THE PERFECT



Dhananjay Munde in soup over Beed Sarpanch's murder



GST Council to decide on taxes on insurance premium ... pg 6



He's his own enemy: MCA on Shaw

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Less people, many choices

THE DISPUTE OVER PLUM DEPARTMENTS AND GUARDIANSHIP OF **DISTRICTS DELAYED PORTFOLIO ALLOCATION EVEN AFTER A WEEK**

By Abhijit Mulye

Mumbai: The difficult choice given to cabinet ministers to choose either of the plum departments or the guardianship of the districts of their liking is delaying the portfolio allocation of the ministers in Maharashtra, sources privy of the developments have

In the previous government the Shiv Sena as well as the NCP pulled shots. They got almost all they wanted - sometimes even at the cost of the BJP. However, with the massive mandate this time, the BJP is not ready to budge. Apart from a couple of plum departments the BJP wishes to keep all the plum portfolios with itself. Moreover, under the new scheme of arrangements between the alliance partners, the old power sharing formula is being replaced with the new one. This is likely to change the guardian ministers of most of the districts and the BJP has staked claim on guardianship of key districts, which in turn has delayed the portfolio allocation, the sources said.

Pune is one of the key districts that the BJP wants to control. During the previous government finance minister and NCP chief Ajit Pawar was also the guardian minister of Pune. However, this time the BJP, which has

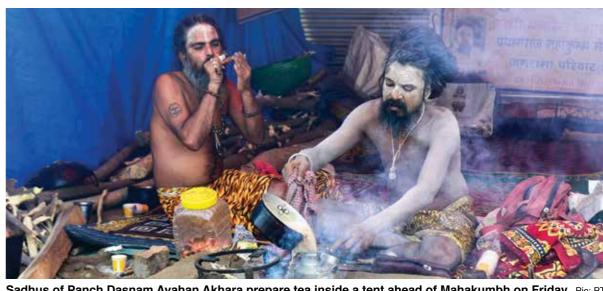


given two ministerial berths to Pune city in the form of Chandrakant Patil and Madhuri Misal, is keen on controlling the funds allocation in the district by staking claim on the guardian ministership. Pawar is not comfortable with this new arrangement and that is delaying the finalization of portfolios, the sources said.

Pawar wanted to keep both - the finance department as well as the guardianship of the Pune district. However, the BJP has asked him to choose between any one of these two things, the sources said. Pawar is upset due to delay in portfolio allocation. But, he is learnt to have been told that deliberations are going on to ensure there is no display of disgruntlement like the one seen after the cabinet expansion wherein several former ministers expressed disappointment over not being clearly told of being dropped from the cabinet in advance.

Attempts are being made to thoroughly discuss even the finer aspects of the new power sharing formula with as many concerned individuals as possible and to convince them to follow the formula. This is delaying the portfolio allocation, the sources

Meanwhile, DCM Eknath Shinde. who is facing ire of his party MLAs after he had to drop at least three of his ministers while he was the CM, mat his party MLAs in a bid to pacify them saying that those who were promised ministerial berth and were not given it stand a chance in the next expansion. However, this has led to speculations whether it was meant just to pacify disgruntled MLAs or some of the ministers in the current cabinet too are likely to be dropped in the due course of time.



Sadhus of Panch Dasnam Avahan Akhara prepare tea inside a tent ahead of Mahakumbh on Friday. Pic: PTI

Judicial probes into Parbhani, Beed

Devendra Fadnavis on Friday announced judicial probes into the Parbhani violence and the murder of village head Santosh Deshmukh in Beed district.

The state will also provide financial assistance of Rs 10 lakh each to the kin of Deshmukh and Somnath Survawanshi, who died after his arrest in connection with the violence in Parbhani over the alleged desecration of a replica of the Constitution, he said.

Opposition leaders have claimed that Karad is a close associate of NCP minister Dhananjay Munde who hails from Beed

The CM also shared details related to the Parbhani case

On the afternoon of December 10, Fadnavis said one Sopan Pawar desecrated a (glass-enclosed) replica of the Constitution near Babasaheb Ambedkar's statue outside Parbhani railway station. Police reached the site where a crowd had gathered and vandalised vehicles, he said.

The collector was asked to reach the spot and defuse tension, the CM said.

The next day, a bandh was called in the city and Parbhani district during which peaceful protests were held. "However, 200-300 people resorted to violence and damaged property," the CM said. Police had to use tear gas and lathi charge to control the situation, he said. Some women even entered the collector's office and vandalised it, Fadnavis said.

Police booked 51 persons

morning that day to highlight atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh and the desecration took place after five hours. Pawar wasn't part of the morcha," he said. Leaders from all political

parties were present. This was not a Hindu versus Dalit case, the CM asserted. "The judicial inquiry

theory. There was a Sakal

Hindu Samaj morcha in the

into the Parbhani violence will be done to clear all doubts. Ambedkar is not limited to any caste. He belongs to all," said Fadnavis.

About the death of Somnath Suryawanshi after his arrest in connection with the violence, Fadnavis said he told a magistrate that the police did not torture

Dhiraj, Deepika emerge national champions



Jamshedpur: Olympian duo of Dhiraj Bommadevara and Deepika Kumari overcame tough challenges from their respective opponents to emerge men's and women's recurve champions in the Archery Senior National here on Friday.

Representing Petroleum Sports Promotion Board (PSPB), Deepika, who has returned empty-handed from four Olympics, defeated her Paris Games teammate Ankita Bhakat 6-2 in the women's final.

Kolkata's Ankita, who represents Jharkhand, took the second set as Deepika faltered but the seasoned archer regained her rhythm to seal the

Rising archer from Haryana, Divyansh Chaudhary also gave India international Dheeraj some anxious moments by holding the first two sets.

But the Services archer won the next two sets to clinch the men's title with a 6-2 margin. It was an upset of sorts

for heavyweights Services in the team event as the second seeded team had to settle for a bronze, pipping Rajasthan 5-4 (29-28).

Railways took the men's team gold, defeating Hary-

Deepika earned two gold medals for PSPB, adding a second in the mixed team event where she partnered her husband Atanu Das to defeat Punjab 6-2.

Results (all recurve

Men's individual: Dhiraj Bommadevara (SSCB) b Divyansh Chaudhary (HAR) 6-2; Bronze playoff: Atul Verma (UTK) b Chingakham Achanba Singh



RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat with others during the inauguration of 'Lokseva Pratishthan School' at Sus Pushan in Pune on Friday.

NIA raids over Maoists' revival

New Delhi: The National Investigation Agency on Friday searched multiple locations in five states in connection with a case relating to attempts at revival of the banned CPI (Maoist) outfit, according to an offi-

cial statement. Extensive searches were conducted at the premises of suspects at two locations in Patiala and Sri Muktsar Sahib districts of Punjab, four locations in Manesar and Gurgaon districts of Haryana, two locations in New Delhi, and one location each in Patna district of Bihar and Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh, it

The suspects whose premises were searched were believed to be involved in propagating the ideology of CPI (Maoist) and the revival of its northern regional bureau wing through various frontal organisations.

The searches led to the seizure of digital devices, including mobile phones. pen drives/hard discs, laptops and memory cards,

SIM cards and other incriminating documents related to naxalism, said the statement issued by the

The searches were conducted in a case that relates to attempts by CPI (Maoist) leaders, cadres, sympathisers and over-ground workers (OGWs) to renergise the outfit's decrepit influence in the NRB region, comprising Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh.

ED books KTR in Formula-E

Hyderabad: The Enforcement Directorate on Friday filed a money laundering case against BRS leader K T Rama Rao and some others in a case linked to alleged payment irregularities during the Formula-E race held in Hyderabad in February 2023.

An Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) has been registered under various sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) taking cognisance of a Telangana Police Anti-corruption bureau FIR filed on Thursday, the sources said.

The accused in the ED case are the same as those mentioned in the ACB FIR, they said.

BRS leader K T Rama Rao, the son of former chief minister of the state K Chandrashekhar Rao, has been named as accused no 1 followed by senior IAS officer Arvind Kumar and retired bureaucrat BLN Reddy as accused no 2 and 3. The case pertains to alleged payments of about Rs 55 crore, some of it in foreign currency without approvals.

Shukla surrenders, faces suspension

Thane: The Maharashtra government employee accused of attacking a Marathi-speaking family at Kalyan in Thane district surrendered before police on Friday, a senior officer Akhilesh Shukla (48), an

for arson and arrested 43 of

them, while women and

children were let off after

being given notice, he said.

unstable and has been un-

der treatment since 2012.

the CM said. Four doctors

checked him and men-

tioned his mental illness.

mood disorder and behav-

ioural issues in their re-

"There is no conspiracy

port, Fadnavis said.

Sopan Pawar is mentally

employee of the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation. his wife Geeta (45) and others have been named in an FIR related to the alleged attack on the family, their neighbour, on December 18.

Akhilesh Shukla surrendered before the Khadakpada police, senior inspector Amarnath Waghmode said.

"We will trace the other

accused." said the police. Meanwhile, before surrendering, Shukla posted a video on social media in which he claimed his wife was beaten up by family

members of the victims. The police have registered a case against Shukla and his wife Geeta (45) under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) sections 74 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 115 (voluntarily causing hurt), 351(3) (criminal intimidation), 189 (2) (3) and (5) (unlawful assembly) and According to police, the

attack took place around 8.45 pm on December 18, and the accused as well as the victims live on the same floor of a building in Kalvan. As per the FIR, the vic-

tim saw Shukla quarrelling with one of their neighbours over lighting of an incense stick. The victim asked Shukla to maintain peace and not to abuse and insult the entire Marathispeaking community.

The accused couple got angry on hearing this and beat up the victim and his wife with the help of eight to ten others. They attacked the male victim using some sharp weapon, iron rod, pipes and wooden sticks, and inflicted wounds on his arms, legs and face. The accused also molested his wife and threatened the couple, it added.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said the process to suspend Shukla has been initiated.

Leverage technology to decouple carbon emissions: EDF

By Akriti Puri

New Delhi: As India experiences rapid economic growth, the need to decouple carbon emissions from economic expansion by leveraging technology has become increasingly urgent, according to Hisham Mundol, the Chief Advisor for the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) in India.

In an interview with PTI, Mundol stressed the transformative role technological innovation can play in achieving sustainable development while addressing the challenges posed by climate change.

India, the world's fifthlargest economy, is currently undergoing a period of swift industrialisation and economic expansion.

Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has consistently grown at rates that position it as one of the fastestgrowing major economies. However, this rapid progress comes with a surge in energy demand, predominantly fuelled by coal and other fossil fuels

Although India's historical contribution to global carbon emissions remains modest -- at just 4 per cent -- its future emissions trajectory is under global

scrutiny. With the country's population surpassing 1.4 billion and urbanisation accelerating, balancing economic aspirations with environmental responsibility has become a critical challenge.

"India needs to grow. That is non-negotiable, and we are probably going to end up doubling our economy every 10 years," Mundol said. "There's a real risk that we will end up doubling emissions. One way that these emissions can be decoupled is through technology.'

Mundol highlighted what he termed a "green bonus" for India. With its low historical emissions,

India is uniquely positioned to leapfrog traditional carbon-intensive pathways by adopting green technologies early in its development.

He noted that responsible and sustainable practices could not only mitigate climate risks but also create economic advantages, fostering innovation and driving competitiveness in global markets.

While Mundol lauded the potential of climate technologies, he cautioned against the risks of overdependence on external innovations. "Climate technology is becoming increasingly weaponised," he warned.

He expressed concerns that a shift from fossil fuel dependency to reliance on monopolised climate technologies could leave developing countries like India vulnerable to geopolitical pressures and supply chain disruptions.

To mitigate these risks, Mundol advocated self-reliance and investment in domestic capabilities, urging India to build robust technological ecosystems that are insulated from international monopolies.

Mundol also addressed the contentious issue of cli-

ing point in global climate negotiations. At COP29 in Baku, developing countries, including India, voiced frustration over insufficient and ambiguous commitments from wealthier nations.

mate finance, a major stick-

"The finance side was disappointing, with commitments spread out over a long period and couched in diplomatic language that allows for multiple interpretations." Mundol said.

He criticised the preference to loans and investments over grants, arguing that these mechanisms are unsuitable for the needs of ing for sustainable growth. Mundol emphasised the importance of concessional finance -- low-interest or no-interest funding with minimal bureaucratic hurdles -- as essential for enabling communities and businesses to transition effectively to low-carbon

developing countries striv-

He further said that India's transition to a lowcarbon economy must be equitable, inclusive, and driven by technological innovation, ensuring that the country remains a beacon of sustainable development in a rapidly warming world.

models

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Dhananjay Munde in soup over Beed Sarpanch's murder

CM FADNAVIS ANNOUNCES TRANSFER OF BEED SP FOR SHOWING LAXITY IN THE INVESTIGATION

By Suyash Padate

Mumbai: NCP Minister Dhananjay Munde has landed in trouble in the murder case of Santosh Deshmukh, sarpanch of Massajog in Beed district. Munde is conspicuous by his absence in the legislature since this case cropped up.

Meanwhile, the leader of the opposition in the Maharashtra legislative council, Ambadas Danve has raised this issue in the House and levelled serious allegations, asserting that Walmik Karad, the alleged mastermind behind the brutal murder of a Beed village head, is evading arrest under the government's tacit protection. Danve insists that Karad remains shielded due to his alleged connections with NCP minister Dhananjay

Speaking in the House, Danve claimed, "Sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh was murdered after being kidnapped. All this happened on the directions of Walmik Karad. He is the mastermind in the case. Fingers are being pointed to Walmik Karad, who has been staying at a farmhouse in Nagpur for the last four days. But the situation is such that the police cannot arrest him.'

The murder case of Santosh Deshmukh, has been making headlines in the state for the past few days. Political accusations are being made on this, now Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has presented his position in the House. Also, Fadnavis has said that whoever is the mastermind in this murder, action will be taken against him. Fadnavis informed that action will be taken against Valmiki Karad in the extortion



Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday announced to transfer Beed Superintendent of Police. The CM said the police were found to

Fadnavis said the abduction and murder of Deshmukh, sarpanch of Massajog village, is already being probed by a special investigation team (SIT) under an IG-rank officer. In addition to that, a judicial probe will be done within three to six months, he said.

The CM assured the House that those responsible for "unleashing" anarchy in Beed district would be punished irrespective of their political links.

Sharing the details tied to the sarpanch murder, Fadnavis said on December 6, Ashok Ghule, Sudarshan Ghule and Pratik Ghule went to the site of an energy project site in Beed district and beat up the watchman Amardeep Sonawane and project manager Shivaji Thopte. Deshmukh was informed about the incident as the Ghules are from the neighbouring village,

case, he will be punished. The ordeal traces back to the he said. Fadnavis said that on December 9, Deshmukh's vehicle was intercepted by a black Scorpio and another car at a toll naka. He was pulled out and bundled into the Scorpio, the CM told the House.

Deshmukh was mercilessly thrashed inside the car, taken out and again beaten up. "The accused fled after realising that Deshmukh had died," he said.

Fadnavis said Deshmukh's brother was in touch with one Vishnu Chate pleading with him to let go of the sarpanch. Chate was the former tehsil chief of NCP in Beed district. Before Deshmukh's murder, manager Thopte of the energy company had filed a police complaint on November 29 alleging an extortion bid, he said. The complaint said that one Walmik Karad talked over the phone to Sunil Shinde and Chate when they were present at the company's office in Massajog village.

Karad demanded that the company stop the work. That day, Sudarshan Ghule also came

abduction and tragic death of

Santosh Deshmukh, the sar-

panch of Massajog village, on

December 9. Deshmukh had con-

to the office and asked the company official to stop work. Project manager Thopte was subsequently called to Parli, where Karad threatened and asked him to either stop the work or pay Rs 2 crore, Fadnavis said, "The link between the extortion and murder is being I assure the House that the mastermind in the

case will be brought to book. If Walmik Karad's involvement in the murder is established, action would be taken. His involvement in the extortion case has been proved," said the CM. While Deshmukh was a Maratha, some of the accused including Chate belonged to the Other Backward Classes. This had given a caste angle to the incident, especially against the backdrop of the Maratha quota agitation and opposition by OBCs to it.

All those directly and indirectly involved in these criminal activities in Beed district will be booked under MCOCA (Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act), Fadnavis said.

fronted an extortion attempt

against an energy company, pur-

portedly orchestrated by Karad and accomplices. Despite the arrest of four individuals, the mastermind and other accused are on the run. As debates heat up during the Maharashtra legislature's winter session, Danve is urging decisive action from the state government, questioning its willingness to confront significant criminal undertakings within its jurisdiction. He emphasizes the necessity for transparency and justice for the peo-

Munde's absence talking point According to sources, the mastermind of this heinous crime is a close associate of Munde. The minister himself admitted having proximity with Karad. Munde, a minister in the newly formed Devendra Fadnavis has virtually gone underground. No NCP leader is ready to talk about Munde.

ple of Beed district.

The opposition cornered the Mahayuti government over the killing of a sarpanch and demanded the arrest of a close aide of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) minister Dhananjay Munde. The opposition also demanded that chief minister Devendra Fadnavis adopt Beed as its guardian minister.

A local NCP leader, Vishnu Chate, has been arrested in the case. Deshmukh was allegedly killed for thwarting an attempt to extort 2 crore from a windmill company. The murder has been politicised as the sarpanch hailed from the Maratha community while Chate, whose NCP is a part of the ruling Mahayuti alliance, belongs to the Vanjari community, an OBC community opposing the inclusion of Marathas in the OBC

Ladki Bahin scheme gets Rs 1.4k cr

Nagpur: The Maharashtra assembly on Friday passed supplementary demands of ing a provision of Rs 1400 crore for the flagship Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana.

The supplementary demands, which were tabled in the assembly on Monday by minister Uday Samant, was passed in the Lower House after a debate.

In the last budget, the state government had provisioned Rs 46,000 crore for the Ladki Bahin Yojana, under which more than 2.5 crore women with an annual family income of less than Rs 2.5 lakh get Rs 1500 as monthly aid.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had recently said this monthly aid would be raised to Rs 2100.

The supplementary demands include a provision of Rs 36 crore for the construction of a statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj at Rajkot fort in Malwan in Sindhudurg district.

A provision of Rs 1,204 crore has been made to provide margin money loan to eligible sugar cooperative factories.

The state government's Mukhyamantri Baliraja scheme under which farmers get free electricity has been provided Rs 3050 crore. The Public Works Department (PWD) has been allocated Rs 7490 crore, a sum of Rs 4112 crore has been provisioned for the Industry, Power and Labour departments, while the Urban Development department has got Rs 2774

A sum of Rs 2007 crore has been earmarked for the Rural Development department, while the Tribal Development department has been given Rs 1830 crore.

Cong members put Ambedkar's photos on desks

Nagpur: Congress leaders grand old party had always graphs of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar on their desks in the assembly amid the party's allegations that Union Home Minister Amit Shah insulted the icon.

This prompted Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar to urge Speaker Rahul Narwekar to allow him to put a similar photo on his desk.

Pawar said Ambedkar belongs to everyone and even the treasury benches should be allowed to display his photographs.

The Speaker said he had not allowed any member to put such photographs on their desks. Narwekar also asked the Congress leaders, including Vijay Wadettiwar, Nitin Raut and Nana Patole, to remove the pictures.

Congress' Vijay Wadettiwar raised the vandalism of their party office in Mumbai. How political parties can resort to hooliganism, he asked.

Bharatiya Janata Party Yuva Morcha (BJYM) workers on Thursday vandalised a Congress office in Mumbai, claiming the insulted renowned social reformer Dr Ambedkar. As many as 14 protesters were detained from the spot, police said

Shiv Sena (UBT) legislators had also placed photos of Ambedkar on their desks but removed them after Speaker's objection.

With the Congress leaders not removing the photos in defiance of the Speaker's message the members of the ruling Mahayuti also placed Ambedkar's pictures on their desks

This prompted the Speaker to adjourn the House proceedings for 10 minutes.

Lawmakers of the opposition also held a protest on the steps of the Vidhan Bhavan against the attack on the Congress office in Mumbai and Shah's alleged remarks against Ambedkar. "We had fought against the British and now we will take on BJP's thugs," they

Congress' Bhai Jagtap wondered how their party office in Mumbai was attacked when police personnel were around.



Singer Sangeeta Katti Kulkarni performs at the '70th Sawai Gandharva Bhimsen Mahotsav' organized by Arya Sangeet Prasarak Mandal (ASPM) at Maharashtriya Mandal in Pune on Thursday.

Five killed after pvt bus turns turtle

Mumbai: Five persons were killed and 27 injured after a speeding private bus carrying a wedding party overturned at a ghat in Maharashtra's Raigad district on Friday morning, police said.

The accident occurred in Tamhini Ghat in the jurisdiction of Mangaon around

He said the bus was heading to Birwadi in Mahad from Lohegaon in Pune district with a wedding party.

The official said the bus driver lost control of the wheel at a sharp bend, causing the vehicle to overturn.

Five persons, including two men and three women, were killed, and 27 persons sustained injuries and were rushed to Mangaon Rural Hospital, he said.

The official said the four of the deceased have been identified as Sangita Jadhav, Gaurav Darade, Shilpa Pawar and Vandana Jadhav, and one of the men is yet to be identified.

`Deshdoot' founder Deokisan Sarda dies

Nashik: Deokisan Sarda, founder of Marathi newspaper group "Deshdoot", died at a hospital here on Friday following a brief illness, his family said.

Sarda is survived by two sons and two daughters.

He founded Shri Sinnar Vyapari Bank in 1959 and served as a director of the Maharashtra State Co-operative Bank from 1963 to 1967.

Sarda was also a director of the Nashik District Central Co-operative Bank, Jalgaon District Central Cooperative Bank and Someshwar Co-operative Sugar Factory.

He was elected as chairman of the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce in

Sarda was also president of the Maharashtra unit of the National Association for the Blind and one of the founders of the Maharashtra Pradesh Maheshwari Sabha.

His last rites were conducted at Amardham crematorium here on Friday

Fadnavis's allegation Centre's failure on terror front: Aaditya

Nagpur: Shiv Sena (UBT) opposition parties launched on Friday claimed CM Devendra Fadnavis's allegation made in the context of the Congress's Bharat Jodo Yatra showed the Centre's failure in not knowing about terrorists operating in the country.

Fadnavis had on Thursday alleged that some organisations, which were declared as the frontal organisations of urban Naxals by the Congress-NCP government in Maharashtra and the Manmohan Singh government at the Centre, participated in the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Talking to reporters on the Vidhan Bhavan premises, Thackeray said the attack on the Congress's office in Mumbai came about after Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remark on Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Bharatiya Janata Party Yuva Morcha (BJYM) workers on Thursday vandalised a Congress office in Mumbai, claiming the grand old party had always insulted Ambedkar. A massive political row

erupted on Wednesday after the Congress and other

leader Aaditya Thackeray an all-out attack on Shah kar and demanded his sacking, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other top BJP leaders rallied to his defence and said he has exposed Congress' "anti-Ambedkar" stand

> "I don't think the offices should have been attacked. The Home Minister should accept that what was in1 his heart came out of his mouth and apologise," the Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA said. He said the first informa-

tion report against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over the scuffle at the Parliament was a "diversionary tactic".

"These are all diversionary tactics, but I don't think Rahul ji or any one of us is afraid. You can file FIRs against us we are not afraid. We demand that he (Shah) should resign as Home Minister because he insulted Dr Ambedkar,"

He said Fadnavis's claim about the Bharat Jodo Yatra only showed the Union Home Ministry's failure to have knowledge about terrorists in the country.

Thackeray said.

High-security jail to come up in Mumbai

Nagpur: The Maharashtra legislative assembly here on Friday passed a bill seeking to reform the prison system in the state.

The Maharashtra Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2024, is based on the Model Prisons Bill. 2023, sent by the Centre to the states, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis told the House.

A high-security prison and detention centre will be set up in Mumbai, while a new prison being built in Pune will be a twostorey facility, he added.

A plot of land has been finalised for the new prison in Mumbai, the CM said.

As many as 1,600 accused who have got bail continue to stay in prison in the state for the lack of money to pay for bail bond, he informed.

The bill provides for categories of prisons such as special prison, open prison for women, temporary prison and open colony. Open prisons and open colonies will help with rehabilitation and reintegration of former jail inmates after their release, Fadnavis said.

The bill also provides for the constitution of a prison and correctional prison force'.

A welfare fund for prison staff



and another fund for the welfare of prisoners is also an important feature of the legislation, the CM

It also provides for better segregation of various categories of

prisoners and their special needs as women, transgenders, undertrial prisoners, convicts, highrisk prisoners and habitual offenders.

The bill also makes provisions for a grievance-redressal mechanism for prisoners, after-care rehabilitation service, and a separate women's ward in prison hospitals. An undertrial review commit-

tee will be set up in every district for periodical review of all undertrial prisoners and to take measures for speedy disposal of cases and make appropriate recommendations to trial courts.

Technology including biometrics, closed-circuit television (CCTV), scanning and detection services, Radio Frequency Identification and video conference facilities will be used for effective management and superintendence of prisons and to ensure the safety of inmates, the CM said.

The entire prison administration will be computerized, the chief minister said.

Congress MLA Nana Patole and Sanjay Kute (BJP) said prison reforms should not lead to a situation where criminals would like to remain in jail. There should be no lavishness, they said.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I also met **Ajitdada** yesterday and **CM** Devendra Fadnavis. They are in power and provide funds for development works.



There should be no politics over development works."

Rohit Pawar, MLA, NCP (SP)

Path cleared for Adani to redevelop Dharavi

Mumbai: The Bombay High Court on Friday cleared the decks for redevelopment of Dharavi slums as it upheld the tender awarded to the Adani Group for the project by the Maharashtra government, ruling there was no "arbitrariness, unreasonableness or perversity" in the decision.

A division bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Amit Borkar dismissed a petition filed by UAE-based Seclink Technologies Corp challenging the state government's decision to award the mega redevelopment project in Mumbai to Adani Properties Pvt Ltd, which had made a Rs 5.069-crore offer.

The bench rejected the contention made by the petitioner that the tender was "tailor made" to suit a particular firm of the private conglomerate, noting three bidders had participated in the process

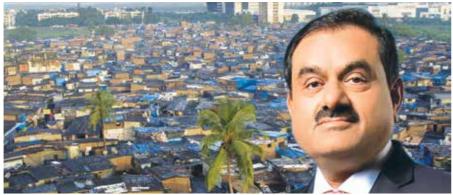
Seclink Technologies had emerged as the highest bidder for the project in 2018, but the tender issued in that year was later scrapped by the government.

The bench noted Seclink Technologies' petition lacks force and hence stands dismissed.

"The grounds urged in support of the petition lack force and accordingly, the challenge to the impugned action on the part of the authorities, whereby the earlier tender process was cancelled and fresh tender process has been resorted to, fails," the HC observed.

The Adani Group had emerged as the highest bidder for the 259-hectare

THE BOMBAY HC UPHOLDS TENDER AWARD



Dharavi Redevelopment Project in the heart of Mumbai and bagged it with its Rs 5,069-crore offer in the 2022 tender process.

In the first tender issued in 2018, the petitioner company had emerged as the highest bidder with its Rs 7,200-crore offer.

The government had, however, cancelled the 2018 tender and issued a fresh one in 2022 with additional conditions

Seclink Technologies first challenged the cancellation of the 2018 tender and subsequently the 2022 tender award to the Adani Group. It had alleged the fresh tender was "tailor made" for the ports-to-energy conglomerate.

The court, in its judgment, noted that except for noticing that the petitioner company was the highest qualified bidder in the 2018 tender process, no final decision was taken by the

"Though the petitioner's bid was declared to be the highest, however, no decision was taken on selection of the successful bidder,

neither any letter of award was issued nor any agreement was signed," the HC maintained.

The court further held it is a well settled principle that a bidder participating in a tender process cannot insist that its tender should be accepted only because of it being the highest or the lowest.

The bench noted the reasons given by the state government for cancelling the 2018 tender process, in its opinion, cannot be said to be "non-existent or unjustified or based on any perversity".

The decision taken by the government does not suffer from the "vice of arbitrariness, unreasonableness or perversity", it emphasised.

The court also refused to accept the petitioner's contention that the 2022 tender conditions were tailor made to suit a particular company and noted at that time, three bidders had participated of which two were found to be technically qualified.

The state government had submitted to the HC that the tender was awarded in a transparent manner and no undue favour was

shown to the highest bidder,

Adani Group. The government had said the 2018 tender was cancelled and a fresh one was issued four years later because of several factors like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war which affected the financial state of affairs.

The first tender for the mega redevelopment project was issued in November 2018. In March 2019, the bids were opened and it was found the petitioner company (Seclink Technologies) was highest bidder.

The same month, an additional 45 acres of land was made available to the government by the Indian Railways for the redevelopment project, as per the state government

there was "no formation of contract" between the state and the petitioner company and hence it has no legal right in the matter.

The government claimed

In November 2020, a government resolution was issued cancelling the first tender claiming there was a material change in the tender condition after "Bid Due

The government further claimed in the new tender, the bids were to be submitted afresh and the petitioner could have submitted a fresh bid complying with its terms and conditions.

Dharavi is a sprawling slum colony having a mix of residential and small industrial units.

Opposition parties in Maharashtra, including the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Congress, had vehemently opposed the award of the tender to the Adani Group alleging irregularities in the entire process, a charge rejected by the Mahayuti government.

The redevelopment of Dharavi, one of the world's densest urban sprawls, had figured prominently in the campaign for the November 20 assembly polls.

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray had said the Dharavi slum redevelopment tender awarded to the Adani Group will be scrapped if his party came to power in Maharashtra.

'We will scrap Dharavi slum redevelopment proiect tender after coming to power. We will not allow Mumbai to be turned into Adani city," the former chief minister said.

Additional concessions that are not specified in the contract have been given to the Adani Group, Thackerav alleged, Mumbai Congress president Varsha Gaikwad had termed the project as the "world's biggest land scam".



part in a protest against Union Home minister Amit Shah over his remarks near Ambedkar Garden in Mumbai on Friday.

Shukla to be suspended

Nagpur: Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said a case has been registered against a state government employee and his wife for attacking a Marathi-speaking family at Kalvan in Thane district and the process to suspend him has been initiated.

The male accused. Akhilesh Shukla, is an employee of the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC), he said.

The CM was speaking in the legislative council in response to the issue raised by Shiv Sena (UBT) legislator Anil Parab.

In the legislative assembly, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar said injustice against Marathi people will not be tolerated and assured a strict action against Shukla.

The police registered a case against Shukla (48) and his wife Geeta (45).

Parab raised the issue in the Upper House of the state legislature. "Shukla insulted and attacked the Marathi family following an argument, in which the victims got injured. Shukla told the victim that he works in Mantralaya and

Insult of Marathi people will not be tolerated: Shinde

Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Friday said insult of Marathi people will not be tolerated in the state. "Marathi 'asmita' (pride) will be protected and insult of Marathi people will not be tolerated," said the Shiv Sena president. Asked about vandalising of the Mumbai Congress office by BJP youth wing workers on Thursday, Shinde, a former CM, said police will deal with those who take law into their hands. "In a democracy, no one has the right to indulge in vandalism," he added.

several Marathi staffers clean his office," he said.

Such incidents of discrimination against Marathi people by those coming from other states are increasing day by day. Marathi people face attacks during train travel or are denied homes in housing societies on the basis of their food choices, he said.

Incidents of Marathi families being bullied by people from other states have been on the rise in Mumbai, Pune, Kalyan and other parts of the state ever since the BJP came to power, Parab alleged.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MLC Sachin Ahir accused the government of not taking any steps to stop such incidents.

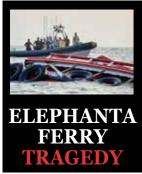
"These kind of incidents are increasing day by day. Action should be taken against the accused," he said.

Congress legislator Bhai Jagtap said accused Shukla used derogatory remarks against the Marathi-speaking people.

"How can he show such an attitude?" he asked.

NCP (SP) MLC Shashikant Shinde said an undeclared rule of not allowing non-vegetarian people prevails in the housing societies in Mumbai, and demanded action against those who indulge in such malpractices.

Worried parents planned to throw children in sea water: CISF



Mumbai: The panic-stricken parents onboard an illfated tourist ferry were thinking of tossing their children into the sea water as a desperate measure after their boat started sinking off Mumbai, but a team of CISF marine commandos stopped them with an assurance that everyone will be saved

CISF constable Amol Savant (36) and his two colleagues became the "first responders" after the December 18 accident. Their patrol boat reached the accident site off the Mumbai coast around 4 pm, and they decided to utilise the "golden hour" for first saving the most vulnerable, including the children.

Fourteen people were killed after a Navy boat rammed into the tourist ferry - 'Neel Kamal' - on way to the Elephanta Island from the Gateway of India in Mumbai late Wednesday



"We were on routine patrol at some distance off the shore when our walkie talkie crackled to inform us that a passenger ferry was sinking. I asked the pilot (speed boat driver) to go full throttle and we reached the accident site about 3-4 kms away in no time," Savant told PTI.

He said he was "astonished to see the accident site. But being a trained soldier, I understood what was to be done and how."

"We saw people were ready to throw their children in the ocean water thinking that they would be saved from the sinking ship. I asked them not to panic and not attempt this. We took charge of the situ-

Navy chief holds meet on craft-ferry crash

Navy chief Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi on Friday visited the Western Naval Command headquarters and held a meeting with top officials over the crash. Admiral Tripathi also conducted an aerial inspection of the place where the incident occurred on late Wednesday afternoon, an official said. In July, Tripathi had also visited Mumbai after a fire on warship INS Brahmaputra.

ation soon," said the jawan, who is posted with the CISF unit that guards the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), Navi Mumbai.

Savant said he too was "shaken initially when he reached the site but then when I saw the children hanging dangerously from whatever was left of the sinking ferry and their helpless parents, I and my colleagues just caught hold of the children and brought

them in our boat." The jawan says they rescued about 6-7 children in the first go followed by women and men.

"There were many hands raised towards us, some screaming, some just requesting to save them. We don't know how many exactly but we were able to help and rescue as many as 50-60 people who were on-

Naval craft driver lost control: Police

The driver of the Naval craft, which rammed into a ferry off the Mumbai coast, lost control over the vessel during its engine trials, leading to the fatal crash mid-sea, an injured Navy staffer has told the police, an official said on Friday. A team from the Colaba Police Station, which is investigating the case, recorded the statement of the injured Navy staffer, Karmaveer Yadav, who is undergoing treatment at a hospital, said the official. According to Yadav, the Naval craft with the ferry packed with passengers, he said. The police team also inspected the craft, said the official. The Navy has instituted a separate 'Board of Inquiry' to probe the collision.

board that ill-fated ferry," Savant, who joined the CISF in 2010, said.

Sub Inspector (SI) Kheioka Sema (38), posted with the CISF unit that provides counterterrorist security cover to the JNPA, was in the second patrol boat that reached the spot.

"I saw a lady who was in the water wearing a life jacket but she had raised her hands in anticipation that she would be rescued. We rushed to her and gently asked her to put her hands down else the jacket would slip and she would start drowning," Sema said.

She was saved, he said. SI Sema, who joined the paramilitary force in 2018, said they administered car-

diopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to maybe 10-12 persons to bring them back to senses and drain out the water they had swallowed.

The two CISF personnel, who had come to Delhi for official work, said a foreigner couple onboard the ferry acted as 'Good Samaritans' as they came forward for help and administered CPR to a number of victims.

"We fanned out to scan about a 300-metre radius looking for life. Our teams also picked up bags, life jackets and other stuff from the ocean water the passengers of 'Neel Kamal' were carrying," Sema said.

The two personnel and their other colleagues have been trained in marine operations, commando tactics and amphibious survival and combat techniques.

"Our personnel who are posted to guard sea ports are essentially trained in marine commando operations, combat and survival techniques. They provide an armed security cover to such facilities against any sabotage or terrorist threat," CISF chief spokesperson and Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Deepak

"These men and women are also taken to the Chilika lake in Odisha as part of a special marine training capsule. We are proud of these personnel who were part of the rescue operation in Mumbai," he said. The force, as per officials,

will recommend the names of the personnel who were involved in this rescue operation for the 'Jeevan Raksha Padak' (or the life saving medal) apart from granting them the highest recognition in their service records.

"The accident site was way beyond the area of responsibility of our two security units deployed at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) and the Mumbai Port Trust but the personnel displayed fine professionalism and devotion to duty by being the first responders to the tragedy and saving numerous lives," a senior CISF officer

BMC official arrested for bribe

Mumbai: An official of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has been arrested in a bribery case for allegedly demanding Rs 2 crore for not acting against an unauthorised construction in the western suburbs, an official said on Friday.

Mandar Ashok Tari (43), a designated officer of the BMC's K East ward in suburban Andheri, surrendered before officials of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Thursday in connection with the case registered against him in August, the official said.

He said Tari had been absconding and surrendered before the authorities after the Bombay High Court reiected his anticipatory bail plea on Thursday.

The official said the accused had allegedly demanded Rs 2 crore from a man to stop an eviction action and allow an unauthorised construction.

Based on the complaint, the Mumbai ACB registered a case under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

In August, the ACB laid a trap and arrested two persons who allegedly collected the first instalment of Rs 75 lakh on Tari's behalf, he

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"It is wrong to label them as urban Naxals. You said these organisations directly or indirectly work for Naxals. I request you to provide me the list of such organisations and those heading them."



Nana Patole, President, **State Congress**

Tell if proposal to cut more trees in Aarey: SC **New Delhi:** The Supreme

Court on Friday directed the Maharashtra government to inform if there was any proposal to fell more trees in Mumbai's Aarey

A bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih directed the parties to complete the pleadings by February second week to enable the Maharashtra government counsel to make a statement on the

When solicitor general Tushar Mehta said everyone involved had public interest in mind, the bench said, "Not just public interest, but the interest of the environment. Thousands of trees must have already

The top court posted the matter for directions on January 10, 2025

The court in 2023 permitted some forest-dwelling tribals to move the Bombay High Court with their grievances related to the felling of trees in Mumbai's Aarey forest for the metro rail project.

On April 17, 2023, the



apex court came down heavily on Mumbai Metro for trying to "overreach" its earlier order permitting the felling of only 84 trees in the forest for a car shed project and directed it to pay Rs 10 lakh as penalty.

The court said it was improper on the part of the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited (MMRCL) to move the tree authority for felling of any trees in excess of 84. The top court, however, permitted the

trees from Aarey forest, saying a stay on tree felling would bring the public proiect to a standstill which was not desirable. The apex court in 2019

company to remove 177

took suo motu cognisance of a letter petition addressed to the chief justice of India by law student Rishav Ranjan seeking a stay on the felling of trees in the colony.

On November 29, 2022, the apex court permitted Mumbai Metro to raise with the relevant authority its plea for felling 84 trees at

The top court had directed MMRCL to strictly abide by its undertaking that no trees will be cut there and warned that any violation would result in strict action.

Mumbai's Aarey Colony.

The apex court had restrained the authorities from felling any more trees after the solicitor general submitted on behalf of the State of Maharashtra that no further trees will be cut.

The felling of trees in the colony has been opposed by green activists and resi-

Chautala's life marked by some highs and many lows

Chandigarh: Five-time Haryana chief minister and the man who passed his Class 12 exams from Tihar Jail when he was 82, Om Prakash Chautala was a politician with a chequered career and life marked by some highs and many lows.

The Indian National Lok Dal president and prominent Jat leader, who was sentenced to prison in connection with a teacher recruitment scam and a disproportionate assets case, died in Gurugram on Friday, days before his 90th birthday on January 1.

Born into an influential political family, Chautala was the eldest son of former deputy prime minister Devi Lal and took on the mantle of heading the party his father founded.

The father was considered a messiah of farmers and the son could never reach those heights but was known for his sharp political acumen and wit despite not being well-educated.

Though he was sworn in as Haryana chief minister five times, he enjoyed only one full term in office -- between 1999 and 2005. In between, right from 1989 to July 1999, he served only intermittent terms in office.

The seven-time MLA became chief minister for the first time when Devi Lal became deputy prime minister in the Janata Dal government in 1989.

He had his fair share of controversies in between.

In 1990, Haryana's Meham assembly seat hit the national headlines after large-scale violence. A rebel Lok Dal leader and seven others were killed in what became infamous as the "Meham Kand". The opposition had then accused Chautala of trying to force his victory in constituency. Later, the polls on the seat had to be postponed thrice.

The INLD remained a steadfast ally of the NDA at the Centre for many years but ties broke before the 2005 Haryana assembly polls. After that,



the INLD never came to power in Haryana and its graph over the years continued to slide following electoral

Though he spent several years in iail and virtually retired from active politics towards the end, Chautala remained the patriarch of the family that plays a prominent role in Haryana politics. While his younger brothers Pratap and Ranjit Chautala followed him into politics, one nephew is a sitting INLD MLA.

Chautala's two sons Abhay and Ajay and their sons are also in politics. While the younger Abhay Chautala is a senior leader of the INLD, the elder, Ajay Chautala, heads the JJP, party he founded in 2018 after a split in the family.

Abhay Chautala's son Arjun is a Haryana MLA while Ajay Chautala's sons Dushyant and Digvijay are JJP leaders, Dushvant Chautala was Haryana deputy chief minister when ML Khattar was chief minister.

Chautala's daughter-in-law and Ajay's wife Naina Chautala was also

an MLA from the JJP.

As the family's political fortunes fluctuated through the years, so did

His major setback came in 2013 when he was jailed in connection with the teacher recruitment scam. Son Ajay and 53 others, including an IAS officer, were convicted and sentenced in the case of illegal recruitment of 3.206 junior basic teachers in 2000 when the INLD was in power.

It was around this time, when he was sentenced for 10 years, that Chautala, all of 82 years at the time, passed his Class 12 in the first division. And before that Class 10.

According to a statement from the party, Chautala clearing his Class 10 exam while in jail was so socially inspiring that there was a film made on it. "Dasvi" was made with Abhishek Bachchan in the lead

While Chautala was on parole, he was released from Delhi's Tihar Jail in July 2021. And less than a year later, he was sent back to Tihar Jail in May 2022 after he sentenced to four years in a disproportionate assets (DA) case. Like before, he was lodged in jail number 2 and became the oldest inmate in the prison at 87.

In August 2002, the Delhi High Court suspended the four-year sentence to Chautala during the pendency of his appeal against the conviction in the DA case.

The party said in a statement that Chautala raised his voice against antipeople policies many times and went to jail many times and also spent 19 months in jail during Emergency.

In his last few years, he made many efforts to see that a third front was forged in the country. Towards this purpose, he met his old associates, including Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda. But it did yield the results he wanted.

-PTI

British left India not due to satyagraha: Arlekar

Panaji: Bihar Governor Rajendra Arlekar on Friday said British rulers left India not because of 'satyagraha', but when they saw arms in native people's hands and realised that they can go to any extent.

Referring to the Portuguese inquisition of Goa, he said it is time a true perspective about history is brought to light without being afraid of anyone.

Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR) had set up a narrative that you are born to be slaves and the then government also supported it, Arlekar alleged without naming the Congress-led dispensations.

He was speaking at the 'A Brief History of Freedom Struggle in North East of India (1498 to 1947)" book authored by Anandita Singh.

In his half-an-hour-long speech, Arlekar, who hails from Goa, said, "What is Goa inquisition? What is that exactly? If we try to bring it out, then some people in Goa get upset. They feel pain.'

"Are we not supposed to tell what your roots are? Some people get upset if we try to tell them from where you belong to, where are your roots. Why should it be?" he said.

We have to speak out without being afraid of anyone, he added.

"Those who invaded us can never be ours. That is why it is necessary to bring out our perspective," he

Arlekar, a former Goa legislative assembly speaker, said if people from places like Guwahati are here telling us their history, why don't Goans write the true history of the land.

WASTE TO BEST

Divide and Rule – Do It Yourself (DIY)



Dr. Sanjay Joshi

o, friends. Did you try that banana peel experiment yet to learn how fresh, yellow peel turns crumbly, black soil? Ever wondered why and how it has happened? The soil is full of huge number of microorganisms namely 'decomposing' bacteria and fungi. There are also larger animals like earthworms and different species of insects. Soil is essentially the natural residence of these organisms. So, did you enjoy observing the banana peel turning into black soil? Now here is a bigger thing you can do.

First, learn and develop the habit of 'segregating' your household waste. Segregation? What's that? Oh. Come on. Simple. All you have to do is sort out your waste into two main categories. All the waste generated in the kitchen that is 'wet waste' which is 'biodegradable' and comprises waste produced after cleaning the vegetables, fruit peels, nirmalya (stale flowers), even stale or leftover foods, tea powder left after the tea is strained etc. etc.

Do you know that just by sorting out and segregating the household waste in this way, you are reducing the volume of the waste that is going out of your house almost by 50 per cent! Wow! It means that only 50 per cent of the dry waste will be dumped in your dustbin which is relatively easy to manage. That is how 'divide and rule' works

You are now going to learn the simple but most effective way of converting all your kitchen waste into compost which is full of essential nutrients and minerals necessary for normal and healthy growth of plants. This composting can be done by using a culture of decomposing bacteria (Bi-ocomposting) or by using the earth-



worms (Vermicomposting). Both these methods are equally efficient and effective. However, at the individual, household level biocomposting is most preferred method. For larger scale operations such as at the community level, I would prefer Vermicomposting. We are going to learn both these methods through these

Bio-composting: This method of home composting is now being encouraged as a means of reducing the organic waste being discarded and sent to the landfills. It uses certain specific varieties of soil bacteria which are already present in the soil. The starting mixture enriched with these bacteria is available in the market. It is commonly known as Bio-culture or Bio-inoculum. You can get it from the plant nurseries or you can order it online.

Once you get this readymade culture as a startup mixture, get ready for the very exciting act of converting all your kitchen waste into a dark soil or the compost. It can be done in a suitable container. Bin composting is the most popular and advanced version of home composting system that overcomes problems experienced in other composting systems. There are bins of different types and different sizes available for home composting in the market.

However, you try to use an old, discarded container for this purpose. The most preferred containers are those made up of plastic such as plastic buckets, bins, bottles etc. collected from waste. Even earthen pots or wooden boxes can be used alternatively. Oh! Our time is over for now. Will continue with this exciting activity next Saturday. Till then, have a great weekend and Merry Christmas to all the readers!

> (The author is an environmentalist. Views personal.)

ASI surveys temple, pilgrimage sites, wells



Sambhal (IIP): A fourmember team of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on Friday conducted a survey of the recently-discovered Shri Kartik Mahadev temple, five 'teerths' (pilgrimage sites) and 19 'koops' (wells), a senior official said

Speaking to reporters, Sambhal District Magistrate Rajender Pensiya said, "A four-member team of the ASI started the survey this morning. This survey continued till 3.30 pm. In this, the ASI team surveyed five pilgrimage sites and 19 wells of Sambhal and also surveyed the new temple (Shri Kartik Ma-

hadev temple) was found." Pensiya further said among these wells, 19 wells including Chaturmukh Koop, Moksha Koop, Dharam Koop and five pilgrimage sites including Bhadrak Ashram, Swargdeep and Chakrapani were surveyed.

"Along with this, the new temple (Kartik Mahadev) that was found has also been surveyed by ASI. We had got all these places measured earlier but ASI did the survey today," the district magistrate said.

Three damaged idols were found inside the well of the Bhasma Shankar temple in Sambhal that was reopened last week after being shut for 46 years, officials had said on Monday.

The Shri Kartik Mahadev temple (Bhasma Shankar temple) was reopened on December 13 after the authorities said they stumbled upon the covered structure during an antiencroachment drive. The temple housed an idol of Lord Hanuman and a Shivling. It had remained locked since 1978. The temple also has a well nearby which the

authorities had planned to Pensiya had earlier told

reporters that the ancient being excavated. "Around 10 to 12 feet of

digging has been done. During this... first an idol of Parvati was found with its head broken. Then Ganesh and Lakshmi idols were found," he had said.

Asked if the idols were damaged and then put inside, Pensiya said, "All this is a matter of investigation... Right now, these idols have come out.

"How did they get inside, what happened and what did not happen will be known after a detailed investigation," he added.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate Vandana Mishra had told PTI that information was received through the local SHO that idols had been found. The temple is situated in the Khaggu Sarai area, just over a kilometre from the Shahi Jama Masjid where violence took place on November 24 during a protest over a courtordered survey of the mosque. Four people were killed and several, including police personnel, were injured in the violence.



drill as part of preparedness in case of train accidents at Alambagh Railway yard in Lucknow on Friday.

Nitish to lead charge in 2025 Bihar polls: NDA

Patna: The ruling NDA in Bihar on Friday dismissed speculations that the coalition could do a rethink on projecting CM Nitish Kumar as its leader in the assembly polls due next year.

Speaking to the media after a meeting held here to bring about better coordination at the grassroots level, state presidents of parties including the BJP, Kumar's JD(U) and Union minister Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) also rubbished suggestions triggered by Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent statement.

Dilip Jaiswal, state minister and Bihar BJP chief said, "We should understand that Amit Shah was trying to underscore that he was a 'karyakarta' (worker) of a party in which big decisions are taken by the parliamentary board".

"But, the leadership role of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had been a given for

condolence message (tweet)

Hussain, the son of the



long. There is no question of going back on that," asserted Jaiswal. He was responding to Shah's recent interview to a news channel in which he was asked whether the NDA could go to polls in Bihar without declaring a chief ministerial candidate.

'Trying best to resolve IOA issue'

New Delhi: The government is trying its best to resolve the differences in the Indian Olympic Association in order to ensure a strong and successful bid for the 2036 Olympic Games, said Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports Raksha Nikhil Khadse here on Friday.

IOA president PT Usha has been engaged in a raging fight with 12 EC members who have refused to ratify the appointment of Raghuram Iyer as the IOA CEO made by her in January. The ongoing tussle is not portraying the right image of the country before the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as India seeks to host the Summer Games and Paralympic Games in 2036.

India has submitted a 'Letter of Intent', expressing its desire to host the Games, to the IOC's Future Host Commission, taking the first concrete step in an ambitious plan after months of informal dialogue with the international body. "I think everyone is try-

ing to work together and we are trying our best to resolve the issues of IOA. The ministry is trying hard to



solve all the differences and issues so that our target of hosting a big event in India is fulfilled," the junior Sports Minister said.

"For that we all need to work together. We need to take this (Olympic) bid forward on a positive note," she said.

With the submission of a 'Letter of Intent', India has progressed from "Informal Dialogue" to the "Continuous Dialogue" stage of the host election process.

In this stage, the IOC conducts a "feasibility study" of the progress of projects associated with the Games in the aspiring host nations.

The next phase of the process would be "Targetted Dialogue", which would require the submission of an edition-specific formal bid, which would be assessed by the Future Host Commission.

Zakir Hussain laid to rest in San Francisco

New York: Zakir Hussain was laid to rest on Thursday at a San Francisco cemetery as renowned percussionist A Sivamani and other artistes performed on their drums at a little distance away in a tribute to

the tabla maestro. Hussain, one of the world's most accomplished percussionists, died at a San Francisco hospital on Monday due to complications arising from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a lung disease. He was 73.

He was laid to rest at the Fernwood cemetery in San Francisco on Thursday.

Hundreds of his admirers gathered at Hussain's funeral to pay their last respects. Sivamani and several other musicians played drums at a little distance away to pay him a tribute.

Sivamani told PTI Video, "Rhythm is God, that is you Zakir bhai. I learned a lot in our journey from 1982 till now. Every moment you are here with us in the rhythm. Every time I hit the rhythm, you are there. We love you Zakir Bhai. Have a lovely journey. Please give my pranam to

all the masters.'

Consul General of India in San Francisco Dr K Srikar Reddy also paid tributes to Hussain.

"The mortal remains of

legendary Tabla maestro and Padma Vibhushan awardee Ustad Zakir Hussain were laid to rest this afternoon at Fernwood Cemetery, Mill Valley, near San Francisco," Indian Consulate in San Francisco said in a post on X.

"On behalf of the Government and people of India, Consul General Dr K Srikar Reddy paid tribute



by draping the mortal remains of the Ustad Zakir Hussain with the Indian national flag, offered condolences to his wife Antonia Minnecola and his family members," the post read.

They also "read out the

of Hon'ble Prime Minister. Around 300 persons, including his family, friends, musicians (Sivamani and others), music lovers, and diaspora members, paid their last respects."

legendary tabla player Alla Rakha, revolutionised the instrument, taking it beyond the limits of classical music to other forms, including jazz and Western classical.

The celebrated musician. one of India's most wellknown, received four

Grammy Awards in his career spanning six decades, including three at the 66th Grammy Awards earlier this year.

Hussain is survived by his wife Antonia Minnecola and daughters Anisa Qureshi and Isabella Qureshi.

Hussain received the Padma Shri in 1988, the Padma Bhushan in 2002, and the Padma Vibhushan in 2023. In his career spanning six decades, the musician worked with several renowned international and Indian artistes.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Sarangi ji is doing drama. I have never seen a better performance in my career (as an actor) than that of Rajput ji, Sarangi ji and the woman from Nagaland. They should be given all the awards in acting."



Jaya Bachchan, MP, Samajwadi Party

Eight dead, 35 injured in fire after accident

reported spotting flames from near-

ly a kilometre away as thick black

smoke filled the sky and ambulanc-

es and fire brigade vehicles rushed

towards the crash zone. A school

van driver on his way to pick up

students recounted with horror the

sight of a man engulfed in flames

nearly 300-metre stretch of the

highway, leading to a long queue of

vehicles. The traffic congestion

grew rapidly with time and by the

afternoon, choked the arterial road

and traffic had to be diverted to al-

highway of the burnt vehicles to

After news of the accident

spread, Chief Minister Sharma and

Khimsar rushed to the SMS hospi-

tal. Sharma spoke to administra-

tion officials and doctors and is-

sued directions to ensure proper

treatment was facilitated. He also

visited the accident site and spoke

I got the incident. This is a very un-

fortunate incident. Instructions

have been given to ensure proper

treatment and other arrange-

"I visited the hospital as soon as

resume vehicular movement.

Authorities were clearing the

The crash initially affected a

on the road



Jaipur: An LPG tanker collided with a truck on Friday, sparking a massive firehall that turned a stretch of the Jaipur-Ajmer highway into an inferno in which at least eight people were killed and nearly 40 vehicles engulfed in

Of the about 35 people injured, nearly half are "very critical", Rajasthan Health Minister Gajendra Singh Khimsar said

Jaipur Police Commissioner Biju George Joseph, who was at the crash site with several officers of his department, said an outlet nozzle of the LPG tanker was damaged in the collision, leading to a gas leak that caused the blaze.

The crash occurred around 5.45 am, when it was still dark, in front of a school, according to officials.

'Vehicles behind the tanker were engulfed in flames. Other vehicles coming from the opposite directions also caught fire and the vehicles collided," he said.

The gas leak also spread the fire in a flash, leaving no scope for those in nearby vehicles to come out. People were seen rushing and taking off clothes engulfed in flames.

The injured were rushed to the SMS hospital in Jaipur in more

than 25 ambulances. Dr Deepak Maheshwari, principal of the SMS Medical College, said eight people have died

He said 43 people were brought to the hospital. Five of them were pronounced dead and three succumbed to injuries during treatment, he said, adding that seven people are on ventilator support.

Officials at the spot indicated that the casualty count may go up. Police suspect some people could not get out of their vehicles in time and got burnt.

The Rajasthan government announced financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh to the next of kin of the deceased and Rs 1 lakh for the

President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Raiasthan Governor Haribhau Bagade, Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma and his predecessor Ashok Gehlot expressed grief over the loss of lives in the crash

In a post on X, Modi announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund to the next of kin of the deceased and Rs 50,000 to the injured. Earlier in the day, eyewitnesses

Khimsar told reporters at the

hospital that all doctors, resident doctors and nursing staff of the medical facility have been called in to manage the situation and another ward opened to accommodate patients. A 'green corridor' was set up from the accident site to the SMS hospital, he added.

An official said a private sleeper bus headed for Jaipur from Rajsamand was behind the gas tanker when the accident occurred and efforts were underway to find the details about the passengers on

A fire department official said, "A few fire tenders from Mansarover were rushed to the spot based on primary information, but later more were sent from other stations as well.'

A team from the regional transport office also reached the spot to investigate the incident and Forensic Science Laboratory teams collected evidence.

Local people complained of itching in the eyes and breathing problems due to the smoke. Some said a few birds were found dead nearby.

A pipe factory along the highway suffered damage in the incident.

Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Prem Chand Bairwa and Minister of State for Home Jawahwar Singh Bedham also reached the accident site, while state Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra and several BJP and Congress MLAs visited the hospital.

The school van driver told PTI that the flames were visible from a kilometre away and there was panic and chaos on the highway.

"As I got closer to the spot, I saw people running in haste and shouting for help. I saw a man engulfed in flames. It was a frightening scene. Fire brigades and ambulances were there but it was difficult for them to reach the spot initially," he



Syro-Malabar Church sets up special court

established at Mount St Thomas, the headquarters of the Syro-Malabar Church, to address ongoing disciplinary issues within the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese as per the Church's liturgical practices, through ecclesiastical

The court was established by Major Archbishop of Syro-Malabar Church, Raphael Thattil on December 18, a release issued by Syro-Malabar Church spokesperson Fr Antony Vadakekkara V C

canonical procedures.

Under Canon Law 89 for the Eastern Churches, the Major Archbishop holds the right and duty to oversee the discipline of clergy. The special court was set up to enforce disciplinary action under the law when orders and warnings are disregarded, the release added.

The unified form of the Holy Mass was implementChurch on November 28,

The establishment of a special court became necessary due to ongoing disciplinary violations, despite efforts by the Pope, the Office for the Eastern Churches, the Syro-Malabar Synod, the Major Archbishop, the Apostolic Administrator, and the Pontifical Delegate to enforce the unified form through doctrine and

These violations have continued to cause division among the faithful and significant discord in the public sphere.

decrees, the release added.

Normally, such courts function in diocesan centres. However, the Apostolic Administrator had informed the superiors that opening a court in the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly was impossible under the current situation, the release said.

Hence, the Major Archbishop has established this of Bishop Mar Bosco Puthur and in line with the instructions from the East-

ern Office in Rome. The court will have the authority to take action against priests, religious, and laity in the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly who violate disciplinary regulations, under canon

This special court will comply with the Code of Canon Law of the Eastern Churches and other relevant ecclesiastical laws.

According to the Eastern Code of Canon Law, court proceedings and sentencing are viewed as a remedy, serving as a cure for wrongdoing.

The Church resorts to iudicial measures when avenues of mercy, love, and counsel have been exhausted.

This special court is empowered to penalise those who have committed offenses against the Church.

Investigation into illegal occupation of temple land

Bareilly (UP): A probe has of the family that built the been launched into a land dispute involving the Ganga Maharani temple here following claims by the temple committee that the land has been occupied illegally, officials said on Friday.

They said District Magistrate Ravindra Kumar has ordered the probe, with a directive to the occupant, Wahid Ali and his family, to vacate the property within seven days.

The officials said Wahid Ali, however, has requested an extension of eight months to vacate the premises.

The area surrounding the temple remains under police surveillance.

As the municipal corporation has been collecting property tax for the building, the records they hold will be crucial in determining the legal status of the land. A final decision will be made after a thorough examination of these records, he said.

The dispute centres around Rakesh Singh, who claims to be a descendant temple around 250 years

Singh has claimed that the temple's land was officially registered in the temple's name in 1905 and alleged that Wahid Ali and his family illegally occupied the temple building, initially under the guise of being part of the Dauli Raghuvar Dayal Sadhan Sahakari Samiti Limited, a cooperative society. Singh also claimed that

the temple's idol was removed and worship ceased due to the occupation. Ali, however, refuted the

claims, asserting that he has lived on the premises for the last 40 years as a watchman for the cooperative society.

He also alleged that officials from the cooperative department were refusing to recognise him as an employee to avoid paying his outstanding salary.

According to Vikas Sharma, secretary of the Dauli Raghuvar Dayal Sadhan Sahakari Samiti, two rooms of the building were rented by the society.





Women injured at 'katha'

Meerut (UP): Surging crowds at the entry gate of a congregation of a religious leader on Friday led to some women being iniured.

Hundreds of people had gathered at the spot being addressed by preacher Pradip Mishra who recites the 'Shiv katha'

As news of the incident spread with some people terming it a stampede, police and district administration officials denied this

"Some women present at the event fell and sustained minor injuries," Senior Superintendent of Police Vipin Tada told PTI. He added that police present at the spot picked them up and provided them first aid.

"As per the current information, there was a crowd surge near the entry gate... There are no reports of any casualties at the moment. Adequate security forces have been deployed at the site," added Meerut District Magistrate Deepak Meena.

Denying reports that some people had been trapped, Meena told reporters that the entire situation was under control.

"All necessary arrangements for the programme were provided as required. The arrangements and security deployment were planned in advance after an inspection of the venue by myself and the superintendent of police," he said.

The event, now in its sixth day, continued as

Put under house arrest, claims Umar Farooq

Srinagar: Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz claimed that he was put under house arrest and prevented from offering congregational prayers at the Jama Masjid for the third consecutive week.

Mirwaiz, who is the chief cleric of Kashmir, alleged that he was barred from offering prayers at the Jama Masjid in the city's Nowhat-

"Again prevented from going to #JamaMasjid for third consecutive Friday. Despite the bone chilling cold thousands of faithfulthe elderly, women, physically challenged, children, people from all over the valley gather, waiting expectantly with a lot of affection and devotion to listen to the word of God at the Grand Mosque," Mirwaiz said in a post on X.

"What hurt and disappointment it brings to them all when those in power assert brute force and detain me, totally impervious and heartless to the grief they cause to them, to me and to the Muslims of the valley," Mirwaiz said.

New 'darshan' system in Puri Jagannath temple

Bhubaneswar: Arrangements are being put in place to provide devotees better facilities of viewing the deities at the Jagannath Temple in Puri, an official said on Friday. Shree Jagannath Temple

Administration (SJTA) chief administrator Arabinda Padhee said the decision was made as devotees often face difficulties in getting a glance of the deities in the sanctum sanctorum due to overcrowding.

"Separate barricades will be set up at the 'Natamandap' (dance hall) along with a ramp system and special arrangement for differently abled persons, as part of the move," Padhee said.

He said plans are afoot to install six rows of collapsible wooden barricades with ramp system in the 'Natamandap' The Odisha Bridge and

Construction Corporation Ltd has been engaged for the purpose and it has assured to complete the new installation by the yearend, Padhee said. The fresh arrangement



will likely be in place from January 1, 2025.

The installation work will not affect the daily rituals at the temple and the ongoing repair work of 'Ratna Bhandar' (treasury chamber), he said.

Padhee also said the ASI has set a target to complete the renovation work of the Ratna Bhandar in three months.

He special arrangements will also be put in place in 'Ananda Bazaar' (Mahaprasad market on the temple premises) to ensure a smooth process of obtaining the prasad.

A committee has also been formed in this regard.

Odisha's Law Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan had recently chaired a meeting to determine the regulatory framework of the new system.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"This government is scared of a debate on the Adani issue, they are scared of any debate. They know their real feelings for Ambedkar ji



are out in the open and therefore they are afraid of the Opposition because we are raising this issue."

Priyanka Gandhi, MP, Congress

By Manish Sain

Panaji: In artist-writer Priya Mani's "Visual Encyclopaedia of Indian Food", the letter 'A' might represent apple, but 'B' doesn't stand for boy; instead, it could stand for banana, black salt, or

At the ninth Serendipity Arts Festival, Mani has featured a glimpse of her vast collection at the Directorate of Accounts building, showcasing it on both the walls and tables.

Two posters featuring the letters A and B along with images of corresponding ingredients and dishes, serve as visual cues,

prompting curious visitors to engage in conversations, share stories, and at times even break into a smile as they recognize familiar foods from their regions.

"Everybody has a food story. Everyone I have met has something to share. So invariably it's a conversation about food. There are so many workers here, who are helping out with the show, have been excited about looking at these images. They come and tell me different things," Mani told PTI.

The 'Visual Encyclopaedia of Indian Foods' is an avant-garde project that blends visual art, culinary heritage, and interactive



technology. Mani uses an ingredient-led narrative to showcase the many visible and invisible aspects of everyday food items.

A designer by profession, Mani has been documenting Indian food for more than a decade. However, it wasn't until the Covid pandemic that she decided to create a visual encyclopedia from A to Z using Instagram, a snapshot of which is featured here at the arts festival.

"Here at Serendipity I have taken this whole project forward as an immersive installation, so when you walk into this room you get a chance to cook. Because for me the act of cooking defines the project," the Copenhagen-based artist said.

Apart from the visuals in the corridor, Mani has also set up a vet-to-be named audio-visual project. The innovative project displays visually stunning shots of different spices and ingredients such as wheat, black pepper, rice, and ginger.

When an orb containing an ingredient is placed in a container. a montage of short videos begins to project on the walls. These videos display the ingredient from its microscopic details to macro photographs, explaining its cultivation process and how it becomes part of a dish finally.

"I have received a response I simply did not expect. It was from a four-year-old child who was super excited and didn't want to leave the room, he wanted to try and learn about every ingredient and then he wanted to share that knowledge with everyone else who came into the room,"

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GST Council to decide on taxes on insurance premium

Jaisalmer: The GST Council, in its meeting on Saturday, is likely to decide on reducing tax rates on life and health insurance premiums, while hiking it on high-end wrist watches, shoes and apparels, besides considering a separate 35 per cent tax slab for sin

The 55th meeting of the GST Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising state counterparts, is likely to discuss rate rejig in about 148 items. besides, it will also deliberate on bringing Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF), a major component for airline industry's operation cost, in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) fold.

The GST rate is also proposed to be cut on food delivery platforms like Swiggy and Zomato, to 5 per cent (without input tax credit), from the current 18 per cent (with ITC).

However, the Fitment Committee (comprising tax officers from the Centre and states) is likely to have proposed a rate hike to 18 per cent on sale of used EVs as well as small petrol and diesel vehicles to 18 per cent from the current 12 per cent. This hike would bring used and old smaller cars and EVs at par with old larger vehicles, according to sources

Also, the Group of Ministers (GoM) on GST compensation cess is likely to get a six month extension till June, 2025, to submit their report. The compensation



cess regime comes to an end in March, 2026, and the GST Council has set up a panel of ministers, under Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary, to decide the future course of the cess.

In the GST regime, compensation cess at varied rates is levied on luxury. sin and demerit goods over and above the 28 per cent tax. The proceeds from the cess, which was originally planned for five years after GST roll-out or till June 2022, was used to compensate states for revenue loss incurred by them post the introduction of GST.

One of the major items on the agenda of the Council is to decide the GST rate on health and life insurance. A GoM set up by the Council under Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary, in its meeting in November had agreed on exempting insurance premiums paid for term life insurance policies from

Also premium paid by senior citizens towards health insurance cover has been proposed to be exempted from the tax.

Besides, GST on premiums paid by individuals, other than senior citizens, for health insurance with coverage of up to Rs 5 lakh is proposed to be exempted.

However, 18 per cent GST will continue on premiums paid for policies with health insurance cover of over Rs

Another major item before the Council is the GST rate rationalisation panel's report, which has suggested rate tweaks in 148 items.

The GoM on GST rate rationalisation earlier this month decided to submit before the Council their recommendation to hike tax on sin goods, like aerated beverages, cigarettes, tobacco and related products, to 35 per cent from the present 28 per cent.

The four-tier tax slab of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent under GST will continue and a new rate of 35 per cent is proposed by the GoM only for sin goods.

The Group of Ministers on rate rationalisation under Bihar Deputy Chief Minister, also decided to propose rationalising tax rates on apparel. As per the decision, ready made garments costing up to Rs 1,500 would attract 5 per cent GST, those between Rs 1,500 to Rs 10,000 would attract 18

Garments costing above Rs 10,000 would attract 28 per cent tax.

Currently, garments costing up to Rs 1,000 attract 5 per cent GST, while those above that attract 12 per cent.

The GoM also proposed hiking GST on shoes above Rs 15,000/pair from 18 per

It also proposed hiking the GST rate on wrist watches above Rs 25,000 from 18 per cent to 28 per cent in the previous meeting on October 19.

The GoM had proposed reducing GST on packaged drinking water of 20 litre and above to 5 per cent from 18 per cent, and reducing tax rate on bicycles costing less than Rs 10,000 to 5 per cent, from 12 per cent. Also, GST on exercise notebooks would be reduced to 5 per cent from 12 per cent.

In total, the GoM on rate rationalisation has proposed tax rate tweaks in 148 items to the GST council. "The net revenue impact of rate rejigs will be positive," an official had said earlier.

Under GST, essential items are either exempted or taxed at the lowest slab, while luxury and demerit items attract the highest slab. Luxury goods like cars, washing machines, and demerit goods like aerated water and tobacco products attract cess on top of the highest 28 per cent slab.

With regard to bringing ATF in GST, the Council is likely to deliberate the timeline and build consensus among states.

When GST was introduced on July 1, 2017, amalgamating over a dozen central and state levies, five commodities - crude oil, natural gas, petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF) - were included in GST law, but it was decided that it would be taxed under GST at a later date.

BRAND ME

Global Emails, Powerful **Personal Brand**



Divyaa Advaani

n today's hyper-connected world, where communication tran-L scends borders, every email you send says more about you than you realize. Whether you're interacting with clients in the U.S., partners in Europe, or collaborators in Asia, your emails create a snapshot of your personal brand. As an Indian professional operating globallyand currently experiencing Australia's dynamic business environment-I've seen first-hand how email practices shape perceptions and determine opportunities.

An email is often your first impression, and sometimes the only impression, you make on someone. It's more than just words; it's a reflection of your professionalism, values, and how seriously you take your business relationships. In a world where physical meetings are becoming rarer and virtual connections more common, your personal brand is being crafted one email at a

Consider this: when you receive a vague, error-ridden email, what assumptions do you make about the sender? Now contrast that with a thoughtful, well-structured email that addresses your concerns, maintains clarity, and respects your time. The difference is stark. The first email may leave you questioning the sender's competence, while the second instils confidence. The same holds true for you when you're the one sending that email.

Your tone, clarity, and attention to detail all contribute to how others perceive you. For example, while casual language may work well with colleagues in some cultures, it may appear unprofessional to partners in others. Understanding these nuances and adapting your style can elevate your personal brand. Being in Australia has reinforced this for me— interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds requires heightened sensitivity to communication styles. These small adjustments can mean the difference between building a strong global network or losing potential clients.

Every part of your email matters. A clear subject line shows respect for the recipient's time. A concise, well-structured message demonstrates efficiency and reliability. Proper grammar and punctuation convey diligence and care. Even your sign-off and signature-complete with your name, title, and relevant links-reinforce your identity and credibility. Including your LinkedIn profile or website adds another layer of authenticity to your

Imagine pitching a business proposal to an international client. If your email is sloppy or unclear, the client may question your ability to handle the project. On the other hand, a polished email can establish you as trustworthy, organized, and committed to excellence. Your emails don't just communicate ideas; they communicate you.

In this competitive world, personal branding through email is no longer optional—it's essential. With global layoffs and market uncertainty, your ability to present yourself consistently and confidently could be the edge that sets you apart. Every email you send is an opportunity to demonstrate your value and professionalism, ensuring that clients and colleagues remember you for from 14+ countries. Views personal.)



the right reasons.

As someone who navigates global communications from India, my current trip to Australia has reinforced a powerful lesson: geographical boundaries don't limit your brand; how you show up digitally does. By treating each email as a representation of your personal brand, you build credibility, trust, and lasting relationships. In a world where deals are won and lost with a click, make sure your emails reflect the story you want the world to know.

Your brand isn't just what you say about yourself; it's what your communication says about you. Craft your emails thoughtfully, and you'll not only connect with the worldyou'll stand out in it.

Stay tuned to my upcoming articles as I travel and explore another part of this world, I shall be sharing insights from my trip too. Connect with me on my social media handles to stay updated with what's next in

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/suaveu6 LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin. com/in/divvaaadvaani

YouTube: https://youtube.com/@

(The author is a personal branding expert. She has clients

Bears tighten grip on markets; Sensex tanks

Mumbai: Equity bench- 5.18 trillion). mark indices Sensex and Nifty plunged about 1.5 per cent on Friday, taking their downtrend to the fifth straight session, due to risk aversion in the global markets after the hawkish stance of the US Federal Reserve.

An across-the-board selloff in equity markets amid unabated selling by foreign investors added to the pressure traders said

The 30-share BSE benchmark tumbled 1,176.46 points or 1.49 per cent to sink below the 79,000 mark to end at 78,041.59. During the day, it slumped 1,343.46 points or 1.69 per cent to 77,874.59

The NSE Nifty tanked 364.20 points or 1.52 per cent to 23,587.50.

As many as 2,950 stocks declined, while 1,045 advanced and 90 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Investors became poorer by Rs 18.43 lakh crore in five days of the market crash as the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms eroded by Rs 18,43,121.27 crore to Rs 4,40,99,217.32 crore (USD

"Disappointment regarding the slower-than-anticipated rate cuts by the US Fed has adversely affected global market sentiment. This bearish outlook is particularly impacting the domestic market, which is already contending with high valuations & low earnings growth.

"The sell-off has been widespread, with significant declines in mid and small-cap stocks, where valuations premiumisation is at a historical peak," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services,

In the past five days, the BSE benchmark tanked 4.091.53 points or 4.98 per cent, and the Nifty slumped 1,180.8 points or 4.76 per cent. From the 30 blue-chip Sensex pack, Tech Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors, Larsen & Toubro, State Bank of India, Tata Consultancy Services, UltraTech Cement and Reliance Industries were the biggest laggards.

JSW Steel, Nestle and Ti-



Enterprises Director Pranav Adani during Bihar Investor Summit 2024 in Patna on Friday.

Forex reserves drop USD 2 bn

Mumbai: India's forex reserves dropped by USD 1.988 billion to USD 652.869 hillion for the week ended December 13, the RBI said

In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had dropped by USD 3.235 billion to USD 654.857 billion.

The reserves have been declining for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation, along with forex market interventions by the tan were the gainers. -PTI : RBI to help reduce volatilities in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in September.

For the week ended December 13, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 3.047 billion to USD 562.576 billion, the data released on Friday

Expressed in US dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased by USD 1.121 billion to USD 68.056 billion during the week, the RBI said.

The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 35 million to USD 17.997 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was also down by USD 27 million to USD 4.24 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data

NITI Aayog suggests accommodations near factories New Delhi: Workers' acdraft notification issued by

commodations near factory sites need to be classified as residential units for levying lower property tax, power and water tariffs so as to ensure better living standard, government think tank NITI Aayog said in a report on Thursday.

The lack of suitable accommodations restricts migration of workers, particularly women, thereby limiting the manufacturing sector's growth potential, NITI Aayog said in a report titled 'S.A.F.E (Site Adjacent Factory Employee) Accommodation - Worker Housing for manufacturing growth'.

"Designate S.A.F.E. accommodations as a distinct category of residential housing to ensure residential property tax, electricity, and water tariffs apply," it recommended.

The report also called for GST exemptions for accommodations meeting specified criteria (e.g., Rs 20,000 per person per month for a continuous stay of 90 days).

The report pitched for including S.A.F.E. accommodations under the exemptions provided for industrial sheds, schools, colleges, and hostels in the

the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEF & CC).

It also called for encouraging the development of accommodations suitable for workers, addressing their specific safety and welfare needs. The report further sug-

gested amending zoning regulations to allow mixeduse developments near industrial hubs, facilitating worker housing close to workplaces.

To overcome financial barriers, the report pitched for providing up to 30 per cent-40 per cent of project "This includes 20 per

cent from the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) and 10 per cent from the sponsoring nodal ministry. with additional contributions from state governments," it said.

The report also emphasised on transparent bidding processes to determine VGF support, ensuring efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

It recommended leveraging VGF to upgrade brownfield worker accommodations, enhancing their safety, capacity, and

The report highlights several challenges that hinder the development of worker accommodations, including restrictive zoning laws, high operating costs, and conservative building bye-laws, among others.

This comprehensive report explores the crucial role of secure, affordable. flexible, and efficient (S.A.F.E.) accommodations for industrial workers in boosting India's manufacturing sector.

It identifies key challenges, offers actionable solutions, and highlights the pivotal interventions required to scale up such housing facilities across the country

In the Union Budget 2024-25, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had emphasized the importance of rental housing with dormitory-style accommodations for industrial workers. This initiative, to be executed under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model with VGF support and commitments from anchor industries, underscores the government's commitment to addressing a critical component of manufacturing ecosystem.

Apple complains Meta requests risk privacy the Digital Markets Act, aims to

London: Apple complained that requests from Meta Platforms for access to its operating software threaten user privacy, in a spat fuelled by the European Union's intensifying efforts to get the iPhone maker to open up to products from tech rivals.

The 27-nation EU's executive Commission is drawing up "interoperability" guidelines for Apple under its new digital competition rulebook. The interoperability measures would ensure that devices like smartwatches or features like wireless file transfers work as smoothly with iPhones as

do Apple Watches or AirDrop. The EU's rulebook, known as promote fair competition in digital markets and prevent Big Tech "gatekeeper" companies from cornering markets. The commission posted proposed measures late Wednesday on how Apple should make its iOS operating system work with other technology.

In response, Apple said it's "concerned that some companies — with data practices that do not meet the high standards of data protection law held by the EU and supported by Apple — may attempt to abuse the DMA's interoperability provisions to access sen-

sitive user data." The company singled out Meta,



saying it has made at least 15 requests "for potentially far-reaching access to Apple's technology stack" that would reduce privacy protections for users.

If those requests were granted, "Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp could enable Meta to read on

a user's device all of their messages and emails, see every phone call they make or receive, track every app that they use, scan all of their photos, look at their files and calendar events, log all of their passwords," the company said in a report.

Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, fought back.

"Here's what Apple is actually saying: they don't believe in interoperability," Meta spokesman Andy Stone said in a post on X. "In fact, every time Apple is called out for anticompetitive behaviour, they defend themselves on privacy grounds that have no basis in

The Brussels-based European Commission's proposed measures call for an approach based on Apple's existing "request-based process," in which developers ask for access to features and functions.

Apple should provide a "dedicated contact" to handle requests and give updates and feedback, and there should be a "fair and impartial conciliation" process to settle disagreements on technical

The commission is now asking for feedback from the public by Jan 9 on the proposals, including from any companies that have made interoperability requests from Apple, or are thinking of doing so.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"We have to adopt technology like electric mobility, biofuels, multimodal transport options to bring down overall carbon impact and make sustainability the core of our thinking."



Piyush Goyal, Union Minister, Commerce and Industry

Turkiye, Russia engage in delicate manoeuvre over Syria after Assad's downfall

Moscow: The rapid downfall of Syrian leader Bashar Assad has touched off a new round of delicate geopolitical manoeuvring between Russia's Vladimir Putin and Turkive's Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

With the dust still settling from the stunning events in Damascus, the outcome for now seems to be favouring Ankara. which backed the victorious rebels, while Moscow suffered a bruising blow to its international clout.

"In the game of Czars vs. Sultans, this is Sultans 1 and Czars 0," said Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute. "Far from being allies, Turkiye and Russia are competitors. And in this case, Turkiye has outsmarted Russia.

The Assad regime's demise opens another chapter in the complex relationship between Putin and Erdogan, with wide-ranging implications not just for Syria but also for Ukraine and the two leaders' ties with Washington.

Russia and Turkiye share economic and security interests — along with an intense rivalry. The personal relationship between Putin and Erdogan often sees them both praising each other, even as they jockey for political and economic gains.

"There are currently only two leaders left in the world -- there is me and there is Vladimir Putin," Erdogan said recently, reflecting the respect for the Kremlin leader. Putin, in turn, has often praises Erdogan's political prowess.



Syrian fighters place their weapons on the floor before Friday prayers at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus,

Conflicts and deals

Russia and Turkiye backed opposing sides in Syria's civil war that started in 2011, putting them on a collision course. Tensions spiraled when a Turkish fighter jet shot down a Russian warplane near the Turkive-Syria border in November 2015, soon after Moscow launched its air campaign to support Assad.

The Kremlin responded with sweeping economic sanctions that halted Turkish imports, drove Turkish companies from the lucrative Russian market and cut the flow of Russian tourists to Turkive's resorts.

Faced with massive economic damage, Erdogan apologized months later. Soon after, Putin staunchly

supported him when he faced an attempted military coup in July 2016, helping to warm ties quickly.

In 2018, Moscow and Ankara negotiated a ceasefire and de-escalation deal for the rebel-held Idlib province in northwestern Syria on the border with Turkiye and sought to anchor the often-violated agreement with follow-up deals in the next few years. But even as they cooper-

ated on Syria, Moscow and Ankara also vied for influence in Libva, where Russia supported forces loyal to military commander Khalifa Hifter while Turkiye backed his Tripoli-based foes. Turkiye also aggressively sought to increase its leverage in the former Soviet Central Asian nations competing with Russia and China.

In 2020, Moscow backed off when Turkiye's ally Azerbaijan routed ethnic Armenian forces in the fighting over the breakaway region of Karabakh. Even though Armenia hosted a Russian military base, the Kremlin has engaged in a delicate balancing act, seeking to maintain warm ties with both Azerbaijan and Turkiye.

While their political interests often clashed, economic ties boomed, with Russia boosting natural gas exports to Turkiye via a Black Sea pipeline; by building Turkiye's first nuclear plant; and by providing the NATO member with

Putin.

Ukraine's territorial integrity and supplied Kyiv with weapons, Erdogan echoed Putin in accusing the US and NATO of fomenting the conflict. Putin has praised Erdogan for offering to mediate a settlement.

hand in negotiations with

While Turkiye backed

In March 2022, Turkiye hosted Russia-Ukraine peace talks in Istanbul that soon collapsed, with both Putin and Erdogan blaming the West for their failure.

Later that year, Ankara pooled efforts with the United Nations to broker a deal that opened the door for Ukrainian grain exports from its Black Sea ports, an agreement that helped drive down global food prices before falling apart the

Turkiye's balancing act in Ukraine is driven by its dependence on the vast Russian market, supplies of natural gas and a flow of

Russia's focus on Ukraine has eroded its clout in regions where Turkiye and other players have tried to take advantage of Moscow's withering influence.

In September 2023, Azerbaijan reclaimed control over all of Karabakh in an one-day blitz while Russian regional peacekeepers stood back. That hurt Russia's ties with Armenia. which has shifted increasingly toward the West.

Moscow's new look at Syria

Focused on Ukraine, Russia had few resources left for Syria at a time when Hezbollah similarly pulled back its fighters amid the war with Israel and Iranian support for Assad also

Russia tried to sponsor talks on normalizing relations between Turkiye and Syria, but Assad stonewalled them, refusing any compromise.

Assad's intransigence helped trigger the Turkiyebacked opposition's offensive in November. The underfunded and demoralised Syrian army quickly crumbled, allowing the rebels to sweep across the country and capture Damascus.

Even as it has offered asylum to Assad and his family, Russia has reached out to Syria's new leaders, seeking to ensure security for its troops still there and extend leases on its naval and air bases.

At his annual news conference Thursday, Putin said Russia offered Syria's new leaders to use the bases for humanitarian aid deliveries and suggested Moscow could offer other incentives.

While Assad's demise dealt a heavy blow to Russia, some believe Moscow could navigate the rapidly changing environment to retain at least some clout.

"Syria's opposition forces well understand that the country's future is uncertain," said Nikolay Kozhanov, a consulting fellow with Chathan House's Russia and Eurasia program, in a commentary. "They want Russia, if not as a friend, then a neutral

He noted that "Moscow's main goal will be to maintain at least a minimal level of influence through a military presence, for example, at its existing bases, or through contacts with other regional players, such as Turkiye.'

Cagaptay observed that while Turkiye would like to see an end to Russia's military presence in Syria, Ankara's position will depend on how relations evolve with Washington.

"If we see a reset in US-Turkish ties where Turkive thinks it can comfortably lean on the US against Russia. I can see Erdogan adopting a kind of more boisterous tone vis a vis Putin," he said.

But if the US maintains its alliance with the Kurds and stands against Turkiye's effort to push back on Kurdish fighters in northeastern Syria, "Ankara may decide that it needs to continue to play all sides as it has been doing for about a decade now.

Putin noted Russia understands Turkive's motives in securing its borders, but he also warned that the Kurds could offer strong resistance if attacked.

Emre Ersen, a Russia expert at Istanbul's Marmara University, also noted that while Assad's fall will diminish Moscow's influence, "the relationship between Turkive and Russia will not be devastated by the events in Svria.'

"Obviously, they still need to reach out to each other regarding the crisis in Ukraine, but also because they have very significant economic relations." Ersen said, adding that Erdogan could be expected to seek more concessions from Russia on energy and trade issues. -AP

Ohio designates October as Hindu Heritage Month

By Lalit K Jha

Washington: The Ohio State House and Senate has passed a bill to designate October as Hindu Heritage

"This is a huge win for Hindus across Ohio and the country. Now, every October, we will be able to officially celebrate our Hindu heritage in Ohio," State Senator Niraj Antani said after the passage of his bill to designate October as Hindu Heritage Month in

Antani is the first Hindu and Indian American State Senator in Ohio's history and the youngest Hindu and Indian American state or federal-elected official in the country

"This was the culmination of a lot of work by Hindu advocates here in Ohio and across the country and I was very happy to partner with them to get this passed," Antani said. A day earlier, he amended his bill into HB 173 on the Senate floor. Both chambers subsequently passed the legislation unanimously.



"Ohio is home to millions of unique individuals, each with their own background and story," State Representative Adam Mathews said. Mathews was the House sponsor and champion of the bill and represents most of Warren County, where many Cincinnati area Hindus reside.

The bill now goes to the governor's desk for his signature or veto.

The Hindu American Foundation has welcomed the passage of the bill.

"By officially recognising Hindu Heritage Month every year, HB 173 goes a long way in ensuring that the contributions, culture and traditions of Hindu Americans are better understood and appreciated by the people of Ohio," said Samir Kalra, HAF managing director.

-PTI

Malaysia to resume hunt for flight **MH370**

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia's government has agreed in principle to accept a second "no find, no proposal from a US company to renew the hunt for flight MH370, which is believed to have crashed in the southern Indian Ocean more than 10 years ago, Transport Minister Anthony Loke said Friday.

Loke said Cabinet ministers gave the nod at their meeting last week for Texas-based marine robotics firm Ocean Infinity to continue the seabed search operation at a new 15,000-square-kilometer (5,800-square-mile) site in the ocean next year.

"The proposed new search area, identified by Ocean Infinity, is based on the latest information and data analyses conducted by experts and researchers. The company's proposal is

credible," he said. The Boeing 777 plane vanished from radar shortly after taking off on March 8, 2014, carrying 239 people, mostly Chinese nationals, on a flight from Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, to Beijing. Satellite data showed the plane deviated from its flight path.



advanced air defense sys-

tems — to Washington's

Ties with Turkiye grew

even more important for

Putin after he invaded

Ukraine in 2022, Europe's

largest conflict since World

The West responded with

economic sanctions that

barred Russia from most

Western markets, restrict-

ed its access to internation-

al financial system, shut

transport routes and halted

exports of key technolo-

gies. Turkiye, which didn't

join the sanctions, has

emerged as Russia's key

gateway to global markets,

strengthening Erdogan's

Relations amid the

war in Ukraine

dismay.

War II.

A girl walks in the Kaweni slum on the outskirts of Mamoudzou in French Indian Ocean island of Mayotte in the aftermath of Cyclone Chido on Friday.

Greece says eight dead, 18 rescued

Athens: A speedboat carrying migrants capsized Friday morning off the eastern Greek island of Rhodes, leaving eight dead and 18 rescued, Greek authorities said.

The coast guard said the incident occurred while the speedboat was carrying out "dangerous maneuvers" to try and evade a patrol vessel, causing migrants to fall into the sea.

A rescue effort is underway involving coast guard vessels and a helicopter as it was unclear whether other passengers were missing, authorities said.

Rhodes, one of several large Greek islands located near the coast of Turkey, is on a busy illegal smuggling route in the eastern Mediterranean. It was the second deadly incident involving migrants in the past week, as authorities in Athens brace for a spike in arrivals as a result of wars in the Middle East.

Seven migrants were killed and dozens are believed to be missing after a boat partially sank south of

the island of Crete over the weekend - one of four rescue operations during which more than 200 migrants were rescued.

The search south of Crete around the tiny island of Gavdos was called off Wednesday. The number of migrants travelling illegally to Greece is expected to top 60,000 this year, with Syrians making up the largest number, followed by Afghans, Egyptians, Eritreans and Palestinians, according to government data.

Man faces death in CEO killing case

New York: The man accused of killing Unitedwhisked back to New York by plane and helicopter Thursday to face new federal charges of stalking and murder, which could bring the death penalty if he's convicted.

Luigi Mangione was held without bail following a Manhattan federal court appearance, capping a whirlwind day that began in Pennsylvania, where he was arrested last week in the Dec. 4 attack on Brian Thompson.

The 26-year-old Ivy League graduate had been expected to be arraigned Thursday on a state murder indictment in a killing that at once rattled the business community and galvanized some health insurance critics, but the federal charges preempted that appearance. The cases will now proceed on parallel tracks, prosecutors said, with the state charges expected to go to trial first.

Mangione, shackled at the ankles and wearing dress clothes, said little during the 15-minute proceeding as he sat between his lawyers in a packed fed-

He nodded as a magistrate judge informed him of Healthcare's CEO was his rights and the charges against him, occasionally leaning forward to a microphone to tell her he understood.

After the hearing, a federal marshal handed Mangione's lawyers a bag containing his belongings, including the orange prison jumpsuit he had worn to court in Pennsylvania.

Mangione had been held in Pennsylvania since his Dec. 9 arrest while eating breakfast at a McDonald's in Altoona, about 233 miles (37 kilometers) west of Manhattan.

At a hearing there Thursday morning, Mangione agreed to be returned to New York and was immediately turned over to at least a dozen New York Police Department officers who took him to an airport and a plane bound for Long Island.

He then was flown to a Manhattan heliport, where he was walked slowly up a pier by a throng of officers with assault rifles - a contingent that included New York City Mayor Eric Adams and Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The US-India defence relationship stands on its own. It is accelerating and advancing in terrific and exciting ways, both as it relates to defence industrial



Ely Ratner, Assistant Secretary of Defence, Pentagon

Seatac (Washington):

Background music is no longer an afterthought at many airports, which are hiring local musicians and carefully curating playlists to help lighten travellers' moods London's Heathrow Air-

port built a stage to showcase emerging British performers for the first time this summer. The programme was so successful the airport hopes to bring it back in 2025. Nashville International Airport has five stages that host more than 800 performances per year, from country musicians to iazz combos. In the Dominican Republic, Punta Cana International Airport greets passengers with live merengue music.

Tiffany Idiart and her two nieces were delighted to hear musicians during a recent layover at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

"I like it. There's a lot of people here and they can all hear it," said Grace Idiart, 9. "If their flight got delayed or something like that, they could have had a hard day. And so the music could



For airports, background music no longer afterthought

have made them feel

Airports are also carefully curating their record-

ed playlists. Detroit Metro better."

Airport plays Motown hits in a tunnel connecting its terminals. Austin-Berg-

strom International Airport in Texas has a playlist of local artists compiled by an area radio station. Singapore's Changi Airport commissioned a special piano accompaniment for its giant digital waterfall.

Music isn't a new phenomenon in airport terminals. Brian Eno's "Music for Airports," an album released in 1978, helped define the ambient music genre. It's minimalist and designed to calm.

But Barry McPhillips, the head of international creative for Mood Media,

airports and other public spaces, said technology is enabling background music to be less generic and more tailored to specific places or times of day.

which provides music for

Mood Media – formerly known as Muzak - develops playlists to appeal to business travellers or families depending on who's in the airport at any given time. It might programme calmer music in the security line but something more energising in the duty-free

WWW.THE PERFECT VOICE.IN

EDITORIAL

Parliamentary Disgrace

eadership, especially in opposition, demands dignity, poise and a certain gravitas. These qualities elevate the office and serve as a counterweight to the government's excesses. Yet Rahul Gandhi, the scion of India's most storied political family and the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, seems woefully ill-equipped to embody such virtues. The events that unfolded in Parliament, a scuffle more befitting a street brawl than the hallowed halls of democracy, have starkly illustrated this failing.

Sonia Gandhi, Rahul's own mother, conducted herself with a dignity that won grudging respect even from her most ardent critics. Leaders like Sushilkumar Shinde and Sharad Pawar understood the art of balancing firm opposition with parliamentary decorum. Rahul Gandhi, by contrast, has turned the Leader of Opposition's chair into a soapbox for puerile theatrics and unfocused belligerence.

The shameful scuffle in the Lok Sabha has added yet another blot to India's parliamentary democracy. Instead of engaging in disruptive theatrics, Gandhi would do well by focusing on rigorous research and delivering incisive speeches that challenge the government on substantive issues.

It is not just the Congress that suffers from Gandhi's missteps; his conduct erodes the Opposition's ability to hold the government accountable. His actions provide fodder for the ruling BJP, which has accused him of incitement and hooliganism.

Rahul Gandhi must realize that the role of Leader of Opposition is not a birthright but a responsibility. His street-level antics may energize a few supporters but do little to address the concerns of millions who look to the Opposition for leadership.

Opposition does not flourish through disruption alone; it must engage with substance. Mr. Gandhi's repeated attempts to pivot to issues such as corporate malfeasance involving Adani or alleged constitutional violations by the BJP lack coherence and are often eclipsed by his own missteps. His claim that the BJP's protests were designed to shield the Home Minister from scrutiny over contentious remarks would carry more weight if it were not delivered in the shadow of yesterday's disgraceful scuffle. His conduct, particularly towards a female MP, as alleged, undermines the moral high ground he so often claims.

Parliament is a theater of ideas, not a boxing ring. For a Leader of Opposition to resort to alleged physicality in the face of disagreement is not only unbecoming but corrosive to the institutions he is sworn to uphold. Rahul Gandhi must realize that leadership is not just about resistance; it is about responsibility. Without this epiphany, he risks reducing the Congress party—and its proud legacy—to a footnote in Indian politics.

In a democracy as vibrant and complex as India's, dissent is a cornerstone. However, dissent devoid of discipline and direction risks undermining the very institutions it seeks to protect. It is time for Rahul Gandhi to rise above his penchant for theatrics and deliver the mature leadership that his position — and the nation — demands.

LET'S TALK POLITICS

Bouquet of Thorns: Maharashtra's Sidelined Political Stalwarts



Abhijit Joshi

n the poetry of Shanta Shelke, the verse, "Thorns hurt someone, and others cry in pain; for me, even a flower pricks—such is my fate!" resonates deeply with the plight of several political leaders in Maharashtra. Despite their steadfast contributions to their parties, leaders like Chhagan Bhujbal, Sudhir Mungantiwar, Deepak Kesarkar, Tanaji Sawant, and Abdul Sattar find themselves relegated to the sidelines in a season of political bouquets. Their stories reveal the complexities of modern Indian politics, where merit, loyalty, and power equations often collide in a volatile dance of inclusion and exclusion.

Among those excluded from the cabinet, Chhagan Bhujbal's omission is perhaps the most glaring. Once the first Shiv Sainik to rebel against Balasaheb Thackeray—under the tutelage of Sharad Pawar—Bhujbal evolved into a formidable force in Maharashtra's political arena. His leadership of the Akhil Bharatiya Mahatma Phule Samata Parishad, where he championed an independent census for Other Backward Classes (OBC), solidified his standing as an OBC icon across states like Maharashtra, Uttar

As parties in the tripartite Mahayuti coalition celebrate electoral success, some seasoned leaders face the prick of exclusion.

Pradesh and Guiara

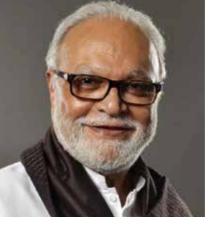
Most recently, Bhujbal's robust rebuttal of Maratha reservation activist Manoj Jarange-Patil helped his party weather electoral storms in the Vidhan Sabha elections. Yet, his efforts were insufficient to secure him a cabinet berth. Insiders suggest two reasons for this snub. First, Bhujbal's nephew, Sameer Bhujbal, contested the Nandgaon assembly seat against Shiv Sena's Suhas Kande, reportedly ruffling feathers with Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. Second, Bhujbal's aggressive stance against Jarange-Patil, while strengthening his party's OBC support, risked alienating Maratha voters.

Speculation now swirls around a potential gubernatorial appointment for Bhujbal. Yet, his exclusion marks a stark reminder of how even political heavy-weights can find themselves at the mercy of electoral arithmetic and internal rivalries.

Sudhir Mungantiwar, a seven-time MLA and a trusted lieutenant of Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, also finds himself sidelined. His exclusion is widely attributed to his loss in the Lok Sabha elections and his fraught relationship with Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

Mungantiwar's rivalry with Fadnavis reached a crescendo when Fadnavis backed Kishor Jorgewar's candidacy in Chandrapur, an area long dominated by Mungantiwar. Jorgewar's victory not only diminished Mungantiwar's influence but also introduced an alternative power centre in the region. Further complicating matters, his uneasy ties with Hansraj Ahir, a former BJP MP, weakened his political footing.

Adding to his woes, Mungantiwar's critics argue that his leadership style failed to evolve with the times. As the BJP pushes for younger faces and fresher narratives, the challenge for stalwarts like Mungantiwar lies in remaining relevant while navigating an increasingly crowded political stage. Observers say that Mungantiwar, once a towering fig-



ure in Vidarbha politics, must now adapt to his party's emphasis on a younger, dynamic leadership to stay relevant.

In the ruling Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde, the sidelining of leaders like Deepak Kesarkar, Abdul Sattar and Tanaji Sawant reflects shifting priorities. Kesarkar, previously lauded for his diplomacy, found himself embroiled in a controversy after a viral altercation with a teacher, which dented his political capital.

Similarly, Abdul Sattar and Tanaji Sawant, despite their contributions, fell out of favour due to alleged missteps and internal dynamics within the Sena. Their exclusion underscores a broader trend within the Shinde camp: a recalibration of loyalties and priorities in the aftermath of its split from the Uddhav Thackeray faction.

Even within the Sena (Shinde camp), the focus on consolidating power under the leadership of Eknath Shinde has led to a more centralized decision-making structure, often at the expense of seasoned leaders. For these sidelined figures, the challenge lies in adapting to this new reality while remaining indispensable to the party's future.

The sidelining of political stalwarts like Bhujbal, Mungantiwar and others offers a sobering lesson in the fickleness of power. Coalition politics, caste equa-



tions, and the need to balance regional aspirations often leave even seasoned leaders out in the cold.

The fates of Maharashtra's sidelined leaders ought to serve as cautionary tales of the thorns hidden within every bouquet of success. Their plight underscores a broader truth in politics: survival demands reinvention, patience and the ability to read shifting winds. Those who can recalibrate alliances and redefine their relevance may yet reclaim their place in the corridors of power. Others, however, may find themselves consigned to the ash bin of political history, their downfall serving as case studies in underestimating the mercurial nature of public life.

For these leaders, survival demands a mix of patience, pragmatism and adaptability. In Maharashtra's volatile political landscape, those who can recalibrate their alliances and reinvent their roles are more likely to endure. Even after all this, Bhujbal may yet find solace in a gubernatorial position, and Mungantiwar could well stage a comeback under Gadkari's aegis. Then again, for others, the road back to relevance may be longer and fraught with uncertainty. The art of survival, as always, lies in enduring the prick while waiting for the next bloom.

(The author is a political observer. Views personal.)

SATTIRE WITH SWAG



EVM verification plea in SC bench

he Supreme Court on Friday said the plea seeking a policy for verification of electronic voting machines will be heard by a bench headed by Justice Dipankar Datta in January next year.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar said the fresh plea of former Haryana minister and five-time MLA Karan Singh Dalal and one Lakhan Kumar Singla on the issue will be heard by a bench headed by Justice Datta in the week commencing January 20.

A bench comprising Justice Khanna and Justice Datta had delivered a verdict earlier in April rejecting back the old paper ballots.

At outset, senior advo-

At outset, senior advocate Maninder Singh, appearing for the Election Commission, sought dismissal of the plea, saying that similar petitions for same reliefs were rejected earlier.

The CJI said the bench headed by Justice Datta would hear this now.

On December 13, a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and P B Varale had refused to hear the plea, saying let it be heard by a bench which had heard similar petitions. Now, it was listed before the CJI-led bench.

In its verdict on April 26, the apex court termed the suspicion of manipulation of the EVMs "unfounded" and said the polling devices were "secured" and eliminated booth capturing and bogus voting.

The top court, however, opened a window for the aggrieved unsuccessful candidates securing the second and third places in poll results while allowing them to seek verification of microcontroller chips embedded in five per cent EVMs per assembly constituency on a written request upon payment of a fee to the poll panel.

The fresh petition of Dalal and Singla has sought compliance of the top court's April 26 judgement delivered in the case of 'Association for Democratic Reforms versus Union of India'.

Dalal and Singla secured the second-highest votes in their respective constituencies and sought a direction to the Election Commission (EC) to implement a protocol for examining the original "burnt memory" or microcontroller of the four components of the EVM - the control unit, ballot unit, VVPAT and symbol loading unit.

The top court had mandated that five per cent of the EVMs in every assembly constituency should undergo verification by the engineers from EVM manufacturers after election results were announced.

STATES WATCH

A Bold Stand Against Jihadist Networks

he Special Task Force (STF) of Assam Police has dealt a significant blow to jihadist ambitions in India's northeast. In a carefully coordinated operation spanning three states, eight operatives of the Bangladesh-based terror outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) were apprehended last weekend. The arrests underscore the persistent threat posed by transnational jihadist networks and the vulnerabilities exploited along India's porous borders.

As the multi-state 'Operation Praghat' unfolded, among those captured was Mohammed Shak Radi, alias Mohammed Shab Sheikh, a Bangladeshi national tasked with setting up sleeper cells for the ABT—a wing of Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). Radi's chilling mandate included not only fostering subversive networks but also planning immediate attacks against religious and political leaders to destabilize India.

The intelligence coup marks a critical milestone, but it also reveals the contours of a larger threat. ABT's agenda is not merely ideological; it is operational, aiming to exploit Assam and West Bengal's proximity to Bangladesh as launchpads for chaos. The arrest of Radi and his associates prevented a covert operation planned for December, likely targeting densely

A multistate crackdown by the Assam Police has laid bare a chilling terror plot on part of the terror outfit ABT, revealing the growing urgency of cross-border vigilance.

populated areas to cause maximum damage.

The arrests revealed a deeply entrenched network. Assam, often a gateway for illegal cross-border activity, has emerged as a key operational base for the ABT. Over the years, the group has sought to exploit the state's geographical proximity to Bangladesh and its historical ethnic tensions to further its radical agenda. The ABT's plans, as disclosed by Assam Police, included covert operations aimed at maximum destruction in Assam and West Bengal.

The ABT's activities are emblematic of a broader strategy by transnational jihadist organizations to destabilize India by exploiting local vulnerabilities. From using en-

crypted communication

devices to leveraging

existing socio-political

fissures, groups like

the ABT are adapting

their methods to outpace tradition-

al counterterrorism frameworks.

India's security concerns are

compounded by recent political de-

velopments in Bangladesh. The

release of Jashimuddin Rahmani.

the ABT's chief ideologue, in Au-

gust has raised alarm bells in New

violence and implicated in the

hacking death of a secular blogger,

was freed on parole under the new

caretaker government in Dhaka.

His release, alongside the jailbreak

of over 500 inmates, including high-

profile militants, highlights a wor-

Rahmani, convicted for inciting

rying shift in Bangladesh's counterterrorism posture.

During Sheikh Hasina's tenure, India had found a reliable partner in combating terrorism. With her ousting following violent protests, India's fears of a rollback in counterterrorism cooperation are proving prescient.

The nexus between ABT and Pakistan-based groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) further complicates the picture. Intelligence reports suggest that LeT has been collaborating with ABT since 2022 to establish a foothold in India's northeastern states, particularly Assam and Woot

sam and West

Bengal.
Such alliances
demonstrate the
regional dimension of
jihadist threats, requiring India to view counterterrorism not as an isolated national effort but as part
of a broader regional strategy.
The northeast is not merely a

frontier region; it is a linchpin in India's Act East policy, serving as the gateway to Southeast Asia. Instability here risks derailing New Delhi's broader geopolitical ambitions, from enhancing connectivity with ASEAN nations to countering China's influence in the region.

The rise of terror networks could undo years of progress in integrating the region with the national mainstream. The northeast's security, once considered a regional issue, has become a national imperative.

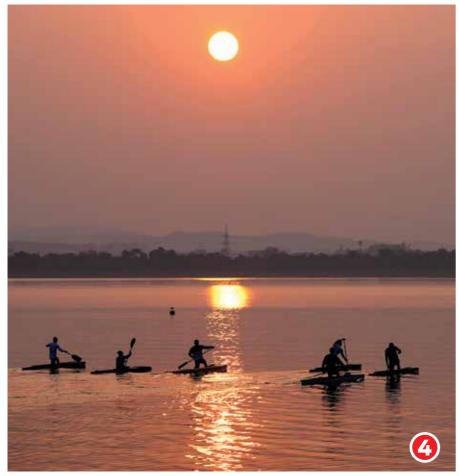
As the shadows of transnational terrorism loom larger, India must shine the light of vigilance and preparedness to dispel them. The battle for the northeast's stability is not just a fight against terrorism but a fight for India's future.

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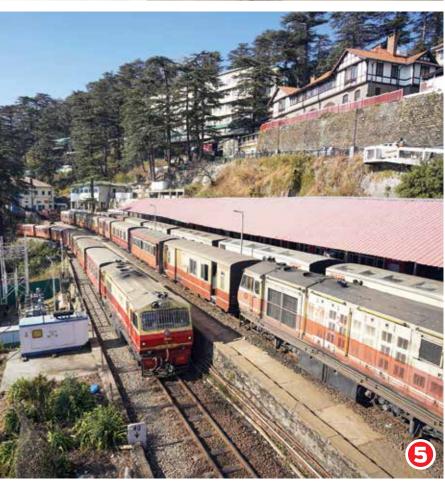








- 1. A Sikh devotee shows his skills during a procession to mark the martyrdom of the four Sahibzade, sons of the 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh, in Amritsar on Friday.
- 2. A Naga Sadhu of Panch Dasnam Avahan Akhara wears a turban made of 'rudraksha' ahead of Mahakumbh festival in Prayagraj on Friday.
- A woman carrying a child walks past decoratives on display at a shop ahead of the 'Christmas festival' in Kanpur on Thursday.
- 4. Rowers practice for an upcoming sports event at the Sukhna Lake during sunrise in Chandigarh on Friday.
- A narrow-gauge holiday special toy train arrives at a railway station in Shimla on Friday.



EXPERTS' VOICE

Mumbai Ferry Tragedy – A Straw That Needs to be Weighed



By Capt. Naveen S Singhal



I umbai ferry incident on 18th Dec resulting in loss of over 13 lives reminds how imperfect things can get even in fair weather and broad day-light. It is a sad day for Mumbai ferry services which have been operating for over 100 years with a reasonably decent safety record. It is also a sad day for the Indian Navy, with CNS Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi offering condolences and ordering an enquiry.

CAN OF WORMS

Indian maritime regulators (Directorate General of Shipping and State Maritime boards) should see this as a significant straw and not wait for the camel's back to break.

MV Herald of Free enterprise (HOF) English channel passenger ferry, sank in a matter of 90 seconds killing 193 persons (passengers/crew) just about 0.7 Km from Zeebrugge berth (Belgium) in 1987. There seems to be a need to revisit and learn lessons from history.

Life saving appliance (Life jackets, Life boats, Life rafts etc) on board ships are designed for a 'distress' scenario or foreseeable worst case scenario and not for bizarre incidents such as this. The manner in which the high speed supposedly a Naval MARCOS boat hit the passenger ferry at about 60 km/hr speed (About 30 knots) is almost like a missile for the wooden tender boats. With just few seconds to act it is unlikely that passengers will be level headed in that moment of distress and wear life jackets with their head above their shoulders.

The fact that the boat had passengers in excess of their certified capac-

ity is not something extra-ordinary East of the Suez. This however, does reflect the inadequate monitoring and control measures by Maharashtra Maritime Board, the authority which surveys a boat before a license is issued by Mumbai port trust.

Is it a case of poor accountability and responsibility by Mr Somebody, Mr Everybody, Mr Anybody OR Mr. NOBODY?

Upgrading the Kali Peeli Taxis of Mumbai Harbour

The incident is an eye opener and an opportunity for the age old kali peeli taxi's (wooden boats) of Mumbai harbour, operating for over 100 yrs, to be upgraded to modern fibre glass boats with AIS fitted on them for digital tracking, to match the 21st century Atal Setu trans harbour link bridge over the harbour.

Mumbai, India's maritime hub, needs to set the trend and align with international standards for other

Indian ports to follow.

Further as a matter of safety and good seamanship practice, all passengers travelling in boats which do not have life rafts and/or life boats, should don the life jackets prior boarding and hand-over at destination on or prior disembarking.

Cricket is to be played in Wankhede Stadium not Marine Drive

Sea trails are conducted in open sea not in and around port channels where ships and boats are navigating and certainly not in Port limits.

ing and certainly not in Port limits. Naval standards of safety are profound given the number of drills they conduct each day, thus giving a Safety talk to Naval personnel is like selling ice to an Eskimo. However, the claim of "double failure" of Engine and Steering is hard to swallow for any mariner.

Some questions that come to the mind of every mariner are:

- Who was at the Helm of the speed boat (experience and qualifications)?
- Why was Emergency STOP not activated if Engines were a problem?
- If steering was not working then how was the craft being manoeuvred in a zig-zag and circular manner prior impact, since this is not possible without a functional rudder?
- Who and how was permission given for sea trials in port limits?

Navy has a lot to answer, since this incident involves a civil craft (Boat) and civilian passengers, thus it will be prudent for Navy and investigators to come out with the facts. Any cover up is unlikely to remain under wraps for long. Thus if SOP's have been ignored and if heads have to roll, then so be it.

American born safety research scientist William Heinrich would be turning in his grave if his 1931 accident triangle theory is ignored.

> (The author is a Shipping and Marine consultant. Member Singapore Shipping Association and empanelled with IMO as a specialist consultant. View personal.)

READERS' VOICE

Lessons from Sweden: Is 'ONOE' the Future for India?



By Madhukar Mazire

weden holds combined municipal, county, and parliamentary elections every four years. Voters can choose to vote for a party, candidate, or both. Early voting is available nationwide for those unable to vote at their designated polling station. Non-Swedish residents living in Sweden for over three years can vote in municipal and county elections. Elections are held on the second Sunday of September, with the next one on September 13, 2026, from 08:00 to 20:00. Early voting starts 18 days prior, on August 24. To gain representation, parties must secure at least 4% of the national vote or 12% in a single

To vote, you must be at least 18 by Election Day (September 13, 2026), a Swedish citizen, and have been registered in Sweden. Non-Swedish citizens can vote in municipal and county elections if they've lived in Sweden for at least three years. Swedish citizens abroad can vote in parliamentary and European elections but must renew their registration every 10 years.

constituency.

Voting options include voting at an embassy or consulate with a valid ID (such as a Swedish passport or ID card). If you don't have one, someone else can certify your identity. Alternatively, you can vote by mail by requesting postal voting materials from Swedish authorities or embassies. Votes must be sent no earlier than 45 days before Election Day and received by the day before the election, which also confirms your voter registration.

Thirty days before the election, a voter list is created, and each voter

receives a ballot card with polling station details. Voters must bring this card or a valid ID to vote. If the card is lost, a duplicate can be obtained from the municipality, county board, or early voting locations.

Early Voting

Early voting is available nation-wide 18 days before the election. Some municipalities may require you to bring your own ballot papers. To vote early, bring your ballot card and a valid ID; someone can certify your identity if needed. If you change your mind, you can vote again on Election Day, with the new vote overriding the earlier one.

Where can I vote in the 2026

election?

As a voter, you're assigned to a specific election district based on your National Account Address. On Election Day, you vote at the designated polling station for your district. Your voting card, sent by mail, shows your district and polling station details. Overseas Swedish voters need a special voting card to identify their polling station, as this information is not included on the foreign voting card.

How to Vote: Party or Candidate?

To vote, you can choose a party or a specific candidate. For a party, you can select a pre-printed ballot with the party's name, leave the candidate's box unticked on a ballot with both names, or write the party's name on a blank ballot. To vote for a candidate, tick their name if the party has multiple candidates, or write the candidate's name on a blank ballot if the party has none. If using a blank ballot, include the party's name as well.

Elections to the Riksdag

In Riksdag elections, you can only vote for candidates listed on the ballot papers for your parliamentary election. Some parties have nationwide ballots marked "The whole country," which can be used regardless of your constituency.

Elections to the Municipal and County Councils

For municipal and county council elections, use ballot papers specific to your municipality and county. While constituencies exist, you can vote for candidates from any constituency within your municipality or county. However, if you choose a candidate from another municipality or county, your vote will only count as a vote for the party in your

The Voting Process

At the polling station, ballots for all parties with at least 1% of votes from the last two elections will be available, along with blank ballots for missing parties. Envelopes are colour-coded: yellow for Riksdag, white for municipal council, and blue for county council elections. Behind the privacy screen, place one ballot per election in the corresponding envelope, marking a candidate's name or writing in the party and candidate for blank ballots. Submit your sealed envelopes at the polling station.

What Happens to Your Ballot?

After presenting your voting card or ID, your vote is recorded, and envelopes are placed in secure boxes. Preliminary counts of Riksdag votes are conducted first, followed by municipal and county elections, with counts made public for transparency. On Wednesday, the electoral committee reviews any uncounted votes, and the county administrative board performs the final count, including late and postal votes.

Sweden's combined elections offer an organised voting process with early voting, absentee ballots, and registration updates. This system could serve as a model for India's "One Nation, One Election" initiative, potentially reducing logistical challenges, improving voter turnout, and maximising resources through streamlined elections.

(The author is an IT-professional.) Views personal.)

HE'S HIS OWN ENEMY: MCA ON SHAW

By Devarchit Varma

Mumbai: The Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) has brushed aside Prithvi Shaw's emotional outburst after his exclusion from the Vijay Hazare Trophy squad, asserting that the temperamental batter has flouted disciplinary norms regularly and is "his own

enemy". A senior official of the MCA, while talking to PTI, claimed that the side was at times "forced to hide" him on the field due to his poor fitness, discipline and

attitude. Shaw had expressed his frustration at not being picked in the 16-member squad for the Vijay Hazare Trophy in a viral social media post some days ago after being a part of the side's title-winning Syed



phy, we were playing with 10 fielders as we were forced to hide Prithvi Shaw. The ball would pass near him and he would barely be able to get to it," the official said on conditions of anonymity.

"Even while batting, we could see he was troubled reaching to the ball. His fitness, discipline and attitude are poor and it is pretty simple, there cannot be different rules for different players," he claimed.

"Even the seniors in the team have started complaining about his attitude

think such posts on social now," he added. media would have any impact on the Mumbai selectors and the MCA," he added. Shaw's teammate and Mumbai captain Shreyas

Iyer too had issued a stern statement on the night Mumbai defeated Madhya Pradesh in the final to win the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. "He needs to get his work

During the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, Shaw

missed training sessions

regularly after showing up

at the team hotel at "six in

the morning" being out for

fended himself by sayin

The youngster has de-

Shaw, who has attracted

a lot of attention for his off-

field activities and not do-

ing his talent justice by fo-

cussing on his game, would

not get any favour from

such social media posts, the

"You would be wrong to

official said.

most of the night.

ethics right. And if he does that, (the) sky's the limit for him," Iyer told reporters in

'We can't babysit anyone, right? He has played so much of cricket. Everyone has given him inputs. At the end of the day, it's his job to figure out things for himself. And he has also done it in the past. It's not

that he hasn't,"

Shaw was earlier left out of Mumbai's Ranji Trophy squad for similar reasons in October after which he was given a specific fitness program to work on at the MCA Academv.

"He is not following that as well properly," the official said.

Shaw broke into the scene amid a lot of hype, making his Test debut in 2018 as an 18-year-old in a home series against the West Indies

His lone century in the format was on that exciting debut but since then, he has appeared in just four more Tests, the last of these being against Australia four years ago.

His ODI and T20 International career has also failed to take off and he hasn't played any white-ball cricket for India since 2021. These are markedly underwhelming statistics for a player, who was touted as the next big thing in Indian cricket just a few years ago.

Several former players have expressed their concern about his antics and attitude both on and off the field. A recent low for him was failing to find any takers in the IPL auction despite coming in with a relatively low base price of Rs 75 lakh.

"I'll tell you one thing. No one is Shaw's enemy. He is his own enemy," the MCA official stated, voicing the frustration that the cricket fraternity in India has felt over him not living up to the early promise.

Vijay Hazare Trophy: All eyes on Varun Chakravarthy

New Delhi: With India set to play Champions Trophy in less than eight weeks' time, a quality wrist-spinner, a second wicketkeeper to back up Rishabh Pant and the form of key pacers will be in focus during the upcoming National One Day Championship for the Vijay Hazare Trophy starting on Saturday across the country.

While the core of the 50-over team is vying for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia right now, the national showpiece has its own significance as some of the stars like Baroda all-rounder Hardik Pandya will get crucial game time.

Punjab's Arshdeep Singh, Madhya Pradesh's Avesh Khan, Rajasthan's Khaleel Ahmed, Bengal's Mukesh Kumar, UP's Yash Dayal would also want to be in the bowling pack, which will expectedly be led by Jasprit Bumrah if all goes well.

Search for wrist spinner

Kuldeep Yadav's long rehabilitation from a groin injury at the NCA (National Cricket Academy) might force the national selection committee to look for a potent option alongside Axar Patel and Washington Sundar, who could be automatic

Chakravarthy and Gujarat's Ravi Bishnoi are two wrist spinners, who did exceedingly well in the T20 International series against South Africa.

While Bishnoi had played his solitary ODI back in 2022 against South Africa, Kuldeep's absence gives him a chance to stake claim in the 50-over set-up.

Chakravarthy had a second coming in international cricket with 17 wickets in his last seven T20Is and 12 of them in South Africa in batting-friendly conditions.

He is expected to start against Chandigarh in Visakhapatnam on Saturday and although he has played only 17 List A matches but 41 wickets at an economy rate of 4.25 is admirable.

Googly bowler Bishnoi has played 25 List A Games with 36 scalps giving away 5.25 runs per over.

Is Iyer a certainty in 50-over format?

Can Shreyas Iyer, with an average of 47 plus across 62 ODIs, walk into the squad for the Champions Trophy? Or he will be put under pressure by someone like Tilak Verma with a List A average of 52 plus and five hundreds in 29 games? In his last ODI innings in South Africa in 2023, Tilak scored 52.

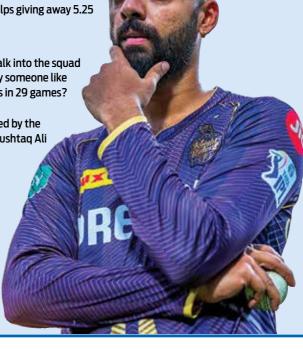
Tilak's performances for Hyderabad will also be keenly watched by the selection committee and Iyer, after leading Mumbai to Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, won't mind a double.

Fringe pacers

If fit, then Mohammed Siraj also selects himself alongside Bumrah while one among Akash Deep and Harshit Rana can make it. This leaves space for one or two more pacers and Arshdeep, Dayal, Mukesh will be trying to prove a point and make it to the final 15.

As far as Mohammed Shami is concerned, it seems that the focus has shifted to IPL.

He will play Bengal's second match in Hyderbad and some good performances might get him back on selectors' radar.



BCCI to elect Shah, Shelar's replacement

New Delhi: The BCCI will hold a Special General Meeting (SGM) in Mumbai on January 12 to elect its new secretary and treasurer after the two posts were vacated by Jay Shah and Ashish Shelar respectively earlier this month.

The BCCI constitution states that any post lying vacant should be filled within 45 days by calling a Special General Meeting. The upcoming BCCI SGM will be held within 43 days of the deadline.

"Yes, after the Apex Council Meeting on Thursday, state units were sent a notification about the date of the SGM, which is January 12 at the BCCI headquarters," a state associa-

tion president told PTI. Shah has already taken over as the youngest chairman of ICC on December 1 and Shelar, a seasoned BJP politician, has been sworn in as a cabinet minister in the recentlyformed Maharashtra government.

As per the Lodha Committee reforms accepted by the Supreme Court, one person can't hold two positions. Shah, who still had a year left in his BCCI tenure before the mandatory cool-



ing off period, relinquished his post as required.

Shelar, who has been a Maharashtra BJP president, had to guit the BCCI post as Lodha Reforms do not allow any minister or public servant to be an office-bearer.

"As the posts of Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer have been vacated, the same are required to be filled up for the remaining period at a Special General Meeting by way of elections," reads an official Board document which is in PTI's possession.

"In this regard, the Apex Council is requested to approve the appointment of

Mr. Achal Kumar Jyoti, former Chief Election Commissioner of India, as the Electoral Officer to conduct BCCI elections at a Special General Meeting," it added.

The 71-year-old Jyoti, who is a retired 1975 batch Gujarat cadre IAS officer, served as India's chief election commissioner from July 2017 to January 2018.

Currently, Assam's Devajit Saikia is performing the duties of Board's interim secretary, while the treasurer's position is lying vacant.

It is expected that the choice of both secretary and treasurer will be a unanimous one.

Pak junior team needs clearance

Lahore: The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has been told to secure government clearance before confirming participation in the FIH Junior World Cup scheduled in India at the end of next year.

PHF Secretary-General Rana Mujahid said the team would require a No Objection Certificate from the federal government for the national squad to travel for the FIH event to be held in December of 2025.

"Normally we have always been permitted by our government to play in major events in India in recent years despite the strained relations between the two countries. But now we have been informed to first get clearance before finalising the team and confirming participation," he told the media here

The Pakistan junior team was unable to take part in the junior World Cup held in Lucknow in December 2016 after the players were not issued visas because of late submission of applications.

Pakistan qualified for the event after finishing runners-up in the Asia Cup held in Oman recently. The Green-shirts lost the continental final to India 3-5.



Indians National Summit in Kolkata on Friday. Pic:PTI

Anahat, Akanksha into semi's

Mumbai: Two-time champion Anahat Singh of India cruised into the semi-finals of the women's event of the 79th Western India Slam, a USD 9,000 prize-money Professional Squash Association (PSA) Challenger event and played at the CCI courts on Friday.

The 16-year-old Anahat Singh defeated eighth seed Anjali Semwal (IND) 11-3, 11-7 and 11-7 in a quarterfinal match.

Top seed Akanksha Salunkhe of India also progressed to the semi-finals as she defeated Hong

Kong's Sze Wing Wai in three straight games. Akanksha won at 11-5, 11-4 and 11-3.

In men's competition, the top two seeds Viktor Byrtus of Czech Republic and Malaysian Ameeshenraj Chandaran advanced to the semi-finals.

The Number one seed Viktor easily defeated seventh seed Hong Komg's Wailok To 11-6, 11-3 and 11-5, while second seed Ameeshenraj Chandaran got the better of fifth seed Yassin Shohdy of Egypt 11-6, 11-2 and 11-5.

U19 Asia Cup final Singapore: A rampag- run out punctured all

India storm into

ing India extended their unbeaten run at the U19 Women's T20 Asia Cup as they reached the final with a four-wicket win over Sri Lanka in their last Super Four contest here Friday.

Aayushi Shukla emerged the wrecker-inchief with a four-wicket haul as the left-arm spinner conceded only 10 runs in her four overs to help India restrict Sri Lanka to 98 for nine after skipper Niki Prasad opted to howl.

Parunika Sisodia, who also bowls left-arm spin, chipped in with two scalps.

Such was India's domination that only two Sri Lankan batters --Sumudu Nisansala (21) and captain Manudi Nanayakkara (33) -- could manage double-digit scores.

The Lankan top-order fared poorly with Sanjana Kavindi (9) and Hiruni Hansika (2) staying together for a mere 12

A 22-run fifth-wicket stand between Nanayakkara and Nisansala was the best for the Lankans. They raised hopes of a rival but the latter's

their hopes.

India did not have the best of starts with opener Ishwari Asware running herself out in the third ball of the chase without bothering the scorer.

Left-arm spinner Chamodi Praboda (3/16) led the Sri Lankan fightback by dismissing three Indian batters but opener G Kamalini (28) and Gongadi Trisha (32) ensured that the small runchase was completed.

Once they departed. Mithila Vinod, batting at number seven, carried the side home with her unbeaten 17-run cameo. India overhauled the target with 31 balls to spare.

India had thrashed Pakistan by nine wickets in their tournament-opener and then got the better of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka while the contest against Nepal did not yield any result.

> Brief Scores: Sri Lanka: 98 for 9 in 20

overs. (M Nanayakkara 33, S Nisansala 21; A Shukla 4/10)

India: 102 for 6 in 14.5 overs. (G Trisha 32, G Kamalini 28; C Praboda

-PTI

Ashwin's desire to evolve made him stand out: Shastri

Melbourne: Ravichandran Ashwin's constant drive to evolve and excel in his craft, coupled with his focus on self-improvement rather than being concerned about the opponents made him stand out, says former India coach Ravi Shastri.

The 38-year-old surprised the cricketing world by announcing his retirement in the middle of the Test series against Australia after the end of the third Test in Brisbane on

Wednesday.

"What stands out for me was his wanting to evolve all the time. He wasn't the kind of guy satisfied as to where he started." Shastri said on 'The ICC Review'.

"For me it was his guile, wanting to excel in his craft and (especially) in the last two-three years the way he got the ball to the way, gave it a rip and got it to dip on the batsman with drift made him stand out," Shas-

tri said. Known for his relentless drive to develop his game, Ashwin consistently worked on new deliveries and refined his action, even in the later stages of his

"He wanted new tricks to be learned. He pursued it, practiced hard at it and continued to look for new things as his career progressed, to keep up with the times," Shastri said.

"His legacy will be of being a terrific match-winner. a fabulous record, 537 sticks. I mean anyone over 500 (in

Ashwin, who made his debut in 2011 against the West Indies, quickly cemented his place in India's Test side. He retired as India's second-highest wick-

Test cricket) is special."

et-taker with 765 scalps, including 537 in Tests. Ashwin and fellow spinner Ravindra Jadeja often bowled in tandem, leading India to numerous victories. Shastri felt the "spin twins" played a role in each

other's success. "And for him to do it in

his span and the way he has done it, especially when it came to bowling in the last four or five years, I think in India, along with Jadeja, I think they were a terrific pair, the real spin twins." "They complemented

each other well and they spurred each other on, so I would say a lot of Jadeja's wickets in the last five-six years have come because of Ashwin and vice-versa."

Shastri highlighted that Ashwin's nearly identical record against left and

right handed batters -- 269 wickets against right-handers and 268 against lefthanders -- demonstrated just how versatile and effective the spinner was, regardless of the opponent or their playing style.

"You look at his record against right-handers, against left-handers, it's pretty much similar, you know, which says it all. It didn't matter to him who he was bowling against. He was up for it," he added.

