennai. He then defeated Anand once more the following year to retain his crown.

He went on to win the title matches against Sergey Karjakin and Fabiano Caruana before taking on Nepomniachtchi. He had said that he would be keen to defend his World title only if Alireza Firouzja had emerged as his challenger, but the Iran-born French

prodigy performed badly at the Candidates tournament – the qualifying event that determines the challenger. It was won by Nepomniachtchi yet again. Following Carlsen's withdrawal, world chess governing body FIDE decided that Ding, who had finished second at the Candidates, would play Nepomniachtchi for the World title.

Garry Kasparov, the former World champion and one of the game's most admired figures, had said that the World championship didn't mean much since Carlsen, the planet's best player, was not part of it.

Carlsen insisted the World championship was important. "Ding and Gukesh have qualified for the World

championship match, and they are deserving of being there," he said. "I have chosen to step away. The world championship in the past has very often been a contest to just determine who the best player in the world is, but it has not always been that way. It may not be that this time. But as a chess fan it is a great spectacle regardless."

Clean sweep

Carlsen said he still loved to play chess and was motivated enough. "It is my favourite hobby in the world, and, you know, it is very satisfying when I can still be quite good at it, especially facing the younger generation," he said "So for me, that is motivation enough in itself."



Coming to each new event, it is like I have never won anything before. I just want to play and win again."

He not merely played and won in Kolkata, but he dominated the event totally. He won both the rapid and blitz titles with a round to spare.

He had won the rapid title by a margin of two points. That is remarkable, especially when you consider the quality of the tournament.

"The game against Arjun Erigaisi (in rapid) was certainly my favourite one here," said Carlsen. "He is an extremely dangerous player when he has the initiative, when he gets to attack. And I sort of willingly got into a position where he had the initiative. So I am very happy that even though my play was obviously far from perfect, that I managed to handle the very complicated position better than he did, and to get the win from there. Apart from that, I think my other wins were either, like either my opponent didn't play in the best way, or they were, they were mainly sort of technical. But of course, overall it was a good performance. And I would say that, yeah, I'm, I'm happy with, with all the wins, even though, even if they were not, like great creative achievements."

Huge positive

Carlsen was returning to Kolkata after winning the Tata Steel tournament in 2019. He said he was happy to be back. "Having more events in India is something that I have been very positive about for a long time now," he said. "There is an enthusiasm and interest for chess here that you really can't find anywhere else. Also, you know, the strength of the local players is higher than most places."

After Kolkata, Carlsen went to Singapore to play a couple of freestyle chess games with World No. 2 Fabiano Caruana. "I am very excited about the future of freestyle chess," he said. "I like the idea in itself. The reasons why I don't like classical chess so much is the preparation, the difficulty of actually getting an exciting game. When you play freestyle, you are guaranteed that, because there is no opening theory. So, we have got a lot of tournaments coming up, next year."

He hopes it will be fun for everyone. "Overall I think it is not only for myself, but exciting for other top players, too," he said. "It is something different from sitting down, to a classical game where, you know, you don't know if you are getting a game or not, because it is so analysed. I enjoy formats like rapid, blitz and freestyle a lot."

THE GIST

Carlsen has been staying away from the World championship cycle since 2021

The Norwegian was returning to Kolkata after winning the Tata Steel tournament in 2019

Carlsen says he's quite excited about the future of freestyle chess, saying he likes the idea

JAMMU AND KASHMIR



Seized vehicles inside the parking lot of the traffic department in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir's summer capital, during an ongoing drive to curb underage driving, in the wake of rising car crashes and accidents; (below) on-road checking to ensure all traffic rules are being followed. IMRAN NISSAR



High on wheelies

After the death of two children in a car crash, where one was driving, Srinagar, in Jammu and Kashmir, is seeing an outpouring of emotion. **Peerzada Ashiq** finds that the police, the government, and civil society have all kicked into action. Traffic officials are clamping down on underage driving, petrol pumps are asking for drivers' IDs, and even clerics are restricting children on bikes and in cars from entering religious places

A tall solitary chinar tree fails to provide a canopy to dozens of people of all ages waiting outside the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Traffic Police's two-storey building in Srinagar's Polo View area. There is the buzz of drivers, some agitating and some pleading, all united in asking for their vehicles back. A pick-up truck pulls up, with a full load of seized two-wheelers from nearby locations. Tow-trucks bring in four-wheelers.

The traffic department's compound is full of vehicles, parked bumper to bumper. With 100-odd people crowding the compound and the 50 or so cars and bikes, only a senior officer's vehicle can negotiate the drive into the compound now. Official data says that over 1,000 two-wheelers and four-wheelers have been seized by the traffic department just this week. All were from underage drivers across Srinagar.

This unprecedented crackdown was triggered by the death of two Class 11 students in an accident caught on surveillance cameras. The clip shows the boys speeding in a sports utility vehicle, attempting to overtake another car, and then hitting a parked truck. The vehicle turned turtle and the video has disturbing details of what happened thereafter.

On November 15, a day after the tragic accident, millions had viewed the clip on social media in the first 24 hours after it was posted.

The bypass, where the incident took place, is an outer ring road that connects Srinagar with Jammu on one side and Baramulla on the other. The viral video, which shook the Valley, sparked a debate on a range of new issues confronting a society that was once known for its strict, conservative upbringing of children.

The Regional Transport Office (RTO), Srinagar, has cancelled 619 driving licenses, penalised 1,600 violators, and imposed fines amounting to ₹2.22 lakh across the city, after the accident. But beyond the administrative crackdown, the deaths of these two children have thrown up discussions around unplanned urbanisation, parenting, and school discipline in Srinagar.

Car counselling

Muzaffar Ahmad Shah, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Srinagar, says parents are often permissive with their children, but social media is also a trigger when it comes to rash driving. Two months ago, the traffic police had counselled the parents of one of the victims of the Tengpora Bypass accident, when he had been caught driving the car. At least 15-20 parents are counselled in such cases every month in Srinagar, officials say.

"We counselled the parents of a boy recently who posted a video of driving at 182 km/hour in Srinagar at night. We tracked down the driver who was a teen from an educated family. He could have killed many in a mishap," says Shah. One of the parents counselled by the traffic



We counselled the parents of a boy recently who posted a video of driving at 182 km/hour in Srinagar at night. We tracked down the driver... He could have killed many in a mishap

MUZAFFAR AHMAD SHAH
Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Srinagar

department admits they and their partner allow their children to drive the car once in a while. "We both work, and spend long hours in the office. After school, the children go to coaching centres and insist on driving themselves. The accident, however, has shaken us. We have decided against allowing our son to drive a car again," they say, on the condition of anonymity.

The police also monitor online accounts that promote stunts, and have seized many vehicles in such cases. There are also complaints of teens driving towards Jammu and Delhi without the consent of their parents. In one such case, a group of schoolboys was tracked down and detained after they planned to drive to Jammu, 300 kilometres away from Srinagar, to celebrate a friend's birthday.

Facts and figures

Magistrates in several districts in the Kashmir valley have issued circulars banning the sale of petrol and diesel to minors. "Any fuel station found violating this order will face suspension or revocation of the license to operate the fuel station," the circular issued by the Shopian district magistrate reads. Scores of petrol pumps across the Valley have started putting up banners, denying fuel to minors.

Jammu and Kashmir sees far more deaths in road accidents than militant violence. While the collective number of militants and civilians killed every year does not go beyond 250, the roads are a far greater danger zone. In 2012 the State recorded 6,709 road accidents, which left 1,165 people dead and 9,755 injured, as per traffic department statistics.

Despite improved car technology and road expansion, including widened national highways and new bypasses, J&K has recorded 4,990 accidents this year so far, which has left 703 dead and 6,820 injured. J&K's summer capital, Srinagar, saw 476 accidents last year, which left 55 dead and 493 injured. This year so far, Srinagar has recorded 394 accidents, which has left 50 dead and 411 injured.

"Unfortunately, a pattern emerging in Srinagar is that the victims of accidents are mostly pedestrians. An almost 40% fatality rate is higher than the national average," Shah says. The growing violation of traffic rules is also evident from the number of challans across the State. According to official figures, over 12 lakh challans have been imposed in J&K this year so far. Srinagar has seen the highest, with 3.37 lakh.

Official figures suggest that Srinagar has 5 lakh registered vehicles and sees a major inflow of tourist vehicles and inter-district traffic on a daily basis. Many experts feel road infrastructure in Srinagar city is not commensurate with the volume of traffic.

Clamping down administratively

Facing a public outcry, the Srinagar administration is engaging representatives of coaching centres and private schools to bring about a behavioural change. "Parent-teacher collaboration, regular interactions between parents, teachers,

and coaching centre representatives will be held to ensure that students receive consistent guidance both at home and in educational settings," says Bilal Mohi-Ud-Din Bhat, Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar.

A dedicated task force comprising representatives from the administration, educational institutions, coaching centres, and civil society has been set up in Srinagar to oversee the implementation of safety and awareness initiatives.

A parent, whose son, a Class 10 student, met with an accident earlier this year in Srinagar's old city, says, "My son has a broken arm and has developed a limp. This is going to impact him all his life now. We need to put in place measures that ensure children, who can't rationalise the impact of rash driving, are not allowed to drive and risk their lives."

Schools across the valley are putting in place new rules to ensure students don't drive to school. G.N. Var, president of the Private Schools Association of Jammu & Kashmir, says the recent accident was a wake-up call. "We are aware that schools have a larger responsibility. The influence of teachers and schools on students is unmatched and we will be leveraging this position to make our society safer," Var says.

The association will push for awareness programmes and organising workshops on campuses to educate students about the dangers of underage driving and the legal implications involved. "Parent-teacher meetings will also discuss driving habits and traffic violations. Schools will use these platforms to discuss the responsibilities of parents and emphasize that parents not allow minors access to vehicles," Var adds.

The schools are mulling implementing a new vehicle policy. "The policy will prohibit students from driving to school unless they are of legal age and possess a valid driver's license. This could include penalties for violations," an Association member says.

Social activation

Hakim Sameer Hamdani is the design director of the conservation organisation, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, Kashmir. He says most accidents take place on newer stretches of road, not in the old city, where the roads are narrow and there are no long, open stretches that are conducive to speeding. "In the old city, besides formal policing, society also plays the role of policing to monitor rash driving."

Kashmir's clergy is seeing underage driving as a societal problem. "No minor student operating any motor vehicle, including a two-wheeler or four-wheeler, will be allowed entry into a religious place," says Imran Ansari, the president of the All J&K Shia Association. He has directed all madrasas, mosques, and Imam Barghas under its umbrella "to exercise strict vigilance".

The Doctors Association Kashmir (DAK), a body of doctors in Srinagar, has also demanded measures to contain accidents in Kashmir. "We are witnessing a worrying surge in trauma cases at local hospitals, with youth disproportionately affected. Many of these accidents result in severe injuries, including traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord damage, and complex fractures," says Dr. Mohd Yusuf Tak, president of the DAK. He adds that tragically, many lives are lost. Of those who survive, many end up with injuries that take months of rehabilitation, to heal.



ANDHRA PRADESH



Blighted by customs: At least 25 children born to couples who had consanguineous marriages suffer from various mental and physical disorders at Srirampuram village of Uppada-Kottapalli mandal in Kakinada district, Andhra Pradesh. T. APPALA NAIDU

Unnamed children of Uppada coast

Villages of the Thondangi and Uppada-Kottapalli mandals in the Kakinada district strictly adhere to their customs of 'Voni', which ensures an active propagation of the unhealthy practice of consanguineous marriages. However, this comes at a great cost, with many children being born out of such marriages becoming victims of severe physical and mental health problems. Mothers of such children are so traumatised that they even fear holding a naming ceremony for their children, finds **T. Appala Naidu**

Koyya Durga (35) has yet to give a name to her eight-year-old son. "I'm afraid that something bad might happen to him if we name him," she says.

In Srirampuram village of Uppada-Kottapalli mandal, on the Uppada coast in the Kakinada district of Andhra Pradesh, Ms. Durga is among the many mothers who dread naming their children. They say that the grief and pain that their consanguineous marriages brought to their families are so deep and intense that they do not dare hold any more celebrations of their personal achievements, including naming their children.

The nearly 600 families in the village under the Pithapuram Assembly segment from which Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan is elected, the majority of whom belong to the Yadava community, irrespective of their economic and educational standards, share a common suffering—the burden of consanguinity and inbreeding.

A majority of the families here were traditionally shepherds who have taken to agriculture and aqua farming which thrive on the Uppada coast.

At 13, Ms. Durga married her 15-year-old maternal uncle Koyya Appala Raju. Their marriage was solemnised in 2002. "Our families fixed our wedding in six months after I attained puberty," says Ms. Durga.

Within two years of marriage, she gave birth to a baby boy, who died due to health complications at the age of five. The couple did not have children for 14 years after the death of their first boy.

"We were blessed with another baby boy in 2016. Even though it was a caesarean delivery, my joy was boundless. But my son didn't cry like healthy babies do. We had to keep him in an ICU at a private hospital for 25 days in Pithapuram," she recollects.

When my son was nine months old, we got him tested, and he was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. The boy even suffers from seizures occasionally.

"The doctors concluded that some deformities might surface as he grows up, but there are possibilities for their cure in the future. They said consanguinity was the prime cause for these health disorders," says Ms. Durga.

The calming sound of the waves or the soothing sea breeze seems to provide little relief to these villagers who are overwhelmed with the many children suffering from severe health problems as a result of their strict adherence to the culture of consanguinity.

Burden of unhealthy customs

"Today, at least 25 children in our village, born to couples who had consanguineous marriages suffer from various mental and physical disorders. There must be at least 30 consanguineous marriages that happened over the past few years here," says farmer Perla Venkata Babji who also married within the family. Within two years, three consanguineous marriages were held in our village, the 40-year-old man says, adding that two of his three sisters have had consanguineous marriages.

Elaborating on the high prevalence of consan-



Looking at my granddaughter Akanksha, I do hesitate to ask my son to take the same risks. But the entire family has given its consent for his marriage to a girl in the same family during the 'Voni', and I cannot go back on my word. The engagement is likely to be held during the coming Pongal festival

KADARI ARJUNUDU
Villager,
Perumallapuram

guinity in the villages on the Uppada coast, Kosuru Ravi Kumar, Medical Officer at Primary Health Centre at Perumallapuram of Thondangi mandal in Kakinada district, says: "Many consanguineous marriages are happening in our area. This practice is more prevalent among the Yadava and fisherfolk communities."

Nearly 70% of children born to couples whose marriage is 'First Grade' consanguinity may develop health disorders. Given their genome history, a marriage between a girl and her maternal uncle can be termed 'First-Grade consanguinity', he says. Mr. Babji says the imposition of the practice of inbreeding begins with the 'Voni' promise, which is made right at the birth of the girl child in the community. That is when the family members choose a boy and make an oral agreement with the girl's family that when she attains marriageable age, she will be married to the boy.

It is also customary that when the girl attains puberty, her parents remind the boy's family of the 'Voni' promise. The villagers explain that it is also considered a grave offence if any family violates the promise.

A. Vara Lakshmi of Perumallapuram in Thondangi mandal married her maternal uncle, a geologist at a Central government institute, as per the 'Voni' promise made by her parents on the day she was born. The Master's degree in Commerce she holds hardly helped her shape her fate.

The eldest of her two children is her four-year-old girl Akanksha who cannot speak, respond, or balance her movements and constantly needs a guardian.

"We never imagined that our Akanksha's destiny would be so bad. The doctors at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS-Bengaluru) confirmed that she suffers from Dandy-Walker Malformation (DWM) and that it is a result of consanguinity," says Ms. Vara Lakshmi, who, like Ms. Durga, doesn't want to give a name to her younger child, a four-month-old boy, fearing something bad can happen to him if she celebrates his birth with a naming ceremony.

The grim reality of the unhealthy custom re-



The parent of a child who suffers from albinism, at Srirampuram.



Perla Nookalamma with her eldest son Sattibabu, at Kodada gram panchayat of Thondangi mandal in Kakinada district, Andhra Pradesh. T. APPALA NAIDU

flected in Ms. Akanksha's inconceivable suffering has, however, not stopped her grandfather from making arrangements for another consanguineous marriage in the family.

"Looking at my granddaughter Akanksha, I do hesitate to ask my son to take the same risks. But the entire family has given its consent for his marriage to a girl in the same family during the 'Voni', and I cannot go back on my word. The engagement is likely to be held during the coming Pongal festival", says Kadari Arjunudu.

Evil of dowry

Meanwhile, in the Perumallapuram gram panchayat, every family has a history of consanguinity, says Buddiga Ramana, a farmer and a local politician.

"By 2019, not less than 25% of marriages performed in our village were consanguineous marriages. Now, it has reduced to 10%. Everybody is aware of the health consequences of consanguinity, but socio-economic factors such as land for dowry and familiarity of the alliance are some things that our Yadava community cannot discount while making a marriage alliance," claims Mr. Ramana, who married his niece.

J.N. NARASIMHA NAIK
Kakinada District Medical and Health Officer

Despite the high prevalence of birth deformities caused by consanguinity in the area, no specific surveys were conducted or targeted campaigns were run to curb the practice, say officials.

Kakinada District Medical and Health Officer J.N. Narasimha Naik has said, "There is no specific campaign targeted at the prevalence and prevention of the practice of consanguinity. However, our field-level staff are campaigning against consanguineous marriages during the door-to-door campaigns of various programmes and surveys."

Dr. Naik notes that the local communities are fully aware of the health consequences of consanguinity and still choose to continue for various reasons, including cultural and economic.

Prenatal counselling

Meanwhile, Government General Hospital (GGH-Kakinada) Superintendent Dr. Vittal says that they are making efforts to bring awareness among the consanguineous couple who visit the hospital for prenatal health check-ups. "We collect the marriage history during the prenatal

tests. We also inquire about consanguinity, particularly when some defect is traced. Families of both couples are called for a counselling session where we explain possible disorders the baby could be born with, their causes and treatments. We also have been performing minor surgeries on the children to remove some defective parts or prescribe treatment in the GGH-Kakinada," he says. "In our area, particularly among the Yadavas, it is a must to give land in dowry if the bride's family has any and 90% of the dowry agreed upon is given in the form of land but not cash," observes Nagalla Srinu, an elder of Srirampuram village even as he watches his neighbour, an albino boy, Krishna, born to a consanguineous marriage leaving for school.

The sudden spur of economic activity, with the development of the Kakinada Special Economic Zone (KSEZ) for multi-sector industries in the area and the development of the Kakinada port, has brought an unprecedented demand for land here in recent times. With land prices soaring, the people here say the demand for land in dowry is also increasing, forcing more families to prefer consanguineous marriages to other alliances for their children.

A decisive move

Meanwhile, Perla Nookalamma of Kodada gram panchayat of Thondangi mandal takes a decisive step to end the misery of consanguinity in her family. While two of her three children were born with visual impairment, she resolves to end the practice with her and not let it pass on to the next generation.

All the children were born out of a consanguineous marriage which was forced upon her as a child, she recounts

Ms. Nookalamma, a daily wage, decides to marry her son to a girl outside their family. "People began to think of adversaries of the consanguinity. However, the lives of some people such as ours are irreversible," says her son Mr. Sattibabu, 30, who aspires to become a government school teacher. His wife, Ms. Kameswari, is also visually challenged, but she does not belong to the same family.

"My husband passed away in 2011 due to prolonged illness. I had to sell 30 cents of family land for the medical treatment of Mr. Sattibabu, who began to suffer from seizures. My entire life is riddled with challenges as if I was born to face them, all thanks to my marriage," she rues. I will not have any nameless grandchildren in my family, she resolves.

At Srirampuram, Ms. Durga, however, is heartbroken. "I have made up my mind not to try for another child. I cannot undergo family planning surgery because I can't afford to take post-surgery rest for weeks and let my child suffer. There is not one to look after my ailing boy," she says as tears welled up in her eyes.

"My ailing boy, who will remain unnamed," she adds as she wipes her tears.
(Names of children changed to protect identity)