

THE PERFECT VOICE



Plot hatched in Pune;
shooters given photo,
flex

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Seasonal change can
affect moods, moral
values

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Sindhu, Lakshya aim to
regain form at Denmark
Open

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आधार लाडक्या बहिणीला आशिर्वाद **महायुतीला!**



महा आघाडी

- तेलंगणात
महिलांना **2500** रुपये दिले नाही
- हिमाचल प्रदेशात
महिलांना **1500** रुपये
देणार अशी थाप मारून

फसवलं!

- कर्नाटकात
अंगणवाडी व आशा सेविकांना
वाढीव मानधन देणार सांगून

गंडवलं!

- झारखंडमधे
बिनव्याजी **2 हजार रुपये**
देणार सांगून

झिडकारलं!

महायुती

शासित

महाराष्ट्रात लाडकी बहिण योजना यशस्वी



4 हफ्ते

जमा!



भारतीय जनता पार्टी, महाराष्ट्र



Suspect flaunted 'gangster' status



Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh native Shiv Kumar Gautam, an absconding suspect in politician Baba Siddique's killing in Mumbai, had taken to posting online content in recent months, flaunting his "gangster" status.

"Yaar tera gangster hai jaani (your friend is a gangster)" Gautam had captioned his photo post on his Instagram account on July 24. The photo showed him



Family members mourn the death of NCP leader and former Maharashtra Minister Baba Siddique at his ancestral village Manjha in Gopalganj district of Bihar on Monday.

on a motorcycle as a Haryanvi song played in the background. Gautam hails from Gan-

dara village in Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh, where locals and police said he had no criminal his-

tory. They added that he had gone to work at a scrap shop in Maharashtra's Pune.

Another post of his on July 8 was captioned "Sharif baap hai # (expletives) hum nahin". On May 26, he posted a brief video of a city skyline along with background music from "KGF", a film about a mercenary, with its dialogue "powerful people make places powerful".

Interestingly, the number of Gautam's followers on Instagram has nearly doubled almost overnight - from 299 on Sunday to 504 on Monday.

His mother, Suman, had expressed shock and disbelief over the police's claim that Gautam was among those involved in the sensational killing of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader and former lawmaker Baba Siddique (66) at Kher Nagar in Mumbai's Bandra area, just outside his son Zeeshan Siddique's office, on Saturday night. Baba Siddique was rushed to the

Lilavati Hospital, where he was declared dead.

Suman told the media that her son had last visited her in Gandara during Holi. She had claimed that after the visit, Gautam left for Pune in the first week of April.

Gautam's Instagram profile showed his last post on the social media platform was on August 4, when he had posed for a photo on a motorcycle.

A post on April 10 showed him working at a warehouse, packing orders. The video was captioned "yeh kam karte hain hum order ready karne ka". His other posts largely carried cryptic messages about heart-break while one was about religious pride.

In all, the Instagram account of the accused has 33 posts, beginning May 20, Siddique was laid to rest on Sunday night with state honours.

Akhtar faces nine criminal cases: Police

Chandigarh: The Punjab Police on Monday said M o h a m m a d Y a s i n Akhtar, one of the suspects in the killing of Baba Siddique, is facing nine heinous criminal cases, including for murder and attempt to murder.

Akhtar (21) is a resident of Shankar village in Jalandhar's district, police said.

A police official in Jalandhar said nine cases are registered against Akhtar alias Jessi alias Sikandar at different police stations.

He is facing serious charges, such as murder, attempt to murder and dacoity, Nakodar Deputy

Superintendent of Police Sukhpal Singh said.

He added that Akhtar is facing two criminal cases in Haryana's Kaithal as well.

Akhtar was arrested in a criminal case in June 2022. He had not visited his village after he came out of jail in June 2024, police said.

Akhtar is suspected to have links with gangster Vikram Brar.

His father Mohammad Jamil Akhtar, who was engaged in the work of laying marble and tiles, and brother were not found in the village and their house was found locked. Akhtar's mother and sister have died.

Cops scanning places of worship

Bhopal: Mumbai Police's search for a suspected shooter wanted in the Baba Siddique murder case continued for the second day on Monday in Madhya Pradesh with joint teams focusing on the places of worship in Ujjain and Khandwa districts, officers said.

A team from Mumbai Police reached MP on Sunday, a day after Siddique was shot dead in the megapolis, to trace suspected shooter Shivkumar Gautam, who is on the run. Suspected "handler" Mohd Zishan Akhtar is also wanted in the case.

Ujjain and Khandwa are famous for the famous Ma-



hakal and Omkareshwar temples which attract thousands of people every day.

Mumbai Police are joined by their counterparts in MP to pick up the trail of the accused shooter, who hails from Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh.

Queried whether the runaway shooter is a religious person who may turn up at these famous temples, a police official evaded a direct reply, saying police are also monitoring other places.

Khandwa is not far from Amravati and Jalgaon in Maharashtra.

"A team of Mumbai Police in collaboration with MP police is looking for the accused who hails from Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh. They suspect he might be hiding in MP and searching him in Ujjain district and Omkareshwar (in Khandwa district)," a police officer told PTI on Sunday.



Accused Kashyap not a minor

By Correspondent

Mumbai: The Mumbai police had gone to Pune searching for Shubham Lonkar, a co-conspirator in the Baba Siddique murder case but could not find him. So they arrested his 28-year-old brother Pravin for his alleged involvement in the crime, an officer said.

Pravin is the third suspect to be arrested in this case so far.

Siddique (66), a NCP leader, was waylaid by three persons at Nirmal Nagar in Bandra area just outside his MLA son Zeeshan Siddique's office and shot at on Saturday night.

He was rushed to the Lilavati Hospital where he was declared dead.

A crime branch officer said Pravin and Shubham "enlisted" two alleged shooters - UP resident Dharmaraj Rajesh Kashyap and Shivkumar Gautam. While Gautam is on the run, police have arrested Kashyap and another alleged shooter, identified as Gurmil Baljit Singh (23), a native of Haryana. A Mumbai court on Sunday remanded Singh in police custody till October 21 and ordered a bone ossification test on Kashyap after he claimed he was a minor. The ossification test was conducted in which it was

proved Kashyap is not minor. He was produced before the court and sent to police custody till October 21. The Police have recovered two pistols and 28 live bullets from the two apprehended shooters.

The Mumbai police are also verifying a social media post, attributed to a purported member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, owning up to the murder of Siddique.

The crime branch was also probing various angles, including a possible contract killing, business or political rivalry or threat over a slum rehabilitation project, according to officials.

CRIME WATCH

Nurse booked for stealing valuables

Thane: The Thane police have registered a case against a nurse for allegedly stealing valuables worth Rs 2.21 lakh from an elderly patient she was caring for, an officer said on Monday.

Based on a complaint, the police on Saturday registered a first information report against Pooja Zhanke (27), who was hired through a nursing bureau to look after a 74-year-old woman after she underwent heart surgery, the officer from Wagle Estate police station said.

The complaint states that Zhanke was hired to provide round-the-clock care to the woman from October 2 to October 11, during which she allegedly stole cash and gold from the victim's house by distracting her, he said. The official said no arrest has been made, and a probe is underway.

Teen commits suicide

Thane: A 15-year-old girl from Thane district allegedly consumed poison after being scolded by her mother for spending too much time on the mobile phone and died during treatment, police said on Monday. The girl, resident of Ambernath area, consumed a rat poison on September 26. She was then rushed to a local hospital. As her condition became critical, she was shifted to a hospital in Mumbai where she died on October 2. Based on the medical report, the police on Saturday registered a case of accidental death.

Four-year-old sexually assaulted

Pune: A man allegedly sexually assaulted his four-year-old neighbour in a slum in the Mundhwa area of Pune. The child's parents are labourers and were friends with the 32-year-old accused, who frequented their house, an official said. "On Sunday afternoon, the girl's parents were not home, and she was left in her elder sister's care. The accused visited their house and took the girl to his place," he said.

When the child's mother returned home, she asked her elder daughter to bring her back. The girl then told the mother about the assault, the official said.

The woman confronted the accused, who fled and has been absconding.

Five sugar mills recommended for loans worth Rs 815 cr

By Correspondent

Mumbai: As part of the pre-election exercise, the Mahayuti government in the state has started financial empowerment of leaders in its fold and as part of this exercise five cooperative sugar mills have been recommended to National Co-Operatives Development Corporation (NCDC).

According to officials from the Co-Operatives department, four mills from Kolhapur district and one from Ahmednagar district have been recommended to NSDC for a loan of Rs 815 crore. Incidentally Chairmen of all the mills are with the Mahayuti.

According to the information received from the CoOp dept officials, the Chhatrapati Rajaram sugar mill at Kasba-Bawda in Kolhapur district which is controlled by former BJP MLA Amal Mahadik has been recommended for a loan of Rs 176 crore, while former MLA Chadradeep Nakre's Kumbhi-Kasari sugar mill has been recommended for a loan of Rs 164 crore. Former MP Sanjay Mandlik's sugar mill in Kolhapur district has been recommended for a loan of Rs 150 crore while BJP



leader Vivek Kolhe's sugar mill in Ahmednagar district has been recommended for Rs 125 crore. The fifth sugar mill that has been recommended belongs to the first independent MLA to lend support to Eknath Shinde government, MLA Rajendra Patil-Yadavkar. It is expected to receive over Rs 200 crore in loan from the national corporation.

Co-Operative Minister Dileep Walse-Patil defended the decision. "Sugar mills play a crucial role in development of the rural economy hence we too need to ensure that their issues are addressed timely. We have recommended NCDC to grant loans to the five sugar mills. The state government has also extended guarantee for the loans, which means if they don't repay the loans the state government shall bare the brunt. This is being done to give impetus to the rural economy. Since the Sugar mills are finally all about farmers," he said.

Gym trainer booked for rape

Mumbai: A 20-year-old gym trainer was booked for allegedly raping a woman after "marrying" her in a temple, a Mumbai police officer said on Monday.

The trainer's parents too were booked for refusing to accept the victim as their daughter-in-law, he added.

The Vakola police station official identified the accused as gym trainer Siddhant Tambe, his mother Minakshi and father Manoj.

"They were booked on the complaint of the 31-year-old victim. She had come to Mumbai recently with her son. As per the complainant, the gym trainer, after befriending her, symbolically married her in a temple. However, his parents refused to accept her in their household," he said.

"She found that Siddhant had consumed poison and was hospitalised. But when she went there he refused to speak to her. Based on her complaint, he was charged with rape and the parents under other offences of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita," the officer added.

MSRTC withdraws passenger fare hike

Mumbai: The Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) on Monday cancelled the proposed 10 per cent fare hike scheduled to be implemented during the Diwali season, officials said.

The fare hike cancellation, announced ahead of the assembly elections, is a huge relief for passengers opting to travel in state transport buses during the festive season.

The MSRTC decision coincides with Chief Minister Eknath Shinde announcing an exemption from paying the toll to light motor vehicles entering Mumbai.

Initially, the revised fare was supposed to come into effect between October 25 and November 24 which could have fetched the cash-strapped transport body a revenue of Rs 70 crore to Rs 80 crore.

The state-owned public transport corporation had already issued a circular to all regional heads asking to stop the implementation of the proposed fare hike, the official said.

Traditionally, the MSRTC is allowed by the state government to raise the fare during the festive season every year, and the

15,000
No of buses in the MSRTC fleet
55 lakh
No of daily MSRTC passengers
Rs 80 crore
The amount MSRTC expected as revenue from the fare hike

hike typically translates into 10 per cent.

A senior MSRTC official said the corporation's newly-appointed chairman Bharat Gogawale recently signed a proposal for the scheduled hike in fare. The recommendation was, however, turned down by Mantralaya, the state secretariat. "The cancellation of the proposed fare revision will put a financial burden on MSRTC as it has to pay Rs 40 crore in bonus to eligible employees before Diwali, apart from settling staff dues," he said. Last Diwali, MSRTC implemented a 10 per cent fare hike between November 8 and 27.

Naxal couple with Rs 10 lakh bounty surrenders Gadchiroli

Gadchiroli: A Naxalite couple carrying a bounty of Rs 10 lakh surrendered before the security forces in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district on Monday, an official said.

Varun Raja Muchaki alias Unga (27) and Roshani Vijaya Wachami (24) turned themselves in before police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), a release issued by the office of the superintendent of police said.

Unga was the commander of the Bhamragadh LOS, and Wachami was a member of the Bhamragadh LOS, it said.

According to police, Unga has 15 offences in his name, of which 10 are encounters, and he carried a bounty of Rs 8 lakh. Wachami has 23 cases to her name, including 13 encounters and a reward of Rs 2 lakh. The couple will receive Rs 11.5 lakh as per the government's rehabilitation policy, it was stated.

At least 27 hardcore Maoists have surrendered before the Gadchiroli police since 2022 due to the intensified anti-Maoist operations, police said.

- PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Ajit Pawar has already announced Rajesh Patil's name. In such a case, the Goa CM saying such things is not appropriate. I am sure Ajit Pawar will apprise the BJP about this."



Hassan Mushrif, Leader NCP

Toll waiver to benefit around 4.80 lakh vehicles in MMR area

Mumbai: Maharashtra Government on Monday announced a complete toll waiver for light motor vehicles entering Mumbai at all five booths, with effect from October 14 midnight. The decision will benefit around 4.80 lakh vehicles in the MMR region that cross these toll points every day, a senior CMO officer said.

The state government has not given the financial implications of the decision even as it announced a committee under Chief Secretary to look into the issues related to compensa-

tion to be given to the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) that handles all issues related to toll roads in the state.

The move to abolish toll comes ahead of the upcoming state assembly polls,

The opposition criticized the decision of toll waiver with Shiv Sena MP Priyanka Chaturvedi calling it a "desperate measure" before the state assembly elections. "Desperate measure just hours before the election code of conduct shows that Mahajhoothi government



knows their days are numbered, so try and salvage whatever little they can to save themselves from the public's wrath. Also because it has been under severe fire for the absolute and total collapse of law and order," she posted on X.

likely to be announced in a day.

The toll waiver is expected to bring relief to people travelling in and out of Mumbai ahead of Diwali. Commuters will be able to travel without paying toll at the five booths - Dahisar,

LBS Road-Mulund, Eastern Express Highway-Mulund, Airoli Creek Bridge and Vashi. Light motor vehicles include cars, jeeps, vans, auto-rickshaws, taxis, delivery vans and small trucks. More than six lakh vehicles cross

Mumbai daily, of which 80 per cent are light motor vehicles, a CMO official said.

CHANGE OF NAME

Ravindrakumar Nathuram Borhade Residing 106, Sonchafa Chs. Near Ambika Nagar, Ambernath Badlapur Road, Belavali, Badlapur (W), Thane 421503 Changed My Name to **Ravindra Nathuram Borhade** as per Maharashtra State Government Gazette No. (M-2429277) Dtd. 2/5/2024
Ravindrakumar Nathuram Borhade (Signature By Old Name)

THE PERFECT VOICE



Nobel prize for economics announced
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ED raids IAS official, minister's aides
... pg 3



Armed man arrested near Trump's rally
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Inside story on Shinde's delayed toll tax waiver

By Abhijit Mulye

Mumbai: While terming the decision to exempt light motor vehicles from toll tax at Mumbai Entry Points (MEP) Chief Minister Eknath Shinde described the scheme as "Mukhya Mantri Ladka Pravasi Yojana" (CM favourite traveller scheme). He also said that this was a long-standing demand and as an MLA he had even staged demonstrations to push for the demand. He however fell short of telling the people what prevented the government from making the decision earlier.

"There had been a long-standing demand to end the toll tax at all the five Mumbai Entry Points. The toll collection process leads to traffic snarls on these entry gates and leads to more pollution. Hence, abolition of toll had been in demand for a long time. As an MLA I too had staged demonstration and even moved court against the toll collection," the CM told reporters.

"I am happy today that the decision we have made



Chief Minister Eknath Shinde with Dy CMs Ajit Pawar and Devendra Fadnis at an Annapurna Yojana event. Pic: PTI

shall benefit lakhs of commuters that include people from middle class also. This shall save time and fuel and save the people from pollution. This shall help people not just from Mumbai and surrounding areas but from across the Maharashtra who come to Mumbai," he said.

However, what he didn't tell today was why did the

decision took so long.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Devendra Fadnis had promised a "toll free" state in the party manifesto before the 2014 assembly elections. However, after the government was formed, PWD - the department that looks after the collection of toll tax went to the Shiv Sena. Incidentally, Eknath Shinde

was given charge of the PWD department back then. So, it was much under his control to waive off the toll. However, it took him almost 10 years and the decision was made only in the last few days of his government.

Why would he have done so?

According to a former offi-

cial with the Maharashtra Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) Shinde had put up a proposal of scrapping the toll tax in the first meeting itself. However, then Managing Director of MSRDC Radheshyam Mopalwar had advised Shinde against abolition of toll tax. "It will be akin to cutting the branch of the tree in the Sheikh Chilli story," Mopalwar whispered in Shinde's ears.

The official had contended that toll is one of the plum sources of the income for the state government and keeping such sources in hand yields much power in the government. Shinde obeyed the advice and didn't do much on the front except doing away with some of the toll plazas on non-prime routes across the state.

According to Union Ministry for Road Transport and Highways, the income from tolls for Maharashtra is expected to be around Rs 1.40 lakh crore by the end of 2024. One can imagine the political power this much of money can buy.

Opp boycott Waqf meeting

New Delhi: Several opposition MPs on Monday boycotted a meeting of the parliamentary committee examining the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, alleging that the panel is not functioning in accordance with rules and regulations.

Opposition MPs, such as Gaurav Gogoi and Imran Masood of the Congress, A Raja of the DMK, Arvind Sawant of the Shiv Sena (UBT), AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi, Samjwadi Party's Mohibbullah and Sanjay Singh of the Aam Aadmi Party, stormed out of the meeting and expressed strong sentiments against its proceedings.

The Joint Committee of Parliament, which is examining the Bill, is not functioning in accordance with rules and regulations, Sawant told reporters. He and some other MPs charged that personal allegations were allowed to be levelled against senior opposition members like Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge by a person who was deposing before the committee.

The opposition members held a separate meeting later to decide their next course of action, with a couple of them suggesting that they may approach the Lok Sabha speaker.

The committee headed by veteran Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Jagdambika Pal continued with its proceedings.

India snaps diplomatic ties with Canada

New Delhi: India on Monday announced withdrawing its high commissioner and other "targeted diplomats and officials" from Canada after strongly dismissing Ottawa's allegations linking the envoy to an investigation into the killing of Sikh extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, in a major downturn in already frosty ties between the two nations.

India's decision came shortly after the Canadian Charge d'Affaires Stewart Wheelers was summoned to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and was told bluntly that the baseless "targeting" of Indian High Commissioner Sanjay Verma and other diplomats and officials was "completely unacceptable".

New Delhi described the charges against Verma as "concocted" and "preposterous imputations" and ascribed the allegations to the "political agenda of the Trudeau government that is centred around vote bank politics".

In its statement, the MEA said India received a "diplomatic communication from Canada yesterday suggesting that the Indian High Commissioner and other diplomats are 'persons of

interest' in a matter related to an investigation in that country".

The Canadian Charge d'Affaires (CDA) was summoned by MEA's Secretary (East) Jaideep Mazumdar and it was underlined to him that in an atmosphere of extremism and violence, the Trudeau government's actions "endangered" the safety of Indian diplomats and other officials.

"We have no faith in the current Canadian government's commitment to ensure their security. Therefore, the government of India has decided to withdraw the high commissioner and other targeted diplomats and officials," the MEA said in a statement.

"It was also conveyed that India reserves the right to take further steps in response to the Trudeau government's support for extremism, violence and separatism against India," it said. The Washington Post, quoting unnamed Canadian officials, reported that Canada on Monday ordered six Indian diplomats to leave the country, including Verma and the top consular official in Toronto.

Verma and other officials will return from Canada in the next few days. -PTI

Plot hatched in Pune; shooters given photo, flex



Mumbai: The conspiracy to kill NCP leader and former Maharashtra minister Baba Siddique was hatched in Pune and shooters were provided with a photo and a flex banner for the target identification, police said on Monday.

Mumbai crime branch probing the sensational murder of the 66-year-old politician exposed the alleged role of Pune-based Pravin Lonkar and his brother Shubham Lonkar in the plot.

"The motive behind the killing will be ascertained

once the wanted accused are arrested," a police official said. Police have identified the Lonkar brothers as the key figures in the crime. The duo allegedly financed the shooters, coordinated logistics, and orchestrated meetings leading up to the attack.

Pravin worked at a dairy owned by Shubham, where they recruited shooters Shivkumar Gautam and Dharmaraj Kashyap, who had connections to a nearby scrap shop.

The conspiracy took shape over several meetings, with promises of substantial payment upon successful execution of the plan. The shooters received an advance of Rs 50,000 each. They purchased a motorcycle to conduct reconnaissance on Siddique's routine and his residence, officials said.

Pravin Lonkar is accused of drafting two shooters to target Siddique and identified by police as a "co-conspirator." Police have so far arrested three persons



The suspects in Baba Siddique's murder case from L-R; Gurmail Singh, Dharmaraj Kashyap, Pravin Lonkar and Mohammad Yasin Akhtar

- Gurmail Baljit Singh (23), a resident of Haryana, Dharmaraj Rajesh Kashyap (19), a native of Uttar Pradesh -- both alleged shooters - and Pravin Lonkar.

Police have widened the dragnet for suspected "handler" Mohammad Yasin Akhtar and Gautam, who allegedly pumped bullets into Siddique's chest.

The investigation disclosed that it was Gautam who called Kashyap, a resident of Uttar Pradesh, to

work with him in Pune three months ago, the police official said.

Subsequently, Gautam relocated to Vinoba Bhawe Nagar locality in Kurla in Mumbai in September 2023 and started staying on rent. He roped in Singh in the conspiracy, he said.

All three shooters- Singh, Kashyap, and Gautam- were paid Rs 50,000 each upfront. They purchased a bike to conduct a recce of the office of Baba Siddique and his routine, the official

said.

The trio constantly remained in touch with their handlers on their mobile phones until Saturday night when Siddique was fatally shot. Gautam initiated firing on Siddique while Kashyap and Singh stood behind him. Kashyap was carrying some spray which he used on Siddique after he was shot.

While Kashyap and Singh were arrested from the spot in Bandra, Gautam fled, the police official said.

Prima facie, Shubham Lonkar had posted on Facebook, attributing the attack to the Lawrence Bishnoi gang. This post has since been deleted, but screenshots have circulated widely. The Mumbai Police are now coordinating with social media platforms to trace the origins of the post.

The investigation also disclosed that Shubham Lonkar provided the shooters with firearms and ammunition. He was incarcerated in a separate arms case registered against him in Akola district in January.

Police have confiscated two pistols, 28 live rounds, and four mobile phones from the suspects, which are being analysed for further insights into the conspiracy, the official said.

The crime branch is trying to identify the persons with whom the Lonkar brothers were in touch.

As the investigation unfolds, the crime branch is exploring all possible connections, including ties to the Bishnoi gang, as some

suspects have prior affiliations. Over 15 teams are now deployed across various states to gather intelligence.

"We are investigating all possible angles, including the involvement of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang," the official said, adding that the persons involved in the crime were assigned particular tasks.

On the possibility of Mumbai Police questioning Lawrence Bishnoi, currently lodged in the Sabarmati Jail, the official said a proposal had been sent to the Home Department for his custody in a case registered earlier.

Meanwhile, locals in Vinoba Bhawe Nagar area's Police Patel Chawl, where the accused persons had rented a house, were shocked by the incident. Recounting their experiences with the suspects, they said Singh used to stand in front of his rented flat and smoke cigarettes, drawing complaints for untidiness. He used to speak in English. -PTI

Uddhav hospitalised for heart ailment

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray was hospitalised to the Reliance Hospital on Monday for a detailed medical evaluation. Thackeray has a history of angioplasty and is currently undergoing tests to assess potential arterial blockages in his heart, with an angiography anticipated as the next step in his evaluation.

Thackeray's health has been a serious concern for the past few years, particularly for cardiovascular issues. In 2016, he underwent angiography at the Lilavati Hospital in Mumbai, which was a follow-up to an earlier angioplasty performed on July 20, 2012, where doctors inserted eight stents to address multiple blockages in the three major heart arteries.

India seeks to strengthen economic, cultural relations at SCO

By Kaswar Klasra

Islamabad: India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar is scheduled to visit Pakistan on Tuesday to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Heads of Government (HoG) meeting. This visit, the first by an Indian foreign minister to Pakistan since the late Sushma Swaraj's visit in 2015, comes at a time of frosty bilateral relations between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. While no formal bilateral meetings between India and Pakistan are planned during this visit, Jaishankar's presence at the summit highlights the importance of multilateral diplomacy, regional security, and In-

dia's strategic interests within the SCO framework.

This visit also plays a key role in India's broader foreign policy, as the country navigates its complex relationships within Asia, particularly with China and Pakistan. At the same time, India continues to balance its role in both Eastern and Western-led global initiatives. Jaishankar's presence in Islamabad extends beyond mere optics; it reflects India's ambitions to strengthen its influence in Central Asia, improve regional security, and leverage multilateral platforms like the SCO to further its national interests.

This diplomatic visit is significant due to the long-



standing tensions between India and Pakistan, which have been strained by cross-border terrorism, territorial disputes, and a lack of direct engagement in recent years. India has maintained that it will not engage in bilateral talks with Pakistan until cross-border terrorism is addressed. The absence of formal talks during this visit reaffirms India's

stance while demonstrating its commitment to multilateral diplomacy. India views the SCO as an important platform for engagement with Central Asian countries, strengthening its counterterrorism efforts, and securing energy supplies. Founded in 2001 by China, Russia, and four Central Asian nations, the SCO has evolved from a re-

gional security forum into a broader organization focusing on issues like counterterrorism, trade, and economic cooperation. India and Pakistan became full members in 2017, adding a new layer of complexity to the organization's internal dynamics.

For India, Central Asia holds strategic importance due to its rich natural resources, including oil, gas, and uranium. These resources are vital for India's energy security, as the country imports over 85 per cent of its energy needs. Central Asia's reserves offer an opportunity for India to diversify its energy supply, reducing its dependence on the volatile Middle East. Kazakhstan, the world's larg-

est producer of uranium, is particularly critical to India's civilian nuclear program, while Turkmenistan's vast natural gas reserves can help meet India's growing energy demands.

India's participation in the SCO aligns with its broader foreign policy of multi-alignment, which seeks to maintain relationships with both Eastern and Western powers. India's active role in organizations like the SCO, BRICS, and the Quad demonstrates its ability to engage with diverse geopolitical groupings. While the Quad is often seen as an anti-China coalition focusing on the Indo-Pacific, the SCO allows India to work with China

and Russia on regional issues, particularly security and counterterrorism.

This multi-alignment approach reflects India's ambition to emerge as a global leader, capable of balancing different geopolitical blocs and navigating competing interests. The SCO offers India an avenue to engage with its traditional rivals while pursuing its economic and security objectives.

of the key aspects of India's engagement with the SCO is its participation in the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), which focuses on counterterrorism efforts. For India, which has faced terrorism threats from its western borders, involvement in RATS is crucial for intelligence sharing,

coordinating counterterrorism activities, and addressing security challenges.

With the rise of extremist groups in Central Asia, particularly after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the region's security has become a priority for the SCO, making India's participation even more important.

In addition to economic ties, India has sought to strengthen cultural and historical links with Central Asia, leveraging its shared Buddhist heritage to enhance diplomatic relations. Initiatives focused on traditional medicine, Buddhist sites, and agricultural cooperation highlight India's use of soft power in its foreign policy.

China's exports slow sharply in September

Hong Kong: China's exports slowed sharply in September as global demand weakened, adding to worries over how to re-charge growth in the world's second-largest economy.

China's leaders have been struggling to rev up the economy since the COVID-19 pandemic ended.

The US and Europe recently raised tariffs on China's exports of electric vehicles and other products, darkening the outlook for China's trade as an engine of growth. The weak growth in imports reflects slack demand, partly due to a prolonged slump in the property industry, a major driver of sales of all sorts of products.

Other data released Monday showed weakening in inflation and falling wholesale prices for manufacturers.

Policy-makers in Beijing have announced a slew of measures to boost the economy, including frontloading 200



USD 81.7 billion -
China's trade surplus in September

USD 91 billion -
China's trade surplus in August

billion Yuan (USD 28.2 billion) from next year's budget for spending and construction projects.

Over the weekend, Finance Minister Lan Fao reiterated that the government is considering still more moves to drive faster growth.

But Lan and other officials have not yet delivered stimulus on the scale economists say is needed to pull the economy out of its

funk. So far this year, up to the end of September, China's exports have risen 4.3 per cent year-on-year, helped by increased shipments of autos, which rose more than 20 per cent, according to a report by ING Economics. But overall exports are slowing.

"With this engine of growth stalling, other areas of the economy such as investment and consumption will need to step up to complete this year's growth objectives," the report said, referring to the government's target of about 5 per cent annual economic growth this year.

Earlier in the year, Chi-

China's exports rose 2.4 per cent in dollar terms from a year earlier last month, down from 8.7 per cent year-on-year growth in August, the Chinese customs office reported Monday. Imports rose just 0.3 per cent in September. Economists had estimated that exports would rise about 6 per cent and that imports would climb about 0.9 per cent.

na's export sector was the main factor supporting its manufacturers.

"We think shipments will stay strong in the near term, supported by gains in export competitiveness," said Zichun Huang of Capital Economics in a note. "Further ahead, though, growing trade barriers are likely to become an increasing constraint." -AP

Retail inflation rises to 5.49 pc on costlier food items

New Delhi: Retail inflation rose to 5.49 per cent in September from 3.65 per cent in the preceding month mainly due to higher food prices, according to official data released on Monday.

The consumer price index-based inflation was 5.02 per cent in September 2023. The National Statistics Office data showed that inflation in the food basket rose to 9.24 per cent in September from 5.66 per cent in August and 6.62 per cent in the year-ago month.

The Reserve Bank, which kept the key short-term lending rate unchanged earlier this month, has been tasked by the government to ensure inflation remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

The wholesale price inflation also rose to 1.84 per cent as food items, especially vegetables, turned costlier. Inflation in food items shot up to 11.53 per cent last month against 3.11 per cent in August.

Inflation in potato and onion continued to be high at 78.13 per cent and 78.82 per cent. Fuel and power category witnessed deflation of 4.05 per cent against a deflation of 0.67 per cent in August. -PTI

INVESTMENT MATTERS Hyundai Motor IPO - Good for Long Term?



By Mangesh Kulkarni

Hundai Motor IPO has opened for subscription on October 15, 2024 and will close on October 17, 2024. The allotment for the Hyundai Motor IPO is expected to be finalized on Friday, October 18, 2024. It is planned to list on the BSE and NSE with a tentative listing date set for Tuesday, October 22, 2024. Hyundai Motor IPO is a book built issue of Rs 27,870.16 crores. The issue is entirely an offer for sale of 14.22 crore shares, therefore the company will not receive any proceeds from the sale. The IPO's price band is set between Rs. 1865 to

Rs. 1960 per share. Applicants are required to buy minimum of 7 shares to qualify for the offer. Retail investors are expected to invest a minimum of Rs. 13,720. Additionally, employees of Hyundai Motors will enjoy a discount of Rs. 186 per share. Established in May 1996, Hyundai Motor India Limited is a subsidiary of the Hyundai Motor Group, ranking as the third-largest original equipment manufacturer ("OEM") globally in terms of passenger vehicle sales. As of March 31, 2024, the company has successfully sold nearly 12 million passenger vehicles in India, in addition to exports.

The company specializes in the production and distribution of four-wheeler passenger vehicles, including models such as sedans, hatchbacks, SUVs, and electric vehicles (EVs). By December 31, 2023, Hyundai

Motor India had established partnerships with 363 dealer companies for distribution and sales across India. Holding a 15% market share in India and boasting leading EBITDA margins of 13.8% in the first quarter of the fiscal year 2025, Hyundai is well-positioned for continued expansion.

Let's now examine the financial performance of the company. Hyundai Motors India Ltd. has demonstrated a revenue and profit after tax growth rate of 19% CAGR and 48% CAGR over the past three years.

The company maintains a low debt position, with a debt to equity ratio below 0.1, and has an average return on equity of 27% over last 3 years (source - screener). At the upper end of the price band, this IPO is available at a P/E ratio of 26.3, indicating it is fairly valued.

India less export-oriented, says Fitch

New Delhi: India, which is less export-oriented than many other Asian economies, would be relatively unaffected in case the US levies higher tariffs on imports, Fitch Ratings said on Monday.

Fitch said higher trade barriers in the wake of the US elections could pose additional challenges for issu-

ers across multiple credit sectors in Asia-Pacific (APAC). Also, weaker growth globally would weigh on macroeconomic prospects in Asia in the event of sharp US tariff increases, especially if China's economic prospects are affected disproportionately. It said that the high share

of exports going to the US, coupled with high dependence on exports for growth within the region, means that any hit to exports to the US would have negative repercussions for GDP in many Asian economies, albeit to varying degrees.

Fitch views Vietnam as the most vulnerable on this front, but Taiwan, Thai-

land, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea would also have significant exposure. A sharp increase in US tariffs could therefore pose a significant challenge for Asian exporters.

"Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia also stand out as economies that would be significantly

hit. India, which is less export-oriented than many other Asian economies, would be relatively unaffected," Fitch Ratings said.

Fitch has conducted an analysis of the potential effects on global growth of higher US tariffs.

"We do not assess the policy positions of Trump's opponent," Fitch said.

Reliance Q2 net profit falls 5 pc on weak O2C business

New Delhi: Reliance Industries Ltd, India's most valuable company, on Monday reported a 5 per cent fall in the July-September quarter net profit as weak oil refining and petrochemical business hurt operational performance. Its consolidated net profit fell to Rs 16,563 crore or Rs 24.48 per share in July-September - the second quarter of the current fiscal - compared to Rs Rs 17,394 crore or Rs 25.71 a share in the same period a year back, according to a company statement.

While retail and telecom businesses posted steady performance, the oil-to-chemical (O2C) business, which is made up of twin oil refineries at Jamnagar in Gujarat and petrochemical units saw margins shrink on global oversupply. The profit before tax (EBITDA) dropped 2 per cent to Rs 43,934 crore. The financial performance was also impacted by finance costs rising by 5 per cent to Rs 6,017 crore, primarily due to higher debt. Also, depreciation rose by 2.3 per

cent. Its cash cow O2C performance was hurt by a global oversupply due to China flooding the market with petroleum products it made from refining cheap Russian crude oil. This led to a fall in product margins.

On the other hand, the firm's other two main businesses - retail and telecom - saw steady performance.

The telecom segment was the bright spot, with all four key parameters - data minute usage, data consumed, average per-user earnings and number of subscribers - showing growth. Upstream oil and gas production business too saw handsome growth, with the firm and its joint venture partner BP Plc of the UK now producing a third of all the gas produced in the country.

Retail profit increased 1.3 per cent to Rs 2,836 crore on a marginally declining revenue. The number of stores increased to 18,946 from 18,918 as of June 30.

-PTI



Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari with CII President Sanjiv Puri during a session at the CII Bioenergy Summit 2024 in New Delhi on Monday.

Pic: PTI

HCC to build two-lane bridge across Agardanda creek

By Correspondent

Mumbai: A two-lane bridge across Agardanda creek in Raigad district has been awarded to Hindustan Construction Company Ltd (HCC) by Maharashtra State Road Development Corp. Ltd. (MSRDC) for Rs 1,031.6 crore, HCC said in a statement.

The bridge, with a length of 4.3 km, is located on the offshore side of Agardanda Jetty and Dighi Port on the Revas-Reddi coastal highway, which has been delayed for over four decades,

on MSH-04.

Once completed, this project connecting Murud and Mhasala in Raigad district is poised to contribute to enhanced connectivity, reduced travel time and the region's overall economic development, the statement said.

Several such bridges on creeks in the Konkan region including Dharamtar, Kundalika, Bankot, Kelshi, Jaigad and Kunkeshwar are proposed and tenders have been awarded. In June, Ashoka Buildcon had emerged as the lowest (L-1)

bidder for two projects - across Jaigad and Kundalika creek with a combined value of Rs 2,152.72 Crore.

The Jaigad project involves constructing a major bridge between Tawsal and Jaigad on Revas Reddi Coastal Highway No. 5 in Ratnagiri at an estimated project cost is Rs 794.85 Crore while the second project was a bridge across Kundalika Creek between Revdanda and Salav also in Ratnagiri district for Rs 1,357.87 Crore.

Both projects are to be executed within 36 months.

BSE's World Investor Week 2024 focuses on tech

New Delhi: Leading stock exchange BSE Ltd on Monday announced the launch of globally popular event World Investor Week 2024 with special focuses on educating investors about technology, digital finance and cyber security.

World Investor Week (WIW), a global initiative by the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO), is being observed in India from October 14 to 20 under the leadership of Sebi and other Market Infrastructure Institutions (MIIs).

This year's theme "Technology and Digital Finance" focuses on educating investors about online safety, with a sub-theme highlighting the prevention of cyber-crimes and frauds, BSE said in a statement.

The exchange inaugurated the World Investor Week 2024 with a ceremonial bell-ringing event at its International Convention Hall. As part of the celebrations, BSE is organising various digital, print and on-ground activities to engage a broad spectrum of investors. Key initiatives include a nationwide quiz for the public, inviting participants to create jingles etc.

RBI pitches for reducing cost, time of remittances

New Delhi: Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday made a case for reducing time and cost of overseas remittances, which are important for developing economies including India.

According to the World Migration Report 2024 released by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), India's remittances surged to USD 111 billion last year, surpassing all other nations.

As per the Bank of England projection, the value of global cross-border payments is estimated to surpass USD 250 trillion by 2027.

The significant volume of cross-border worker remittances, the growing size of gross flows of capital, and the increasing importance of cross-border e-commerce have acted as catalysts to this growth, he noted.

"Remittances are the starting point for many emerging and developing economies, including India, to explore cross-border peer-to-peer (P2P) payments. We believe there is immense scope to significantly reduce the cost and time for such remittances," Das said in his keynote address at the conference on 'Central Banking at Crossroads.'

Besides, he said, the feasibility of expanding real-time gross settlement (RTGS) to settle transactions in major trade currencies such as dollar, Euro and Pound can be explored through bilateral or multilateral arrangements. India and a few other economies have already commenced efforts to expand linkage of cross-border fast payment systems both in the bilateral and multilateral modes, he said.

These include Project Nexus, a multilateral international initiative to enable instant cross-border retail payments by interlinking domestic Instant Payment Systems (IPs) of four ASEAN countries (Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) and India.

Under bilateral arrangements, cross-border payment linkages have already been established by India with Singapore, UAE, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Nepal, etc.

The Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) is another area which has the potential to facilitate efficient cross-border payments, he added.

Nobel prize for economics announced

Stockholm: The Nobel memorial prize in economics was awarded Monday to Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James A. Robinson for research that explains why societies with poor rule of law and exploitative institutions do not generate sustainable growth.

The three economists "have demonstrated the importance of societal institutions for a country's prosperity," the Nobel committee of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sci-

ences said at the announcement in Stockholm.

"Reducing the vast differences in income between countries is one of our time's greatest challenges. The laureates have demonstrated the importance of societal institutions for achieving this," Jakob Svensson, Chair of the Committee for the Prize in Economic Sciences, said.

He said their research has provided "a much deeper understanding of the root causes of why countries fail or succeed." But



he added that "democracy is not a panacea. Introducing democracy is very hard. When you introduce elections, that sometimes creates conflict."

Asked about how economic growth in countries like China fits into the theo-

ries, Acemoglu said that "my perspective is generally that these authoritarian regimes, for a variety of reasons, are going to have a harder time ... in achieving ... long-term sustainable innovation outcomes." The difference, the econ-

omists found, is a US system that protects property rights and gives citizens a say in their government.

"This is a time when democracies are going through a rough patch. ... It is, in some sense, quite crucial that they reclaim the high ground of better governance."

The economics prize is formally known as the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel. The central bank established it in 1968 as a memo-

rial to Nobel, the 19th-century Swedish businessman and chemist who invented dynamite and established the five Nobel Prizes.

Though Nobel purists stress that the economics prize is technically not a Nobel Prize, it is always presented together with the others on December 10, the anniversary of Nobel's death in 1896.

Nobel honours were announced last week in medicine, physics, chemistry, literature and peace. -AP

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The Prime Minister's visit to the US has been a landmark visit. The first time we have come to an agreement where we are going to put chip plant in place in India, and supply chips to defence in the US."

Jyotiraditya Scindia, Telecom Minister.



Money laundering: ED raids IAS official, minister's aides

Ranchi: The Enforcement Directorate on Monday conducted searches against a senior IAS official, persons linked to a cabinet minister and some others as part of a multi-crore money laundering probe into alleged irregularities in the water and sanitation department of poll-bound Jharkhand, official sources said.

The sources had earlier said that the raids were linked to the Jal Jeevan Mission, a scheme of the central government.

They said alleged illegal commission payments at the rate of 10 per cent was prevalent in the works awarded by the water and sanitation department and these kickbacks were shared among politicians

in power, bureaucrats and department officials.

A total of 23 premises in state capital Ranchi and Chaibasa in West Singhbhum district were searched by the officials of the federal agency.

The ED team was provided security cover by the CRPF, the sources said.

Premises linked to secretary rank IAS official Manish Ranjan, Harendra Singh, a personal staffer of drinking water and sanitation minister Mithilesh Kumar Thakur, Thakur's brother Vinay Thakur, some government officials, contractors and businessmen were searched by the agency, the sources said.

Ranjan is the secretary of the land, road and building department, and has



been questioned by the ED earlier in a separate money laundering case in which it arrested former minister Alamgir Alam.

Reacting to the development, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren said "these are not unexpected" and will "continue as assembly elections are

approaching." He said opposition BJP's active members have been visiting Jharkhand, apparently referring to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

Sarma and Chouhan are incharge and co-incharge

for the assembly elections in the state, and have been attacking Soren over "corruption", "infiltration" and "declining" law and order.

Meanwhile, Thakur charged that the raids are "politically motivated" as he refused to "buckle under pressure" of the saffron brigade to join the BJP.

Alleging that the ED was working on the directions of the central government, he demanded that the agency should come out with the list of recoveries it made from his residence, besides others associated with him.

"People have every right to know how much funds, illegal documents, gold, diamonds and other jewels

were recovered from premises linked to me," Thakur said.

The money laundering case stems from a December, 2023 FIR lodged by the Jharkhand Police against one Santosh Kumar, a former cashier-cum-upper divisional clerk (UDC), posted at the office of Drinking Water and Sanitation Suvarnarekha Division, Ranchi along with unknown others.

The police FIR alleged that Santosh Kumar, in connivance of other government officials, "dishonestly" made fake payee ID of an entity and used the account details of his own and his company Rockdril Constructions (OPC) Private Limited to fraudulently withdraw funds of Rs

2,71,62,833 causing wrongful loss to the state government.

"It is found that a total of Rs 23 crore has been credited into the accounts of Santosh Kumar and his company from Treasury Office, Ranchi. This amount was subsequently withdrawn by Santosh Kumar and distributed among the other officials," the FIR stated.

Officials said apart from the stated modus operandi of "bogus" billing and subsequent payment by the department, there was also "systemic" corruption in the department for collection and distribution of commission against the allotment of tenders to contractors.

-PTI

Actor Bala arrested, Court grants bail

Kochi: Film actor Bala was arrested by the police early on Monday following a complaint filed by his ex-wife, a singer, and their daughter.

After recording his arrest, the police took him for a medical examination and presented him in court, which granted him bail.

While granting bail, the court ruled that no videos of his child should be uploaded on social media platforms and directed him to cooperate with the investigating officer, according to his lawyer.

He was released on bail with two sureties of Rs 25,000 each.

Police said Bala was arrested on charges including defamation via social media, insulting womanhood, and cruelty towards children.

The actor was also taken into custody from his home early on Monday, according to the police.

-PTI



Junior doctors take part in a protest march to Raj Bhavan demanding a quick and transparent probe into the alleged sexual assault and murder of a trainee doctor in Kolkata on Monday. Pic: PTI

Bomb threat email sent to GNLU, turns out to be hoax

Ahmedabad: The in state capital Gandhinagar received a bomb threat email, which turned out to be a hoax after a thorough check of the premises, a police official said on Monday.

The email, which was sent by an unidentified person to the official ID of the GNLU registrar on Sunday evening, claimed a bomb had been placed in the campus.

In May this year, similar hoax emails were sent to airport and 10 schools.

AP to get Rs 20,000 cr through liquor licenses, sale

Amaravati: The cash-strapped Andhra Pradesh government expects about Rs 20,000 crore through sale of licensing fee and liquor during the remaining financial year, sources said on Monday.

"As such the state government netted Rs 1,800 crore towards non-refundable application fee for 3,396 outlets. Once the outlet was allotted on lottery basis, the winner will have to pay licensing fees ranging from Rs 50 lakh to Rs 85 lakh in six installments. Last year

the government got Rs 30,000 crore through liquor sales. This year for the remaining six months, the government is expecting over Rs 17,000 crore," a source, privy to the development told PTI.

According to Mukesh Kumar Meena, Principal Secretary, Revenue (Excise), the state government has received nearly 90,000 applications for 3,396 private liquor outlets throughout the state with Rs 2 lakh as non-refundable application fee contributing to

about Rs 1,800 crore to the exchequer.

The state government will get Rs 2,084 crore as licensing fee annually from the liquor outlets in six installments. The collective first installment amount of Rs 335 crore from all the liquor shop license holders will be received by Tuesday, he said. Further, the official said all modes of payment such as cash, UPI and others will be allowed at the liquor shops by consumers, unlike cash-only mode during the YSRCP regime.

Meitei, Kuki, Naga MLAs to meet in Delhi

Imphal: For the first time since the ethnic violence broke out in Manipur last year, a number of MLAs of Meitei, Kuki and Naga communities are set to hold a joint meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday under the supervision of the home ministry, officials said.

Three Naga MLAs will attend the meeting in the national capital, while the exact number of Meitei and Kuki legislators to participate is not yet clear, they said. "The talks are part of the Centre's efforts to facilitate a dialogue between the warring communities and seek a solution to the crisis," an official told PTI.

Over 200 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence in Manipur since May 2023.

"From the Naga side, three MLAs - Awangbou Newmai, L Dikho and Ram Muivah - will be attending the meeting in New Delhi. Muivah is currently in the national capital over a personal issue," an official source said. All three MLAs are from the Naga People's Front (NPF), an ally of the ruling BJP in the state.

Several BJP legislators also left for the national

capital on different flights from Imphal.

"We have been asked to come to Delhi to discuss certain things. I don't know the exact agenda now. We have been exploring all means for bringing peace," Water Resources Minister Awangbou Newmai told reporters at Imphal airport.

NPF legislator L Dikho said it is difficult to bring peace to Manipur unless all the communities and people are involved.

"The initiative of the Home Ministry is a very good sign and I have hopes. I would like to attend the meeting and see how far we can go with this initiative," Dikho said. State Congress president K Meghachandra said any initiative to reach a solution is good but the opposition party was not invited.

"However, if the outcome is positive, it will be good for the people of entire Manipur. But the participation of opposition is also required (at the meeting) given the magnitude of the violence," said Meghachandra who also left for Delhi for some other reason.

Speaker T Satyabrata had flown to Delhi on Sunday. -PTI

Idol in Hyderabad temple vandalised

Hyderabad: Mild tension prevailed in Secunderabad here on Monday after an idol was found damaged at a temple and a large number of people gathered near the premises of the place of worship demanding stern action against the perpetrators.

The idol at the Muthyalamma temple was allegedly vandalised and one person was taken into custody in connection with the



incident, a senior police official told PTI adding further investigation was on.

Union Minister and Telangana BJP president G Kishan Reddy visited the Muthyalamma temple and demanded a thorough investigation into the incident. "I demand a thorough inquiry into it and punish those who damaged the idol. It is the state government's responsibility to provide security to Hindu temples," Kishan Reddy demanded.

A large number of police personnel were deployed near the temple. -PTI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Delhi Chief Minister Atishi during a meeting in New Delhi. Pic: PTI

Boy, 16, held on charge of abduction dies in police custody

Muzaffarnagar: A 16-year-old boy held for allegedly abducting a girl died in police custody, police on Monday said.

The boy had reportedly fled with a girl from Bijnor after which her family lodged a complaint of abduction at Suohara Police Station on Sunday, a local said.

Bijnor Superintendent of Police Abhishek said that a police team traced the couple in Ambala

Sunday night. On the way to Bijnor, Sub-inspector Sunil Kumar kept them illegally at his house in Shamli, where the boy died, he said.

Police were investigating the death and boy's body had been sent for postmortem in Shamli, Circle Officer Shyam Singh said. Though nothing is conclusive yet, police suspect the boy killed himself.

-PTI

Brother Eric D'souza, passes away in Goa

Panaji: Brother Eric D'Souza, the teacher loved by generations of students and became famous as a mentor to Shah Rukh Khan and Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, died in an old-age home here after prolonged illness.

The 74-year-old, D'Souza was bedridden with Parkinson's disease. -PTI

Three international flights receive bomb threats

Mumbai: Security agencies went into a tizzy after three international flights originating from Mumbai received bomb threats on Monday, with a New York-bound Air India flight getting diverted to Delhi.

Apart from the Air India flight, two IndiGo flights -- one to Muscat and another to Jeddah -- also received bomb threats, as per officials. The IndiGo flights received the threats before they took off and the planes concerned were moved to isolation bays for security

safety protocols are being diligently followed to ensure the safety of the passengers and crew on board," a senior (Delhi) police officer said.

All passengers have disembarked and the aircraft was being searched, as per officials.

The IndiGo Mumbai-Muscat and Mumbai-Jeddah flights also received bomb threats, a Mumbai police official confirmed, but said "nothing was found (after inspection of the aircraft and passengers



checks on Monday morning.

Air India in a statement said, "Flight AI119 operating Mumbai to JFK on October 14 received a specific security alert and on instructions of the government's security regulatory committee was diverted to Delhi." "The aircraft is currently stationed at the Indira Gandhi International Airport, and all standard

and baggage scanning."

"IndiGo flight 6E 1275 operating from Mumbai to Muscat had received a bomb threat. As per protocol, the aircraft was taken to an isolated bay, and following the standard operating procedure, mandatory security checks were promptly initiated," the Gurugram-headquartered budget airline said in a statement. -PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Nowadays, you must be seeing that the people from the BJP are acting as per their whims and fancies. Who has not seen that in Lakhimpur an MLA was slapped! And then what action was taken. Should the administration not have taken suo motu action?"



Akhilesh Yadav, Samajwadi Party chief

17, including 4 Taiwanese, held for 'digital arrest' fraud

Ahmedabad: Seventeen persons, including four hailing from Taiwan, were arrested by Ahmedabad Cyber Crime Branch for allegedly operating a nationwide "digital arrest" racket, a Gujarat police official said on Monday.

Digital arrest is a type of cyber crime in which the victim is made to believe that he/she is under investigation by authorities for money laundering, drug smuggling etc. The victim is asked to remain in confinement while being acces-

sible to fraudsters via video call and other online tools, hence the term digital arrest. The victim is then forced to transfer large amounts of money into various bank accounts by the accused in order to be let off.

The gang had "digitally arrested" a senior citizen for 10 days, kept watch on him via video calls and got him to deposit Rs 79.34 lakhs as "refundable" processing fees to sort out an "RBI issue", said Joint Commissioner (Crime)



Sharad Singhal.

As per police, the senior citizen had registered a complaint that some persons calling themselves officials of TRAI, CBI and cyber crime branch had alleged that his account was being used for illegal transactions.

"After receiving a complaint last month, our teams raided places in Gujarat, Delhi, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Odisha and Maharashtra and nabbed 17 persons, including four Taiwanese natives, for running this nationwide racket. We believe they may have targeted some 1,000 persons so far." The four Taiwanese nationals have been identified as Mu Chi Sung (42), Chang Hu Yun (33), Wang Chun Wei (26) and Shen Wei (35), while the remaining 13 are from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Odis-

ha and Rajasthan, he added.

The four accused from Taiwan were visiting India for the last one year and had provided mobile phone apps and other technical support to members of the gang to transfer money from one account to another.

"The mobile app being used by the gang was developed by the Taiwanese accused. They have also integrated online wallets in their system. Money received from victims was

transferred to other bank accounts as well as crypto accounts in Dubai using this app, explained Singhal."

The racket was being run from call centres designed to resemble real offices of probe agencies and from which video calls were made. Police have recovered Rs 12.75 lakh in cash, 761 SIM cards, 120 mobile phones, 96 cheque books, 92 debit and credit cards and 42 bank passbooks related to accounts taken on rent to make transactions. -PTI



Devotees take bath at Har Ki Pauri in Haridwar on Monday. The main stream of Ganga has been closed at Har Ki Pauri from October 12 to November 3 for the annual repair and cleaning work. Pic: PTI

Delhi bans sale, use of firecrackers

New Delhi: The Delhi government on Monday imposed an immediate ban on the production, storage, sale, and use of all kinds of firecrackers across the city, effective until January 1.

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai made the announcement and urged Delhi residents to support the government's efforts to curb air pollution.

Rai in a post on X said, "In view of the increasing pollution in winter, a ban has been imposed on the production, storage, sale, and use of firecrackers from today till January 1."

"The Delhi government has issued instructions regarding the ban, and we request the cooperation of all Delhiites," he added.

The Delhi Pollution Control Committee has issued detailed instructions to ensure the effective implementation of the ban with a provision of strict punishment for violations.

The ban, which applies to all forms of firecrackers, including those sold online, comes ahead of the winter pollution that worsens due to stubble burning, lower wind speeds, and other seasonal factors.

According to the directive, Delhi Police is tasked with enforcing the ban and is required to give daily action reports to the DPCC.

Rai, who was visiting the construction site of a sports complex, said, "Today, the AQI has been reported in the 'poor' category, and as winter approaches, pollution tends to increase as temperatures drop. The government is working on a 21-point plan to address this issue, and we will intensify our efforts to raise public awareness on the matter."

Seasonal change can affect moods, moral values



By Ian Hohm and Mark Schaller

Vancouver (Canada): Moral values are the principles that guide a person's perceptions of good and bad, and right and wrong. They shape our prejudices, political ideologies and many other consequential attitudes and actions.

It's tempting to assume that a person's moral values are stable across time and circumstances, and to some extent they are — but not entirely. Moral values are malleable and can sometimes change depending on the specific thoughts, feelings and motivations that arise in different situations.

Our research examined whether moral values might change with the seasons, too.

Changing values

Seasons are characterized not just by changes in the weather, but also by many additional changes in our surroundings and the rhythms of our lives. These may include spring cleaning, spending more time with family in summer, back-to-school shopping in the autumn or preparing for winter holidays.

Consequently, changes in

the seasons lead to changes in the things that people think, feel and do. Most people know that seasonal changes in the weather have effects on people's moods, but that's just the tip of the iceberg. Psychological research has revealed seasonal effects on attention and memory, generosity, colour preferences and many other things.

And so, in our recent research, we investigated whether there might also be seasonal cycles in the moral values that people endorse.

We examined five core principles that previous research has identified as fundamental moral values. Two of these principles — don't hurt other people and treat all people fairly — pertain to individual rights and are referred to as "individualizing" values. Three other principles — be loyal to one's group, respect authority and maintain group traditions — promote group cohesion and are referred to as "binding" values.

Most people endorse all these values, but people differ in the extent to which they prioritize them, and these priorities have important implications. People who prioritize individualizing values are more politically liberal, whereas peo-

ple who prioritize binding values are more conservative, more punitive and express stronger prejudices against out-groups.

Seasonal cycles

Do the seasons affect the extent to which people endorse these core moral values? To find out, we obtained data from YourMorals, a research website that uses online survey methods to assess people's self-reported endorsement of all five of these core moral values.

This seasonal cycle was bimodal, with two peaks and two valleys each year: Americans endorsed binding moral values (valuing loyalty, authority and group traditions) most strongly in the spring and autumn, and least strongly in midsummer and midwinter. This bimodal seasonal cycle in binding moral values showed up again and again in the data, year after year.

Additional analyses on data from Canada and Australia revealed similar patterns: Canadians and Australians also endorsed binding moral values most strongly in the spring and autumn, and least strongly in midsummer and midwinter.

-The Conversation

India to launch updated biodiversity plan at UN

New Delhi: India has updated its national plan to protect biodiversity in alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Bio-

diversity Framework, officials said on Monday.

They said the updated plan will be released at the biannual UN Biodiversity Conference (COP16), scheduled to take place in Cali, Colombia from October 21 to November 1.

An official said India updated its NBSAP to align it with the new goals and targets set by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF), adopted at the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in Montreal, Canada.

One of the main goals of the KM-GBF is to protect at least 30 per cent of the world's land and

30 per cent
Area of world's land and ocean to be protected by 2030

oceans by 2030.

KM-GBF also aims to restore damaged ecosystems, such as forests, wetlands and rivers by 2030 to ensure they continue to provide essential services like clean water and air.

It also seeks to reduce pollution from plastics and chemicals that harm wildlife and ecosystems, while ensuring that local communities — especially indigenous peoples — who protect and rely on biodiversity are

involved in decision-making and benefit from the sustainable use of resources.

Officials, however, said protecting 30 per cent of land and oceans is a collective global goal and not a national goal.

They say that the responsibility to achieve these goals should not fall disproportionately on developing countries, arguing that developed nations, which have historically contributed more to biodiversity loss and climate change, should take on a greater share of the burden in terms of conservation efforts and financing.

-PTI

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), adopted in 1992 to protect the world's biodiversity, requires countries to create a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), which is a key tool for safeguarding and utilising biodiversity at the national level.

ShakthiSAT mission to train 12k girls from 108 nations

New Delhi: Aerospace startup Space Kidz India has launched "ShakthiSAT", a global mission to train about 12,000 girls across 108 countries on space technology, aiming for a satellite launch under ISRO's Chandrayaan-4 mission, fostering international collaboration in space exploration.

President Droupadi Murmu will unveil the official poster of ShakthiSAT in November 2024, according to a company statement.

"The mission includes 120 hours of online training for high school girl students (aged 14-18) to teach them about various aspects of space technology, payload development, and spacecraft systems," ShakthiSAT mission lead Srimathy Kesan told PTI.

Participating nations include the UK, UAE, Brazil, Kenya, Australia, France, Greece, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan, among others.

By engaging 108 students from each partici-

ating country, the mission seeks to nurture talent, foster international collaboration, and ignite interest in the vast possibilities of space science, ultimately creating a ripple effect that inspires millions of young girls worldwide.



"I am extremely happy to have conceived this idea, and I am confident that this initiative has the potential to benefit not only our country but the entire world. Our goal is to inspire and empower young women, providing them with opportunities that have the power to transform lives and unite us globally through the awe-

inspiring domain of space exploration," Kesan said.

After completion of the online training, the mission will select 108 students — one from each country — who will travel to India for hands-on training in building payloads and spacecraft prototypes between June and August next year.

A prototype presentation will be made before Prime Minister Narendra Modi later this year or early next year, she said.

"The mission aims to launch the satellite as part of ISRO's Chandrayaan 4 mission in 2026," Kesan further said.

Chennai-headquartered Space Kidz India has launched 18+ NSLVs (BalloonSats), 3 Suborbital Payloads, and 4 Orbital Satellites. It claims to be the first organisation in the world to have launched satellites with the help of high school and college students.

-PTI

First population estimation of riverine dolphins

New Delhi: India has conducted its first population estimation of riverine dolphins in the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Indus River systems and its findings will be released soon, officials said on Monday.

The famous Ganges River dolphin is found in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system and its tributaries spanning across India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. A small population of the Indus river dolphin, a close relative of the Ganges river dolphin, is found in the Indus River system in India.

"Under Project Dolphin, we have completed the estimation of riverine dolphins, the first of its kind in the world. The survey, conducted over two years, covered 8,000 kilometres of the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Indus rivers. The results will be released soon," an official said.

India launched Project Dolphin, a conservation initiative to protect dolphins in both freshwater rivers and coastal waters, in 2020.

Delhi AQI better despite huge Dussehra celebrations

New Delhi: Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai said on Sunday that in spite of Dussehra celebrations in the capital, people are breathing clean air, and added the number of days with "good", "satisfactory", and "moderate" air quality is going up, indicating an improvement in managing pollution.

Rai also said that Delhi's Air Quality Index has remained outside the "poor" category after Dussehra, however, as per the Central Pollution Control Board the city's air quality was recorded in the "poor" category with a reading of 225 at 12 pm.

In a press conference on Sunday, Rai said every year after Dussehra, the air quality usually dips into the "poor" category, but this year Delhi is experiencing clean air.

The environment minister said that over the past two years, Delhi has recorded 200 days of "good," "satisfactory," or "moderate" air quality between



An anti-smog gun being used to curb air pollution in New Delhi on Sunday. Pic: PTI

January and October 12, compared to just 109 such days in 2016.

Rai said this is an indicator of progress in managing pollution, crediting the improvement to efforts by the Delhi government and public support. He noted that achieving this without a lockdown marks a significant accomplishment for the city.

On Saturday, the day of Dussehra, the AQI was in the "moderate" category with a reading of 155.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe".

The minister also criticised the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for claiming that pollution levels in Delhi are worsening, urging them to review the data.

Rai highlighted that on August 30, he had written a letter to the Union Environment Minister Bhu-

pender Yadav, requesting a joint meeting to address air quality issues, but he had not received a response.

The Delhi minister said he sent another request on October 10, urging the central government to collaborate on anti-pollution efforts. He emphasised that during critical periods, such as post-Dussehra when temperatures drop, emergency pollution-control measures become essential.

-PTI

Climate change could reduce Amazon's methane absorption

New Delhi: Extreme temperatures and humidity driven by climate change could reduce the Amazon rainforest's capacity to absorb the greenhouse gas methane by 70 per cent, a study has found.

Researchers said that under a warmer climate, the extreme rainfall and droughts projected for South America's Amazon could impact its net greenhouse gas emissions.

Often referred to as the 'lungs of the planet', the tropical rainforest lies majorly in Brazil, with parts in Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, among others, and is known to be a crucial 'greenhouse gas sink' that absorbs these gases from the air.

However, 20 per cent of the

Amazon region, which remains flooded for nearly half a year, releases methane, countering its ability to absorb other greenhouse gases, the researchers at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil said. Their study is published in the journal *Environmental Microbiome*.

Previous studies have shown that the flooded areas of Amazon contribute up to almost 30 per cent of methane emissions from wetlands globally.

"Although it's already been shown that factors such as air temperature and seasonal flooding can influence the flow of methane in these environments. But what should we ex-



pect in the context of climate change and the projected extreme weather?" Lead author

Julia Gontijo, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California, Davis, US, said.

For this study, researchers took soil samples from two flooded regions of the Amazon

and one from elevated forests known to absorb methane. These samples were subjected to extreme temperatures — 27 degrees Celsius and 30 degrees Celsius — and humidity.

They found that in the soil sample from the elevated forest methane absorption dropped by 70 per cent in hot and dry conditions, while methane production surged in heavy rainfall, as the soil was not used to dealing with extreme humidity.

"Within this (elevated) forest soil, an average decrease of 70 per cent in (methane) consumption potential was observed with temperature increase in dry conditions," the authors wrote.

It means that the floodplain

microbiome can adapt to climate change but the upland forest microbiome is sensitive to its effects, which could cause a shift in the balance of greenhouse gas emissions in the Amazon in future, Gontijo said.

"In view of the Amazon Rainforest biome's importance in proportion to global levels, this could represent a very serious problem," she said.

She further said that in both (the) floodplains, although there was no observation of significant changes in methane emission patterns, the number of methane-producing microorganisms increased that can be a future problem.

The results could be used in framing public policies, the author added.

-PTI

Israeli strike on hospital tent camp kills four

Deir al-Balah: An Israeli airstrike on a hospital courtyard in the Gaza Strip early Monday killed at least four people and sent flames sweeping through a packed tent camp for people displaced by the war, leaving more than two dozen with severe burns, according to Palestinian medics.

The Israeli military said it targeted militants hiding out among civilians, without providing evidence. In recent months it has repeatedly struck crowded shelters and tent camps, alleging that Hamas fighters were using them as staging grounds for attacks.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central city of Deir al-Balah was already struggling to treat a large number of wounded people from an earlier strike on a school-turned-shelter nearby that killed at least 20 people when the early morning airstrike hit and fire engulfed many of the tents.

Associated Press footage showed children among the wounded. A man sobbed as he carried a toddler with a bandaged head in his arms. Another small child with a bandaged leg was given a blood transfusion on the floor of the packed hospital.

Hospital records showed that four people were killed and 40 wounded. Twenty-five people were transferred to the Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza after suffering severe burns, according to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital.



Palestinians look at the damage after an Israeli strike hit a tent area in the courtyard of Al Aqsa Martyrs hospital in Deir al Balah near Gaza Strip on Monday.

Pic: AP

Israel is still carrying out near-daily strikes across the Gaza Strip more than a year into the war, and has been waging a major ground assault in the north, where it says militants have regrouped.

The war began when Hamas attacked southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, while Palestinian militants abducted around 250 hostages. Around 100 are still being held inside Gaza, a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 42,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were fighters but says women and children make up more than half the fatalities. Around

90 per cent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people have been displaced by the war, often multiple times, and large areas of the coastal territory have been completely destroyed.

Israel has ordered the entire remaining population of the northern third of Gaza, estimated at around 400,000 people, to evacuate to the south and has not allowed any food to enter the north since the start of the month. Hundreds of thousands of people from the north heeded Israeli evacuation orders at the start of the war and have not been allowed to return.

That has raised fears among Palestinians that Israel intends to implement a plan devised by former generals in which it would order all civilians

out of northern Gaza and label anyone remaining there a combatant — a surrender-or-starve strategy that rights groups say would violate international law. The plan has been presented to the Israeli government, but it's unclear whether it has been adopted.

With no end in sight to the war in Gaza, Israel is also waging an air and ground war in southern Lebanon against the Hezbollah militant group, an ally of Hamas that has been firing rockets into northern Israel for more than a year.

Israel has also threatened to strike Iran in retaliation for a ballistic missile attack, raising the prospect of an all-out regional war.

A Hezbollah aerial at-

tack on an army base in northern Israel killed four soldiers and severely wounded seven others Sunday, the military said, in the deadliest strike by the militant group since Israel launched its ground invasion of Lebanon nearly two weeks ago.

The Lebanon-based Hezbollah called the attack near Binyamina city retaliation for Israeli strikes on Beirut on Thursday that killed 22 people. It said it targeted Israel's elite Golan brigade, launching dozens of missiles to occupy Israeli air defence systems during the assault by "squadrons" of drones.

Israel's national rescue service said the attack wounded 61. With Israel's advanced air-defence systems, it's rare for so many people to be injured by drones or missiles.

Four Israel soldiers killed

Deir Al-balah: Israel's military says four soldiers were killed in a Hezbollah drone attack on an army base next to Binyamina city. A military statement says the strike Sunday evening also severely injured seven soldiers.

It's the deadliest Hezbollah strike since Israel launched its ground invasion of Lebanon nearly two weeks ago.

The Lebanon-based Hezbollah earlier claimed responsibility and called the attack retaliation for Israeli strikes on Beirut on Thursday that killed 22 people.

-AP



People ride the Giant Wheel and flying chair ride at Gillian's Wonderland, the popular amusement park on the boardwalk in Ocean City of New Jersey, US.

Pic: AP

US plane crash: Clashes amid immersion of idols

Savannah: One person died as a result of a small plane crash Sunday night in a Savannah, Georgia, residential neighbourhood, local police said.

The Savannah Police Department said in a brief statement that officers were dispatched to the crash site on East 66th Street, roughly 4.8 kilometers south of the city's historic landmark district. "The pilot is deceased, and the passenger has minor injuries," Savannah police posted on X, adding, "No one on the ground was injured."

Savannah's firefighter union posted on Facebook that the crash happened shortly before 10 pm Sunday. The Savannah Professional Firefighters Association posted a photograph of a mangled plane on the ground in front of a house.

The cause of the crash was not immediately known. Police said the Federal Aviation Administration is investigating.

Dhaka: At least three people were injured in a clash that broke out between police and Hindu community going to immerse idols following the conclusion of Durga Puja in an Old Dhaka locality, a media report said on Monday.

The three people, including a police officer, were injured when miscreants threw bricks from the rooftop of Nur Super Market in Patuati area of Old Dhaka on the procession heading to immerse idols in the Buriganga river late Sunday night, The Daily Star newspaper said quoting an eyewitness.

Following the attack, members of the Hindu community tried to enter the market but faced resistance from the police.

Kotwali police station Officer-in-Charge Md Enamul Hasan told the newspaper, "The locals attempted to enter the market. For the sake of the market's secu-

urity, we resisted them from entering, which eventually led to the clash."

The officer further said that unable to control the situation, he informed the army and they arrived and dispersed the crowd. "The situation is now largely under control," he added.

The five-day Hindu religious festival that began with an invocation of Goddess Durga on Wednesday, concluded with the immersion of Goddess Durga murtis on Sunday.

The Hindus constitute about 8 per cent of the 170 million population in Bangladesh. The community has faced attacks since regime change on August 5 and in the latest series of incidents, Durga Puja mandaps faced vandalism. A crude bomb was allegedly thrown at a Durga Puja mandap in the Tanti Bazar area of Old Dhaka on Friday and although the bomb caught fire, nobody was injured.

Indian HC to Ottawa 'person of interest', alleges Canada

New Delhi: India on Monday outrightly rejected as "preposterous imputations" Canada's indication linking the Indian high commissioner to Ottawa to the investigation into the alleged killing of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said India received a "diplomatic communication from Canada yesterday suggesting that the Indian High Commissioner and other diplomats are 'persons of interest' in a matter related to an investigation in that country."

"The Government of India strongly rejects these preposterous imputations and ascribes them to the political agenda of the Trudeau government that is centred around vote bank politics," it said.

The MEA said India now reserves the right to take further steps in response to these "latest efforts of the Canadian government to concoct allegations against Indian diplomats".

"Since Prime Minister Trudeau made certain allegations in September 2023, the Canadian government has not shared a shred of evidence with the Government of India, despite



Justin Trudeau

many requests from our side," the MEA said.

"This leaves little doubt that on the pretext of an investigation, there is a deliberate strategy of smearing India for political gains," the MEA said. It said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's hostility towards India has long been in evidence. In 2018, his visit to India, "which was aimed at currying favour with a vote bank, rebounded to his discomfort."

"His Cabinet has included individuals who have openly associated with an extremist and separatist agenda regarding India," the MEA said. "His naked interference in Indian internal politics in December 2020 showed how far he was willing to go in this regard," it added. "That his government was dependent on a political party, whose leader openly espouses a separatist ideology vis-a-vis In-

dia, only aggravated matters," the MEA said.

The relations between India and Canada came under severe strain following Trudeau's allegations in September last year of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Khalistani extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. The latter was gunned down in Surrey, British Columbia in June last year. New Delhi rejected Trudeau's charges as "absurd".

"The Trudeau government has consciously provided space to violent extremists and terrorists to harass, threaten and intimidate Indian diplomats and community leaders in Canada. This has included death threats to them and to Indian leaders," the MEA said. The MEA said High Commissioner Sanjay Kumar Verma is India's senior most serving diplomat with a distinguished career spanning 36 years.

"He has been Ambassador in Japan and Sudan, while also serving in Italy, Turkey, Vietnam and China. The aspersions cast on him by the Government of Canada are ludicrous and deserve to be treated with contempt," it said. -PTI

Russia captures Ukraine village

Kyiv: Russia said Monday it has captured the village of Levadne in southern Ukraine as it probes for weaknesses along the war's roughly 1,000-kilometre front line, including in eastern areas which currently are the main focus of Moscow's military effort before winter arrives.

Ukrainian authorities, meanwhile, reported no nighttime Shahed drone attacks on the country for the first time in about six weeks, after saying five days ago it struck a Shahed storage facility in Russia's Krasnodar region where some 400 drones reportedly were being kept.

In Moscow, the Defence Ministry said Russian troops took Levadne in the Zaporizhzhia region. Levadne was seized by the Russians early during the war but was recaptured by Ukrainian forces during a counteroffensive in the summer of 2023.

Ukraine's troops are straining to hold back Russia's military might, especially in the eastern Donetsk region, and don't have the manpower or weaponry to launch their own offensive.

-AP

Chinese premier in Pak for SCO meet

By Sajjad Hussain

Islamabad: Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Monday arrived for a four-day visit during which he will attend the SCO summit and hold bilateral meetings with his Pakistani counterpart Shehbaz Sharif and discuss issues of mutual interests, including the strategic CPEC.

This is the first visit by any Chinese premier to Pakistan in 11 years and comes on the back of recent attacks on Chinese nationals working on infrastructure projects in Pakistan.

Prime Minister Sharif received Li along with cabinet ministers at the Nur Khan airbase at Rawalpindi near here.

Li and other foreign leaders will attend the 23rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (CHG) of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Islamabad to be held on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Earlier there were speculations about Li's participation in the wake of the killing of two Chinese workers in a suicide attack in Karachi and the ongoing agitation by the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party for the release of its



Over 200 workers of Imran's party arrested Pakistan's law enforcement agencies have arrested more than 200 workers of Imran Khan's party in the Punjab province to thwart its planned protest in Islamabad during the SCO summit, police said on Monday. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had announced to hold a demonstration at the D-Chowk in the capital during the two-day Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit that is scheduled to begin on Tuesday.

jailed leader and former premier Imran Khan.

State-run the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) reported ahead of Li's visit that he would be meeting Pakistan's civil and military leadership and attend

the SCO summit during his October 14 to 17 visit.

Sharif and Li will lead their respective delegations to comprehensively discuss all aspects of Pakistan-China relations, including economic and trade ties and

cooperation under the USD 60 billion CPEC. The two sides will also discuss regional and global developments.

Earlier last week, Sharif assured the Chinese of personally overseeing the investigation into the Karachi attack, for which the outlawed Baloch Liberation Army has claimed responsibility. On Friday, China said it had dispatched an inter-agency working group to Pakistan to review the security of scores of Chinese personnel working on the CPEC projects.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"A victory by Donald Trump in US presidential election would bring misfortune to the world. I don't interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, but this matter is too important for the world. I deeply believe that Americans will vote responsibly."

Lech Walesa, Ex President, Poland



Armed man arrested near Trump's rally

Los Angeles: A Nevada man with a shotgun, loaded handgun, ammunition and several fake passports in his vehicle was arrested at a security checkpoint outside Donald Trump's rally Saturday night in the Southern California desert, authorities said. He was released the same day on \$5,000 bail.

The suspect, a 49-year-old resident of Las Vegas, was driving an unregistered black SUV with a "homemade" license plate that was stopped by depu-



ties assigned to the rally in Coachella, east of Los Angeles, Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco said at a news conference Sunday afternoon.

The driver claimed to be

The suspect, a 49-year-old resident of Las Vegas, was driving an unregistered black SUV with a "homemade" license plate that was stopped by deputies assigned to the rally in Coachella, east of Los Angeles. The man was arrested on suspicion of possessing a loaded firearm and possession of a high-capacity magazine, the department said in a statement.

a journalist but it was unclear if he had the proper credentials. Deputies noticed the interior of the vehicle was "in disarray" and a search uncovered the weapons and ammo, along with multiple passports

and driver licenses with different names, Bianco said.

The man was arrested on suspicion of possessing a loaded firearm and possession of a high-capacity magazine, the department

said in a statement.

"This incident did not impact the safety of former President Trump or attendees of the event," the Saturday statement said. Trump had not yet arrived at the rally at the time of the arrest, the sheriff said Sunday. The suspect is scheduled to appear in court on Jan. 2, 2025, according to online records.

Bianco declined to speculate about the suspect's motives or frame of mind. "We know we prevented something bad from hap-

pening, and it was irrelevant what that bad was going to be," Bianco said.

The man made it past an outer security boundary and was stopped at an inner perimeter patrolled by the sheriff's department, Bianco said. Another security checkpoint closer to the rally site was operated by the Secret Service.

"The U.S. Secret Service assesses that the incident did not impact protective operations and Trump was not in any danger," the U.S. Attorney's Office said.

EDITORIAL

Raj's Solo Gambit

Raj Thackeray, the maverick leader of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), has long been the political enfant terrible of Maharashtra. In a recent address to his party workers in Goregaon, he declared the MNS's intent to contest the upcoming state elections independently, distancing himself from both the ruling Mahayuti and the opposition Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA). Thackeray's rhetoric was fiery as ever, positioning himself as the outsider in the state's fluid political landscape.

His assertion that the MNS will be part of the next government is a bold claim for a leader whose party has been in decline since its heyday in 2012. In his address, Thackeray railed against political flip-flopping, lambasting those who switched sides for power and warning that Maharashtra should never bow before the dictates of Delhi—a thinly veiled critique of the central government's influence over the Eknath Shinde-led Mahayuti coalition.

Thackeray's criticism of industrial giant Adani, accusing it of land grabs in Maharashtra, may be an attempt to tap into a perceived well of populist anger against crony capitalism. But this anti-corporate stance sits uneasily with his recent dalliance with the BJP, a party that has hardly shied away from close ties with big business.

His dismissal of the Maratha reservation as unattainable and critique of the 'Ladki Bahin' welfare scheme—deemed fiscally unsustainable—reflect his willingness to tackle contentious issues, even at the risk of alienating a key voter bloc.

Yet, despite this strident anti-establishment tone, Thackeray's actions have been far more conciliatory towards the ruling BJP and CM Shinde in the last couple of years. Earlier this year, he campaigned vigorously for the ruling Mahayuti's candidates in the Lok Sabha elections after declaring his unconditional support for PM Modi despite receiving no electoral seat himself. His familiar brand of oratory, marked by scathing attacks on his cousin and rival, Uddhav Thackeray and savage lampooning of political rivals, has not translated into any political capital.

The MNS, founded in 2006 to champion the cause of the 'Marathi mannos', has seen its fortunes dwindle over the years. In 2014, it suffered twin electoral debacles and subsequent local and national elections only cemented its political irrelevance. Even its fiery campaign against north Indians, which once garnered both support and notoriety, has become a footnote. The question remains what does Raj Thackeray want? In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, he had campaigned for Congress-NCP. This time, his meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah earlier this year led us to think the MNS would finally be an integral part of the Mahayuti. This, however, has not come to pass, and Thackeray's solo gambit for the state elections suggests either a calculated risk or a desperate last stand. If the MNS falters once more in this Assembly election, Thackeray risks being consigned to the margins of Maharashtra's political history.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

National Rebellion or Threat? Populism and the EU's Crisis of Democracy

By
Christoph Ernst

The rise of right-wing populism in Europe, often characterized by figures like Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Jörg Haider in Austria, is not merely a reaction to domestic discontent but a broader challenge to what many view as an increasingly authoritarian European Union. The real conflict, it seems, lies between national sovereignty and a supranational body that increasingly dictates policy to its member states often without democratic accountability. For critics, the EU has become a 'hyperstate' of unelected officials who meddle in everyday life, from immigration quotas to economic policy, and even the limits of free speech.

Italian writer Ignazio Silone, reflecting on fascism's many faces, famously remarked, "If fascism returns, it will not say, 'I am fascism.' No, it will say, 'I am anti-fascism.'" Silone, who had experienced the Stalinist purges firsthand, coined the term "red fascism" to describe how authoritarianism could emerge under the guise of liberation or even democracy. His insight is eerily prescient today, as governments and institutions weap-

The rise of right-wing populism signals a deeper clash between national sovereignty and an increasingly authoritarian European Union.

onize the rhetoric of anti-fascism to silence dissent.

Austrian author Thomas Glavinic, reflecting on modern European politics, argues that elections offer little real choice. National policies, from immigration to digital censorship, are increasingly dictated by the EU's technocrats - individuals who are not accountable to voters but whose decisions shape the lives of millions. As Glavinic cynically observes, elections are little more than a "collective hallucination" of democracy, a spectacle in which the electorate's influence is negligible.

For many Europeans, this erosion of national sovereignty has created a backlash, particularly among those who feel that traditional values and local interests are being sacrificed at the altar of a distant, unaccountable bureaucracy. The rise of populist movements, whether it is Orbán's Fidesz party in Hungary or the FPÖ in Austria, is seen as an "earthquake" shaking the foundations of European politics. Yet, instead of engaging with the legitimate concerns of these movements - immigration, economic inequality or the erosion of national identity - the political establishment has often resorted to vilifying them as proto-fascist threats to democracy.

Jörg Haider's rise in Austria, for example, was met with widespread condemnation by the European elite, who painted him as a new Hitler. His nostalgia for pre-war Austria and critique of unchecked immigration provided an easy narrative for his detractors to frame him as an extremist. Yet Haider's appeal lay precisely in his ability to speak for the 'little people'—those who felt alienated by a political system dominated by technocrats and entrenched elites. Instead of addressing these grievances, the establishment used moral panic to delegitimize popular discontent, a tactic that has since become standard across Europe in dealing with right-wing populists.

This moral framing has allowed the EU and its defenders to present themselves as the guardians of liberal democracy



while systematically stripping away the very freedoms they claim to protect. The EU's push for regulations against disinformation and hate speech on digital platforms is a prime example. Under the guise of protecting public discourse, the EU has given itself the power to decide what constitutes acceptable speech.

The rise of conservative and nationalist movements across Europe is thus framed as a rebellion against this creeping technocratic authoritarianism. These movements are often described as anti-democratic, yet their core message is one of reclaiming national self-determination. As in Austria, where the FPÖ's victory was described as an "earthquake," the populist surge is not a simple matter of left versus right. It is a revolt against the patronizing paternalism of a Brussels elite that increasingly governs Europe in a top-down, neo-feudal manner.

Looking at the antics of functionaries like Thierry Breton or Ursula von der Leyen, the EU has no longer anything to do with popular rule of whatever kind. And against this background, the alleged anti-fascism in an anti-racist guise is just a sham, through which mighty apparatchiks justify their ever more comprehensive claim to power.

The need to be counted among the 'good guys' and to generate moral capital

by elevating oneself above the alleged 'bad guys' is as old as the hills, often achieved by demeaning others based on race, religion, or worldview. It is much more strenuous to proceed according to traditional rules, discuss conflicts openly and resolve contrary interests through compromise. But I prefer that, as it is the only way that allows the dignity of all parties concerned to be respected.

Two years after the bloody defeat of the Italian fascists and the German Nazis, on 11 November 1947, Winston Churchill said: "Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one claims that democracy is perfect or all-knowing. Indeed, it can be said that democracy is the worst form of government, apart from all the others that have been tried from time to time."

The future of Europe will be determined not by whether it can stamp out the populist right, but whether it can restore faith in democracy itself. If it fails, the continent risks sliding into the very authoritarianism it claims to oppose.

(The author is an historian and novelist who writes historically-aware crime fiction. He is currently working on a book on Germany's migration crisis. Views personal.)

GLOBAL WATCH

Durga Puja in Bangladesh: A Festival of Fear

Despite the Hindus in neighbouring Bangladesh putting up a brave face during the recent Durga Puja festivities, the atmosphere for the minority community since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government is far from celebratory.

A pervasive sense of insecurity looms over the Hindu community, particularly following the recent wave of violence and persecution that has marked the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus.

The assaults on Hindus have become alarmingly frequent, with reports of temple desecration and the forceful occupation of Hindu homes and properties. This environment of fear has traumatized the country's Hindu minority, which numbers over 13 million in a predominantly Muslim nation. Despite assurances from Yunus's administration for enhanced security during the festival, the situation remains dire, with radical Islamist groups openly threatening Hindus and calling for the public celebration of their religious festivals to cease. Some extremist factions have even suggested outright bans on Hindu festivals, framing such demands within a context that prioritizes the Islamic identity of Bangladesh.

The government's response has been woefully inadequate, failing to reject these extremist demands or take meaningful action against

As rising Islamist threats and government restrictions dampen Hindu celebrations, the minority community in Bangladesh faces an uncertain future marked by insecurity and foreboding.



those inciting communal tensions. In a notable display of capitulation, authorities this time had instituted restrictions on Durga Puja celebrations, forbidding the traditional beating of drums, blowing of conch shells, and ringing of bells during daily prayers. This decree, which has no precedent since Bangladesh's independence in 1971, has left Hindus feeling particularly marginalized and is interpreted as tacit support for Islamic fundamentalism by the Yunus administration.

Furthermore, the recent spate of attacks on Durga idols and puja mandaps, escalating just weeks before the festival, saw idols of goddess Durga being broken in many parts of the country by Islamists. Despite government assurances, the culprits remain unpunished.

This climate of fear had led to a significant downturn in Durga Puja celebrations this year with reports of many organizers having opted to cancel festivities altogether. Reports from various districts, including Khulna, Rangpur, and Jhainadaha, indicate that puja organizers have received threats from Islamist groups demanding a so-called 'tax' of five lakh Bangladeshi Taka for 'permission' to conduct their celebrations. Such demands hark back to the jizya—historically levied on non-Muslims under Islamic rule—evoking deep historical grievances among the Hindu population.

The oppressive atmosphere

reached a climax with the vandalism of a Durga idol in Kishoreganj, where Muslim extremists decapitated the goddess' image.

In response, India has condemned the attacks, calling on the interim government in Dhaka to ensure the safety of Hindus and other minorities.

On October 12, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) expressed "serious concern" over the recent desecrations and attacks. "These are deplorable events. They follow a systematic pattern of desecration and damage to temples and deities that we have witnessed over several days now," the MEA said. India urged the Bangladeshi government to take immediate steps to protect its minorities and their places of worship, especially during the Durga Puja season. The MEA's statement came after a series of targeted attacks, including a crude explosive device thrown at a Durga Puja pandal in Dhaka, which injured several volunteers and one devotee.

The implications of the government's inaction are profound. Trust between the Hindu community and state authorities is dwindling, with scepticism surrounding promises of protection from further attacks.

The gradual erosion of cultural identity amid escalating religious intolerance suggests that the nation may be heading towards a future where such festivities are relegated to quiet, solitary observance rather than vibrant communal celebration.

STATES WATCH

Caste Quandary: Sub-Categorisation at a Crossroads

On October 11, the Telangana government appointed the Justice Shameem Akhter Commission to explore the sub-classification of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and provide recommendations. The move comes on the heels of an August Supreme Court ruling that empowered states to pursue such sub-categorisation, aimed at ensuring a more equitable distribution of benefits among marginalised SC communities. This process, which seeks to address persistent inequalities and improve representation, is fraught with challenges, not least the absence of updated caste data.

The commission, a one-man body tasked with completing its work in just 60 days, finds itself hampered by the same obstacle that confronted the B.N. Lokur Committee in 1965 - a lack of reliable census data on caste. Despite recognizing the need for urgent reforms, the Lokur Committee ultimately stopped short of recommending sub-categorisation. It did, however, highlight the advanced status of some SC groups, such as the Malas, and the need for their removal from the SC list, citing their disproportionate access to resources.

Telangana's decision to appoint the commission comes at a critical juncture. The state is currently undertaking a large-scale recruitment drive for government posts, which

As Telangana takes a step towards caste justice, the one-man commission's 60-day mandate raises questions about the Congress government's political will and intent for genuine reform.



TELANGANA

could significantly affect disadvantaged SC subgroups. The Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS), a group that has long championed the cause of SC sub-categorisation, has urged the government to delay the appointment of 11,000 teachers until the sub-categorisation process is complete. However, MRPS leader Manda Krishna Madiga's protests have been met with resistance, his planned march in Hyderabad thwarted by the police. Despite this, Madiga remains a central figure, advocating for the rights of his community through Gandhian means of protest for over four decades.

The social realities for many SC communities remain stark. Discrimination persists in various forms, particularly against more disadvantaged subgroups like the Madigas. Historically, efforts to address these inequalities through sub-classification have been made, but they have met with mixed results. In 1999, the Andhra Pradesh government, under Chandrababu Naidu, introduced the Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of

Reservations) Act, which sought to divide SCs into four groups - Relli (A), Madiga (B), Mala (C), and others (D). The legislation was in effect for four years until the Supreme Court struck it down, deeming the state's actions an overreach of its constitutional powers.

The Telangana government's approach mirrors the intentions of the 2000 Act, which provided separate quotas for Madigas (around 60% of the SC population) and Malas (about 28%) based on Census 2011 data. However, the decision of the Revanth Reddy-led Congress government to form a one-man commission to investigate sub-categorisation, rather than using existing legal frameworks, appears more like a delaying tactic than a decisive move toward reform.

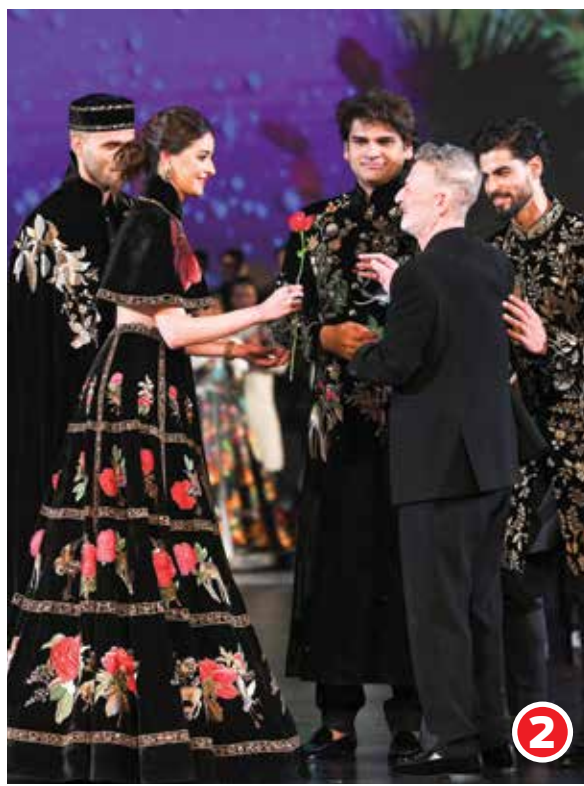
At a high-level meeting held on October 11, the Chief Minister instructed officials to begin a caste census immediately, setting a 60-day deadline for its completion. The data from this census, which will rely on the 2011 Census as a baseline, will be crucial for informing both the sub-categorisation of SCs and a broader survey of the social and economic conditions of the state's Backward Classes (BCs).

The Telangana government has announced a moratorium on new job notifications until the Justice Shameem Akhter Commission submits its report, aiming to reassure marginalized communities like the Madigas amid ongoing hiring. By involving all government departments in data collection, the Reddy administration seeks to ensure a fairer resource distribution among SCs and BCs. However, scepticism remains regarding the commission's true intentions—will it foster real change or merely delay progress?

As the December 9 deadline approaches, the outcome of the sub-categorisation debate looms large over Telangana's marginalized castes and draws national attention.



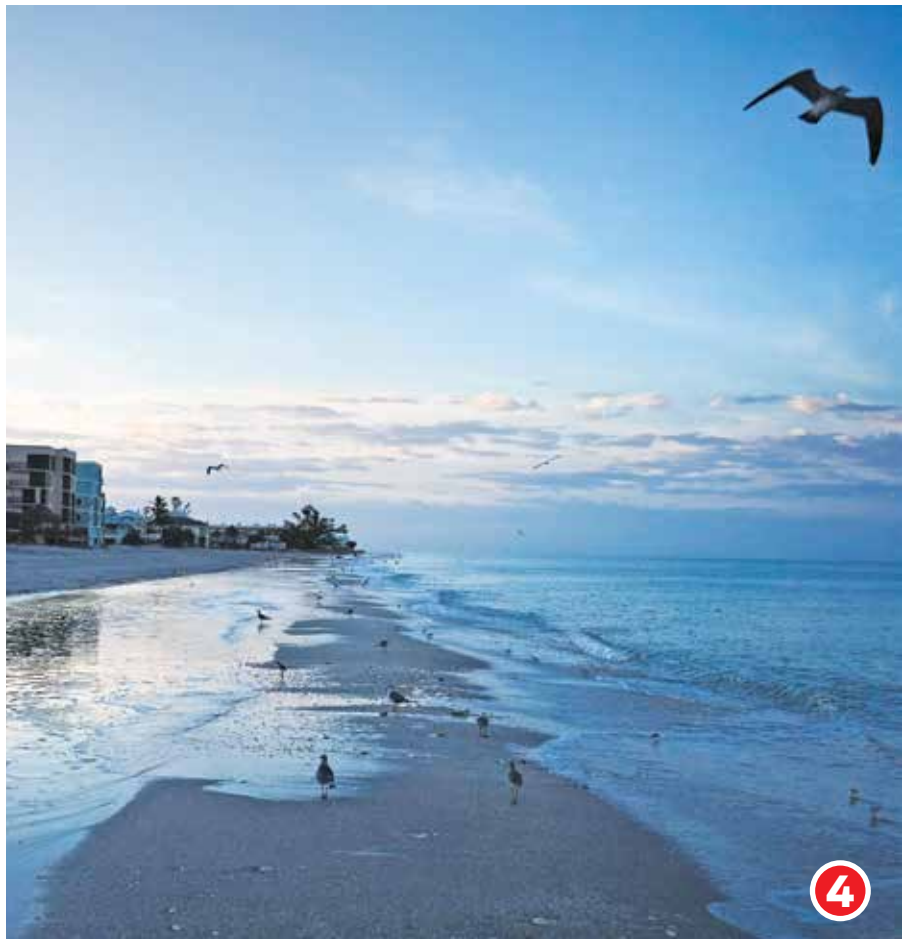
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KALEIDOSCOPE

1. A woman purchases earthen lamps (Diya) from a roadside vendor in Bikaner on Monday.
2. Actor Ananya Panday with designer Rohit Bal on the ramp during the grand finale of Lakme Fashion Week in New Delhi on Sunday.
3. Yachts ahead of the Indian Navy Sailing Championship (INSC) that will be held from Oct. 16 to Oct. 19, 2024, at Indian Naval Academy in Kerala.
4. Birds visit a sandbar as the sun rises on Manasota Key in Englewood following the passage of Hurricane Milton on Sunday.
5. Devotees carry palanquin of deities during the second day of International Dussehra festival in Kullu on Monday.



5

All Pictures PTI, AP

EXPERTS' VOICE

Essential Tips to Stay Safe Online



By Pravin Dixit

The increasing number of cybercrimes occurring daily is both alarming and traumatic. No one is exempt; it affects nearly everyone—rich or poor, educated or uneducated, men and women, young and old. The criminals are often invisible or use fake identities, while victims tend to be gullible and unsuspecting. Most do not report these crimes due to shame, fear, or lack of awareness. By the time they realise they've been cheated, significant time has passed, allowing the criminals to complete their transactions and withdraw the funds.

The nature of cybercrime varies by location and incident, taking many forms, including fake investment portals, enticing job offers, fraudulent matrimonial proposals, and so-called "digital arrests." These crimes often start with a call from an unknown person making attractive offers or threats about non-existent crimes. Criminals may impersonate gas company representatives, asking for personal information and bank details, or send emails requesting banking information. In some cases, victims receive video calls where they are "digitally arrested" and pressured to make large payments, with fraudsters preventing them from leaving until the payment is made.

Victims include retirees seeking high-return investments, unemployed youth searching for jobs, and young women interested in marriage proposals. Some women face blackmail or threats of compromising photo publication. Cybercriminals employ various tactics—false promises, unusual returns, and exploitation of greed or dreams—to lure victims. Surprisingly, even those savvy in social media, mobile technology, and computers, including individuals with substantial funds, often fall prey to these schemes.

In some cases, law enforcement agencies have arrested criminals but remain unaware of where the money has gone. On October 10, 2024, the NIA (National Investigative Agency) stated, "Investigations revealed that five individuals trafficked vulnerable Indian youth to the Golden Triangle Region in Laos, forcing them to commit cyber scams targeting European and American citizens. They operated through the consultancy firm All International Services, which served as a front for human trafficking" (The Perfect Voice, October 11, 2024). Many of the real culprits behind these cybercrimes are based in China or Pakistan, causing chaos in countries like India, the USA, and the UK.

Apart from registering offences under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and the I.T. Act under various provisions, the RBI and other public and private banks are constantly alerting their customers and the public, in general, to guard against fraudsters and not to disclose their account details or not fall prey to any links for rewards. They have also publicised their helplines, where the victims are asked to report at the earliest.

The Government of India has issued helpline no. 1930, and the website for victims to report is <https://www.cybercrime.gov.in>.

The Department of Telecommunications has also launched the चक्र portal for reporting suspected fraud and unsolicited commercial communication received in the last 30 days. You can access the portal via this link: <https://services.india.gov.in/service/detail/chakshu-report-suspected-fraud-communication>

The portal offers several services, including:

- Identifying your wireline internet service provider.
- Reporting international calls that appear to have an Indian number.
- Checking the number of connections issued in your name.
- Verifying your mobile device using its IMEI number.

India Cybercrime Coordination Centre
The Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) was established by

the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in New Delhi to provide a coordinated framework for Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) to address cybercrime comprehensively. I4C serves as the nodal point for combating cybercrime across the country.

I4C focuses on raising awareness and training law enforcement officers as **Cyber योद्धा (Cyber Warriors)**, having trained thousands of police officers in handling cybercrime. It also spreads awareness on social media through **Cyber दोस्त (Cyber Friends)** campaigns.

For safe practices to prevent cybercrime, visit I4C's website. Some key tips include:

1. Avoid pop-ups, unknown emails, and suspicious links.
2. Use strong passwords and multi-factor authentication.
3. Regularly update and back up your data.

The portal also outlines various categories of cybercrimes, such as cryptocurrency crime, cyber terrorism, hacking, social media-related crimes, etc.

I urge everyone using computers, mobiles, or other electronic devices to avoid responding to calls, emails, or video calls from unknown numbers, whether in India or abroad. If you choose to respond, verify the caller's details first. Staying vigilant is essential to protect your life, money, dignity, and reputation from the growing threat of cybercriminals.

The Government of India must ensure its portals and helplines are available 24/7 and user-friendly for easy access. It should also secure personal data shared with online platforms, banks, and investment centres, as fraudsters often exploit this information. Legal measures must be introduced to prevent data breaches, with strict penalties for those responsible for leaks. Additionally, the government should study technological innovations from advanced countries to effectively track and apprehend cybercriminals. Strengthening coordination with international organisations and foreign governments is crucial to protecting Indians from these borderless threats.

(The author is former DGP, Maharashtra. Views personal.)

READERS' VOICE

Ayushman Bharat: A Lifeline or a Lost Cause?



By Smitha Balachandran

Ayushman Bharat was launched in 2018 as a flagship insurance scheme by the Modi government designed to provide annual insurance coverage of five lakh rupees per family for those hailing from the most economically deprived sections of society. This comprehensive insurance scheme aims to protect the poorest of the poor from falling into catastrophic debt, which can occur due to the inability to afford necessary medical expenses, such as doctors' fees, hospital bills, treatment costs, and surgical operations. By addressing these financial barriers, Ayushman Bharat seeks to ensure that vulnerable families can access essential healthcare services without the fear of overwhelming financial burdens. However, six years after its incep-

Ayushman Bharat, an insurance scheme for the economically disadvantaged, struggles to effectively deliver necessary healthcare to those in need. A thorough review is essential to address concerns and ensure the scheme meets its intended goals.

tion, the Ayushman Bharat scheme seems to have somewhat derailed, primarily due to a variety of reasons. To begin with, in Maharashtra, the government has empanelled a significantly higher number of private hospitals compared to government hospitals for Ayushman Bharat-related treatments. The stark reality is that private hospitals often show a marked disinterest in providing health care to economically deprived sections of our population, as their operations are fundamentally driven by profit motives. In an article published by The Scroll, many private hospitals have reported that since 2021, they have faced considerable delays in the processing of claims, along with numerous rejections and deductions in payments. Despite the government's substantial budget allocations for Ayushman Bharat, actual spending remains disappointingly low. For clarification, in the 2022-23 fiscal year, the budget allocation for the scheme was ₹6,412 crores; however, during the first nine months of 2022, the government released only 18% of these allocated funds. This discrepancy raises significant concerns about the scheme's effectiveness in delivering necessary healthcare to those in need.

Keeping these facts in perspective, it would make far more sense to increase the number of government-empanelled hospitals across various states and significantly improve their overall quality. As highlighted in a recent article in Economic and Political Weekly, many government hospitals in Maharashtra face challenges due to inadequate health infrastructure and poor maintenance of diagnostic equipment, resulting in a notable mismatch between demand and supply. Even more concerning, a poorly organised and corrupt system leaves the public health system in the state consistently lacking essential medications. Consequently, these public health facilities often resort to providing private prescriptions, which leads to enormous out-of-pocket expenses for patients. This unfortunate state of affairs has



a devastating impact on the economically disadvantaged, further exacerbating their struggles and hardships in accessing necessary healthcare services.

Ayushman Bharat, while a significant initiative, does not extend its coverage to outpatient treatment, and it notably does not provide reimbursement for critical diagnostic tests such as CT scans and MRI scans. This limitation raises concerns about the comprehensiveness of the healthcare services offered under the scheme.

Additionally, a troubling aspect of the healthcare landscape in Maharashtra is the persistent shortage of medical professionals. Each year, approximately 7,000 medical graduates enter the workforce; however, data from the Public Health Department highlights that a staggering 14% of medical officer positions remain unfilled. Even more alarming is the vacancy rate for district health officers, which stands at 64%, while 54% of civil surgeon posts are unoccupied. Furthermore, the situation for specialists is dire, with a vacancy rate of 81%.

All these factors have to be considered when the overall effectiveness of the scheme is determined. The deprived, especially the most economically deprived sections of our society, cannot but be adversely affected by these conditions.

(The author is a private researcher. Views personal.)

Sindhu, Lakshya aim to regain form at Denmark Open

Odense (Denmark): Indian badminton stars PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen will be eager to bounce back from a disappointing resumption to their season when they compete in the USD 850,000 Denmark Open Super 750, starting Tuesday.

Both players found the going tough in the Arctic Open in Vantaa, Finland, last week where former world champion Sindhu suffered a first-round exit, while 2021 world bronze winner Sen bowed out in the second round.

At Arena Fyn in Odense, they will hope for better results as they lead India's challenge in this prestigious tournament, the 13th event of the 2024 BWF World Tour.

Sen, who finished fourth at the Paris Olympics, went down fighting to Chinese Taipei's Chou Tien Chen last week.

Here, the 23-year-old from Almora will face China's Lu Guang Zu in his opening match -- an opponent he is yet to meet in professional badminton.

Should he advance, Sen might face Indonesia's Jonatan Christie in the second round, with reigning world champion Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand will, in all likelihood, be waiting for him in the quarter-finals.



PV Sindhu

Lakshya Sen

Sindhu, a two-time Olympic medallist, will need to quickly address the issues affecting her performance after a disappointing first-round loss to Canada's Michelle Li, an opponent she had previously defeated 10 times.

Under the guidance of new coaches Anup Sridhar and Korea's Lee Hyun-il, she will open against Chinese Taipei's Pai Yu Po and could potentially face China's Han Yue in the second round if she progresses.

In addition to Sindhu, India will have several other competitors in women's singles, including the in-

form Malvika Bansod, Aakarshi Kashyap, and promising talent Unnati Hooda.

Bansod, who had reached the quarterfinals of China Open, will go up against Vietnam's Nguyen Thuy Linh at first, while Kashyap faces Thailand's Supanida Katethong.

Hooda, the 2022 Odisha Open winner, will compete against Lauren Lam from the USA.

While there will be no Indian representation in men's doubles, Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, who had missed the Paris Olympics, will compete in the women's doubles, tak-

ing on the fifth-seeded Malaysian duo of Pearly Tan and Thinnah Muralitharan.

The Panda sisters, Swetaparna and Rutaparna, will face off against Chang Ching Hui and Yang Ching Tung of Chinese Taipei.

In mixed doubles, the husband-wife combination of B Sumeeth Reddy and Sikki Reddy are set to face Canada's Kevin Lee and Eliana Zhang, while Sathish Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath will take on Indonesia's Rehan Kusharjanto and Lisa Kusumawati.

-PTI

Tilak Verma to lead India A in T20

New Delhi: Mumbai Indians star Tilak Verma will lead India A while Abhishek Sharma will serve as his deputy in the upcoming men's T20 Emerging Teams Asia Cup, scheduled from October 18 to 27 in Muscat, Oman.

The 21-year-old Verma brings experience from four ODIs and 16 T20Is, while Sharma has played eight T20Is. The squad also includes leg spinner Rahul Chahar, who has six T20I and one ODI appearances for India.

India A boasts several players with IPL experience, including Prabhsimran Singh from Punjab Kings, Anuj Rawat from Royal Challengers Bangalore, Ayush Badoni from Lucknow Super Giants, Ramandeep Singh from Kolkata Knight Riders, and Nehal Wadhwa from Mumbai Indians in the batting lineup.

Placed in Group B, India A will kick off their campaign against Pakistan on October 19 at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground in Muscat.

Oman and UAE complete their group, while Group A consists of Afghanistan A, Bangladesh A, Hong Kong, and Sri Lanka A.

This will mark the first time the tournament is played in the T20 format. The previous five editions were held in the 50-over format.

India A Squad: Tilak Verma (C), Abhishek Sharma (VC), Prabhsimran Singh (WK), Nishant Sindhu, Ramandeep Singh, Nehal Wadhwa, Ayush Badoni, Anuj Rawat (WK), Sai Kishore, Hrithik Shokeen, Rahul Chahar, Vaibhav Arora, Anshul Kamboj, Aaqib Khan, Rasik Salam.



India's Shafali Verma bats during the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2024 match between India and Australia at Sharjah Stadium in United Arab Emirates on Sunday. Pic: AP/PTI

All India FIDE Chess

IM Kulkarni shares lead with 3 others

By correspondent

Mumbai: IM Vikramaditya Kulkarni of Mumbai along with Yash Watarkar (Pune), Arnav Kherdekar (Mumbai) and AIM Saikat Nath (Delhi) with five points each share the lead at the top at the end of the fifth round of the SMCA Chess School organized 1st All India FIDE Rating Open Chess Tournament 2024, played at the Russian House, Peddar Road, Mumbai.

On the first two boards of the fifth round, the top-ranked Kulkarni (2185) defeated Darsh Shetty (1798) on the top board, while Watarkar (1963) outwitted Paltgar's Deepak Soni (1750) on the second board to

maintain the winning momentum.

Kherdekar (1846) brushed aside the challenge from Delhi's Tarun N. (1730) on the third board, while Saikat Nath (1829) also from Delhi tasted success defeating Karnataka's Rajeev Rudra (1738) on the fourth board.

Results - Top-10: Round 4: IM Vikramaditya Kulkarni (4) beat Amey Dandekar (3) 1-0; Yash Watarkar (4) beat Prisha Margaj (3) 1-0; Atish Laddad (4) beat Sanjeev Mishra (3) 1-0; Arnav Kherdekar (4) beat Udupi Acharya (3) 1-0; Guruprasad Kulkarni (3) lost AIM Saikat Nath (4) 0-1; Anirudh Subramanian (3.5) drew Om Gada (3.5) 0.5-0.5; Darsh Shetty (4) beat

Kshaunish Jaiswal (3) 1-0; AIM Samarth Patodekar (3) lost Deepak Soni (4) 0-1; Rajeev Rudra (4) beat Shraddha Padvekar (3) 1-0; Aditya Siddharth (3) lost Tarun N (4) 0-1.

Round 5: Darsh Shetty (4) lost IM Vikramaditya Kulkarni (5) 0-1; Deepak Soni (4) lost Yash Watarkar (5) 0-1; Tarun N (4) lost Arnav Kherdekar (5) 0-1; AIM Saikat Nath (5) beat Rajeev Rudra (4) 1-0; Atharv Soni (4.5) beat Atish Laddad (4) 1-0; Om Gada (4.5) beat Shubham Baviskar (3.5) 1-0; Anirudh Subramanian (4.5) beat Kush Agarwal (3.5) 1-0; Yuti Patel (4) drew Kartik (4) 0.5-0.5; Palaash Mapara (4) drew Dhruv Muthe (4) 0.5-0.5; Sanjeev Mishra (4) beat Hitansh Gohil (3).

Tendulkar honored by Dallas Cowboys during NFL Game



By Seema Hakhu Kachru

Houston (USA): The legendary Sachin Tendulkar was presented with a custom Number 10 jersey by team owner Jerry Jones in a special honour during a Dallas Cowboys NFL game here.

The gesture highlights the growing footprint of cricket in the United States, with Tendulkar playing a key role through his involvement with the National Cricket League (NCL).

As a co-owner of the NCL, Tendulkar is working to introduce cricket to new American audiences with its innovative Sixty Strikes format. His recognition at one of the NFL's most iconic venues marks a signifi-

cant moment in bridging the worlds of cricket and American sports.

Earlier on Sunday, Tendulkar kicked off the NCL's community outreach efforts by inspiring hundreds of young athletes at the University of Texas at Dallas.

"Cricket has given me so much, and being here in Dallas—both teaching these young athletes and receiving this incredible recognition—has been truly humbling," Tendulkar said.

"Inspiring these kids and sharing my journey with them has been incredibly fulfilling. I want them to know that with dedication, passion, and belief, they can achieve anything—

whether on the cricket field or in life."

The NCL has quickly gained attention for blending world-class cricket with cultural events and community-focused initiatives with the tournament set to conclude on Monday.

Featuring stars like Shahid Afridi, Suresh Raina, Shakib Al Hasan, and Chris Lynn, the NCL is establishing itself as a premier event on the global cricket stage.

Headquartered in Dallas, the National Cricket League also attracted cricket legends such as Sunil Gavaskar, Wasim Akram, and Sir Vivian Richards to mentor the players.

The event is endorsed by the ICC and supported by SEE Holdings. -PTI

U Mumba aim to reclaim lost glory

Mumbai: After three consecutive seasons of league-stage exits, former Pro Kabaddi League champions U Mumba will be eager to reclaim their lost glory in Season 11. The Mumboys won the PKL title in Season 2 but have failed to lift the coveted trophy since.

Season 11 will see U Mumba continue with Iranian Gholamreza Mazandarani as their head coach. An experienced coach who has tasted success, Mazandarani led the Iranian kabaddi team to gold at the 2018 Asian Games and previously coached U Mumba in Seasons 6 and 10.

Sunil Kumar, eighth on the leaderboard for most tackle points (336) in PKL history, will lead their defence after U Mumba spent an impressive INR 1.015 crores on him at the Player Auction. U Mumba's defence is packed with proven talents who have showcased their defensive prowess in the past. In addition to Sunil Kumar, the defence boasts players like Parvesh Bhainswal, Rinku, Gokulkannan M, Bittu and Sombir highlighting their defensive depth.



Players of Vidarbha and Andhra greet each other at the end of their Ranji Trophy cricket match in Nagpur on Monday. Vidarbha won the match. Pic: PTI

Olympics bronze winner Kusale gets Rs 2 cr

Mumbai: Shooter Swapnil Kusale, who won a bronze medal in this year's Paris Olympics, was on Monday honoured with a cheque of Rs 2 crore by the Maharashtra Government. CM Eknath Shinde and Deputy CMs Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar honoured Kusale and other sportspersons at an event in Mumbai. Kusale claimed a



bronze medal in the 50m rifle 3 positions event of the Paris Olympics. Kusale's father and brother are

teachers in a district school and his mother is the sarpantch of Kambalwadi village near Kolhapur in Ma-

harashtra. Athlete Sachin Sarjearao Khilari, who broke the Asian record to win the silver medal in the men's shot put F46 event at the Paris Olympics was given a cheque of Rs three crore on the occasion. The coaches of these sportspersons were also honoured with cheques of between Rs 20 to 30 lakh. -PTI

Muzumdar rues missed opportunities

Sharjah: A disheartened India head coach Amol Muzumdar rued the missed opportunities that could have altered the game's outcome after his team's hopes of reaching the women's T20 World Cup semifinals were dashed by a loss to Australia.

In a bid to control their own destiny, the Indian team delivered a lackluster performance on the field, ultimately resulting in a nine-run loss to defending champions Australia in their must-win game on

Sunday.

"I think we were right in the game, right till the last over. Just that experience of Australia, saw them through," Muzumdar said at the post match press conference.

"Just a little disappointing with the loss. And I feel we've fielded pretty well. But yeah, a couple of chances could have been, we could have taken those chances and then the things could have been different.

"Maybe 10-15 runs less, even the last over. But at

the same time, I would like to say that we put in our best effort forward in this game," he added.

India dropped as many as three catches, while also missing a stumping opportunity. To add to their woes, a close lbw call also went against them.

In the 17th over of the Australian innings, Phoebe Litchfield, batting on 5, had attempted a reverse sweep with the on-field umpire giving her leg-before-wicket after she missed the shot.

However, a decision to



review handed her a reprieve because the ball pitched outside leg stump. India players, including vice-captain Smriti Mand-

hana, protested, claiming the ball pitching outside the leg-stump line should be deemed inconsequential given the batter had

switched stances.

Litchfield went on to add 10 more crucial runs, helping Australia post the highest team total at Sharjah in the ongoing tournament.

"What I gathered from that non-dismissal is that she didn't move before the ball was released. So, the leg mark, what was there, it stood as it is. That was my only understanding about it. Whether it was out or not, it was up to the umpires to decide or the third umpire. So yeah, it was a crucial one."

Australia posted a total of 151/8. In response, India fell short, finishing at 142/9 despite skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's unbeaten 54.

With senior players Harmanpreet and Deepti Sharma in the middle, India needed 85 off 10 overs.

Asked what message was being sent to the duo in the middle at the time, Muzumdar said: "First and foremost, it was about the run chase. Second was keeping the net run rate also in account. But the only message was if we take it a little

deeper, then we do have a good chance to chase these runs down.

"I think Harman's presence was very important till the end. That is what I felt in her run chase. We almost got it through."

India's chances of making the semifinal now hinge on Pakistan beating New Zealand on Monday.

"Well, I just want to wish Pakistan all the best. That's all I can say. But we will be watching the game very closely, that's for sure."

-PTI