

'Ambedkar Ji Did Not Allow...': Kharge's Scathing Reply To Shah's Parliament Speech, Demands Apology

New Delhi. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge slammed Union Home Minister Amit Shah for his recent speech in Parliament, calling his remarks "far from the truth." Kharge accused Shah of using the platform solely to praise Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He also alleged that the BJP was attempting to divert public attention. Reacting to the introduction of the 'One Nation, One Election' bill in the Lok Sabha, he stated that both its advantages and drawbacks need to be debated.



"When the bill comes up for discussion then we will talk about its advantages and drawbacks. It has to be discussed after meeting with everyone. Everyone has opted together for the introduction, we will speak about it in Parliament," IANS quoted Kharge as saying. Kharge's remarks came after the home minister's parliamentary address on Tuesday over the 75 years of Constitution, during which Shah lashed out at the Congress party of appeasement politics. He slammed the Congress for making constitutional amendments to

empower 'one family' while the Bharatiya Janata Party made amendments to empower citizens. Shah said Congress amended the Constitution 77 times in its 55 years of rule whereas the BJP made 22 changes in 16 years.

BJP, Congress Spar Over Ambedkar

Reacting to Amit Shah's speech, the Congress party accused Home Minister of displaying a deep 'hatred' for B.R. Ambedkar in his remarks during a Rajya Sabha debate on the Constitution. The party demanded an apology from Shah, blaming the BJP and RSS leaders for their negative stance toward Ambedkar.

In a post on 'X', Kharge accused Amit Shah of insulting BR Ambedkar. Kharge stated,

"The insult of Babasaheb by the home minister has once again proven that the BJP-RSS were against the tricolour, their forefathers opposed the Ashok Chakra, and the people of the Sangh Parivar wanted to implement Manusmriti instead of the Constitution of India from the very first day." "Babasaheb Dr Ambedkar Ji did not allow this to happen, that is why there is so much hatred towards him," he added.

"The ministers of the Modi government should understand carefully that for crores of people like me, Babasaheb Ambedkar is no less than God... He is and will always be the messiah of Dalits, tribals, backward classes, minorities and the poor." Kharge's post in Hindi read. Amit Shah had claimed that the Congress party is hiding its true sentiments about Dr. BR Ambedkar. "It has become a fashion to say Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. If they had taken God's name so many times, they would have got a place in heaven," Shah said, taking a swipe at the opposition. He claimed Ambedkar had to resign from the first Cabinet because he disagreed with the Congress-led government's policies, including Article 370.

Bengaluru BJP MLAs seek Rs 50 crore development fund from Karnataka government

A day after first-time BJP MLAs sought Rs 100 crore each for their constituencies, BJP legislators from Bengaluru wrote to Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar asking for a special grant of Rs 50 crore.

Bengaluru. Bengaluru BJP MLAs followed the suit of first-time assembly representatives and appealed to the Karnataka government for a special grant of Rs 50 crore. The BJP MLAs from Bengaluru wrote a formal letter,



addressed to Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, and highlighted the urgent need to repair major roads and address connectivity issues in the district. Shivakumar is also the cabinet minister for Bengaluru Development and Town Planning, and the Bengaluru Urban District Incharge. According to the letter, signed by 15 BJP MLAs including Ashwath Narayan and R Ashok, there

was an urgent need to improve the connectivity infrastructure in the Silicon Valley of the East, as they are struggling to keep up with international standards. In the letter, the legislators emphasised that Bengaluru's reputation as a global IT hub

took a hit because of the inadequate infrastructure. They stated that this lack of basic amenities was causing the city to lose its ability to attract investments. The MLAs warned that the lack of proper infrastructure is compelling industries to consider relocating to neighbouring states. The letter by BJP MLAs of Bengaluru came a day after first-time BJP MLAs in the state wrote to the Chief Minister seeking Rs 100 crore each for development of their constituencies.

While petitioning for the grant, the MLAs said they needed the funds to resolve issues of abrasion caused by rains, agricultural damage, as well as infrastructure repairs, including hospitals, schools, roads, and electricity.

According to them, they required Rs 50 crore each for the two consecutive fiscal years to kickstart essential development projects in their areas.

Madhya Pradesh Ladli Behna Scheme Has Seen No New Beneficiaries For 16 Months: Minister

Madhya Pradesh government's flagship Ladli Behna scheme was seen as having played a key role in the BJP remaining in power in the state.

New Delhi. No fresh registrations have been accepted under the Madhya Pradesh government's flagship Ladli Behna scheme, which was seen as having played a key role in the BJP remaining in power in the state, since August 20, 2023 - two months before the state elections - a minister informed the Assembly today. The minister's statement comes at a time when government functionaries have been asserting that the state will increase the amount given to eligible women from the economically poor sections under the scheme from ₹ 1,250 per month to ₹ 3,000 - as promised after its introduction last year. She informed the Assembly that the amount is not being changed as of now. On Tuesday, which was the



second day of the winter session, Congress MLA Mahesh Parmar raised four key questions regarding the scheme.

He asked when the government intended to restart registrations for women who missed out during its launch and those who are newly

eligible; whether it plans to increase the amount to ₹ 3,000 in the ₹ 22,400-crore supplementary budget tabled on Tuesday; whether the eligibility age would be reduced from the current 21 to 18; and if the upper age limit would be extended beyond 60 years.

Response

Answering Mr Parmar's questions, Women and Child Development Minister Nirmala Bhuria said the government has no plans to initiate fresh registrations under the scheme as of now. She said there was no proposal to raise the monthly assistance from ₹ 1,250 to ₹ 3,000 in the supplementary budget and no change in the eligibility age was being considered.

Nitin Gadkari, 19 BJP MPs skip One Nation One Poll session, may get notice: Sources

NEW DELHI. A total of 20 BJP MPs, including senior leaders like Nitin Gadkari, Giriraj Singh, and Jyotiraditya Scindia are set to face the music for their absence in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday during the introduction of the One Nation, One Election Bill, as per sources. The party had issued a three-line whip mandating all MPs to be present in the House for the session. However, the absence of these lawmakers has raised eyebrows, prompting the BJP to reportedly prepare notices to hold them accountable for defying party orders. The Bill, central to the government's push for simultaneous elections across the country, was introduced in the Lok Sabha by Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal amidst heated exchanges. The opposition criticised the move as "dictatorial" and an attack on India's federal structure. Despite the backlash, the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill passed its introductory phase with 269 votes in favour and 198 against after a 90-minute debate and a division of votes.



Meghwal, addressing concerns raised during the debate, assured the House that the legislation would not interfere with the autonomy or powers of the states. Additionally, the Union Territories Amendment Bill, aimed at aligning elections in Delhi, Puducherry, and Jammu and Kashmir with Lok Sabha polls, was also introduced. Meghwal dismissed opposition claims that the Bill violated the basic structure doctrine, asserting that the legislation adhered to constitutional principles. While the introduction of the Constitution amendment Bill requires a simple majority, its passage will require the government to garner a two-thirds majority in the House. The Opposition, however, came down heavily on the Centre, claiming that the Bills failed to secure a majority. Congress leader Manickam Tagore said that the government failed to cobble up 307 votes out of the total 461 that it needs to secure a two-thirds majority. Shashi Tharoor echoed a similar sentiment, saying that the government shouldn't be too persistent about implementing the Bill. As of today, the BJP-led NDA holds 293 MPs in its ranks, while the Congress-led INDIA coalition has 234. Even with full attendance, the NDA lacks the numbers required to pass bills amending the Constitution, a point emphasised by Congress leaders. To secure the necessary two-thirds majority, the BJP will need backing from unaffiliated parties, assuming all MPs are present and voting.

When government prioritises...: Rahul Gandhi as trade deficit hits all-time high

With India's trade deficit in November surging to an all-time high, Rahul Gandhi blamed it on the government's prioritisation of 'crony businesses' over 'play-fair businesses'.



New Delhi. Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, blamed the government's prioritisation of "crony businesses" over "play-fair businesses" for the trade deficit in November surging to an all-time high. Gandhi, who has repeatedly used the 'crony capitalism' pitch to claim a nexus between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a few selected businesses, claimed it had led to weakening of the manufacturing sector and depreciating currency. "What happens when a

government prioritises crony businesses over play-fair businesses? Result: Weakened manufacturing sector, depreciating currency, record high trade deficits, high interest rates, falling consumption and soaring inflation," the Raebareilly MP tweeted.

According to Commerce Ministry data, India's trade deficit widened to a record \$37.84 billion in November, driven primarily by surging gold

imports and falling exports. It has led to the rupee slipping to a new low against the US dollar.

The data showed that the trade deficit, the difference between imports and exports, during the April-November period widened to \$202.42 billion.

RAHUL GANDHI UPS ANTE AGAINST BJP

The attack comes at a time when the Congress has intensified its pitch against the BJP following the US indictment of businessman Gautam Adani. Adani and seven others have been indicted by US prosecutors for allegedly offering Rs 2,029 crore in bribes to Indian government officials to secure "lucrative solar energy supply contracts".

Last month, in an opinion piece for a newspaper, Gandhi alleged that a "new breed of monopolists" were controlling the country's governing institutions and regulators. He said that these "match-fixing" monopoly groups have amassed colossal wealth, resulting in the decimation of lakhs of small businesses.

Free healthcare for 60 and above: Arvind Kejriwal's second big poll promise

Announcing the 'Sanjeevani' scheme, Arvind Kejriwal said that any resident of Delhi, above 60 years, will get free healthcare services under the scheme. The entire expenses of treatment will be born by the Delhi government, Kejriwal said.

New Delhi. Aam Aadmi Party supremo and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday announced the 'Sanjeevani' scheme to provide free healthcare for senior citizens in Delhi. According to Kejriwal, the 'Sanjeevani' scheme will be launched after the AAP party returns to power in Delhi next year.



Under the new scheme, senior citizens in Delhi can avail free health care services from any private or public hospital in the national capital. The 'Sanjeevani' scheme will apply to all above the age of 60 and will not have restrictions based on income.

Speaking at the launch of the scheme, Kejriwal said that AAP workers

would reach people's doorstep in two to three days to register senior citizens for the scheme. "Today, for the people of Delhi, I am going to announce the 'Sanjeevani' scheme. Under this, all people above the age of 60 will get free healthcare. We will introduce and pass the scheme after the polls. Whether they

(senior citizens) want to get treated at a public hospital or private hospital, the entire treatment will be free of cost. There will be no BPL, APL, TPL or RPL. There will not be any upper limit. The Delhi government will bear the expenses of the full treatment," the AAP supremo said at an event at the party headquarters.

"The registration will start in two to three days. But, you don't have to go anywhere to register. AAP volunteers will come to your home for registration and give you a health card," he added.

The 'Sanjeevani' scheme came days after Kejriwal announced the launch of the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojna to give monthly assistance of Rs 1,000 to

Arvind Kejriwal announces 'Sanjeevani' scheme for senior citizens in Delhi
Elderly people to get free health services from any private or public hospital under new scheme
AAP targets third term, focusing on women, elderly voters ahead of polls

women in the city and promised to raise it to Rs 2,100 after the elections. AAP is seeking a third consecutive full term in Delhi, following its landslide victory in 2020, where it won 62 out of 70 seats. The upcoming elections will serve as a test of the party's governance model.

AAP and its leaders have ramped up their outreach to women and elderly voters ahead of the

February 2025 Assembly elections. On December 16, during a padayatra in the Badarpur constituency, Kejriwal claimed a survey showed that as many as 60 per cent of women in Delhi are set to vote for AAP. "There must be some shortcoming in my penance that 40 per cent of women are not voting for me. This time, 100 per cent of women must vote for the Aam Aadmi Party," Kejriwal said.

Sri Lanka's once-Marxist president on 1st India trip

Unlike Nepalese PM Oli, who was not invited by India and visited China instead, Sri Lankan President Aruna Kumara Dissanayake, popularly called AKD and once a Marxist, has chosen to come to India first (December 15 to 17) before going to China next month. Which country – India or China – will a newly elected leader in India's neighbourhood visit first has become a competitive affair. That it would be India first was determined by geography; Delhi's emergency assistance of \$4 billion when others, including China, turned away during Sri Lanka's worst economic crisis since its independence; and Foreign Minister Jaishankar being the first to invite him. Conflicted by having to choose, Colombo is calling both visits as economic investment-related, though these will be largely exploratory and about getting to know one another's interests and concerns. India is receiving a largely unknown leader from a fringe party, not the traditional United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).

AKD is the leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP): the JVP having spearheaded two insurrections, both of which Delhi helped Colombo to defeat.

The JVP, representing Sinhala nationalism, was opposed to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and 13A devolution to Tamils. The triumph of AKD and NPP came in the aftermath of the people's uprising following the sovereign default of June 2021, in which the fiercely loyal to the Rajapaksa's Sri Lankan Army did not intervene to keep the clan in power.

Not many Lankans had heard of AKD, but most knew about JVP. Still, AKD and the NPP won historic victories in presidential and parliamentary elections in September and November, ending the rule of the two parties and five families.

For the first time, a Tamil party did not win its stronghold, Jaffna. Instead, it was the NPP, which lost only Batticaloa among the country's 25 districts. The NPP, which had just three seats, catapulted to 159 members in a 225-seat parliament. The small new cabinet includes two upcountry Tamils, none from the north and no Muslims. Only two have been ministers earlier. Lacking experience, the government will rely heavily on the bureaucracy. AKD has promised to root out corruption and review the existing contracts (including Adani's), release land occupied by the army, address concerns of the minorities, including reconciliation and issues with the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), and maintain neutrality between India and China. Till recently, government ministers would say that for security, Sri Lanka would look to India and for economy, rely on China. This was turned on its head during the economic meltdown.

After the fourth tranche of the \$2.9-billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan, AKD decided not to renegotiate with the IMF to reduce hardships faced by the people. Following a debt restructuring agreement, the budget will be presented on February 17, 2025. Bringing the economy back on track is AKD's biggest challenge. Another challenge is to replace the 1978 constitution with a new one, which most executive presidents had pledged to do, but wavered.

A prominent visitor to Colombo was US Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu, who promised "unwavering support for the government's anti-corruption drive" and help recover funds taken from the country. The Verite Research think tank is conducting a study on detecting corruption in procurement processes which will come in handy. During the people's uprising, "corruption at the very top" was at the heart of the ouster of former President Gotabhaya Rajapaksa. In India's neighbourhood now, there is a third player: the US. No longer does Washington say India is in the lead, we will follow. Instead, it says it also has its own interests. Sri Lanka sits astride key sea trade routes in the Indian Ocean, with the dominant Hambantota Port with China on a 99-year lease.

Revival of India's North Korean mission reflects strategic shift

Developments in the Korean peninsula are of greater strategic importance to India today than they were four years ago.

INDIA has decided to resume normal functioning of its embassy in Pyongyang, North Korea. The embassy was closed on July 2, 2021, when Ambassador Atul Malhari Gotsurve and the entire Indian staff at the mission packed up and left for New Delhi via Russia. Like most things related to North Korea, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) never formally announced that it had shut its embassy there. However, without any Indian staff, let alone diplomats, no work was being done in the world's most reclusive consular outpost. The MEA never named a replacement for Gotsurve in Pyongyang and he was sent, 14 months ago, as Ambassador to Mongolia. A technical team and quasi-diplomatic personnel have reached Pyongyang and they are in the process of making the mission functional after a protracted period of disuse for almost three-and-a-half years, inter-agency sources in the government told me in New Delhi. Their first job is to extensively debug the building and clear it of security and spying hazards. North Korea is notorious for its dodgy intelligence methods against foreigners and bad faith in dealings with legations it has agreed to host. It may be months before an ambassador heads the mission, given Pyongyang's notorious and opaque bureaucracy and delays in making even minor decisions on foreign policy, such as agreeing to receive a new envoy.



Meanwhile, South Korea has embarked on a journey of engaging India along a road which has not been traversed by any country since the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s. This year, in a bold departure from common practice worldwide, South Korea celebrated its National Day in the sprawling Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi. Its embassy in India invited a few thousand Indians, mostly young people, to join in the mass celebration. Last year, it began its experiment of taking the message of the most important day on the South Korean diplomatic calendar to the multitudes of Delhi. The mission walked away from routine cocktail receptions in chandeliered halls, like most embassies in India do on their national days. Instead, thousands of young Delhiites swayed in the open to K-pop (Korean pop music) and other instruments of modern youth culture in Seoul, Busan, Incheon and other big cities. Reaching out to the Indian masses

was first tried in a bilateral engagement by Nikita Khrushchev, leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin in 1955 in Kolkata (then Calcutta). A smaller version of that Soviet outreach was tried in Ahmedabad in 2020 when the Indian diplomacy tried to sweep then US President Donald Trump off his feet with crowds he could never muster in his own country. The attempt was a non-starter because Trump was defeated in his bid for re-election later that year. But similar efforts by India and the Soviet Union yielded rich dividends. Indo-Soviet relations were consolidated with popular endorsement. South

Yeo to impose martial law and his subsequent impeachment — has impacted the country's macro-economic activities, which depend heavily on government support.

India has been cold to calls for South Korea to be invited into Quad, the four-nation, amorphous group of Australia, India, Japan and the US. Where high-level visits took place frequently and with much fanfare, they are now irregular. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not visited Seoul since early 2019. The last visit to New Delhi by South Korea's President was a year before Modi's trip. Foreign ministers from both countries have met more often, but the frequency of their exchanges has lacked the regularity and dynamism of, say, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's engagement with his counterpart from the UAE or Singapore. India decided, in principle, to reopen its valuable Pyongyang listening outpost in February. South Block, seat of the MEA, has been in touch with Germany and the UK, which had already sent teams to North Korea around that time to consider the resumption of their diplomatic activity, which had been interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, Indian diplomats have compared notes with their counterparts in Sweden and Poland, which were the first to reopen their embassies in Pyongyang. New Delhi's initiative gained urgency in November after Trump won the US presidential election. In his first presidential term, Trump had said about North Korean leader Kim Jong Un that "we fell in love". They met three times, which was without precedent. It is likely that Trump would revive his summit diplomacy with Kim when he returns to the White House. Even if those summits do not yield concrete results, Trump relishes the worldwide media attention it gives him. It was partly diversionary when he was President. It deflected criticism from real problems in the US. Developments in the Korean peninsula are of greater strategic importance to India today than they were four years ago. North Korea is a more emboldened military factor in East Asia now than it ever has been. New Delhi would want to ensure that Pyongyang's new and bigger arsenal of hypersonic and short-range weapons does not have any place in Pakistan's offensive military thinking. India also wants to calibrate North Korea's stepped-up ties with Russia against its own overall security paradigm. A listening post in Pyongyang with a competent ambassador would be a significant strategic asset for South Block.

Korea is trying to replicate the Indo-Soviet successes, which flourished for several decades. Seoul has realised that the folkloric tale of Ayodhya's Princess Suriratna travelling to Korea to marry King Kim Suro in 48 AD has captured the imagination of the Indian people. It now wants to cement India-South Korea relations through the people-to-people route. South Korea is looking at relations with India in the very long term. Like Singapore, with its policy of developing a second arm of its economy through emerging markets like India, a strategy the island nation has implemented since 1991. Seoul is ready to try unconventional methods to achieve this objective and hopes that the results will match its efforts. After rapid strides in the last two decades, economic relations between India and South Korea have hit a plateau. This is partly because the South Korean economy has slowed down. Repeated political turmoil — the most serious was a failed attempt by President Yoon Suk

Fix health insurance

Hidden costs, denied claims a bane

THE shocking murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in the US, reportedly motivated by grievances over denied claims, has ignited a global debate about health insurance systems. While the US struggles with its own healthcare challenges, India faces a similarly disheartening reality. As per a recent survey, 43 per cent of policyholders in India reported difficulties in claim processing, ranging from rejections due to "pre-existing conditions" to opaque exclusions hidden in fine print. India's health insurance sector, touted as a safety net, often traps patients in a web of delays and financial burdens. Claims are sometimes processed so sluggishly that hospital discharges are delayed, forcing families to bear additional costs. Ambiguous contracts filled with technical jargon only worsen the plight of policyholders, many of whom are left financially and emotionally drained. Adding to the problem, insurance premiums have seen staggering hikes — over 50 per cent for one in five policyholders last year — making coverage unaffordable



for many middle-class families. This trend undermines public trust and risks turning health insurance into an

unsustainable financial burden rather than a source of relief. The lessons from the US are clear: distrust between stakeholders-insurers, healthcare providers and patients leads to systemic failures. India must urgently address this mistrust by strengthening transparency and accountability within the insurance sector. Models like managed care, which integrate healthcare delivery with insurance, can reduce costs and improve patient outcomes.

The Insurance Regulatory Development Authority of India must enforce stricter transparency norms, ensure grievance redress mechanisms and penalise unscrupulous practices. Strengthening public systems like Ayushman Bharat can complement these measures by reducing dependence on private insurers. The growing disenchantment with health insurance calls for meaningful reforms. India cannot afford a system that prioritises profit over patient welfare.

INDIA bloc totters as Congress faces isolation

Alliances are stitched on the basis of strengths of the allies, not their weaknesses. The Congress is often weak in a direct fight with the BJP.

THE 2024 Lok Sabha election results initially suggested that the INDIA bloc could serve as a stable and effective opposition to challenge the Narendra Modi government till 2029. However, this coalition is already tottering. The yearend is seeing the bloc heading for a premature demise. The outcomes of the Haryana and Maharashtra Assembly polls seem to have convinced a number of INDIA members, including the Trinamool Congress, Aam Aadmi Party, Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar), Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray), Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal that the Rahul Gandhi-Mallikarjun Kharge-led Congress is good for nothing. As a seemingly well-thought-out strategy, AAP came out first, announcing "zero space" for the grand old party in the Delhi Assembly elections. The remarks of Lalu Yadav and his son Tejashwi make it clear that they do not want the Congress in their mahagathbandhan for the 2025 Assembly polls in Bihar. The year 2026 has Assembly polls lined up in Kerala, Assam, West Bengal, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu, while the 2027 calendar has elections in Goa, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Manipur, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat. A cursory look at the political situation shows that the Congress faces the uphill task of wresting Assam from the BJP and Kerala from the LDF and retaining Himachal. In the rest of the states, it is either politically irrelevant or leans heavily on allies, like the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh.

This explains why there is a churn within INDIA. Alliance politics in India is guided by certain principles and compulsions that are missing from the INDIA story as of now. Firstly, alliances are stitched on the basis of the strengths of the partners, not their weaknesses. The Congress is often weak and vulnerable when it fights against the BJP in a direct electoral battle. Arvind Kejriwal has, therefore, turned stern, even though the Congress has hinted at accepting even a single-digit figure for seat-sharing in the Delhi Assembly polls. In



Kejriwal's assessment, the Congress is a liability as far as Delhi is concerned as the minority vote is set to switch from the Congress to the AAP. The Congress is now staring at the prospect of drawing a blank in the national capital for a record third time. The 'Kejriwal formula' to drive the Congress out of the state-level alliance is emboldening the likes of Tejashwi Yadav, Mamata Banerjee, Akhilesh Yadav, Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray. Unfortunately, for the Congress, the opportunity to prove its mettle would only come during the Assam and Kerala Assembly polls of 2026. Rahul Gandhi has issued a directive to senior party leaders and colleagues not to respond to bloc leaders' comments or remarks. This is a weak and feeble attempt to let the alliance continue. The issue of the bloc's leadership is

constantly raised by several regional parties within the alliance. In fact, except for the Congress, virtually everyone in the alliance parivar has recommended or supported Mamata as its head. She has even gone to the extent of 'accepting' the responsibility. But the Congress' studied silence is blocking this move's progress. The Congress, perhaps, understands that INDIA partners want a 'co-equal' status within the bloc. Once again, the history of alliance politics in the country says something different. Alliances have worked and prospered whenever there has been a dominant partner and several minor players. For example, the UDF and LDF alliances in Kerala led by the Congress and the CPM, respectively, or the success of the NDA under the BJP. The Janata Party experiment of 1977, the National

Front (1989) and the United Front (1996) were a disaster simply because they were based on the 'co-equal' recipe. The Congress, even in terms of diminishing returns, fancies itself as the first among equals due to the virtue of having 100-odd seats in the Lok Sabha. Interestingly, the leadership of an alliance was seldom sought in the past. Morarji Desai became the Prime Minister not because he was the best or a contender but for a reason — to keep Charan Singh in check. NT Rama Rao became the National Front convener in 1988-89 because he was not a contender for the post that saw Devi Lal's nomination; later, the coveted post was offered to VP Singh. During the days of HD Deve Gowda and Inder Kumar Gujral, TDP leader and Andhra Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu acted as convener and kingmaker of a short-lived United Front. In the Vajpayee era of unstable alliance politics, George Fernandes was chosen as the NDA convener. Rama Rao, Naidu or Fernandes were never heard hankering for a post that was offered to them. Ditto for Desai, Devi Lal, Gowda and Gujral. The Congress would want Mamata to know this. The stalwart who can communicate it all is Sharad Pawar. But after the November 23 Maharashtra verdict, Pawar is a king without a kingdom, bitter and lonely. He is looking for a scapegoat for his party's horrible performance in Maharashtra. And, the Congress fits the bill. While Pawar looks for a humiliating merger with nephew Ajit Pawar-led NCP, he is plotting with Mamata and Kejriwal to pin the blame on the Congress. The Congress is missing an effective manager like Ahmed Patel to launch a counter-offensive or a cogent strategy. The three Gandhis and Kharge may look powerful, but deep inside, they are vulnerable and incapable of reaching out to mavericks like Mamata, Kejriwal, Lalu and Pawar. Lastly, it must be remembered that the birth of alliances is announced with a lot of pomp and show, but their death goes unnoticed.

Rashmika Mandanna

Reveals Why She Said Yes To Vicky Kaushal's Chhaava



Rashmika Mandanna, riding high on the success of Pushpa 2, is gearing up for her next big project, Chhaava, in which she stars alongside Vicky Kaushal. In a recent interview, Rashmika shared her initial reaction when she was offered the role. Rashmika, who is predominantly known for her work in South Indian cinema, admitted that she was initially taken aback when the filmmakers approached her to play a Maharashtrian queen. In conversation with Pinkvilla, Rashmika Mandanna revealed what she promptly said after hearing the script for Chhaava the first time. She recalled, "The first narration of Chhaava I heard, the film team were in touch with the managers and they called me into their office. They told me who it is about and that is something... Its huge. And for me in my head I am thinking I am from South, how can you think about me playing a Maharashtrian queen. Let me just ask you this basic question- Me! How? What is going on? But the second I heard the script for the first time in my life I didn't take a second to say yes."

Rashmika Mandanna spoke fondly of her transformation for Chhaava, describing how surprised she was during her look test. Not only did she look the part of a Maharashtrian queen, but her facial features, body language, and overall style also seemed to align with the role in a way she hadn't anticipated. She remarked, "Suddenly, my features, my body language, and everything changed." In addition, the actress praised her co-star, Vicky Kaushal, and director Laxman Utekar for their incredible contributions to the film. She gushed about Vicky's performance, saying, "He has killed it," and expressed admiration for Laxman Utekar's craft. She couldn't help but be in awe of their work, commenting, "My God, I can't. I'm all gushing all over like their craft like it's amazing."

Vicky Kaushal, Rashmika Mandanna, and Akshaye Khanna, among others, feature in Chhaava, which tells the narrative of a brave historical figure, the Maratha king Sambhaji. The film was expected to compete with Pushpa 2 at the box office. However, the producers eventually moved the release date to February 14, 2024.



Kajol Drops Throwback Pics From K3G Sets: 'They Just Don't Make Them Like They Used To'



Karan Johar's Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham... is undoubtedly one of the classic films of all time. The movie, released on December 14, 2001, with an ensemble cast featuring Kajol, Shah Rukh Khan, Jaya Bachchan, Amitabh Bachchan, Kareena Kapoor, Hrithik Roshan and others, has etched a special place in millions of hearts. Today, as the movie completed 23 years since its release, Kajol dropped some mesmerising photos from the sets of the musical romance drama, leaving her fans in complete nostalgia.

On Instagram, Kajol walked down memory lane and posted a couple of photos clicked while filming Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham... The first photo featured Big B with his wife, portrayed by Jaya Bachchan in the film, alongside their on-screen sons and their loved counterparts. All six of them were seemingly grooving to the beats of the song, Bole Chudiyen, sung by Jatin-Lalit, while the candid moment was captured. The following two photos showed Kajol cuddled up with SRK in romantic poses while looking gorgeous as ever in a red saree. The superstar, on the other hand, looked handsome in an all-black outfit.

Alongside it, Kajol revealed her honest opinions about cinema and penned in the caption, "Life, love and laughter. They just don't make them like they used to anymore. 23 years and some fabulous memories later..." And we simply can't deny it. Such movies are for a lifetime. She even hashtagged the post with words like "23 years of K3G", "K3G" and "memories".

Within no time after Kajol made the post, her fans were left in nostalgia. Social media users started rooting for a Kajol and SRK reunion on-screen under the banner of Karan Johar's Dharma Productions. One user commented, "A movie that never gets tired of watching," while another said, "Fav movie since childhood!!!" A social media user wrote a meaningful note mentioning, "Absolutely... 23 years of this masterpiece K3G... @kajol You're too good there... Just watched it yesterday with the whole family... And coincidentally, you happened to be in Nagpur yesterday."

Sandeep Reddy Vanga's Spirit: Kareena, Saif And Mrunal Thakur May Join Prabhas in Cop Thriller



After the massive success of Kabir Singh and Animal, Sandeep Reddy Vanga is gearing up for his next ambitious project in Hindi cinema. Earlier this year, Pinkvilla had reported that Vanga is set to begin shooting for the Prabhas-led Spirit in the first quarter of 2025, aiming for a 2026 release. The pre-production work for this high-octane cop thriller is currently underway, including casting, and Pinkvilla has learned that Sandeep Reddy Vanga and producer Bhushan Kumar are in talks with Mrunal Thakur for the female lead. According to a source close to the development, discussions are ongoing with Mrunal Thakur to play the female lead opposite Prabhas in Spirit. The source revealed, "Spirit is the most ambitious and awaited films of Indian Cinema, and the makers are going all out to have the best and most talented actors of world cinema on board the film. While Prabhas is locked to play the role of a cop, the conversations are in progress with Mrunal Thakur, Saif Ali Khan, and Kareena Kapoor with the latter two for the negative turn."

The insider further shared that Spirit is set to redefine the cop-action genre in Indian cinema, promising a unique narrative. "It's a story like never before, in the template of a commercial Indian Film. There are good people and bad people in the tale, but with a lot of elements of grey that Vanga is known for. Every character has a purpose, and it's among the most ambitious films for Sandeep Reddy Vanga. The writing work and prep is going on in full swing, and the ones who have heard the narration inform that Vanga is going to reintroduce Prabhas like never before in Spirit," the source added. Bhushan Kumar is reportedly fully backing Vanga's vision for the project.

Additionally, fans can look forward to a unique dynamic between Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor, as the real-life couple will be playing a pair of antagonists in Spirit. The source added, "It's the first time that a real-life couple will be playing a negative role as a couple in a feature film. The two will also have a lot of action to do alongside Prabhas and other members. The paperwork for all the talents is yet to be done, as the discussions for monetary terms are underway." Produced by Bhushan Kumar and Sandeep Reddy Vanga, Spirit is set to hit the big screen in 2026. Once the project wraps, Vanga will shift his focus to his next venture, Animal Park with Ranbir Kapoor, scheduled to

Kangana Ranaut

Critiques Bollywood, Praises South Films: 'They Are Obsessed With Abs, Bikes And Babes'



Kangana Ranaut has shared her views on the rising success of South Indian films compared to Bollywood at the box office. According to the actor, one of the main reasons behind this trend is that Hindi films have increasingly lost touch with reality. Speaking at Agenda Aaj Tak, Kangana was asked about the massive popularity of Allu Arjun's Pushpa franchise and how it compares to the current situation in Bollywood. She remarked, "Pehle toh mujhe nahi lagta ke Bollywood or Hindi cinema ne mainstream hone ka theka liya hua hai (I don't think Bollywood can be dubbed as mainstream). They are not mainstream by any standard. Our films should be defined as the Indian film industry, one industry in which every type of audience is addressed."

Kangana attributed the success of Pushpa 2 to the relatable character Allu Arjun portrays, a daily wage worker. She pointed out Bollywood's detachment from reality as a major issue. "People in Bollywood live in a bubble. And that is one of the biggest reasons I have a problem with them. Kyunki yeh log bubble se nikalna nahi chahte han (They don't want to come out of the bubble). All they need is to go to the gym, take protein shakes, take injections. They don't have any connection with reality," she said. The actor further emphasized that such roles would rarely attract Bollywood stars. "Inko chahiye six pack abs, hot babe, beach, bike, item number bas bahut hai (They want six pack abs, hot babe, beaches, bike and item numbers. That's enough for them)... It is important to have a reality check," she concluded. Pushpa: The Rise became a pan-India phenomenon upon its release in 2021, grossing over ₹136 crore in Telugu and ₹106 crore in its Hindi-dubbed version, making it Allu Arjun's highest-grossing film. Its songs and dialogues resonated with audiences across the Hindi-speaking regions. Now, the sequel, Pushpa 2: The Rule, continues Pushpa Raj's journey, showing his rise from a daily wage earner to the leader of a red sanders smuggling syndicate. Rashmika Mandanna reprises her role as Srivalli, Pushpa's wife, standing by him against his estranged family. Fahadh Faasil returns as police officer Bhanwar Singh Shekawat, still grappling with the humiliation he faced in the first film. The sequel ends with a setup for the next installment, Pushpa 3: The Rampage.

