

Omar to be J&K CM as NC legislators give thumbs up

POLITY & GOVERNANCE



National Conference (NC) vice-president Omar Abdullah is set to become the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir after his party's legislators unanimously approved him for the position. NC president Farooq Abdullah announced Omar Abdullah unanimously chosen as the leader of the legislature party.

Omar Abdullah is poised to form the government in Jammu and Kashmir, with the support of the Congress, after a 10-year gap. The new government is expected to be finalized within two days. Farooq Abdullah mentioned that

talks with the Congress are ongoing, and once the Congress provides a letter of support, the National Conference (NC) will formally approach the Raj Bhavan to stake its claim to form the government.

Congress representatives, who won just six of the 32 seats they contested, are expected to meet with NC leaders in Srinagar on Friday. Party sources revealed that both parties are discussing the government's structure and transition process to ensure a smooth formation.

The NC received a shot in the arm as four Independent legislators, all from the Jammu region, announced their support: Pyare Lal Sharma (Inderwal), Satish Sharma (Chhamb), Choudhary Mohammed Akram (Surankote), and Rameshwar Singh (Bani). These four will add to the NC's own tally of 42 seats in the 90-member Assembly. The new government will also have the support of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s single MLA and the six Congress legislators.

Top NC leaders have been promising to include leaders from Jammu in the government to ensure representation from the region. The BJP swept most of the seats in the plains of Jammu, in the Samba, Kathua, and Reasi districts, winning 29 seats.



India bids farewell to Tata

PERSONALITY IN NEWS



Senior politicians, industrialists, and celebrities joined thousands of mourners, including Tata employees and Mumbaikars, in bidding farewell to Ratan Tata, one of India's corporate giants, as his mortal remains were cremated with full state honours in India's financial capital on Thursday. Mr. Tata, chairman emeritus of Tata Sons, died late on Wednesday, at the age of 86.

Union Ministers Amit Shah, and Piyush Goyal; Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his deputies Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar; Opposition leaders Sharad Pawar, Supriya Sule, Uddhav Thackeray, and Raj Thackeray; industrialists Mukesh Ambani, Kumaramangalam Birla, and Harsh Goenka; Tata Group chairperson N. Chandrasekaran, and Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das were among those who paid tributes at the Worli crematorium and the National Centre for Performing Arts where his body was kept earlier in the day.

India, ASEAN nations to look at linking payment systems

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India will share its expertise in using digital public infrastructure (DPI), like Aadhaar and Unified Payments Interface (UPI), with ASEAN countries and explore partnerships to tackle challenges in sectors such as education, healthcare, agriculture, and climate change. Following the 21st India-ASEAN summit, attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a joint statement announced plans to explore collaboration on cross-border payment system linkages between ASEAN and India through digital solutions.

In a joint statement, both sides emphasized strengthening the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. The statement reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peace, stability, maritime safety, and security, ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight, and supporting lawful maritime activities, including unhindered commerce. It also stressed the need for peaceful dispute resolution.

Strategic partnerships

In his closing remarks at the summit, Prime Minister Modi stated that the two joint statements adopted on enhancing digital transformation and the comprehensive strategic partnership will serve as a foundation for future collaboration.

The India-ASEAN summit, attended by leaders of all 10 ASEAN member nations, comes at a time of heightened tensions between the Philippines and China over maritime rights in the South China Sea, and ongoing conflict in Myanmar, where ethnic groups are fighting the military regime.

India and ASEAN nations agreed to explore collaborations between their national agencies to drive fintech innovations and support digital solutions, including in the financial sector. Both sides also expressed their commitment to enhancing cybersecurity cooperation to strengthen the digital economy.

Additionally, they agreed to collaborate on developing knowledge, skills, infrastructure, risk management frameworks, and policies to responsibly leverage AI technologies and capitalize on AI advancements.

The 10 member countries are Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. Mr. Modi held a meeting with the newly appointed Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba during which they discussed ways to enhance cooperation in different areas, including infrastructure, connectivity and defence.

Govt. declares Hizb-ut-Tahrir a terrorist organisation

INTERNAL SECURITY

The Union Home Ministry designated Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT) as a terrorist organization under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) on Thursday. The ministry stated that HuT is involved in terror-related activities, including radicalizing youths to join terrorist groups and raising funds for terrorism, which poses a significant threat to India's national security and sovereignty. The government, committed to countering terrorism, emphasized its firm stance against such threats. HuT, active in Bangladesh, seeks to establish a global Islamic State and Caliphate by overthrowing democratically elected governments through jihad and terrorism. The NIA recently arrested an alleged HuT member in Chennai.

S. Korea's Han Kang wins Nobel Prize in literature

PERSONALITY IN NEWS



The Nobel Prize in Literature for 2024 was awarded to South Korean writer Han Kang “for her intense poetic prose that confronts historical traumas and exposes the fragility of human life”. In awarding the top prize to a 53-year-old Asian writer at the peak of her writing career, the academy has ensured a wider readership of an “innovator in contemporary prose”, who with her experimental style has conjured up universal tales of the human condition. With a radical and poetic imagination, she writes about women battling patriarchy, violence, grief and also about historical wrongs and injustices.

Her literary career began with a book of poems but her breakthrough novel was *The Vegetarian*, first published in Korean in 2007, and translated into English by Deborah Smith in 2015. It scooped up many honours, including the Man Booker

International Prize in 2016. Winning the Booker opened the door for her other books, *Human Acts*, *The White Book* and *Greek Lessons*, to be translated into English. Another, *We Do Not Part*, the story of two women told in the backdrop of a hidden chapter in Korean history, a massacre that happened in the 1940s, is being translated by e. Yaewon and Paige Aniyah Morris, and will be published in early 2025.

In its bio-bibliography, the academy says that in *We Do Not Part*, Han Kang, with “imagery that is as precise as it is condensed, conveys the power of the past over the present,” and also “traces the friends’ unyielding attempts to bring to light what has fallen into collective oblivion and transform their trauma into a joint art project, which lends the book its title.”

In her oeuvre, the academy says Han Kang, the first Korean to win the Nobel Prize in literature, confronts historical traumas and invisible sets of rules and, in each of her works, exposes the fragility of human life. “She has a unique awareness of the connections between body and soul, the living and the dead, and in her poetic and experimental style has become an innovator in contemporary prose,” it contends. But most of all, Han Kang has shown the power of literature to “speak the truth.”

Bonedi bari pujas of Kolkata bring back annals of the past for younger generations

ART & CULTURE



Bonedi bari pujas or the Durga Pujas performed at Kolkata’s aristocratic households of yesteryear are some of the oldest puja celebrations in the city. Some date back 415 years or more, way before the British set foot in India. Traditions like using old moulds to make the faces of the idols, or pandits, idol makers, and dhakis (drummers) who have been with the family for generations are still kept alive by the current generations.

A lesser-known Durga Puja but historic one is a 307-year-old bonedi bari puja from Sarisha in South 24 Parganas, the Basu Bari Puja. Started in 1717, this puja is one of the iconic celebrations in the locality. Traditionally our family were the zamindars of this place, so during immersion on Dashami our goddess is immersed first and then the rest

of the locality pujas. This tradition is still followed by many in honour of the history.

Sobhabajar Rajbari in the northern parts of Kolkata is one of the oldest Durga Pujas in that side of the city. This puja was started by Raja Naba Krishna Deb, one of the closest confidants of Sir Robert Clive. There are two divisions to this Durga Puja, one was started in 1757, another in 1790.

Prabir Krishna Deb, an 8th generation heir of Raja Naba Krishna Deb from the 1790s Durga Puja lineage (choto torof or Gopinath bari, younger side), told The Hindu that their side of the pujas started over 233 years ago. Traditionally we used to fly a nilkantha (Indian roller) bird on Dashami to send a message to Lord Shiv about Goddess Durga’s departure from Earth and her next journey onto her abode in the mountains. But we had to stop because of the government’s animal welfare rules.”

Durga Pujas in their courtyard were a star-studded affair in those glory days. People like Ramkumar Chattopadhyay, Birendra Krishna Bhadra, and other famous singers came to perform for their audience. They have kept the cultural programmes alive, where dramas are conducted by the family members themselves. Hundreds of locals and puja enthusiasts from across the State flock to their homes every year to get a glimpse of the royalty of the age-old traditions.

Back in the day bonedi bari pujas were not very inclusive; they mostly allowed extended family members to attend. Over the years, modernisation changed the world view and common people were allowed inside the tall gates of the old houses.

Cultural legacy

Though home-based pujas are always considered a woman’s domain, the same women were never made the in-charge of any major Durga Pujas and most traditions were passed down through male heirs

of the family in the bonedi baris of Kolkata.

Female-driven

This age-old tradition was broken and challenged by the Darjipara Mitra Bari Durga Puja in north Kolkata when the Mitra household did not have a male heir to take over the puja rituals. The Mitra Bari puja is now 218 years old and Anushua Mitra Biswas and other women in the family take a leading role in managing it.

On the last day of the pujas, Dashami (Dasara), the women who conduct the boron (farewell) ceremony go and sit on the goddess's throne. This tradition is followed to signify that Durga is a female power, so are the women of the family.

The blue-blooded sea creature on Odisha's coastline

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT



Horseshoe crab, found only on select coasts around the world, it has survived 445 million years, as fossils show, without undergoing any morphological change. It belongs to a class called Merostomata, living fossils, or those organisms that haven't changed in millennia. Today, its existence is threatened by anthropogenic changes in the ocean.

The dwindling population of horseshoe crabs and their shrinking spawning grounds have raised concerns among scientists. In August this year, for the first time in

over a century, scientists of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) in collaboration with the Odisha Forest Department began tagging horseshoe crabs — 12 to begin with — to understand their population dynamics and habitat use, a critical step towards their conservation and management.

On Odisha's coastline

The ZSI first reported the species in 1909. Although the beaches of Balasore were once teeming with horseshoe crabs, their numbers have drastically declined since then. Despite their ability to survive millennia, no major scientific research in India has been conducted on them. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) also slots horseshoe crabs in the 'data deficient' category, highlighting the lack of comprehensive information about the species. However, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) conducted the first detailed survey of horseshoe crabs along the east coast of India in 2005. This survey resulted in the listing of the crab in the Schedule IV of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

The crab's blue blood is used to produce a rapid diagnostic reagent, limulus amebocyte lysate, essential for testing the toxicity of injectable drugs. One litre of horseshoe crab blood can fetch a few lakh rupees due to its biomedical applications in America. A report in Fortune magazine says 30% of the blood is drained before the crab is put back into its habitat. In the process, up to 30% of crab lives can be lost.

There are four species of horseshoe crab: the mangrove (*Carcinoscorpius rotundicauda*), which inhabits the coastal waters of South and Southeast Asia; the Atlantic or American (*Limulus polyphemus*), found along the Atlantic coast of the United States and the southeastern Gulf of Mexico; the coastal (*Tachypleus gigas*), also native to South and Southeast Asia; and the tri-spine (*Tachypleus tridentatus*), found in Southeast and East Asia. India is fortunate to have two species: *Carcinoscorpius rotundicauda* and *Tachypleus gigas*, both found along the Odisha coast.

Procreating with nature

Scientists say tides play a crucial role in the arrival of horseshoe crabs on Odisha's beaches. Chatterji says during high tide, the crabs come ashore, when the waves rise to 2.6 metres. Their numbers peak when the waves reach 3.1 metres. Full moon and new moon are the ideal occasions, with the waves rising high. Their choice of beach also depends on the sediment composition.

Horseshoe crabs choose sandy beaches where the grain size ranges between 63 and 120 microns. This specific sand grain size range allows for optimal water retention, which occurs about six to seven inches below the surface. If the grains are larger, water retention is poor, making the site unsuitable for spawning.

Mature female crabs come to these beaches to lay eggs and release 400-500 eggs per clutch. Males are typically attached to the females during this process. Water is essential for the activation of the eggs, once they are produced; without it, the eggs remain dormant.

Nesting takes place along the margin of the high tide line, ensuring the eggs remain inundated as the tide rises and falls. Over a period of 40 to 42 days, the eggs incubate and the embryos develop. Temperature also plays a role in this process, and the Odisha coastal weather helps them breed through the year.

In Balaramgadi, the intertidal zone extends up to 7 km into the continental shelf, followed by a deeper zone. It is within this shelf area that hatching takes place. The horseshoe crab uses 10 legs to walk and two to feed.

A loss of habitat

The species is endangered by the gradual loss of its habitat. The spawning and nursery grounds along most parts of Odisha's coast have been damaged. These crabs feed on decomposed insects and algae. However, the mangrove forests are thinning, and sandy beaches are undergoing transformation due to human activities. Shoreline fortifications like stone patching and the use of geotubes to protect the shore from erosion have worsened the situation.

Being an intertidal species, horseshoe crabs do not naturally come ashore. Without their preferred habitats, they lay eggs irregularly and younger crabs become easy prey for natural predators like crows and dogs.

Unregulated regular fishing activities, rough stone patching (stones placed to protect the beach from erosion), and discarding of fishing nets along the coast are major reasons behind horseshoe crab mortality. Crabs wash ashore in the tide and subsequently get trapped in the cracks of stone patching on the beach.



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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu made his first bilateral visit to India nearly a year after his election, marking an effort to improve ties with New Delhi. Although he initially visited Turkey, China, and the UAE before India, tensions between India and the Maldives were rooted in his campaign, which supported the opposition's "India Out" movement. Additionally, a controversy arose over Lakshadweep being promoted as an alternative to Maldives tourism, sparking a "Boycott Maldives" campaign in India. Concerns in New Delhi also grew over Male's economic initiatives and defense pact with China.

However, efforts to mend relations have progressed. India replaced its stationed troops in the Maldives with technical personnel, as per Muizzu's request, and both countries resumed positive engagement with visits by their foreign ministers and joint projects. India further supported the Maldives by extending \$100 million in SBI subscriptions to help the country avoid a debt default. Muizzu has since softened his rhetoric, sacked critical ministers, and taken steps toward better bilateral relations with India. India's financial support, including a \$400 million aid package and a ₹3,000 crore currency swap arrangement, has bolstered the Maldives' currency reserves. Both nations have jointly announced infrastructure projects, initiated Free Trade Agreement talks, and outlined a vision for a comprehensive maritime security partnership, signalling a shift in relations. During his visits to Mumbai and Bengaluru, President Muizzu encouraged the return of Indian tourists and promoted investment and employment opportunities. This diplomatic turnaround, grounded in historical ties and geographical proximity, highlights the effectiveness of sensitive diplomacy over aggressive posturing, reaffirming India's role as the Maldives' "first responder" in times of need.

Can India escape middle-income trap?

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The World Development Report 2024, published by the World Bank, highlights the "middle-income trap," where growth rates slow as incomes rise. The report estimates that economies with per capita incomes reaching 11% of that of the U.S. experience stagnation, hindering their progress to high-income status. Over the past 34 years, only 34 middle-income economies, defined as those with per capita incomes between \$1,136 and \$13,845, have successfully transitioned to higher income levels.

The World Development Report outlines the policies and strategies needed to escape the middle-income trap, drawing on the experiences of countries that have successfully transitioned. It emphasizes the "3i" approach: investment, infusion of new global technologies, and fostering an environment for domestic innovation. Achieving this is challenging and necessitates agile and responsive state policies. India faces significant obstacles in navigating the middle-income trap in the modern economy.

Role of the state

Most countries that successfully escaped the middle-income trap were part of the European Union, which promoted growth by facilitating the movement of capital and labor among its members. Many other countries lack such institutions, experiencing liberalized capital inflows while facing restrictions on labor movement. South Korea is noted as a significant non-European country that successfully broke free from the middle-income trap.

The South Korean government played a significant interventionist role in directing private sector activities to support an export-driven growth model. Successful companies received access to new

technologies and other forms of support, while underperforming firms were allowed to fail. This approach created a controlled market environment where the state actively pursued developmental goals, regulated local elites, and ensured alignment with its economic plans.

Chile is another economy that successfully escaped the middle-income trap, largely due to state intervention in supporting its natural resource-exporting sectors. A notable example is the salmon industry, which thrived thanks to targeted government actions across various fronts that fostered its growth. The South Korean government's approach offers valuable lessons for India, emphasizing the need for a neutral state that allows underperforming firms to fail and provides support based on performance rather than connections to power. While powerful business houses can drive growth, they must invest, adopt new technologies, and innovate. South Korean conglomerates, known as chaebols, are now leaders in innovation.

The pitfalls

South Korea's success was built on manufacturing exports; such a strategy is not possible in today's economic scenario. World export growth has slowed, with demand from large economies slowing down following the multiple shocks of the last few years. Several countries have seen a slow turn to protectionism. The employment losses in developed economies caused by free trade have made it more difficult for countries such as India to access foreign markets.

Moreover, several countries have been hit by what economist Dani Rodrik terms 'premature deindustrialisation'. Modern economies face a reduction in the income share of manufacturing at much lower levels of GDP compared to previous economies. Manufacturing is no longer an engine of growth for developing economies, and it remains to be seen whether the service sector is strong enough to break the trap.

Challenges facing India

The power of billionaires in the Indian economy has increased, and they are seen as being close to the state, with the state unable — or unwilling — to ensure high rates of investment from domestic capital. The manufacturing sector has stagnated, and there has been a reversal of the process of structural transformation, with employment increasing in agriculture and in low-productive forms following the pandemic.

The growth of the aggregate economy is not being reflected on the ground. While the government estimates a real GDP growth of around 7 % in recent years, wages have not kept up. According to the PLFS, nominal wages for regular wage workers at the all-India level between April and June 2023-24 has only grown at around 5 %, and that of casual workers at roughly 7 %. With an inflation rate of roughly 5 % during this time, this implies that wage earners have seen little to no real wage growth. An economy cannot break a middle-income trap if workers are unable to partake in the growth process, as reduced consumption demand will become a drag on the economy.

Most importantly, the question of democracy looms large. South Korea's export strategy was overseen by a military government that ruled till the 1980s. The government frequently quelled labour unions to aid the accumulation process of capital. Chile deposed the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende by a military coup, installing General Augusto Pinochet as the head of state. It is vital not to take the wrong lessons from these countries, and think that democracy is an acceptable price to pay for higher growth. The challenge for policy is to promote state intervention to ensure growth while maintaining the sanctity of the democratic ethos.



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