

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 Munde.

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 be lax.

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 in Beed district and beat up the watchman Amardeep Sonawane and project manager Shivaji Thoapte.

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

abduction and tragic death of

Santosh Deshmukh, the sar-

panch of Massajog village, on

December 9. Deshmukh had con-

fronted an extortion attempt

against an energy company, pur-

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 Thoapte 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

to the office and asked the company official to stop work. Project manager Thoapte 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 probed.

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.

Ladki Bahin scheme gets Rs 1.4k cr

Nagpur: The Maharashtra assembly on Friday passed supplementary demands of Rs 33,788.40 crore, including 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 crore.

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 on Friday placed photographs 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

grand old party had always 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 shouted.

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

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 said.

It also provides for better segregation of various categories of

prisoners and their special needs as women, transgenders, under-trial prisoners, convicts, high-risk 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 under-trial review committee will be set up in every district for periodical review of all under-trial 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.



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

Pic:PTI

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 9.15 am, an official said.

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, an industrialist and the founder of Marathi newspaper group "Deshdoot", died at a hospital here on Friday following a brief illness, his family said.

He was 92.

Sarda is survived by two sons and two daughters. He founded Shri Sannar 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 Co-operative Bank and Someswar Co-operative Sugar Factory.

He was elected as chairman of the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce in 1968.

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 Aardham crematorium here on Friday evening.

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

Nagpur: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray 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

opposition parties launched an all-out attack on Shah for his remarks on Ambedkar 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 in his heart came out of his mouth and apologise," the Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA said.

He said the first information 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," Thackeray said.

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.

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 two-storey facility, he added.

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



Eight dead, 35 injured in fire after accident



Jaipur: An LPG tanker collided with a truck on Friday, sparking a massive fireball 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 flames.

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 injured.

President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Rajasthan 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

reported spotting flames from nearly a kilometre away as thick black smoke filled the sky and ambulances 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 on the road.

The crash initially affected a 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 alternative routes.

Authorities were clearing the highway of the burnt vehicles to resume vehicular movement.

After news of the accident spread, Chief Minister Sharma and Khimsar rushed to the SMS hospital. Sharma spoke to administration officials and doctors and issued directions to ensure proper treatment was facilitated. He also visited the accident site and spoke to police officials.

"I visited the hospital as soon as I got the incident. This is a very unfortunate incident. Instructions have been given to ensure proper treatment and other arrange-

ments," he told reporters at the crash site.

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 Rajasmand was behind the gas tanker when the accident occurred and efforts were underway to find the details about the passengers on board.

A fire department official said, "A few fire tenders from Mansarovar 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 Jawahar 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 said.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the 61st Raising Day of SSB near Siliguri on Friday.

Pic: PTI

Syro-Malabar Church sets up special court

Kochi: A special court was 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 canonical procedures.

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 said.

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 implement-

ed in the Syro-Malabar Church on November 28, 2021.

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 decrees, the release added.

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

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

special court at the request of Bishop Mar Bosco Puthur and in line with the instructions from the Eastern 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 law.

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 judicial 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 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

of the family that built the temple around 250 years ago.

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 Raghuvhar 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 Raghuvhar Dayal Sadhan Sahakari Samiti, two rooms of the building were rented by the society.

Samajwadi Party MP Priya Saroj and Congress MP Praniti Shinde during INDIA bloc MPs' protest against Home Minister Amit Shah near Vijay Chok in New Delhi on Friday.



Pic: PTI

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 injured.

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 was so.

"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 usual.

Put under house arrest, claims Umar Farooq

Srinagar: Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on Friday 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 Nowhatta locality.

"Again prevented from going to #JamaMasjid for third consecutive Friday. Despite the bone chilling cold thousands of faithful-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 year-end, 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

Everybody has a food story: Artist Priya Mani

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 bread.

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 yet-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," she said.

EDITORIAL

Parliamentary Disgrace

Leadership, 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.



By
Abhijit Joshi

LET'S TALK POLITICS
Bouquet of Thorns: Maharashtra's Sidelined Political Stalwarts

In 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

Pradesh, and Gujarat. 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 heavyweights 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

The 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 reject-

ing the demand for bringing back the old paper ballots.

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 'As-

sociation 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 after election results were announced.

STATES WATCH

A Bold Stand Against Jihadist Networks

The 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

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-

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 northeast states, particularly Assam and West



ASSAM

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.

crypted communication devices to leveraging existing socio-political fissures, groups like the ABT are adapting their methods to outpace traditional counterterrorism frameworks.

India's security concerns are compounded by recent political developments in Bangladesh. The release of Jashimuddin Rahmani, the ABT's chief ideologue, in August has raised alarm bells in New Delhi.

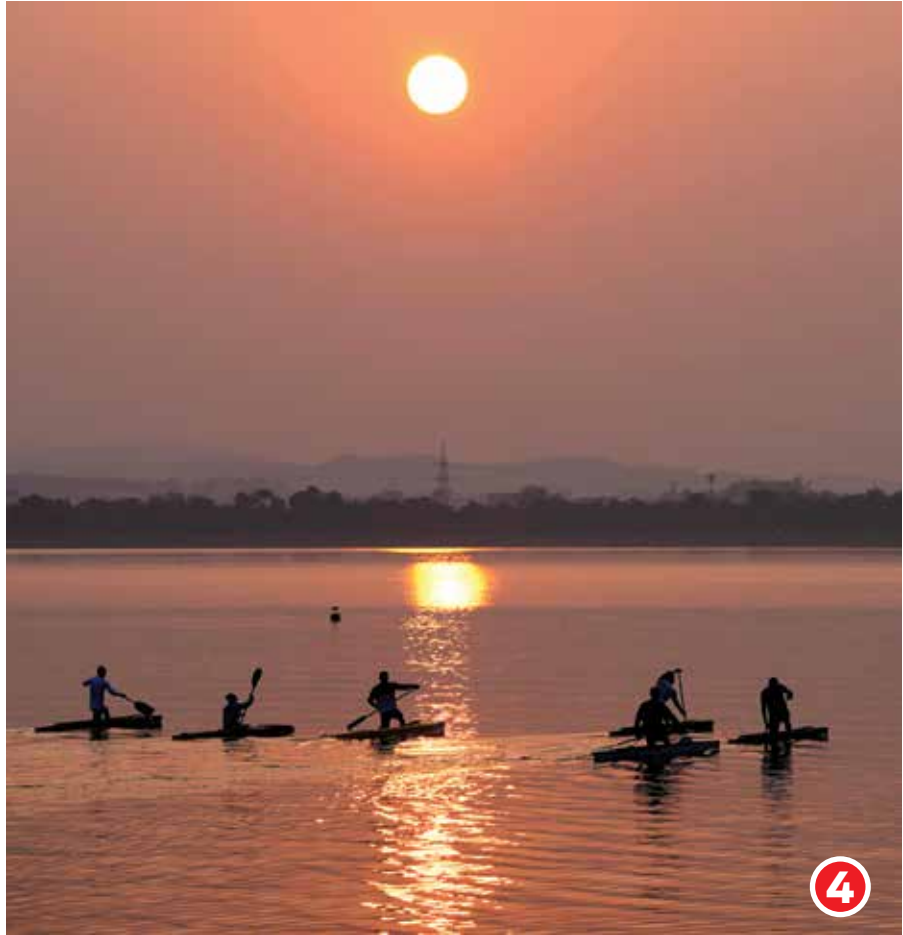
Rahmani, convicted for inciting violence and implicated in the hacking death of a secular blogger, was freed on parole under the new caretaker government in Dhaka. His release, alongside the jailbreak of over 500 inmates, including high-profile militants, highlights a wor-

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.



KALEIDOSCOPE

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.
3. 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.
5. A narrow-gauge holiday special toy train arrives at a railway station in Shimla on Friday.

All Pictures PTI, AP

EXPERTS' VOICE

Mumbai Ferry Tragedy – A Straw That Needs to be Weighed



By
Capt. Naveen S Singhal



Mumbai 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 capacity

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.

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

Sweden 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 constituency.

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.

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 nationwide 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 area.

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.)

