

ANDHRA PRADESH THE JAGAN-SHARMILA RIVALRY

BULLET TRAIN PROJECT ON THE FAST TRACK, FINALLY

VEHICLE SCRAP POLICY HITTING A ROADBLOCK

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INDIA TODAY

↑ **52%**
High-end smartphones



↑ **18%**
Premium cars



↑ **18%**
Bikes above 150 cc



THE PREMIUM PHENOMENON

RISING INCOMES ARE PUSHING **MIDDLE-CLASS INDIANS TO CHOOSE Fancier, Pricier Products** across sectors to realise their aspirations for a better lifestyle

↑ **45%** High-capacity washing machines



↑ **22%**
Deluxe residences (Rs 1 crore+)



↑ **35%**
Frost-free refrigerators



↑ All figures are growth in sales

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THE PREMIUM PHENOMENON

Rising incomes are pushing middle-class Indians to choose fancier, pricier products in their quest for a better lifestyle

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WEST BENGAL

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

When Congress leader Rahul Gandhi asked his colleagues from the West Bengal unit their opinion on joining hands with the Trinamool Congress (TMC) for the upcoming Lok Sabha election, all key leaders unanimously voted against it. That wasn't hard to predict: the TMC may now be an ally of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) nationally, but locally it remains a predatory foe. So, at a closed-door

pow-wow in Delhi on December 20, Bengal Congress leaders made it clear to Rahul they had no problems teaming up with the Left—as they had done in the 2016 and 2021 assembly polls—but the TMC was a different kettle of fish. And very thorny. This veto came just a day after TMC chief Mamata Banerjee had suggested, at a Delhi meet of the new Opposition bloc, that Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge be made its prime ministerial face. The state leaders told Rahul that an alliance with the TMC

would alienate their core voters—who have allegedly suffered political persecution by the ruling party—and that would only add to BJP votes. They also accused Mamata of trying to destabilise the Congress and, by extension, INDIA, by projecting Kharge, not Rahul, as PM.

It's rumoured that leaders like Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal and Uddhav Thackeray of the Shiv Sena (UBT) are siding with Mamata—acting as a group within a