

# THE PERFECT VOICE



**Damania vs Munde: Part Two**

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## Modi equates Rahul with 'urban naxal'

**SAYS THOSE WHO ENTERTAIN THEMSELVES BY GETTING PHOTO SESSIONS DONE IN HUTS OF THE POOR WILL FIND THE TALK ABOUT THE POOR IN PARLIAMENT BORING.**

**New Delhi:** In a scathing attack on Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said some people are openly speaking the language of urban naxals and asserted that those who "declare a war" against the Indian State can neither understand the Constitution nor about the country's unity.

He also took a dig at Arvind Kejriwal and AAP a day before the Delhi assembly polls, saying "some parties are like 'AAP-da' for the future of the youth".

Modi asserted that while his government's schemes saved lot of money, it was not used to build 'Sheesh Mahal'.

Replying to the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address in Lok Sabha, he made several veiled attacks at former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, saying those who entertain themselves by getting photo sessions done in huts of the poor will find the talk about the poor in Parliament boring.

"Those who walk around



with Constitution in pockets, do they know how they forced Muslim women to live in hardship. We brought in the triple talaq law to give right to them," Modi said.

"Today some people are openly speaking the language of urban naxals. The things that urban naxals say (are being said). These people who speak the language of urban naxals, who declare war against the Indian State, can neither understand the Constitution nor about the country's unity," Modi said.

Though Modi did not name anyone, his remarks

were an apparent reference to Gandhi's comments last month that "we are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian State itself".

In a veiled jibe at AAP convenor Kejriwal, Modi said some leaders focus on jacuzzi and stylish showers while his government's focus of providing water to every household.

He also said that "some parties are like AAP-da for the future of the youth" as they promise various kinds of doles at the type of elections but never fulfil them.

"Some government schemes saved lot of mon-

ey, but we did not use it to build 'Sheesh Mahal'," Modi said.

Without naming Gandhi, Modi took a swipe at him for his reaction on the President's address, saying those who entertain themselves by getting photo sessions done in huts of the poor will find the talk about the poor in Parliament boring.

Soon after the President delivered her address to a joint sitting of Parliament on January 31, Sonia Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were seen discussing the speech in the Parliament complex. During the discussion, Rahul Gandhi was heard asking Sonia Gandhi if the President's speech was "boring".

"We did not give false slogans, but real development to people," Modi said.

"Till five decades, slogans of 'garibi hatao' were heard and now 25 crore poor have come out of poverty," he said.

He said till now poor peo-

ple have got 4 crore house.

"The one who has lived that kind of life knows what it means to have a house with a proper roof," Modi said.

"Pain of poor, troubles of common man, cannot be understood just like that; it requires passion and some just don't have it," he said in a swipe at the opposition.

"We live by the spirit of the Constitution and do not resort to politics of poison," he said.

In a dig at former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, Modi said a PM who used to chant '21st century' was so far from reality that he was unable to provide for needs of 20th century.

Modi also hailed his government's decisions in the Budget. In 2002, there was no tax on incomes of up to Rs 2 lakh and now there is no income tax on earnings up to Rs 12 lakh, he pointed out.

Modi said his government started the Ayushman Bharat for poor, but some states have stalled the scheme, leaving poor people in hardship. -PTI



Preparations underway on the eve of the Delhi Assembly elections in New Delhi on Tuesday. Pic: PTI

## 'Has media become heaven of morons?'

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday came down heavily against the media while putting to rest random speculations about his not shifting to Varsha, the official residence of Maharashtra Chief Minister.

"I feel as if the media has become heaven of morons. Pardon me, but I'll speak straight. I was watching the debates on the media today. People were discussing whether Varsha will be razed? What kind of craziness is this? Is it any ordinary private property that would be razed at anybody's will and wishes?" Fadnavis said when asked to comment on the speculations over his not moving in to Varsha bungalow on Malabar hill.

"I'm supposed to move



into the bungalow after DCM Eknath Shinde vacated it. But, before that some civil work needed to be completed. In the meanwhile, my daughter who is in class 10, suggested that we move the residence after her final exams which are starting on 17. We agreed to that and decided to shift residence after her exams. But, people are crazily discussing and debating the matter. I do not feel to reply to any of such questions," Fadnavis told the audience as he was interviewed at a function to launch the year-book of prominent Marathi

daily Loksatta.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader MP Sanjay Raut, earlier in the morning, had told the media that Fadnavis is delaying moving in to Varsha because he wants to raze and rebuild it since horns of bison sacrificed at Guwahati were buried in the premises of the bungalow during his predecessor Eknath Shinde's regimen. The media then ran the story several times throughout the day making it the most debated topic.

"The buffalo horns, supposedly from animals sacrificed at Guwahati's Kamakhya Temple, were buried in the bungalow's lawn. Whispers among Varsha's staff suggest these horns are enchanted. They were buried with the intention to prevent any new CM from holding on to power for long."

## One killed in fight over train seat

**Mumbai:** A 26-year-old man was killed, and another sustained injuries when a group of people attacked them following a dispute about a seat on an express train at Nandurbar railway station in Maharashtra.

One person has been arrested, and a minor has been detained for the attack on board the Chennai-Jodhpur Express on Sunday evening.

He said the victims, Sumar Singh and Parbat Parihar (40), boarded the train from Chennai and were travelling to their hometown in Jodhpur.

When the train reached Bhusawal station, the duo entered an argument with one of the passengers over a seat, and the latter called some of his friends to Nandurbar station, the official said.

Once the train arrived at Nandurbar, the friends of the passenger attacked the duo with sharp weapons, injuring them, he said.

The official said railway staff reached the spot, but the attackers managed to flee by then. The injured men were admitted to the district hospital, where Singh died in the early hours on Monday.



Cancer survivors take part in an event organised to mark the World Cancer Day at a hospital in Mulund, Mumbai on Tuesday. Pic: PTI

## Centre lists measures for LGBTQ+ couples

### Same household for ration cards, joint bank account

**New Delhi:** The Centre on Tuesday outlined a series of measures aimed at ensuring the welfare and rights of the LGBTQ+ community, including allowing queer partners to open joint bank accounts, be treated as a single household for ration cards, besides strengthening their access to healthcare.

Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment BL Verma outlined these steps in a written response to a question in the

Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Among the initiatives, Verma said the department of food and public distribution has issued an advisory to the states and Union Territories, stating that "partners in a queer relationship are to be treated as part of the same household for the purposes of ration cards".

Additionally, states have been asked to ensure that such couples do not face discrimination while obtaining these documents, said Verma, who's also the

MoS for consumer affairs, food, public distribution.

The government also clarified that there are no restrictions on the members of the queer community opening joint bank accounts or nominating their partners as beneficiaries.

"The department of financial services has issued an advisory stating that persons in a queer relationship can be nominated to receive the balance in an account in case of the account holder's death." -PTI

## BMC's tax-free Budget in election year

**BIG PROMISES IN BIGGEST EVER BUDGET**

By Abhijit Mulye

**Mumbai:** The Mumbai civic administration made big promises aimed at upgrading the city's infrastructure, improving traffic decongestion and enhancing urban mobility in Mumbai as the whopping Rs 74427.41 crore worth of annual budget of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation for financial year 2025-26 was presented on Tuesday.

The BMC made promises to boost educational facilities, de-pollute the city and prominently bringing it up on the global tourism map while setting up the Budget Estimates for the fiscal year 2025-26 to Rs 74427.41 crore. This exceeds the Budget Estimates of 2024-25 of Rs 65180.79 crore by 14.19 per cent. Additional Commissioner Abhijit Bangar presented the budget to Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani. Interestingly, the BMC has not proposed hike in taxes or fees or fares in the budget, which comes ahead of the upcoming

### Property tax on commercial establishments in slums

BMC has decided to impose property tax on commercial establishments operating in slum areas, and is also considering the levy of a Solid Waste Management (SWM) user charge in the future. Addressing a press conference after the civic body's budget was presented on Tuesday, BMC commissioner and administrator Bhushan Gagrani said an additional revenue of Rs 350 crore was expected in FY 2025-26 from property tax on shops and other commercial units in slums.

The civic body is expecting to collect a total of Rs 5,200 crore in property tax during the next financial year. Overall, it is expecting to earn more than Rs 43,000 crore in revenue from various sources.

elections.

Among the ambitious projects proposed in the budget, the BMC has proposed a Transportation and Commercial Hub for the city located at Dahisar Check Naka on the Western Express Highway. It essentially consists of huge parking space and facilities for those coming to the city.

The BMC also intends to construct a Tiger monument within the GMLR tunnel, located beneath the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, as part of its upcom-

ing development initiatives.

This project aims to combine infrastructure with wildlife conservation, providing a unique landmark that highlights the region's rich natural heritage.

The civic administration has also revealed its plans of expanding their gamified learning initiative in schools. It has also proposed a Rs 1,000 crore grant for BEST in the 2025-26 budget, considering the current situation.

**The carrot of Mumbai Eye again... Page 3**

## Maha: 13 IAS transferred

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra government on Tuesday transferred 13 IAS officers, including Pravin Darade, who has now been posted as principal secretary in the Cooperation, Marketing and Textile Department.

Pankaj Kumar, a 2002 batch IAS officer has been posted as secretary and special enquiry officer (2) in the GAD.

Nitin Patil, who was secretary in the State Human Rights Commission, has been posted as commissioner of Skill Development, Employment and Entrepreneurship. He has been replaced by P K Dange.

Shweta Singhal, who was secretary to governor, has been posted as Amravati divisional commissioner, and is now replaced by Prashant Narnaware.

Anil Bhandari, joint chief executive officer, Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation, Mumbai has been posted as director of Information Technology.

S Ramamoorthy, secretary, Fee Regulatory Authority, has been posted as deputy secretary to governor. Nanded collector Abhijit Raut has been posted as joint commissioner of State Tax.

## New rules likely for 'Award Wapsi'

**New Delhi:** A parliamentary committee has suggested "consent of the recipient" was a must in case a National Akademi decided to confer an award to prevent the honour's return by the individual for political reasons as it was "disgraceful" to the country.

The panel also recommended that an undertaking would have to be signed before an award is given and suggested adding a non-disclosure clause to protect against the potential breach of confidential-

ity of the selection process.

In its report, presented in Parliament on Monday, the panel has observed that "such inappropriate incidents involving the return of awards undermine the achievements of the other awardees and also impact the overall prestige and reputation of the awards".

The report is titled, "Action taken by the government on the recommendations/observations of the committee contained in its three hundred fifty-first report on the subject, 'Func-

tioning of National Akademi and other Cultural Institutions".

"The committee notes the instances of recipients of awards, given by Akademi (such as Sahitya Akademi Awards), returning their awards in protest of certain political issues which are outside the ambit of the cultural realms and the autonomous functioning of the concerned Akademi," it said.

The panel also observed that awards given by each Akademi continue to be top honours for an artist in In-

dia. The committee emphasised that Sahitya Akademi or other Akademi are "apolitical organisations".

"There is no place for politics. The committee, therefore, suggests that whenever an award is given, the consent of the recipient must be taken, so that he/she does not return it because of political reasons; as it is disgraceful to the country," the panel said in its report.

The committee has also recommended "prior concurrence of short-listed candidates" for awards be-

fore finalisation.

"A system may be put in place where an undertaking is taken from the proposed awardee citing acceptance of the award and that the awardee cannot dishonour the award at any point of time in future. Awards may not be given without such an undertaking," it said.

In the event that the awards are returned, the awardee shall not be considered for such an award in the future, the report said.

The Ministry of Culture



has told the panel that it agreed with the committee's perspective and would like to "avoid controversies

in all regards". "However, obtaining a signed commitment from the writer prior to the

award announcement would unfortunately compromise the confidentiality surrounding the selection process. Additionally, the legal enforceability of such a pre-declaration commitment might be uncertain," the ministry has said.

The committee said it acknowledges the ministry's reply and understands its concern about confidentiality and legal implications related to obtaining signed commitments.

The panel in its report has suggested that the "commitment document should include a non-disclosure clause to protect against breach of confidentiality". -PTI

# Damania vs Munde: Part Two

ACTIVIST ALLEGES SCAM IN AGRICULTURE DEPT UNDER MUNDE; HE DISMISSES CHARGES

**Mumbai:** Activist Anjali Damania on Tuesday alleged that there was a Rs 88 crore scam in the agriculture department when NCP leader Dhananjay Munde held the portfolio in the previous Mahayuti coalition government.

Munde, currently the minister for Food and Civil Supplies, termed her allegations as "baseless". There were no irregularities in the tender process questioned by Damania, and his department provided nano fertiliser to farmers at rates lower than market rates, he claimed.

Holding a press conference here, Damania, a former Aam Aadmi Party leader, claimed that despite the Union government's 2016 directive to transfer money directly to farmers' bank accounts under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), the agriculture department purchased equipment and fertilisers for distribution to farmers at inflated rates.

Dhananjay Munde is already under fire over the arrest of his aide Walmik Karad in an extortion case related to the murder of sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh in Beed district.

Damania also presented documents related to the alleged scam.

"These documents are proof of how the minister siphoned off farmers' money and violated laws. As per the government resolution (GR) on DBT, all scheme-related funds were to be transferred directly to farmers' bank accounts, except for certain government entities such as Mahabeej, KVK, and MAIDC, which produce their own goods. However, this rule was disregarded," she claimed.

She referred to a GR dated September 12, 2018, which listed 62 components under DBT.

While the chief minister has the power to add new components to the DBT list, the existing compo-



nents could not be removed without approval of a committee of the chief secretary, finance secretary and planning secretary, Damania said.

Just before the Model Code of Conduct for the Lok Sabha elections came into effect, the state government issued a new GR on March 12, 2024, appointing agriculture commissioner as controlling officer for purchasing agricultural inputs, she said.

Then agriculture commissioner Pravin Gedam raised concerns on March 15, 2024, stating that implementation of a purchase-based scheme was wrong, the activist claimed.

Gedam pointed out that as the items being procured were not produced by Mahabeej or MAIDC, the funds should have been disbursed through DBT to farmers instead of purchasing these items, she said.

Gedam told Munde about these irregularities, but the minister advised the Director and Deputy Secretary of the Agriculture Department to proceed with the purchases, Damania alleged.

Gedam's comment was not available immediately.

On March 15, Munde allegedly sought permission from then deputy chief minister and finance min-

ister Ajit Pawar to issue tenders. Pawar, who heads the Nationalist Congress Party, approved the request, Damania claimed.

Then Chief Minister Eknath Shinde approved the removal of certain components from the DBT list, despite not having the authority, she alleged.

The agriculture department under Munde was guilty of major financial irregularities in the procurement of five items, namely, nano urea, nano DAP, battery sprayers, metaldehyde pesticide and cotton bags, the activist said.

Nano urea and nano DAP, produced by IFFCO, were allegedly purchased at inflated rates. While a 500-millilitre bottle of nano urea was available for Rs 92 in the market, the agriculture department allegedly issued a tender to purchase it for Rs 220 per bottle. A total of 19,68,408 bottles were procured. Similarly, nano DAP, priced at Rs 269 per bottle in the market, was purchased for Rs 590 per bottle, Damania claimed.

Battery sprayers, available in the market for Rs 2,496 apiece, were procured for Rs 3,425, she alleged.

Damania had earlier levelled allegations against Munde regarding his alleged financial links to Walmik Karad. Opposition in Ma-

harashtra has been demanding the minister's resignation since Karad's arrest last month.

In his reaction, Munde said the allegations were baseless. "None of the allegations leveled by her in various cases over the years have been substantiated. May be she is considering return to politics and that is why making such allegations," the minister added.

Beyond creating sensation, there was nothing to the allegations, Munde said, adding, "whoever has instigated her to target me, I extend my best wishes to them."

The NCP leader claimed that the March 2024 tender process was conducted as per government regulations.

He had been facing a "media trial" for the last 58 days (apparently referring to the aftermath of the December 9 murder of Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh), Munde claimed.

"Why is this happening? Who is behind it? I do not know. As far as the DBT system is concerned, any exclusion from it requires the approval of both the agriculture minister and chief minister. When I was agriculture minister, all procedures were duly followed," he asserted.

On the nano fertiliser controversy, Munde said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself has strongly endorsed nano fertiliser. After his encouragement, Maharashtra provided it to 4,00,000 farmers. It was procured from a central government-affiliated company, and its price remains the same across the country.

"We provided it at an even lower rate. Nano fertiliser has significantly increased farmers' income, and there has been no wrongdoing," he said.

## Construction of submerged weirs sanctioned

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra State Cabinet on Tuesday approved a special provision of Rs 170 crore for construction of 25 submerged weirs in the Koyna Reservoir area, covering Mahabaleshwar and Jaoli talukas in Satara District.

These 25 weirs fall within the submerged zone of the Koyna Reservoir, where water levels significantly drop between February and May, creating acute drinking water and irrigation challenges for local residents. To address this issue, new weirs will be constructed to ensure water availability during low reservoir levels.

The cabinet also approved an administrative sanction of Rs 315.05 crore for strengthening and leakage prevention work on the Temghar Dam in Mulshi Taluka, Pune District.

The Temghar Dam supplies 3.409 TMC of drinking water to Pune city annually and also supports irrigation for 1,000 hectares in Mulshi Taluka. However, leakage from the dam has resulted in significant water wastage, posing a serious risk to both the dam's stability and Pune city's water security. Multiple expert committees have reported on the urgent need for remedial measures. The approved project will help stop leakage, enhance dam safety, and ensure sufficient water availability for irrigation.

The cabinet approved one-year extension for the amnesty scheme that allows Class-2 government landholders to convert their land into Class-1 ownership at concession.

## World Bank portfolio below historical averages



US Consul General Mike Hankey paid a courtesy visit to CM Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday.

**Mumbai:** World Bank's country head for India Augustine Tano Kouame on Tuesday said the current size of portfolio under implementation across various sectors in Maharashtra stands at USD 600 million, and pointed out that it has gone lower than the historical averages partly due to the Covid pandemic and also other priorities pursued by the team.

Kouame met Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and expressed the multilateral lender's intent to expand the commitment.

"The World Bank is interested in increasing its commitments to Maharashtra in the coming years," Kouame told PTI after meeting Fadnavis here.

During the meeting, the visiting WB officials discussed a slew of potential projects and ideas which included a large programme to make cities and urban spaces livable, efficient and sustainable.

Water, sanitation and efficient urban local bodies, along with infrastructure projects focusing on transportation are also high on the Bank's agenda, he said.

Coastline development in such a way that it helps the local communities build livelihoods without hurting

the natural diversity was also discussed, he said.

The bank is also mulling a follow-on investment in a project aimed at expanding agricultural productivity, he said, adding that making cities and districts flood-resilient was discussed.

It is also keen to play a part in promoting innovation and quality of health-care in the state, he said, adding that ideas on helping Maharashtra achieve its ambition of taking the gross state domestic product to USD 1 trillion were also discussed.

The present portfolio concentrates on the agriculture, skills and capacity framework for districts, Kouame said, pointing out that there are a slew of other areas where the state can partner.

Declining to specify the Indian state with the highest commitments, the country head said the bank wishes to go beyond financial support to get the global best practices. When asked about Maharashtra's finances and about certain social sector schemes criticized as doles, he said the bank will wait for the state budget to be presented next month and then comment on concerns around fiscal profligacy, if any.

## Panel to probe Beed fund allocation



**Mumbai:** Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Tuesday set up a three-member inquiry panel to investigate alleged discrepancies in the allocation of Rs 877 crore by the Beed district planning committee when his cabinet colleague Dhananjay Munde was the guardian minister.

Ahead of the state cabinet meeting on Tuesday here, Munde, who is under fire from the opposition over the murder of a sarpanch in Beed, met Ajit Pawar, who heads the NCP. However, details of the meeting were not available.

The panel's probe will cover the administrative approvals granted for projects under the district planning committee for 2023-24 and 2024-25 when

Munde, a prominent NCP leader from Beed, was the guardian minister.

According to sources close to Pawar, the committee will review all approved works and scrutinise their technical clearances, commencement orders, and fund allocations in 2023-24 and 2024-25.

The decision about setting up a panel has come after BJP MLA Suresh Dhas levelled allegations against Munde a few days ago, and Pawar had assured a thorough investigation in the matter.

Sources said the inquiry committee has since convened at the Beed district collector's office and sought records of all works undertaken over the past two years.

In a post on X, activist

Anjali Damania said Dharashiv deputy collector Santosh Bhor would chair the committee, which will include M K Bhange, additional director of the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, and Jalna district planning officer Sunil Suryawanshi.

She said the team had been tasked with examining the status of approved works, the technical clearances granted to them, and the distribution of funds. The inquiry team must submit its report within a week, as per the directive issued by State Secretary Sushma Kamblil.

The panel was set up after Pawar chaired the first meeting of the district planning body on January 30. Following this meeting, a decision was made to investigate the approval of works worth Rs 877 crore undertaken in Beed in the last two years.

The opposition has been mounting pressure for Munde's resignation after the murder of Massajog village sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, as his close aide Walmik Karad was arrested in an extortion case related to the murder. -PTI

## Boy steals gun, fires shots in air

**Pune:** A 13-year-old boy allegedly stole a revolver and rounds from the house of a retired police officer and fired shots in the air in a village in Kolhapur district, police said on Tuesday.

The firing occurred in Ujalwadi village in Kolhapur's Karvir taluka on February 1.

According to the police, the boy's mother was employed as a house help at the retired cop's residence.

"On Friday, the boy's mother took him to work and asked him to help with the cleaning. The teen found a revolver and some rounds in a drawer, and presuming it was a toy gun, he stole the weapon," an official from Gokul Shirgaon police station said.

He said the next day, the boy went to a grazing ground with his friend near the village and fired shots in the air.

The former cop realised that the weapon was missing and lodged a complaint, he said. An investigation revealed that the boy had stolen the gun and fired 20 rounds in the air, the official said.

"We found 20 empty cartridges and two rounds at the spot," he said.

## Industry facilitation process to get speed

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** To effectively implement the 'Ease of Doing Business' policy and provide seamless services to investors, the revamped MAITRI 2.0 portal (maitri.maharashtra.gov.in) under the Industries Department was unveiled by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar at the weekly meeting of the state cabinet on Tuesday.

The MAITRI (Maharashtra Industry, Trade, and Investment Facilitation Cell) portal is a significant step towards industrial development, investment, and business facilitation. First launched in 2016 as MAITRI 1.0, it has now been upgraded to version 2.0 with several advanced features and technical enhancements, said Industries Development Commissioner Deependra Singh Kushwah during the presentation.

Industries Minister Uday Samant later said that the portal will enhance transparency and speed in Maharashtra's

industrial facilitation process, offering easier and faster services to entrepreneurs, traders, and investors.

Industries Secretary Dr. P. Anbalagan said that the new portal has single application system that enables the industries to obtain multiple approvals and permits in one place, eliminating the need to apply separately to various departments.

Among other key features, the portal now has real-time tracking and dashboard where investors can

track the real-time status of their applications and receive key updates; AI-based Chatbot and online assistance center to provide instant information on government schemes, permits, subsidies, and various other aspects; incentive calculator

Investors can estimate the incentives and financial benefits they are eligible for under various government schemes using this feature and digital document depository so that the industries would securely store and access necessary documents.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The BJP-led government is not just corrupt, but those who are part of it are all criminals. Not only ministers, but the entire administration is corrupt. The BJP is behind the charges against Dhananjay Munde."



Nana Patole, Chief, Maharashtra Congress

## Woman kept chained in parents' house

**Jalna:** The police have rescued a woman held captive by her parents, who kept her chained inside their house for two months in a remote village in Jalna district, an official said on Tuesday.

The police acted on Monday following directions of the Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court on a complaint by the woman's husband, the official said.

He said the woman, Shahnaz alias Sonal, was rescued from her parents' house in Alapur village in Bhokardan tehsil, where they had allegedly kept her chained for two months.

According to the police, the woman, who is in her 20s, had an interfaith mar-

riage, and the couple had a three-year-old son.

Police said she went to visit her parents with the child two months ago. Upset about the interfaith marriage, the parents refused to allow her to return to her husband and kept her chained in the house, where they lived in isolation.

The official said despite repeated attempts, the husband was unable to bring her back and was denied entry into the house, following which he moved the court. He said a police team raided the house, rescued Shahnaz and her son, and handed them over to the husband through a government lawyer.

PUBLIC NOTICE	PUBLIC NOTICE
<p>NOTICE is hereby given that N.A land bearing Survey No. 192/24 Part (old Survey No. 142), admeasuring 1.74.00 Ares/Square metres, assessed at Rs.17.40 Paise, Survey No. 196/8 Part (old Survey No. 143), admeasuring 1.24.00 Ares/Square metres, assessed at Rs.12.40 Paise, Survey No. 196/9 Part (old Survey No. 143), admeasuring 4.76.00 Ares/Square metres, assessed at Rs.47.60 Paise, Survey No. 196/10 (old Survey No. 143), admeasuring 3.00.00 Ares/Square metres, assessed at Rs.30.00 Paise, lying being and situate at village Achole, Taluka Vasai, District Palghar belonging to ANAND VAIBHAV CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING SOCIETY LTD who have applied to Vasai Virar City Municipal Corporation for the Re-Development Construction permission.</p> <p>Therefore, all persons having any claim against or in the said land or any part thereof by way of sale, mortgage, gift, exchange, lease, charge, lien, trust, maintenance, lispendence, attachment, inheritance, possession or otherwise howsoever are hereby required to make the same in writing to the undersigned along with documentary evidence in support of such claim at their office at A/101, Aarti Apartment, Vartak Road, Virar (West), Taluka Vasai, District Palghar, within 14 (Fourteen) days from the date of publication otherwise the No claim certificate will be issued without reference to such claim and the same if any, will be considered as waived.</p> <p>(NITIN N. SHAH) (ADVOCATE &amp; NOTARY) Place: Virar Date: 05.02.2025</p>	<p>NOTICE is hereby given that originally my client MR.ASHOK BABAJI MORE is the owner in respect of Flat No. B/305, Shree Vallabh Darshan CHS, Y. K. Nagar, Opp Viva College, Virar-West, Palghar-41303, admeasuring built up area admeasuring 40.55 sq.mtrs (super built up), constructed on land bearing Survey No.353.Hissa No.14, at village-Bolnij, taluka -Vasai, Dist- Palghar, originally said Flat purchased by LATE MRS.ANJALI ASHOK MORE from M/S SHREEVALLABH ASSOCIATES vide registered sale agreement No. VASAI-1712-2005 dated 22/03/2005 &amp; to purchase this flat they obtained loan from DHFL Housing Finance Ltd and mortgage this flat. Now Piramal Capital &amp; Housing Finance Limited have take over DHFL, And LATE MRS. ANJALI ASHOK MORE expired on 14-06-2022 leaving behind her legal heir 1) MR. ASHOK BABAJI MORE (Husband) 2) MR. RAJ ASHOK MORE (Son) 3) KUMARI RIYA ASHOK MORE (Daughter). Now MR. ASHOK BABAJI MORE intend to foreclose above home loan and he is demanding all original documents of the said flat from Piramal Capital &amp; Housing Finance. All the banks, financial institution, person etc. are hereby requested to initiate to my client or to me as their counsel about any claim, whatsoever regarding the claims, objections from any person having right, title or interest in said flat by way of legal heirs etc. with sufficient proof within 14 days at shop no.23, Shree Vrindavan CHS Ltd, B/H Woodland Cinema, Virar(W), Palghar -401303 from the date of issue of this notice, and thereafter no claim shall be considered.</p> <p>Sd/- Date:05/02/2025 V.S.Riddhi (Advocate High Court)</p>
<p>NOTICE is hereby given that my clients Smt. Leena Hiten Asher &amp; Ms. Bhakti Hiten Ashar, the legal heir of Late Hiten Laxmidas Ashar, have decided to sell their Shop No. 26, C Wing, Ground Floor, Peninsula Park CHS Ltd, Survey No. 346, Hissa No. 15, 18, Part 11, Village Bolnij - Virar (W), Pin - 401303.</p> <p>Any person having any objection to sale or claiming any right, title or interest in said Shop by way of sale, exchange, gift, mortgage, charge, trust, possession, inheritance, lease, lien, attachment or any other right whatsoever. The same may be made known in writing to me at Shop No. 23, Shree Vrindavan CHS Ltd., Virar (W), Dist-Palghar, Pin 401 303 within 15 days from the date of issue of this notice, failing which society shall proceed to change the name as per rules.</p> <p>(NITIN N. SHAH) (ADVOCATE &amp; NOTARY) Place: Virar Date: 05.02.2025</p>	<p>NOTICE is hereby given that our clients 1) MR. HARESH J. SHETH, 2) MR. NIKUNJ H. SHETH, 3) MR. RONAK H. SHETH all residing at 303, Heena Gaurav Heights, S.V. Road, Above Snehanjali Showroom, Kandivali (West), Mumbai - 400 067 are the owners of Shop No. 6, on the Ground Floor, admeasuring 170 Square feet (Carpet area), in 'SHRIPAL SHOPPING CENTRE', 'SHRIPAL SHOPPING CENTRE PREMISES CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LTD.', situate at Village VIRAR, Taluka Vasai, District Palghar, within the area of Sub-Registrar at Vasai No. 1 to 6.</p> <p>By an Agreement dated 10th April 1992, M/s. SHRIPAL DEVELOPERS PVT. LTD. had sold the said Shop No. 6 to MR. RAJESH AMRUTAL SHAH, on the terms and conditions mentioned in the said Agreement. The Original Agreement dated 10/04/1992 executed between M/s. SHRIPAL DEVELOPERS PVT. LTD. and MR. RAJESH AMRUTAL SHAH in respect of the said Shop No.6 has been lost and/or misplaced.</p> <p>Therefore any person having any claim in full or part thereof in any manner whatsoever are requested to make the same known to the undersigned in writing at A/101, Aarti Apartment, Vartak Road, Virar (West), Taluka Vasai, District Palghar, within 14 days of this notice, failing which the same will be deemed to have been waived.</p> <p>Dated: 05/02/2025 Sd/- N.B.DESHMUKH &amp; CO., ADVOCATE</p>

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Notice is given on behalf of my client Smt. Shanta Dilip Sapkal is the joint owner with her husband Shri. Dilip Laxman Sapkal of a Flat No. A/404, 4th floor, Jankee Apartment Co-op. Hsg. Society Ltd., Near Don Basco Church, Waman Nagar, Haring Wadi, Manvelpada Road, Virar (East), Taluka-Vasai, District Palghar - 401305, having area admeasuring 17.93 Sq. Meters, survey no. 146, Hissa No. 4 and having House tax No. VR06/2249/61, light meter consumer no. 001524201964 stands in the name of Shanta Dilip Sapkal, my client's husband Shri. Dilip Laxman Sapkal expired on 22/11/2018 at - Mira Road (East), Thane - 401107, without making any will and leaving behind his wife (1) Smt. Shanta Dilip Sapkal and two daughters (2) Miss. Rani Dilip Sapkal (3) Mrs. Disha Kamlesh Mhatre (Miss. Disha Dilip Sapkal) and one son (4) Mr. Sumeet Dilip Sapkal, except them no other legal heir of the deceased, Now Smt. Shanta Dilip Sapkal occupying above mentioned flat no. A/404 as an absolute owner and above mentioned 2 daughter's and one son already had given noc in favour of their mother, now Jankee Apartment Co-op. Hsg. Society Ltd. issuing fresh society share certificate in favour of Smt. Shanta Dilip Sapkal and my client also willing to sell the above-mentioned flat no. A/404 to the concerned Purchaser/Purchasers being legal heirs of deceased, if any other legal heirs and any other person/persons or claimants then take the objection within 15th days of this date of public notice in the office of ARUN KUMAR JAIN, ADVOCATE add-AT Shop No. 1A, Ram Krishna Apartment, Morya Nagar, Manvelpada road, Virar (E), Taluka - Vasai, District - Palghar - 401305.

Date : - 05/02/2025

Signature  
Arun Kumar Jain  
Advocate

## BMC's Biggest Budget

# Carrot of 'Mumbai Eye', again

By Quaid Najmi

**Mumbai:** Unveiling a bunch of mega-infrastructure projects, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) plans to construct the long-pending attraction, 'Mumbai Eye' under a public-private-partnership (PPP) model in 2025, billed as the election year.

BMC Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani announced that the 'Mumbai Eye' - on the lines of the eye-catcher 'London Eye', or the Millennium Wheel launched in 2000 - will be built at a suitable location in the metropolis this year.

The 'Mumbai Eye' project has been under discussions after the Shiv Sena proposed it in 2008, and in 2022, the MMRDA had volunteered to construct the giant cantilevered observation wheel at the Bandra Reclamation, but was dumped in cold storage after local opposition.

Besides the 'Mumbai Eye' that would enhance the Mumbai skyline, the BMC has a slew of other big and small projects that are expected to improve the



quality of commute and life in the city, for which an outlay of Rs. 5,100 crore has been made.

The game-changer Mumbai Coastal Road Project (MCRP) from Princess Street to Worli is functional in both directions, and the remaining around 6 per cent work shall be finished by May 2025, for which Rs. 1,507 crore has been earmarked.

The MCRP-North Project and the Goregaon Mulund Link Road Connector has been aligned from Versova Interchange to Dahisar Interchange with an

elevated connector to the GMLR entry point in Goregaon east.

These would help connect south Mumbai with Mumbai, Mulund and Thane, travel time between Versova-Dahisar will be slashed by upto 40 minutes and see massive traffic movements of 140,000 passenger car units per day on the sector besides drastically reducing pollution levels.

The final leg of the MCRP will be through an elevated signal-free road between Dahisar to Bhayander west costing around

Rs. 4,300 crore, allowing vehicles to zoom from Mumbai to Thane from the western side. Presently, the sole route is the Western Express Highway.

The GMLR, running through a twin-tunnel under the Sanjay Gandhi National Park is slated for completion by 2028, for which the BMC has allocated Rs 1959 crore.

The BMC will also focus on a 'Universal Footpath Policy' to provide liveable, pedestrian and differently-abled friendly walkways across the city.

To make commute

smoother and snarls-free, the BMC has concretised 1,333 kms of the road networks in two phases.

In the first phase started in January 2023, 698 kms roads (324 Kms) were taken up of which 187 are completed (26 per cent) and the rest are in progress.

The second phase from December 2024 saw 1,420 roads (377 kms) taken up for concretization and work has been initiated on 720 more roads.

By June this year, the BMC plans to complete 75 per cent of the Phase I and 50 per cent of Phase II out-



standing works, with expert guidance from IIT-Bombay.

To resolve the problems of vehicle parking, the BMC will construct a multi-level robotic 194-capacity car park near Flora Fountain for which the Work Orders are issued.

Another parking lot for 640 cars and 112 two-wheelers will come up at Worli Engineering Hub for which a contractor has been appointed and a budgetary provision of Rs. 200 crore made.

By March 2025, the BMC plans to complete 7 impor-

tant bridges on different roads - at Charkop (near Ravi Apartments) in Borivali; new bridge linking Shankar Lane-Iraniwadi in Kandivali west; third phase of the Mrinaltai Gore Flyover in Goregaon west; new bridge over Mithi River linking Dharavi-Sion and Bandra east; new bridge at Nanepada Nullah in Mulund; a road over bridge near Nahur railway station in Phase I; and a ROB at Carnac Bunder.

The BMC is struggling to complete the ROB construction Vikhroli Bridge, Nahur Bridge (Phase-1),

Gokhale Bridge and Carnac Bridge and throw them open to traffic before monsoon.

While the contract for the Belasis Bridge is till April 2026, the BMC hopes to complete it before the deadline and open it by the year-end. The ROB at Ghatkopar and Vikhroli Railway Station, plus the Tilak Bridge in Dadar, Reay Road Railway Line Bridge, Byculla east Bridge have been taken up through the BMC-appointed agency MRIDCL, a joint venture of Maharashtra Government and Ministry of Railways.

- The BMC has proposed policy reforms and modernisation wherein a Centralised Property Information System is being developed to consolidate all records of BMC-owned assets and facilitate their development through innovative land development models, including exploration of utilising vacant municipal plots under PPP model as a sustainable and efficient revenue generation strategy.
- In order to generate revenue from

BMC plots, the civic body has taken a policy decision to auction BMC plots under 100 per cent Annual Statement of Rates (ASR). Accordingly, it has decided to auction a BMC plot at Asphalt Plant, Worli on lease for development through private builders.

- The BMC also proposes levy of Entertainment Tax/Fees that will be implemented as per the amendments after an exemption period.
- According to the budget document,

the proposal for increasing fees for renewal of Trade Licences, under section 394, is in process and will be finalised shortly.

- The Budget Estimates of Revenue Income for 2024-25 was proposed at Rs 35749.03 crore which is revised to Rs 40693.85 crore, a rise by 13.83 per cent at Rs 4944.82 crore.
- "The actual income received up to 31.12.2024 is Rs 28308.37 crore. The estimated Revenue Income for 2025-26 is proposed at Rs 43159.40 crore

which exceeds Budget Estimates of 2024-25 by 20.73 per cent.

- The major sources contributing to revenue income include compensation in lieu of Octroi at Rs 14,398.16 crore, Development Plan fees and premiums Rs 9,700 crore, property tax Rs 5,200 crore, water and sewage charges Rs 2,363.15 crore, interest on investment Rs 2,283.89 crore, supervision charges Rs 2,130.17 crore, grant in aid from state government Rs 1,325.07 crore

and others Rs 3,709.31 crore.

- Total pending dues from the offices of various departments of the State Government under jurisdiction of BMC on account of Grant-in-aid, Property Tax and others are amounting to Rs 9750.23 crore as on 31st December 2024. This includes, an amount of Rs 6581.14 crore on account of grant-in-aid from Education Department of the State Government," reads the budget document.
- For 2024-25, revenue expenditure

was estimated at Rs 28763.94 crore which is revised to Rs 26835.25 crore, a fall by Rs 1928.69 crore.

- The actual revenue expenditure of Rs 15912.37 crore is incurred up to 31.12.2024, which is 59.30 per cent of the Revised Estimates 2024-25.
- "Budget Estimates of Rs 31204.53 crore is proposed on account of revenue expenditure for 2025-26. As far as Capital Expenditure is concerned, Rs 43162.23 crore is proposed in 2025-26," it stated.

## Khichdi 'scam': Bail to Aaditya's aide

**Mumbai:** The Bombay High Court on Tuesday granted bail to Shiv Sena (UBT) functionary Suraj Chavan in a money laundering case linked to alleged irregularities in the distribution of 'khichdi' packets to migrant workers in Mumbai during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Justice Milind Jadhav allowed Chavan's bail application, saying he was incarcerated for more than one year and the trial in the case was "not likely to be completed in the foreseeable future".

"If applicant's detention is further continued, it would amount to infringement of his fundamental rights under Article 21 of the Constitution of India of a speedy trial and guarantee of personal liberty."

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested Chavan, a core committee member of the Yuva Sena, youth wing of the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT), in January 2024.

The money laundering case of the ED stems from a First Information Report registered by the Mumbai police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW).

As per the ED, the Bri-

hanmumbai Municipal Corporation transferred Rs 8.64 crore into the bank account of Force One Multi Services to distribute khichdi packets to migrant workers who were stranded in the city during the lockdown.

Force One Multi Services generated proceeds of crime of Rs 3.64 crore, of which Rs 1.25 crore was diverted to Chavan's bank account and Rs 10 lakh to the bank account of his partnership firm Fire Fighters Enterprises, it claimed.

In this manner, Chavan wrongfully acquired proceeds of crime to the tune of Rs 1.35 crore, which he used to buy property and invest in dairy business, the central agency alleged.

Advocate Ashok Mundargi, appearing for the accused, had argued that Chavan was not named as accused in the 'predicate' offence and the ECIR (Enforcement Case Information Report), but arrested solely based on the statements co-accused in the case. He said that using the statements of accused persons as witnesses "solely for the arrest of the applicant is the most unfair part of investigation".



Shiv Sena UBT functionary Suraj Chavan reacts as he gets his release on bail from Arthur Road jail on Tuesday. Pic: Bhushan Koyande

## MNS opposes Bandra land sale

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) has decided to oppose the sale of prime plot of land near Bandra-Worli sea link. It's a demarcated green zone and making any development on this land will be in violation of coastal regulatory zone (CRZ) act.

The MNS has written a letter to the vice president of Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation

(MSRDC) in which the party has thrown the light on this irregularity. This land originally belonged to the state government which was given to MSRDC free of charge. Now the corporation has decided to sell this land to the private developer. Since it is a green belt, development cannot be done here.

"If the MSRDC took the decision to sell this 29 acre land to the developer, the MNS will oppose this move.

We demand to scrap the tender process initiated by MSRDC", Tushar Aphale, MNS Bandra ward president has stated in a letter.

The MNS has also demanded to change the English name plates put in the MSRDC office to Marathi. In another letter the party has also demanded to change the LED bill-boards set up at Bandra reclamation as those hoardings are diverting the attention of drivers.

## Man killed in road rage

**Thane:** A 45-year-old man was attacked and killed by two unidentified two-wheeler riders in a road rage incident in Navi Mumbai, police said on Tuesday.

The police have registered a murder case in connection with the attack that occurred in Kharghar on Sunday night, an official said.

He said the victim, Shivkumar Roshanlal Sharma, a resident of Vashi, was riding his two-wheeler on the Belpada-Utsav Chowk road when he allegedly cut in front of two persons on a scooter.

The official said that angered by the manoeuvre, the accused duo stopped Sharma's scooter and confronted him. One of them grabbed the victim, while the other accused hit him on the head with a helmet.

He said Sharma collapsed on the spot, and passersby rushed him to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared him dead on arrival.

The official said the police are examining CCTV footage from the area and gathering witness statements to trace the perpetrators.

## Torres case Held actor possessed fake birth certificate



**Mumbai:** Ukrainian actor Armen Ataine, arrested in the Torres investment scam, possessed a fake birth certificate and made a false claim of being an Indian national, Mumbai Police has told a court here.

The actor, arrested last week, was remanded in 14-day judicial custody by a court here on Monday after his police custody ended. The police did not seek an extension of his custody but said they would apply for fresh remand if the need arose.

During the investigation, Ataine claimed that he was an Indian national and produced a birth certificate, Aadhaar card, driving license and other documents, the remand note submitted by the police said.

"Upon inspection of the documents, suspicion arose regarding the birth certifi-

cate, as it was mentioned that it was issued by the F Ward of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation. Therefore, the said birth certificate was verified with the F Ward, and it was found to be forged," it said.

Platinum Hern Pvt Ltd, owner of Torres jewellery brand, is accused of cheating investors of crores of rupees through a combination of Ponzi and multi-level marketing (MLM) schemes.

Six persons have been arrested in the case until now. More than 10,800 investors have so far approached the Mumbai police with complaints of being cheated, and the known fraud amount is more than Rs 57 crore, as per officials.

The firm duped them by promising attractive returns on investment, the complainants alleged.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The cluster scheme will provide a comprehensive solution for all types of rehabilitation and development, ensuring that every affected family receives the benefits they deserve. I will ensure that long-pending projects are completed on time."

Eknath Shinde, Deputy Chief Minister



## IIT-B alumni launch initiative for affordable housing

**Mumbai:** The Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IIT B) on Tuesday announced that the alumni of its 1974 batch have launched an initiative to provide innovative, climate-resilient and sustainable housing for underserved populations.

The initiative, HEARTS'74 (Habitat for Everyone: Affordable, Resilient, Transformative, and Sustainable), is the 1974 batch's legacy project, the institute said in a statement.

"At IIT Bombay, we take great pride in the impact



our alumni make on society. The HEARTS'74 initiative by the Class of 1974 is a powerful example of this, aiming to revolutionise af-

fordable, resilient and sustainable housing for underserved communities across rural India. This project reflects the shared commit-

ment with our alumni to addressing critical challenges through innovation, collaboration and a shared vision for a better future,"

said Prof Ravindra Gudi, dean of alumni and corporate relations (ACR).

As per the statement issued by the institute, the ongoing project will utilise locally available, environmentally friendly materials and focus on building capacities within local communities to foster livelihood opportunities.

The batch has pledged Rs 14 crore to IIT Bombay and has already raised Rs 10 crore, with Rs 8 crore of the total pledge dedicated towards the HEARTS'74 project.

"The role of alumni in supporting their alma mater is pivotal to the growth and prosperity of both the institution and the communities we serve. This initiative is a reflection of our collective responsibility to give back to society, and we are proud to leverage our IIT Bombay education to drive this critical mission forward. HEARTS'74 is not just about providing homes. It's about creating a sustainable future for those who need it the most," said Raj Melville, an alumnus from the 1974 batch.

# Days after deadly stampede, 2.5 cr devotees take holy dip



Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath offer prayers while taking a holy dip at Sangam during the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Tuesday. Pic: PTI

**Mahakumbh Nagar:** Under fire ever since the stampede that killed at least 30 devotees, the Yogi-Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh government left nothing to chance for the Basant Panchmi bathing at Maha Kumbh, moving personnel with a "zero error" approach under the Operation 11.

Monday's Basant Panchmi 'Amrit Snan' saw over 2.5 crore devotees taking a dip at the Maha Kumbh under a new set of security measures. The situation remains challenging for the authorities still, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi set to visit Maha Kumbh on Wednesday for a dip.

The state government has been parrying charges of concealing the death toll from the January 29 Mauni Amavasya stampede and was hard pressed to rejig its security apparatus for the rest of the 12-year mega gathering.

Not taking chances, the authorities unveiled 'Operation 11' — a set of measures

## PM to visit Maha Kumbh Mela today

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Wednesday and take a holy dip at the Sangam around 11 am, his office said. During his visit to Prayagraj earlier on December 13, 2024, Modi inaugurated 167 development projects worth Rs 5,500 crore, improving connectivity, amenities and services for the general public. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was in Prayagraj and the Maha Kumbh Mela area on Tuesday ahead of the prime minister's visit.

## King of Bhutan takes dip at Sangam

Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck visited the Maha Kumbh on Tuesday and took a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam. Accompanied by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the king performed rituals like offering 'arghya' to the Sun before taking the dip. He appeared in a formal Gho (the national dress for men in Bhutan) along with Kera (a belt) when he landed at the airport and was greeted with an orange stole by the chief minister. Later, when King Wangchuck took to the waters he was seen in a long saffron-colour kurta and pyjama.

ures focused on managing the crowd for the Basant Panchmi rush.

"The plan included deploying additional security forces at key locations where pilgrim pressure was greater and extensive traffic diversions to prevent congestion, particularly on pontoon bridges leading to the Triveni Sangam," an official told PTI.

Lessons from the Mauni Amavasya stampede were factored into the updated plan, officials said, adding,

emphasis was laid on stricter access controls, enhanced barricading and real-time monitoring of high-density areas.

Inter-agency coordination was strengthened to ensure multiple forces, comprising the state police, PAC, and CAPF, work in unison to regulate crowd movement, an officer said.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath conducted an aerial survey of Maha Kumbh before he tasked officials with a "zero error" plan for

the February 3 Basant Panchmi Snan.

"Since 3.30 am on Monday, the CM had been monitoring live feed from Maha Kumbh from his Lucknow residence," Director of Information Shishir said.

Maha Kumbh DIG Vaibhav Krishna was seen moving on horseback to monitor proceedings while senior IAS officials Bhanu Goswami and Ashish Goyal, both credited for the seamless conduct of the 2019 Kumbh, were specially

rushed to the Maha Kumbh.

Other officials like Mela Adhikari Vijay Kiran Anand, ADG Bhanu Bhaskar, and SSP Rajesh Dwivedi all came together to guard against crowding at any particular point to avoid a January 29 repeat, now being probed by a judicial panel.

A command centre kept a vigil on pilgrim movement, and even a slight buildup at any particular point was noticed and promptly pointed out to

multiple teams, an official said. One of the primary aspects of 'Operation 11' was the strict enforcement of a one-way movement route for devotees. More barricades were placed and additional police forces were stationed at bathing ghats.

"Enhanced security measures were introduced on major bridges, including the New Yamuna Bridge and Shastrri Bridge, where Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) units were deployed. Motorcycle squads also monitored and managed the crowd."

Decongesting railway stations and proper road transport to prevent crowding was a key component of the plan because in 2013, a stampede at the railway station had claimed nearly 40 lives of pilgrims who were returning from the Kumbh.

"There was extra security at Prayag Junction, Jhansi Railway Station, and key bus terminals. The UP government worked closely with the railways to increase train frequency for pilgrims, while additional buses and shuttle services were introduced to facilitate smooth travel between major transit points. "Diversions were enforced at critical junctions, with additional traffic police ensuring free movement of devotees," an official privy to Operation 11 said.

Several police officers were posted in sensitive areas, while four senior su-

## 'Govt hiding digits of dead'

Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday alleged that the government was hiding the number of deaths in the stampede at the Kumbh congregation in Prayagraj, and demanded strict action against those trying to cover up the "mis-management" in organising the fair. Participating in the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address, Yadav said the government claimed to organise digital Kumbh, but was hiding the digits of the dead.

"The figures for the deaths in the Maha Kumbh accident, treatment of injured, availability of medicines, doctors, food, water, transport should be presented in Parliament," he said. Yadav said when the stampede broke out, the government asked the seers to postpone the 'shahi snan', which is performed at the unique alignment of planets.

## Raut claims 2,000 deaths in Kumbh stampede

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Tuesday triggered an uproar in the Rajya Sabha by claiming that "2,000 people died" in the January 29 Maha Kumbh stampede, prompting Deputy Chairman Harivans to ask him to authenticate the figure. During the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, Raut questioned the official death toll of 30 in the stampede. "When the stampede happened 4-5 days back, it was told (that) it was not stampede but a rumour...30 people died. Whether the figure is true? Don't hide it... We are responsible even if one person died...The figures that we have seen with our eyes is 2,000 people were dead."

perintendents of police and three additional superintendents of police were tasked with reinforcing safety protocols. Officers from the Anti-Corruption Department, administrative divisions, and key police units were brought in to handle pilgrim flow.

"We worked to prevent bottlenecks, monitored high-density locations, and ensured a rapid emergency response mechanism. None

were allowed to sleep or crowd the passage leading to the ghats," officials said.

"Clear instructions regarding movement, designated entry and exit points, adequate signage, and volunteers to assist devotees were all part of the plan. A public awareness drive was also carried out while emergency response teams and medical personnel were asked to remain alert for emergencies," they said.

## Two fetuses excised from 3-day-old child's abdomen

**Amravati/Buldhana:** Days after a woman was detected with 'fetus in fetu', an extremely rare condition, two fetuses were removed successfully post-delivery from her three-day-old child's abdomen in Amravati district of Maharashtra on Tuesday.

The 32-year-old woman from Buldhana district was detected with the rare congenital anomaly, in which a malformed fetus is located within the body of another fetus, last month when she underwent sonography as part of regular health check-up.

The woman delivered a baby boy on February 1 at Buldhana Women's Hospital. Subsequently, she and the child were shifted to a super specialty government hospital in Amravati district where a team of doctors operated upon the newborn to remove two fetuses from his stomach.

The boy was operated under the supervision of Dr Usha Gajbhiye at Amravati Divisional Hospital.

Talking to reporters, Dr Gajbhiye said there were two twins like fetuses with hands and legs in the stom-

ach of the three-day-old child. The fetuses were removed successfully during the operation and the baby and mother were doing well, she said.

Obstetrician and gynaecologist at the Buldhana hospital, Dr Prasad Agarwal, who conducted sonography on the woman when she was 35-week pregnant, told reporters last Tuesday that 'fetus in fetu' is one of the rarest medical conditions, occurring one in five lakh cases.

Only about 200 such cases have been reported (across the world) till now, that, too, after delivery, including 10-15 cases in India, he had said.

"But I was lucky and vigilant enough to notice something very unusual with this baby, grossly normal growing fetus with a few bones and a fetus-like structure in its abdomen," Dr Agarwal said.

"It struck me immediately that this is not normal. It was 'fetus in fetu', one of the rarest cases in the world. We asked for a second opinion and the case was confirmed by radiologist Dr Shruti Thorat."



Devotees in the Brahma Rathotsava of Lord Shri Venkataramana in Mangaluru.

## Now, China probes Google

**Hong Kong:** China Tuesday announced a flurry of retaliatory measures against the US, including tariffs on imports of products such as coal, liquefied natural gas products and crude oil, as well as an antitrust probe into Google. It also placed two other US firms on an unreliable entity list that could bar them from investing in China.

China and Google have had a long and entangled relationship going back to the early 2000s.

Here's a look at Google's history in China and what the antitrust probe means for the company:

Google launched Chinese-language search engine google.cn in 2006. It was censored to comply with Beijing's laws, and in 2009, was a major search engine in China with about 36% market share.

In 2010, in response to a cyberattack and an increasing unwillingness to comply with censorship rules, Google said it was no longer willing to block search results and shut down its Chinese search engine, redirecting users to its Hong Kong site instead.

Beijing later blocked Google services under its Great Firewall censorship

system, including its email service Gmail, as well as its Chrome browser and search engine, making it inaccessible to users in mainland China.

China typically blocks most Western internet platforms, such as Google, as well as social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram.

China's State Administration for Market Regulation said Tuesday it was investigating Google on suspicion of violating anti-trust laws. The announcement came minutes after the 10% tariffs imposed by US President Trump.

## Ram temple head priest critical

**Lucknow:** The head priest of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya remains in critical condition after suffering a brain stroke and is undergoing treatment at the Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGI) here, hospital authorities said on Tuesday.

Mahant Satyendra Das (85) was shifted to SGPGI on Sunday after initial treatment.

According to a hospital statement, the priest had suffered a stroke. He is diabetic and hypertensive and is currently in the Neurology ICU, SGPGI.

Given his age and comorbidities, his condition remains critical, though his vitals are stable. He is under close monitoring, SGPGI said in a statement.

Das was the priest of the makeshift Ram temple when the Babri Masjid was demolished on December 6, 1992, having taken over the role just nine months earlier. He chose a spiritual life at the age of 20 and has been the longest-serving head priest of the temple.

A member of the Nirvani Akhara, Das is among the most accessible seers of Ayodhya. -PTI

## Cheetah Veera gives birth to two cubs



**Bhopal:** Cheetah Veera gave birth to two cubs at Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur district on Tuesday, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said.

With these births, KNP is now home to 26 cheetahs, including 14 cubs.

In a post on X, Yadav said, "Two cheetah cubs enter Madhya Pradesh's Jungle Book. I am happy to share that the number of cheetahs is continuously increasing in the state. Today, female cheetah Veera has given birth to two cubs."

He congratulated the officers, doctors and field staff engaged in the cheetah project and said as a result of their tireless work, Madhya Pradesh is also known as the "land of cheetahs".

The chief minister said with the increase in the cheetah population in the state, tourism in the state is getting a boost and

opening new doors of employment.

"We are always ready for conservation, promotion and restoration of all wildlife along with cheetahs," he said.

On September 17, 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi released eight Namibian cheetahs — five females and three males — into enclosures at the KNP as part of the world's first intercontinental translocation of the big cats.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to notify that our client Mr. Joshua Samson Ezekiel propose to sell his Flat No. 102, Building No. 2, Gulshan Villa Premises Co-operative Society Limited, plot No. 208/B, Juhu Cross Lane, (Barfiwala Marg), Andheri(W), Mumbai 400 058. Our client has acquired the title to the aforementioned flat through a Gift Deed dated 12/08/2021 from his father Capt. Samson Ezekiel. In the recital of the said Gift Deed, it was wrongly mentioned that the aforesaid Flat is acquired by Mr. Chandrakant R. Parikh instead of mentioning the name of the Donor i.e. Capt. Samson Ezekiel. The typographical error was overlooked by the Donor and the Donee and registered the said Gift Deed and as Capt. Samson Ezekiel is expired on 14/04/2022, our client is unable to execute the Rectification Deed to rectify the error in the Gift Deed. Any persons or persons having any claim against or in the aforesaid property by way of inheritance, mortgage, possession, sale, gift, lease, lien, charge, trust, maintenance, easement, transfer, licence, understanding, arrangement either agitated in any litigation or otherwise or any other right or interest whatsoever are hereby required to make the same known in writing to the undersigned within a period of 15 days from the date of publication hereof.

If no claim is made as aforesaid our clients will be at liberty to complete the transaction in respect of the said proposal without any reference or regard to any such purported claim, right or interest which shall be deemed to have been waived for all intents and purposes and not binding on our clients.

Dated on this 5th day of February 2025 at Mumbai

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## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"In today's world, people do not commit violence with knives or weapons, but through unsustainable lifestyles that harm nature. Religious leaders should declare environmental harm a sin and protecting nature an act of virtue."



Sonam Wangchuk,  
Climate Activist

## 'HECI could lead to closure of rural institutions'

**New Delhi:** The proposed Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) which seeks to replace different regulators including UGC and AICTE could lead to closure of institutions in rural areas that suffer from infrastructure or faculty shortages and indirectly fuel privatization, a parliamentary panel has flagged.

The committee, headed by Rajya Sabha MP Digvijay Singh, has recommended that a simplified hierarchy of regulatory bodies would be more effective.

The panel also suggested that the Education Ministry should ensure that any such unified regulatory body must have adequate rep-

resentation for all states and there should not be excess centralization.

The Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports presented its report in Rajya Sabha on Tuesday on 'Review of Education Standards, Accreditation Process, Research, Examination Reforms and Academic Environment in Deemed, Private Universities and other Higher Education Institutions'.

The National Education Policy, 2020 envisages the creation of HECI as the principal regulator for higher education, with four verticals for regulation, accreditation, funding, and academic standards.

"The committee observes that the multiplicity of regulators leads to inconsistency in standards and monitoring, making it difficult for institutions to function effectively. Moreover, state universities, which educate over 90 per cent of the student population, are caught in between national and state-level regulations.

"The draft HECI Bill (which seeks to replace UGC as a single regulator) appears to perpetuate many of these same issues by maintaining a Central Government-heavy composition and insufficient state representation," the report said.

The panel noted that the pro-

posed HECI Bill will hold significant power, including the ability to grant degree-awarding authority and close institutions failing to meet standards.

"This removes state control and could lead to the closure of institutions in rural areas that suffer from infrastructure or faculty shortages. It would indirectly fuel privatization especially in rural areas." "The committee, therefore, recommends that a simplified hierarchy of regulatory bodies would be more effective, the department should ensure that any such unified regulatory body must have adequate representation for all states." -PTI

DELHI ASSEMBLY POLLS

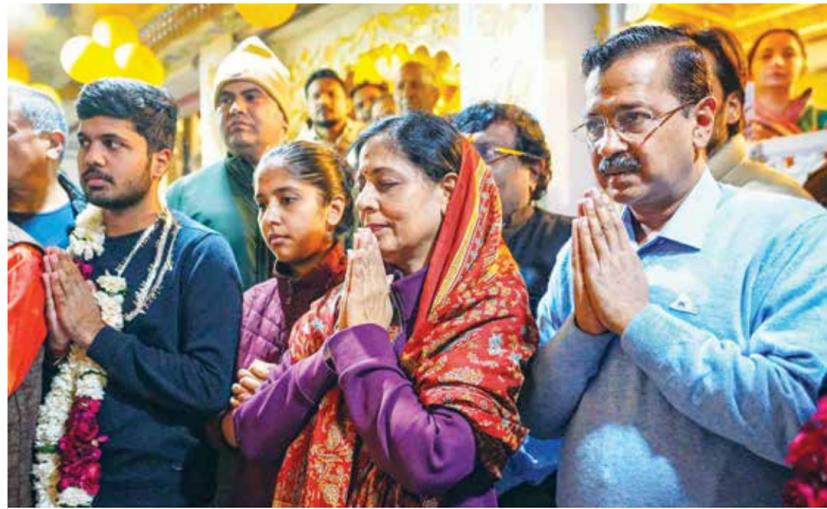
# Delhi Police books CM Atishi for MCC 'violation'

New Delhi: Delhi Police registered an FIR on Tuesday against Chief Minister Atishi, the AAP candidate from Kalkaji, for allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and obstructing public servants on duty, an official said.

"We have registered an FIR against Kalkaji AAP candidate at the Govindpuri Police Station under various sections and further investigation is under process," said the police officer.

He further said that action was taken as the AAP candidate was found at Fateh Singh Marg along with 50-70 supporters and 10 vehicles. Police instructed them to vacate the area as per MCC guidelines. But they obstructed an officer from doing his duties, he said.

In a post on X, Atishi hit out at the Election Commission, alleging BJP candidate Ramesh Bidhuri and members of his family were openly resorting to "hooliganism" but no action was taken, while a case was registered against her.



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal with wife Sunita Kejriwal offers prayers at Hanuman temple at Connaught Place in New Delhi. Pic:PTI

- PTI

## BJP into hooliganism; EC partisan: Atishi

New Delhi: Delhi Chief Minister Atishi on Tuesday accused the BJP of engaging in "hooliganism" and alleged the Election Commission and Delhi Police are shielding saffron party workers, while targeting AAP leaders and members. Atishi, who is contesting from the Kalkaji constituency, claimed at a press conference here that democracy in India was now in the hands of Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar and the country is watching "if it survives in the national capital". "The BJP is openly engaging in hooliganism. But instead of

taking action against them, Delhi Police is protecting them, while the Election Commission is filing cases against those who are raising complaints," she said. The chief minister specifically accused BJP candidate Ramesh Bidhuri, who is contesting the poll against Atishi, and his family members of engaging in "hooliganism" in Kalkaji, and alleged no action had been taken against them. "The people of Delhi are watching everything. On one side, there is a party that wants to stop free welfare

schemes and is engaging in violence. On the other, the AAP is working so that every household saves Rs 25,000 per month," she asserted. Atishi's remarks came hours after Delhi Police registered an FIR against her for allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and obstructing a public servant from discharging his duty. Officials said she and a group of 50-70 supporters with 10 vehicles were found blocking the Fateh Singh Marg, violating Model Code of Conduct. When instructed to vacate the area, she allegedly

obstructed a police officer from carrying out his duty. A police official claimed an AAP worker slapped a head constable. In response, Atishi took to social media platform X, accusing the Election Commission of bias. "BJP candidate Ramesh Bidhuri and his family members are openly engaging in hooliganism, yet no action is taken against them. Instead, a case has been filed against me," she wrote. The Delhi Assembly elections are scheduled for February 5, with results to be announced on February 8.

## Defamation case against Tharoor junked

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Tuesday dismissed a criminal complaint filed by BJP leader Rajeev Chandrasekhar against Congress MP Shashi Tharoor accusing him of defamation.

Additional chief judicial magistrate Paras Dalal refused to summon Tharoor saying prima facie "no ingredients of defamation" was made in the complaint.

Chandrasekhar alleged Tharoor defamed him by making false and derogatory statements on national television as he claimed the BJP leader bribed voters in the Thiruvananthapuram constituency during 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Tharoor, said Chandrasekhar, made the allegations with the intent to lower his reputation and to impact the result of the last general elections while knowing fully well that the statements were false.

The interview(s) was/were published by various news channels as well as on social media platforms at the behest of the proposed accused and resulted in loss of reputation of the complainant in the society, which ultimately resulted in the complainant losing the Lok Sabha Elections, 2024, his complaint said.

In a related development, the Delhi High Court on Monday summoned Tharoor in a defamation suit where Chandrasekhar sought Rs 10 crore in damages for loss of reputation.

Justice Purushendra Kumar Kaurav posted the matter on April 28.

"Let the plaint be registered as a suit. Issue summons to the defendant (Tharoor). List before the joint registrar on April 28."

## Committee to assess UCC draft bill



Gandhinagar: The BJP government in Gujarat on Tuesday formed a committee headed by a retired Supreme Court judge to assess the need for the Uniform Civil Code in the state and also draft a bill for the same.

The five-member committee, to be headed by former SC judge Ranjana Desai, will submit its report within 45 days, following which a decision about implementation of the UCC will be taken, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel said addressing a press conference here.

The committee will also meet religious leaders, including from the Muslim community, to prepare the report, a senior government official said. "To assess the need for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and to prepare a draft bill for the same, we have decided to form a committee under the former judge of the Supreme Court," CM Patel said.

Other members of the committee include retired IAS officer CL Meena, advocate RC Kodekar, former vice chancellor of Veer Narmad South Gujarat University Dakshesh Thakar and social worker Gita Shroff.

Notably, the BJP-ruled Uttarakhnd has already implemented the UCC.

CM Patel said the Gujarat government is committed to fulfil Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve of implementing the UCC across the country.

The five-member committee will examine various aspects related to the UCC and take views of the people from different walks of life to prepare its report, he said.

An "appropriate decision" will be taken after going through the report, the CM said.

Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi said that the UCC, if implemented, will protect the rights of tribals.

"The UCC implemented by the Uttarakhnd government presented a model before the country because it protects the customs and traditions of tribals.

Our (Union) Home Minister Amit Shah has also clarified in Jharkhand that UCC will protect the traditions followed by tribals," Sanghavi said.

He said the committee will also meet religious leaders, including Muslim leaders, to prepare the report.

## ABT, JAM member arrested in Assam

Guwahati: A member of the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JAM) was arrested by the Special Task Force (STF) of Assam Police from Kokrajhar district, an officer said on Tuesday.

Based on specific intelligence inputs, an STF team along with district police launched an operation and nabbed the person from an undisclosed part of the district on Monday.



The arrested person was identified as Nasimuddin SK, an active member of ABT and JAM, and a close associate of the already arrested Nur Islam Mandal, the prime accused in terror-related cases in Kokrajhar, the police officer claimed.

The arrested person was allegedly a co-conspirator of Mandal in acquiring weapons and manufactur-

ing IEDs intended to arm extremist organisations, the officer added.

The arrested person was booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Passport Act, Explosives Act, Arms Act and Foreigners' Act.

The arrest was made during the ongoing 'Operation PRAGHAT', which was started in December last year, to dismantle fundamentalist networks and Global Terrorist Organisations (GTO) across the country.

The arrested person was produced before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Kokrajhar and remanded to seven days of police custody.

On December 25, two suspected members of a terror network were apprehended along with a huge cache of arms and ammunition from the Namapara area of Kokrajhar district.

On the intervening night of December 17-18, the Assam Police arrested eight fundamentalists, including one Bangladeshi, in coordinated inter-state operations and busted an attempt to set up ' sleeper cells ' to carry out subversive activities across the country.

-PTI



Passengers arrive to board an EMU local train decorated to commemorate 100 years of electrification by the Indian Railways at Howrah Station in Kolkata on Tuesday. Pic:PTI

## 'Will get cow smugglers shot'

Karwar: Amid cow theft cases in Uttara Kannada district, District in-charge Minister Mankal S Vaidya has warned that those indulging in such activities would be shot at on the road or at the circle in the open.

Asserting that he will not let such activities to continue in the district, he assured that the administration is taking all necessary measures to protect cows and the interest of those rearing it.

The minister's statement came in the wake of outrage over the recent incident of the slaughtering of

a pregnant cow near Honnavar here.

"Cow theft has been happening for several years. I have told the SP (Superintendent of Police) that this should stop and should not happen at any cost. It is wrong. We worship cows. We affectionately rear this animal. We grow up drinking its milk," Vaidya said.

Speaking to reporters here on Monday, he said, he had instructed police to take merciless action against those behind it, irrespective of whoever they are.

"Arrests have been made

(in some cases) - if such things continue - it may be wrong if I say this. I will ensure that they (accused) are shot on the road or at the circle. Work, earn and eat. There are enough jobs available in our district. We won't support such people at any cost," he added.

Noting that such incidents had happened earlier too, when the BJP was in power, the minister hit out at the opposition party for targeting the government on the issue, and accused it of remaining silent on the issue while in power.

-PTI

## Nine militants arrested

Imphal: Security forces arrested nine militants belonging to different banned outfits from Imphal East, Imphal West, Kakching and Thoubal districts.

Five members of the Kangleipak Communist Party (City Meitei) were arrested from Mantripukhri Thakurbari area of Imphal East district on Monday.

One 9mm pistol, a magazine, 11 live rounds of ammunition, two hand grenades, and three mobile phones, were seized from their possession.

A member of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (MC) Progressive involved in extortion activities was arrested from Singjamei Thokchom Leikai in Imphal West district on Monday, police said.

A member of the banned United People's Party of

## Forces seize arms and ammunition

Imphal: Security forces seized a huge cache of arms and ammunition from Manipur's Bishnupur and Tengnoupal districts during search operations, police said on Tuesday. During a search operation at Phougakchao Mamang Leikai area near the banks of Khuga river in Bishnupur district on Monday security forces seized one AK-47 rifle along with a magazine, one 2-inch mortar, two SMG carbines, two country-made 9mm pistols along with magazines, three hand grenades, two IED explosives, twenty gelatine sticks and five 9mm live rounds, they said.

Kangleipak (UPPK) also involved in extortion activity was arrested from Irengband Hawairou area in Kakching district on Monday.

Manipur Police arrested one active cadre of PRE-

PAK (Pro) from Yairipok Bazar in Thoubal district on Monday.

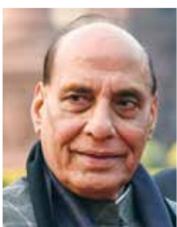
On Sunday, security forces arrested one active cadre of the banned Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup.

-PTI

## Ex-Army officer helps Manipur victims

Pune: Moved by the plight of people hit by the ethnic violence in Manipur, a retired Lieutenant Colonel of the Indian Army has taken on a mission to help widows earn their livelihood and fund the education of children affected by the strife. In recognition of his efforts, Lt Col L Manongba (retd) was honoured with the Veteran Achiever award by Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi at the Army Day Parade in Pune last month. He was lauded for empowering 35 widows to start small enterprises for their livelihood and supporting the education of 60 children who have lost their fathers in the strife-torn Manipur. "Through the Wings of Hope initiative, we continue our mission to rebuild lives and restore hope for those devastated by the ethnic violence in Manipur," Lt Col Manongba told PTI over phone.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY



"The words attributed to the Army Chief by Shri Rahul Gandhi were never spoken by him at any time. It is a matter of deep regret that Shri Rahul Gandhi

should indulge in irresponsible politics on matters of national interest."

Rajnath Singh, Minister, Defence

## Temple area turns police citadel

Madurai: The scenic Thiruparankundram hill town, where the abode of Lord Subrahmanya graces devotees, has turned into a police citadel on Tuesday with over 4,000 police and officers from 10 districts taking control following the prohibitory orders clamped by the Madurai district administration.

About eight activists from the Hindu Munnani, which had announced an agitation today to protest against a section of people consuming non-vegetarian food on the mountain, have

been detained by the police.

Though the temple on the hill top is dedicated to Lord Subrahmanya (Murrugan), there's a Sikandar Badusha Dargah on the hill. Things had been normal in the town until a group of people allegedly consumed non-vegetarian food on the hillock much to the ire of the Hindu devotees, recently.

Police said eight Hindu Munnani members have been detained as a precautionary measure. Meanwhile, a Hindu

Munnani leader said the district administration's decision to enforce prohibitory orders in Madurai had been challenged in the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court.

Condemning the arrest and also the administration's decision, BJP senior leader H Raja said when the national agencies were involved in arresting terrorists hiding in Tamil Nadu, the state police resorted to arresting members of Hindu organisations that wanted to stage a peaceful protest on the

Thiruparankundram hill. "This situation will change one day," he said.

Terming the ban order as "suppression of democratic rights and feelings of devotees," Hindu Munnani state president Kadeshwara Subramaniam said his organisation would not hesitate to launch a freedom struggle for Hindus from Madurai soil.

"If the ruling DMK thinks that it can suppress the voice of democracy and also the feelings of devotees by force, then the Hindu Munnani will once again



wage a freedom struggle for Hindus on the soil of Madurai, defying the ban with the support of Muruga devotees," he said.

He accused the police of foisting cases against many people purportedly for violating the ban.

-PTI

## THE TARIFF WAR

# China counters with tariffs on US products

Beijing: China countered President Donald Trump's tariffs on Chinese products with tariffs of its own on multiple US imports Tuesday as well as announcing an antitrust investigation into Google and other trade measures. US tariffs on products from Canada and Mexico also were to go into effect Tuesday, though Trump agreed to a 30-day pause on his threats against Mexico and Canada as they acted to appease his concerns about border security and drug trafficking.

Trump planned to talk with Chinese President Xi Jinping in the next few days. This isn't the first round of tit-for-tat actions between the two countries. China and the US had engaged in a trade war in 2018 when Trump raised tariffs on Chinese goods and China responded in kind. This time, analysts said, China is much better prepared to counter. "They have a much more developed export control regime. We depend on them for a lot of critical minerals: gallium, germanium, graphite, a host of others. So ... they could put some significant harm on our economy," said Philip Luck, a former State Department official and director at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Monday at a forum. The slew of measures announced Tuesday cut across different sectors of the economy, from energy to individual US companies.



“EU is a power that stands its ground and that if hit with tariffs, the 27-nation bloc would have to make itself respected. Trump's threats are pushing Europeans to be more united, more active in addressing their collective security challenges.”

Emmanuel Macron, President, France

### EU struggles to avoid 'stupid tariff war'

By Lorne Cook and Raf Casert

**Brussels:** After three years spent trying to deter Russia from destroying Ukraine, European Union leaders grappled on Monday with how to respond to a major ally who appears determined to start a trade war or even seize part of their territory. It would "be a cruel paradox if, during the time of this direct Russian threat and Chinese expansion," the EU and the United States might end up in a "conflict among allies," said Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency. Since taking office last month, US President Donald Trump has threatened to impose tariffs on EU imports and refused to rule out military force to take control

of Greenland, an autonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark. Trump has also mystified Europeans by showing little sign of how he intends to end the war in Ukraine within six months as promised, let alone in a day, as he boasted while campaigning last year. Trump slapped tariffs on European steel and aluminum during his first term, and EU leaders have already been in contact with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau since Canada imposed retaliatory duties on US goods in response to a 25 per cent tariff levied by Trump. The U.S. president later on Monday agreed to a 30-day pause on his tariff threat as America's two largest trading partners took steps to appease his concerns about border security and drug trafficking.

### Counter tariffs

China said it would implement a 15 per cent tariff on coal and liquefied natural gas products as well as a 10 per cent tariff on crude oil, agricultural machinery and

large-engine cars imported from the US. The tariffs would take effect next Monday. "The US's unilateral tariff increase seriously violates the rules of the World Trade Organisation," the

State Council Tariff Commission said in a statement. "It is not only unhelpful in solving its own problems, but also damages normal economic and trade cooperation between China and the US."

### Further export controls on critical minerals

In addition to the tariffs, China announced export controls on several elements critical to the production of modern high-tech products. They include tungsten, tellurium, bismuth, molybdenum and indium, many of which are designated as critical minerals by the US Geological Survey, meaning they are essential to US economic or national security that have supply chains vulnerable to disruption. The export controls are in addition to ones China placed in December on key elements such as gallium used in manufacturing.

### US companies also impacted

In addition, China's State Administration for Market Regulation said Tuesday it is investigating Google on suspicion of violating anti-trust laws. The announcement did not mention the tariffs but came just minutes after Trump's 10 per cent tariffs on China were to take effect. It is unclear how the probe will affect Google's operations. Google has a limited presence in China, and its search engine is blocked in the country like most other Western platforms. Google exited the Chinese market in 2010 after refusing to comply with censorship requests from the Chinese government and following a series of cyberattacks on the company.



## Indians' deportation begins

New Delhi: The first round of deportation of illegal Indian nationals from the US comes around two weeks after Donald Trump became the US president for a second term.

Trump has promised a strict policy approach in dealing with illegal immigrants residing in the US and already signed a number of immigration-related executive orders.

Asked about the deportation flight bringing back a group of illegal migrants to India, a US embassy spokes-

### El Salvador to take deportees of any nationality

**San Salvador:** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio says El Salvador's president has offered to accept deportees from the US of any nationality as well as violent American criminals now imprisoned in the United States. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio was visiting El Salvador on Monday to press a friendly government to do more to meet Trump administration demands for a major crackdown on immigration amid turmoil in Washington over the status of the government's main foreign development agency. Rubio arrived in San Salvador shortly after watching a US-funded deportation flight with 43 migrants leave from Panama for Colombia. That came a day after Rubio delivered a warning to Panama that unless the government moved immediately to reduce or eliminate China's presence at the Panama Canal, the US would act to do so.

“President Nayib Bukele has agreed to the most unprecedented, extraordinary, extraordinary migratory agreement anywhere in the world. He's also offered to do the same for dangerous criminals currently in custody and serving their sentence in the United States even though they're US citizens or legal residents.”

Marco Rubio, US Secretary of State

person did not provide details, but asserted that Washington is removing illegal migrants.

"I can't share any details on those inquires, but I can share, on the record, the United States is vigorously enforcing its border, tightening immigration laws, and removing illegal migrants," the official said.

"These actions send a clear message: illegal migration is not worth the risk," he added.

Following his phone conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 27, Trump said India "will do what is right" on the deportation of illegal migrants from the US.

Last month, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)

said it is opposed to illegal immigration and would be ready to take back Indians staying illegally in the US provided their nationality is verified.

India is opposed to illegal immigration because of its links to several forms of organised crime, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on January 24.

"We will take them back provided documents are shared with us so that we can verify their nationality, that they are indeed Indians," he said.

At the same time, Jaiswal said it would be "premature" to talk about the number of illegal Indian immigrants staying in the US.

-AP

## Rushdie's attacker goes on trial



**Mayville:** In 2022, Salman Rushdie was about to deliver a lecture before a live audience in western New York when a man ran towards him and plunged a knife into the author's hand as he raised it in self-defence.

In the coming weeks, Rushdie is expected to return to the same New York county to recount the experience as one of the first witnesses in the trial of the man charged with wielding the knife that day, Hadi Matar.

Jury selection is scheduled to begin Tuesday. Matar, 27, of Fairview, New Jersey, has pleaded not guilty to charges of attempted murder and assault.

Under different circumstances, Rushdie's book, which details his account of that day and his recovery, might offer important

evidence in the Aug. 12, 2022, attack that left the 77-year-old blind in his right eye and his hand permanently damaged.

Matar's lawyer, Nathaniel Barone, has not detailed how he plans to defend his client against the charges. He has clapped back at critics who question why Matar did not take a plea deal in light of the prosecution's case.

In a separate indictment, federal authorities allege that Matar was motivated by a terrorist organisation's endorsement of a fatwa, or edict, calling for Rushdie's death.

A separate trial on the federal charges — terrorism transcending national boundaries, providing material support to terrorists and attempting to provide material support to a terrorist organisation — will be scheduled in US District Court in Buffalo.

Rushdie spent years in hiding after the late Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued the fatwa in 1989 after publication of the novel "The Satanic Verses," which some Muslims consider blasphemous. In the federal indictment.

## Pak to send Afghan refugees back

**Islamabad:** The Pakistan government has devised a plan to move registered Afghan refugees out of Islamabad and Rawalpindi and gradually repatriate them back to their country.

Authorities have also been directed to implement the plan without making any public announcement, Dawn newspaper reported quoting sources.

It reported that the plan was finalised in a series of meetings presided by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif last week.

One of the meetings was also attended by Chief of Army Staff Gen Syed Asim Munir, a source in the prime minister's office confirmed.

Under phase I of the relocation plan, Afghan nationals having the Afghan Citizens Card (ACC) will be "immediately" moved out of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

They will then be sent back to Afghanistan alongside illegal and undocumented refugees.

ACC is an identification document issued to registered Afghan nationals by Nadra.



Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake hoists the national flag during the country's 77th Independence Day ceremony in Colombo on Tuesday. Pic: AP/PTI

## Russia renews attacks

**Kyiv:** Moscow's renewed attacks on Ukraine's electricity infrastructure this winter have heightened scrutiny over the Ukrainian Energy Ministry's failure to protect the country's most critical energy facilities near nuclear power sites.

Despite more than a year of warnings that the sites were vulnerable to potential Russian attacks, the Energy Ministry failed to act swiftly, current and former Ukrainian officials in Kyiv told The AP.

Two years of punishing Russian strikes on its power grid have left Ukraine reliant on nuclear power

for more than half of its electricity generation. Especially vulnerable are the unprotected nuclear switchyards located outside the perimeters of its three functioning nuclear plants, which are crucial to transmitting power from the reactors to the rest of the country.

"The switchyards that handle electrical routing from nuclear power plants are a vital component of Ukraine's nuclear energy infrastructure — powering homes, schools, hospitals, and other critical civilian infrastructure. Given Ukraine's heavy reliance on nuclear energy, military at-

tacks on these switchyards would be devastating, severely impacting civilian life and undermining the resilience of the energy grid," said Marcy R. Fowler, head of the office for research and analysis at Open Nuclear Network, a programme of the US-based NGO PAX sapiens that focuses on reducing nuclear risk.

Only in the fall, after Ukrainian intelligence agencies warned of potential Russian strikes targeting the nuclear switchyards, was action taken to begin building protection — far too late in the event of an attack, analysts said.

## Suspect claims 'no intent to kill Kishida'

**Tokyo:** A man who threw a homemade pipe bomb at former Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at a 2023 campaign event denied that he intended to kill the politician as his trial began Tuesday at a court in western Japan.

Ryuji Kimura, 25, is charged with attempted murder for the April 15, 2023 attack on Kishida at a small fishing port in the city of Wakayama, as well as four other charges including violations of laws controlling explosives and deadly weapons.

The then-prime minister was unhurt, but two people sustained minor injuries. Kimura was arrested on the spot.

At Tuesday's trial at the Wakayama District Court, Kimura pleaded not guilty to attempted murder, saying he didn't intend to kill Kishida, according to Japan's NHK public television and other media. They said Kimura admitted to making the bombs and other charges.

A ruling is expected later this month.

The attack on Kishida came about a year after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during a campaign speech



in Nara, another city in western Japan. That attack shocked the nation and prompted greater protection for dignitaries.

Gun-related crime is rare in Japan because of strict gun control laws, but there has been a series of high-profile knife attacks in recent years on subways and elsewhere, and there is growing concern about homemade guns and explosives.

Prosecutors said the bomb Kimura threw at Kishida was one of two he brought to the campaign event.

Social media postings later suggested Kimura had grievances about Japan's election system.

Authorities found parts of the pipe bomb stuck in a container 60 meters (65 yards) away from the venue. Prosecutors say that it was potentially lethal.

-AP

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

“We will send a delegation to Qatar to continue indirect talks with Hamas. I will convene security Cabinet to discuss Israel's demands for the next phase of the ceasefire when I return to Israel.”



Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister, Israel

## Rebels in Congo city declare ceasefire

By Chinedu Asadu and Justin Kabumba

**Goma:** The Rwanda-backed rebels who seized eastern Congo's key city of Goma announced Monday a unilateral ceasefire in the region for humanitarian reasons, following calls for a safe corridor for aid and hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

The M23 rebels said the ceasefire would start Tuesday. The announcement came shortly after the UN health agency said at least 900 people were killed in

last week's fighting in Goma between the rebels and Congolese forces. Government officials previously cited a toll of 776.

The city of two million people is at the heart of a region home to trillions of dollars in mineral wealth, and after consolidating control of Goma last week, the rebels were reported to be gaining the upper hand in other areas of eastern Congo and advancing on another provincial capital, Bukavu.

But the rebels said Monday they would halt fight-



ing to allow humanitarian activities and that they did not intend to seize Bukavu, though they earlier have expressed ambition to march on the capital a thousand miles away.

"It must be made clear that we have no intention of capturing Bukavu or other areas. However, we reiterate our commitment to protecting and defending the civilian population and our

positions," M23 rebel spokesman Lawrence Kanyuka said in a statement.

There was no immediate comment from Congo's government.

The announcement came ahead of a joint summit this week by the regional blocs of southern and eastern Africa, which have called for a ceasefire. Kenya's President William Ruto said Monday the presidents of Congo and Rwanda would attend.

Foreign ministers from the Group of Seven ad-

vanced economies, or G7, urged parties in the conflict to return to the negotiating table. In a statement on Monday, the group called for a "rapid, safe and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians."

Congolese authorities have said they are open to talks to resolve the conflict, but that such a dialogue must be done within the context of previous peace agreements. Rwanda and the rebels have accused the Congo government of defaulting on previous agreements.

-AP

**Karunaratne to retire after 100th Test**

Galle: Former Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne is set to retire from international cricket after playing his 100th Test, which will be the second and final match against Australia starting here on Thursday.

The 36-year-old, one of the most prolific batters for Sri Lanka, has scored 7,172 runs at an average of just under 40, with 16 centuries and 34 half-centuries in 99 Tests over nearly 14 years. He has also featured in 50 ODIs, scoring 1,316 runs with one century and 11 fifties.

"It is difficult for a Test player to keep himself motivated to play 4 Tests for a year and maintain his form," Karunaratne, who made his Test debut in 2012, was quoted as saying by 'Daily FT'.



"In the last two-three years after the WTC (World Test Championship) was introduced, we have been having very little bilateral series. My current form is another reason; completing my 100 Tests, the end of the WTC cycle (2023-25), I thought is the right time to retire."

Karunaratne plans to relocate to Australia with his family next month. Having made his first-class debut for Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) in 2008, he will play his final match for them against NCC in the SLC Major Club three-Day Tournament from February 14-16.

**Winner Praggnanandhaa returns home to rousing welcome**



Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa addresses the media upon his arrival after winning the Tata Steel Chess Masters 2025 at Chennai airport on Tuesday. Pic: PTI

Chennai: Newly-crowned Tata Steel Chess winner R Praggnanandhaa was given a warm reception upon his return home, as hundreds of fans, along with officials from the Tamil Nadu government and the national federation gathered to receive him at the airport here on Tuesday.

The 19-year-old from Chennai on Sunday defeated reigning World Champion and compatriot D Gukesh to claim his maiden Tata Steel Chess tournament crown, marking the biggest win of his career so far.

"I feel very happy to win this tournament, and it is very nice to see that two Indians, two Tamil Nadu people played in the tie-breaker in the end. We both played well. Huge congrats to him

(D Gukesh) as well, he played really well," he said.

Both Praggnanandhaa and Gukesh finished with 8.5 points after losing their 13th-round games, but Praggnanandhaa showed remarkable mental resilience to triumph 2-1 in the tie-breaker during the 87th edition of the prestigious event in Wijk Aan Zee.

Praggnanandhaa became the first Indian after Viswanathan Anand to win the Tata Steel Chess title.

Anand, a three-time winner (2003, 2004, and 2006) when the event was known as the Corus Chess Tournament, had also shared the honours twice (1989 and 1998) during its earlier form as the Hoogovens Tournament.

Praggnanandhaa de-

scribed the final day as "crazy and long" after he battled exhaustion and nerves to outwit Gukesh in a thrilling tie-breaker.

He demonstrated his resilience by recovering from an early blunder that had cost him the opening game of the tie-breaker. Facing a must-win situation, Praggnanandhaa opted for a Trompowsky opening and managed to push the match into sudden death.

As a draw seemed imminent in sudden death, Gukesh lost control, and Praggnanandhaa capitalised on the mistake to clinch his maiden title.

Praggnanandhaa will be next competing at the Prague Masters to be held from February 25 to March 7. -PTI

**Vihang, Dnyanvikas champions**

Thane: Thane's Vihang Krida Kendra and Dnyanvikas Foundation Sangh (Thane) won the title in the men's and women's category in the Kho-Kho tournament organised by the Shri Mavali Mandal.

In the women's final, Dnyanvikas Foundation defeated Thane's R. F. Naik team 10-08 with 1:10 minutes remaining. Dnyanvikas Foundation won the toss and decided to defend. Both teams were tied at 5-5 at halftime.

Dnyanvikas's Dhanashree Kanak (2:40, 3:20 min. defence and 2 points), Divya Gaikwad (2:20 min. and 3 points) and Roshni Junghare (1:40, 2:20 min. defence and 1 point) made a significant contribution to achieving victory.

For the Naik team, Shweta Jadhav (1:10 min. defence and 3 points), Rupali Bade (2:40, 1:40 min. defence) and Geetanjali Narsale (1:30, 3:50 min. defence) played well, but they were unsuccessful in avoiding defeat.

In the men's final, Vihang Krida Kendra defeated Mumbai Suburban's Shirsekar's Mahatma Gandhi Sports Academy by 15-10 points. Vihang won the toss and chose to defend.

Vihang played aggressively and took a 4-point lead of 8-4 at the break. Vihang's Ashish Gautam (1:50, 1:50 min defence and 3 points), Akash Togare (2:40, 2:30 min. defence), Laxman Gavas (2:00 min. defence and 4 points) played an important role in the team's victory.

Shirsekar's Mahatma Gandhi Sports Academy's Ramchandra Jore (2, 2 min. Defence and 1 point), Dheeraj Bhawe (1, 1.40 min. defence and 2 points) and Prateek Deore (1:10, 1:50 min. defence) played well.

**My goals are not done yet: Maaya Rajeshwaran**



By Correspondent

Mumbai: Rising star 15-year-old Maaya Rajeshwaran scripted another sensational win at the L&T Mumbai Open WTA 125 Series at the Cricket Club of India in Mumbai. She prevailed against Jessica Falla, winning 7-6, 1-6, 6-4 in a nail-biting encounter to seal her place in the main draws.

Maaya Rajeshwaran registered her second win of the tournament, having defeated World No. 265 Nicole Fossa Huergo in the previous round. She will now be part of the main draw and will be up against Yuriko Lily Miyazaki of Great Britain.

The young tennis star has been part of the Rafael Nadal Academy in Spain, while competing in ITF Juniors tournaments around the world. After confirming her participation in the main draw,

Maaya reflected on her performance and reiterated her goals.

She said, "First of all, I was pretty happy with qualifying because that was my first goal when I entered the tournament. My goals are not done yet, but the first goal is accomplished for now. She did test me in the third set, but I'm happy to win."

The 15-year-old prodigy also shed some light on the kind of support she has received in her journey, especially from her parents. She mentioned, "One thing that I'm really happy about is that my dad doesn't trouble me with me often, because I don't play tournaments in India, but when I travel in India, he comes. I'm very happy when he travels because if he's there, I really have my head down and focus. He helps me remain calm, so even if I'm playing a very tough match, he'll be there to support me. I feel

like almost 100% of my pressure goes to him at that point, so I'll be at ease."

While Maaya's mother travels with her consistently, she also receives support from Amalgam Steel, who has been her sponsor for the last couple of years. They leave no stone unturned to contribute towards her growth and provide continuous support in her journey.

Speaking on her experience of being part of the qualifying draws at the L&T Mumbai Open WTA 125 Series, Maaya stated, "It does feel pretty good. It's not something new that I've been doing, but in the WTA circuit, yes, it does feel pretty amazing. I also want to thank the Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association (MSLTA) for having faith in me and giving me an opportunity as the wildcard at such a prestigious event."

**Varun summoned to bowl at team nets**

By Aparajita Upadhyay

Nagpur: In-form mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy has linked up with the Indian ODI squad after his heroics in the just-concluded T20I series against England as the team management wants the KKR mystery spinner to "keep up the momentum".

Chakravarthy, who got 14 wickets in five T20Is against England and was adjudged the 'Player of The Series', hasn't been picked for the three ODIs against England and the Champions Trophy later this month.

Chakravarthy was seen training and bowling in the nets on Tuesday.

It is understood that head coach Gautam Gamb-

hir wants Chakravarthy to remain in rhythm and bowl to the likes of Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, and Rishabh Pant.

With the deadline for squad changes for the Champions Trophy set for February 12, he remains a strong candidate for selection. However, it is unlikely that he will be added to CT squad without playing a single ODI.

India have got three finger spinners - two left-armers (Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel) and one right-arm off-spinner in Washington Sundar. Kuldeep Yadav, who is returning to the Indian team after undergoing a sports hernia surgery in October 2024, is the lone wrist spinner in the squad.



Billy Harris of Great Britain returns to Eric Vanshelboim of Ukraine during the men's singles Round of 32 match at the ATP Challenger Chennai Open 2025 tennis tournament in Chennai on Tuesday. Pic: PTI

**World Padel League from today**

By Correspondent

Mumbai: The World Padel League (WPL) will make its much-anticipated debut at the Nesco Center in Mumbai on Wednesday.

To be held until February 8, it will bring together 32 of the world's top padel players on Indian soil.

They will compete across four teams - Sohail Khan Ent. Panthers, SG Pipers Cheetahs, Game Changers Lions, and Vernost Jaguars - with each team featuring

a lineup of eight players, including five men and three women, along with a coach/captain.

The WPL will kickstart with a thrilling opener as the Vernost Jaguars face Sohail Khan Ent. Panthers. In the second match of the opening day, SG Pipers Cheetahs will take on Game Changers Lions.

On the second day, Sohail Khan Ent. Panthers will meet SG Pipers Cheetahs in the first match of the day, followed by a clash between Vernost Jaguars and Game

Changers Lions. The league stage concludes on February 7, with Game Changers Lions taking on Sohail Khan Ent. Panthers in the first match and the SG Pipers Cheetahs facing Vernost Jaguars in the second. The top two teams from the overall points table will compete in the finals on February 8.

**Teams:**  
1. Sohail Khan Ent. Panthers 2. SG Pipers Cheetahs 3. Game Changers Lions 4. Vernost Jaguars.

**Mumbai Walkathon registration**

Mumbai: The Mumbai Walkathon has officially opened registrations for its inaugural edition on March 16 in Juhu.

The Mumbai Walkathon will be flagged off at Jambabai Narsee School Ground and will lead to Juhu Beach and back. Walkers can choose from three categories: 10km Pro Walk, 5km Family Walk, and 3km Fun Walk.

The registration is open at www.justwalkindia.com and will close on February 28, or until Walking Bibs slots are filled up, whichever occurs first. The fees will be 10km Pro Walk - Rs 999, 5km Family Walk - Rs 899 and 3km Fun Walk - Rs 799.

The Race Director Kapil Arora - an Ironman triathlete and Guinness record holder - will lead the event as the Chief Walker of #JustWalkIndia. He emphasized the Walkathon's mission: "Recognizing and honouring the simplicity and beauty of walking as a path to a healthier, happier, and more connected life is what Mumbai Walkathon would be."

**Ranji Trophy Quarterfinal SKY, Dube included in Mumbai squad**

Mumbai: India's T20 captain Suryakumar Yadav and Shivam Dube have been included in Mumbai's 18-member squad for their Ranji Trophy quarterfinal clash against Haryana, starting from February 8.

Both Suryakumar and Dube, who took part in the recently-concluded India-England five-match T20I series which the hosts won 4-1, have played one game each in Mumbai's title defence of the Ranji Trophy this season.

Mumbai qualified for the quarterfinals after their crushing victory by an innings and 456 runs against Meghalaya, while Jammu and Kashmir are the other team to make it to the knockouts from Elite Group A.

Suryakumar was a part of the Mumbai side in their clash against Maharashtra in October, whereas Dube was a member of the star-studded hosts' side that included India Test and ODI skipper Rohit Sharma as well as Yashasvi Jaiswal, and which lost to J&K at home last month.



The 42-time winners Mumbai will travel to Rohtak where they will take on Haryana, who had finished at the top of Group C, at Chaudhary Bansi Lal Cricket Stadium in Lohli.

Among other inclusions in the side is the uncapped Harsh Tanna, who has so far played four List A matches.

Mumbai squad: Ajinkya Rahane (c), Ayush Mhatre, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Amogh Bhatkal, Suryakumar Yadav, Siddhesh Lad, Shivam Dube, Akash Anand (wk), Hardik Tamore (wk), Suryansh Shedge, Shardul Thakur, Shams Mulani, Tanush Kotion, Mohit Avasthi, Sylvester D'Souza, Royston Dias, Atharva Ankolekar, Harsh Tanna.

**India is a sleeping giant in golf: Greg Norman**

By Suman Ray

Gurugram: Australian legend Greg Norman believes India is a sleeping giant in golf and it would require more competitions in the country to help its players realise their true potential as he pitched for making the recently-concluded International Series here an annual affair.

The 69-year-old former world number one, who has 88 professional titles under his belt, was hopeful of India's growth in the sport.

"One of my initial focus points was to invest into the sleeping giant, which was the Asian tour. India is a sleeping giant when it comes to Golf. I mean you just look what's happening in India with the game of golf, it has only just started, right?" Norman told select media on the sidelines of

the Asian Tour event here on Sunday.

"For the next 25 years, which is a generation, India is right in the middle of them," he said.

Norman was the CEO of LIV, a breakaway league founded in 2022 and financed by Saudi Arabia.

It has introduced some fresh rules like three-day 54-hole tournaments, instead of the traditional 72-hole four-day events. The LIV tournaments have also done away with the concept of weekend cut and all those who start get to play the entire tournament besides being entitled to prize money.

The International Series is a partnership between the Asian Tour and LIV but it adheres to the traditional 72-hole concept with a cut at the end of two rounds to ensure that players

are entitled to points under the world golf ranking system, which has refused to recognise the 54-hole LIV events.

The LIV events have also faced significant resistance from the existing PGA Tour (USA) and the European Tour, which claim that the parallel tour "disrupts" the sport by offering players higher prize money and a seemingly more relaxed rules

structure.

Norman believes LIV can have a great role in helping Indian golf, which was on a high when the likes of Jeev Milkha Singh, Shiv Kapur, SSP Chawrasia, Jyoti Randhawa and Arjun Atwal regularly won tournaments on all three tours till about a decade back.

However, the momentum has been somewhat lost in the past five years.

"I love LIV to come to India because to me, it's significant, right? Everything takes baby

steps. And obviously, the international place to enter the league is important to do that," he pointed out.

"LIV created a new dynamic for the game of golf because it gave an opportunity in the competitive golfing world for a new business model... Different formats have come out and enticed millions and millions of people to come into the game of golf," he asserted.

"I truly believe LIV will be the true global golf platform for golf. We want to be in all the continents of the world... We bring a product that's a plug and play that's never been done before. We bring franchise models. We're bringing the youth side of it," he explained.

**Norman lauds Anirban Lahiri**

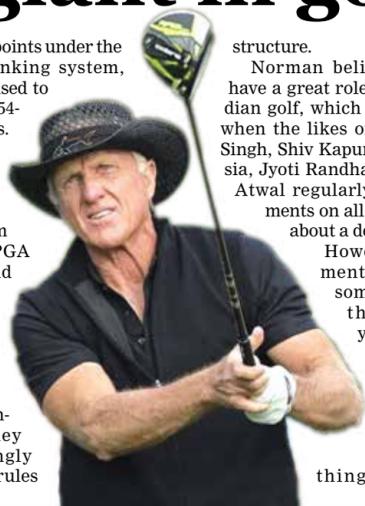
Lahiri has joined ranks with LIV

along with some other prominent names like Bryson DeChambeau, two-time Major winner Dustin Johnson and Lee Westwood, a former world number one.

"He's not just a great golfer, but he's a great person. He's a great spokesperson. He's a great representative of your country. So, all those ingredients allowed me to go, let's go do it," Norman said of the Indian, who has seven Asian and two European titles to his credit.

The Australian great was also full of praise for 15-year-old rising Indian golfer Kartik Singh, who made the cut at the International Series here.

"He's captured it. He made the cut. I think it's pretty impressive. I haven't seen his swing at golf club... I look forward to seeing his swing at golf club." -PTI



# Anderon stands by Hindenburg report on Adani

## SAYS CLOSURE NOT DUE TO ANY THREAT

By Ammar Zaidi

**New Delhi:** Activist short-seller Nathan Anderson, known for his high-profile campaigns against the likes of Adani Group, said the decision to shut his firm, Hindenburg Research was not because of any legal or any other threat, but due to workload. And that he stands by all its reports including the one against Adani Group.

Anderson told PTI that Hindenburg's January 2023 report accusing Adani Group of "the largest con in corporate history" was a result of following "red flags" raised against the conglomerate in reports.

Adani Group had repeatedly denied all allegations in the report.

He termed as "goofy conspiracy" the attempts by some to link Hindenburg with alleged anti-India groups like OCCRP and George Soros, saying his outlet never commented on them as it followed the policy of not feeding into "silly conspiracy theories".

Anderson, who came to be known for meticulously detailed reports against companies he alleged were committing fraud, last

month announced shutting down his forensic research firm nearly eight years after he founded it.

Asked why he chose to shut down Hindenburg when he could have stepped back and passed on the reins of the company to someone else, he said there is "no way to separate me from the brand."

"Hindenburg is basically synonymous with me," he said. "If it was a software application or a bicycle factory you can sell the application or the factory. But when it's research driven by me, you can't really just hand that off, and so I would not actually be 'done'. But I am happy to support the team if they want to launch a new brand, which I expect they will."

The interview with Anderson, who is based in New York, was done over phone calls and text messages.

Anderson, who first shot to fame with a report against electric truck company Nikola and had gone after the companies of major financial figures, including Carl Icahn's Icahn Enterprises LP, had last month blamed the "inten-



Anderson, who is based in New York, was done over phone calls and text messages.



Anderson had alleged that Adani Group had used a web of companies in tax havens to inflate its revenue and manipulate stock prices, even as debt piled up. The conglomerate vehemently denied all claims but the damning report at one point sheared over USD 150 billion off its value, losses it eventually recouped in over a year's time. This, as it slashed debt, pared share pledges and won new investors.

sity and focus" of the job for the decision to wind up.

He had spent much of the last eight years either in fights or preparing for the next fight. Many times during this period, he was often trailed and attempts were made to infiltrate his system.

"As to why I retired - it is all in the letter (released on January 16 that announced shutting down of Hindenburg) - it is not based on any threat, health issue, personal issue or otherwise," he said.

Conspiracy theories like being on the verge of an investigation by the US Department of Justice and/or US SEC to "concoct a counter-narrative about my retirement is a great example of why I am happy to instead be enjoying more time with family, friends and good music," he said.

Hindenburg has said it is not under investigation by

one markets regulator Sebi had initiated into certain issues prior to the Hindenburg report.

On some seeing the Hindenburg report as against India and India's growth story, Anderson said, "We have always believed in India's potential and view market transparency and strong corporate governance as key factors that can fuel India's growth story." He did not elaborate.

"We initially saw media articles outlining red flags, took a closer look, and just kept following the evidence," he said on why the Adani group was chosen.

On allegations of being in cohorts with OCCRP and George Soros, he said, "Of course not, but we have a policy of not feeding into silly conspiracy theories. When the main response to 100+ pages of evidence (presented in the report against Adani Group) is a goofy conspiracy, we view it as a sign that we were right on the mark."

Asked about the response of regulatory bodies in India to Hindenburg reports, he said, "We view our role as researching and writing about issues in need of transparency."



BJP MP Mahesh Sharma and TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday.

PICT: PTI

## Dissanayake bids to achieve economic freedom

**Colombo:** President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Tuesday said that Sri Lanka must work in unison to achieve economic freedom rather than yield to vulnerabilities within the global economic system.

Addressing the 77th Independence Day celebrations of the island nation, Dissanayake said, "Collectively, we must persist in our struggle for freedom on behalf of this motherland."

"To secure our economic freedom, rather than succumbing to weakness in the global economic system and being overwhelmed by its every fluctuation, we must unite in our efforts for this motherland," said the 56-year-old president.

In keeping with his government's policy of minimizing state expenditures as the island nation struggles to emerge from the 2022 economic crisis, this



His party won two-thirds of control in the 225-member assembly and more significantly, overwhelming support in the Tamil regions. The Tamils had eschewed support for the main Sinhala community political parties in Sri Lanka's political history.

This was the first time that a government had won two-thirds control or over 150 seats in a parliamentary election held since 1989.

Dissanayake inherited an economy battered by the 2022 crisis. He has completed the long-drawn-out debt restructuring of the island's external debt — a process all but completed by his predecessor Ranil Wickremesinghe before last year's presidential election.

The island nation, in April 2022, declared its first-ever sovereign default since gaining independence from Britain in 1948.

-PTI

## Budget to foster public-private cooperation in infra

**New Delhi:** The budget announcements aim to foster public-private cooperation and are expected to attract global investments in the infrastructure sector, industry players and experts said.

In her budget speech on Saturday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made several announcements to give a push to various sectors, including infrastructure.

She said Rs 1.5 lakh crore will be provided towards 50-year interest free loans to states, for infrastructure development, and an asset monetisation plan will be launched for 2025-30 period to infuse Rs 10 lakh crore capital in new projects, besides an outlay of Rs 500 crore for setting up a centre of excellence in artificial intelligence for education.

Rasmi Ranjan Ray, SUEZ India CEO said the Budget has set the stage for transformative, infrastructure-led growth with a record allocation of Rs 1.5 lakh crore in the form of 50-year interest-free loans to states for infrastructure projects.

Virendra D Mhaskar, Chairman & Managing Di-



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday.

PICT: PTI

rector, IRB Infrastructure Developers said asset monetization target of Rs 10 lakh crore as announced in Budget FY26 will make significant opportunities available for the private sector to deploy resources.

"The continuation of tax exemption to sovereign wealth funds & pension funds sends right message to global money that they are welcome to participate in the Indian growth story," he added.

BK Goenka, Chairman of Welspun World said the budget sets India on a

stronger medium-term growth trajectory by addressing critical issues to further enhance ease of doing business in the country — be it with regards to import and use of capital goods, streamlining duties and tariffs, support to MSMEs.

Kavita Shirvaikar, Managing Director of Patel Engineering said the government has placed strong focus on the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model alongwith other areas, in the Budget for 2025-26.

With these initiatives,

the PPP model is well positioned to take a significant lead in the fast-tracking of India's infrastructure development, foster cooperation between the public and private sectors, and drive sustainable economic growth, she said.

Indrajit Mookerjee, Executive Director & Vice Chairman, Texmaco, said the increased capital outlay for the railway will play a pivotal step toward enhancing connectivity, freight efficiency, and multimodal logistics—key drivers of economic growth.

Gurmit Singh Arora, National President, Indian Plumbing Association said the plumbing sector has got a substantial boost with extension of potable water supply connectivity to a further 100 crore households under the extended Jal Jeevan Mission.

The growth of this segment is linked with the growth of infrastructure in the country. Increased competitiveness in infrastructure will necessitate positively modernized plumbing practices throughout the industry, he said.

-PTI

## 'Non-inflationary budget to aid RBI'

**New Delhi:** The government has taken measures to lower fiscal deficit and delivered a non-inflationary Budget, and the Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank has to now decide on interest rate cut to boost growth, Finance Secretary Tuhinkanta Pandey said.

"The fiscal policy and the monetary policy need to work in tandem, not at cross purposes... Because a lot more benefit will come also with monetary easing, if we are able to maintain inflation control."

The Budget has projected a 4.4 per cent fiscal deficit in FY26, down from 4.8 per cent for the current fiscal year.

"It's very important to be clear (what) we have to do within a certain fiscal regime. And, we have to that extent aided the monetary authorities..." Pandey said at an Assocham post-Budget interaction here. The monetary policy committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will begin its three-day meeting on February 5. The MPC will announce its policy decisions on February 7.

## India to gain from US-China trade war

**New Delhi:** The trade war between the US and China is expected to benefit Indian exporters in increasing their shipments to the American market, sources said.

They said the country was the fourth-largest gainer when the US imposed higher duties on Chinese goods during US President Donald Trump's first tenure. After coming to power again, Trump on Saturday signed an order to impose stiff tariffs on imports from China, fulfilling a campaign promise but raising the prospect of increased prices for American consumers.

"India is likely to gain out of this trade war. Significant rise in exports are expected from India," a source said. Exporters have also stated that the imposition of customs duties by the US on imports from China provides huge export opportunities for India to America. The tariffs would affect exports from China to the US as they would push prices of their goods in the American market, making them less competitive.

"The move can create opportunities for Indian exports due to the trade diver-



sion effects as US buyers will seek alternative suppliers to avoid higher costs." Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) Director General Ajay Sahai said. He said the extent of benefits depends on India's production capacity and competitiveness.

"The sectors which are likely to gain are electrical machinery and components, auto components, mobile, pharma, chemicals, apparel, fabrics," Sahai added.

During April-November 2024-25, the US was the second-largest trading partner of India with USD 82.52 billion bilateral trade in goods (USD 52.89 billion worth of exports, USD 29.63 billion of imports and USD 23.26 billion trade surplus). In 2021-24, America was the largest trading partner of India.

-PTI

## Subhash Ghai buys apartment for Rs 24 cr

**Mumbai:** Bollywood director Subhash Ghai, along with his wife Mukta Ghai, has bought an apartment in Bandra West, Mumbai, for Rs 24 crore, Square Yards said on Tuesday.

In a statement, real estate consultant Square Yards said it has reviewed property registration documents on the website of Inspector General of Registration (IGR).



The property bought by Ghai along with his wife is located at 81 Aureate, a project by MJ Shah Group, spread across 4.48 acres and featuring 4 BHK apartments.

The apartment has a carpet area of 4,364 sq ft (405.42 square metre) and a built-up area of 486.69 square metre (5,239 sq ft), the statement said.

## Sensex, Nifty settle at one-month high

**Mumbai:** Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded nearly 2 per cent on Tuesday in line with a recovery in Asian peers after US President Donald Trump delayed tariffs on Mexico and Canada for a month.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,397.07 points or 1.81 per cent to settle at a month's high of 78,583.81. During the day, it surged 1,471.85 points or 1.90 per cent to 78,658.59.

The NSE Nifty soared 378.20 points or 1.62 per

cent to 23,739.25, a level not seen since January 3.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Larsen & Toubro rallied nearly 5 per cent. Adani Ports, IndusInd Bank, Tata Motors, Reliance Industries, UltraTech Cement and Asian Paints were also among the major gainers.

ITC Hotels, Zomato, Nestle and Maruti were among the laggards.

"Yesterday, the Indian market struggled to absorb the optimism generated by the good Union Budget due



to heightened geopolitical risks stemming from 'Trump tariff war'. However, India could outperform in a weak global market, and as a rebound has

been triggered in the global sentiment, it has fuelled a sharp surge in domestic equities," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

A strong start, driven by a rebound in global markets, gained further traction as renewed buying in select heavyweight stocks sustained the upbeat sentiment, Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said adding that all major sectors contributed to the rally, with energy, banking, and metals lead-

ing the gains.

The BSE midcap gauge jumped 1.35 per cent and smallcap index surged 1.20 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, capital goods rallied 3.42 per cent, industrials (2.59 per cent), energy (2.50 per cent), oil & gas (2.40 per cent), power (2.31 per cent), and financial services (2 per cent). BSE FMCG emerged as the only laggard.

As many as 2,509 stocks advanced while 1,410 declined and 154 remained

unchanged on the BSE.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong ended significantly higher.

European markets were trading mostly lower. US markets ended in the negative territory on Monday.

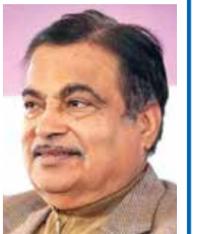
Global oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 1.05 per cent to USD 75.16 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,958.37 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

-PTI

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Because of the unemployment and poverty, there is a lot of migration from rural India to urban India. That is the reason today we are seeing a lot of problems in metro cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata Chennai, and Bangalore."



Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister, Roadways.

## EDITORIAL

## Marathi Mandate

The Maharashtra government has taken a commendable step to promote its native language. The Mahayuti administration's recent directive making Marathi compulsory for all government, semi-government and local self-government offices, as well as state-run corporations and aided institutions is an ambitious effort to elevate Marathi's role in public administration and governance. Officials will be required to use Marathi with visitors, excepting foreigners and non-Marathi speakers. Keyboards must include Marathi Devanagari script, with penalties for non-compliance.

The directive transcends the confines of the mere symbolism and extends to advertisements, official correspondence, tenders and notices - all of which must now be issued exclusively in Marathi. Even central government offices operating in Maharashtra are expected to comply, with signboards, application forms, and websites to be trilingual under the Centre's policy, but with Marathi taking precedence.

In theory, this move should bolster the language's prestige and ensure greater accessibility for the state's citizens. In practice, however, its effectiveness will depend on its implementation and the clarity of communication. If executed well, this could be a model for linguistic policies in multilingual societies. If done poorly, it risks becoming yet another bureaucratic edict that is ignored.

Official correspondence between departments has historically been conducted in English, and key policy decisions have been documented in it. The result has been a linguistic disconnect between the government and large sections of the population. While English remains indispensable in global commerce and higher education, making governance more accessible in Marathi in Maharashtra should be the goal every government strives for.

Mere compulsion is not enough. If Marathi is to be the primary language of administration, it must be used in a manner that is clear and simple. A heavy reliance on bureaucratic jargon will only alienate citizens rather than empower them. In the past, the use of highly Sanskritised Marathi in legal and administrative documents has made comprehension difficult even for native speakers. To be truly effective, the government must ensure that official communication is in a language that people can understand, rather than one that is so formal that it feels foreign.

The government has framed this as part of a broader Marathi Language Policy, aiming to establish Marathi as the language of knowledge and employment over the next 25 years. But the challenge remains for a linguistic mandate to translate into meaningful change.

By mandating Marathi in governance, Maharashtra has taken a decisive step in reinforcing its linguistic heritage. The key now is to implement this directive pragmatically, ensuring that the language of administration is one that truly serves the people and not one that turns into yet another bureaucratic obstacle.

## GLOBAL AFFAIRS

## Trump, the Panama Canal and the Cost of Climate Denial



By  
Dr. Manisha Shrimali

In 1989, as American troops descended on Panama to oust Manuel Noriega, Washington justified its intervention by citing the need to protect the Panama Canal. The 51-mile waterway, a lifeline of global trade and a pillar of U.S. strategic influence, was too important to be left in the hands of an unpredictable strongman. Three decades later, the canal faces an even graver threat - not from a dictator, but from a force that Donald Trump has spent years dismissing: climate change.

Even as Trump continues to fume on 'taking over' the Panama Canal, the 51-mile waterway, which handles 6 percent of global maritime trade, faces the real danger of drying up. Deforestation and erratic rainfall have left its freshwater reservoirs, especially Gatun Lake, at historic lows. In 2023, the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) was forced to cut daily vessel transits from 36 to 24, impose weight restrictions, and raise transit fees. The consequences for global trade are severe: higher shipping costs, supply chain disruptions and longer transit times.

For the United States, the stakes are

**The drying canal is a warning that short-term economic gains cannot outrun long-term environmental realities.**

particularly high as roughly 70 percent of all goods passing through the canal are bound for or originate from American ports. The shortcut the canal provides is invaluable: a container ship carrying goods from China to New York can save two weeks of travel time by bypassing the treacherous route around Cape Horn. A drying canal means longer transit times, higher costs, and disruptions to industries that rely on just-in-time supply chains. Electronics, raw materials, and foodstuffs will become more expensive, triggering inflationary pressures at a time when the global economy is still recovering from pandemic shocks.

The canal has always been central to U.S. economic and geopolitical power. Since its completion in 1914, it has underpinned American global trade dominance, allowing goods and energy to flow efficiently between the Atlantic and Pacific. The United States controlled the canal until 1999, when it handed over operations to Panama under the Torrijos-Carter Treaties. That transition was seen as a landmark moment for Latin America—an assertion of sovereignty after nearly a century of American control. But even under Panamanian management, Washington has remained deeply invested in the canal's operations, seeing it as critical to both commerce and security.

The crisis in Panama is not happening in a vacuum. The immediate cause of the canal's crisis is climate change. Scientists have long warned that deforestation in the Amazon - the planet's 'air conditioning system' - is disrupting rainfall patterns across Latin America, including Panama. The Amazon rainforest generates massive amounts of moisture, regulating climate systems that extend far beyond its borders. But rampant deforestation, driven by agriculture and logging, has transformed the rainforest from a carbon sink into a carbon emitter. In 2023, the Amazon experienced its worst drought in recorded history, intensifying El Niño weather patterns and



worsening the dry conditions in Panama. Less rain means less water for the canal, forcing difficult trade-offs between vessel capacity and economic efficiency.

Some have proposed engineering solutions like pumping seawater into Gatun Lake or diverting rivers, but these measures carry steep environmental and social costs. They risk contaminating freshwater supplies and displacing local communities. The only sustainable answer lies in reducing emissions and curbing deforestation. Yet Trump's approach to climate policy remains unchanged. During his presidency, he rolled back environmental protections, withdrew from the Paris Agreement, and championed fossil fuel expansion. His 2024 campaign rhetoric has continued in the same vein, attacking climate policies as job-killers while dismissing global warming as a hoax.

Trump's insistence on prioritizing short-term economic gains over long-term sustainability could prove costly. The drying canal is not just an environmental concern but a national security risk. If its decline accelerates, alternative trade routes will emerge. China, already the second-largest user of the canal, has been expanding its Arctic shipping ambitions as melting ice opens new passages. A weakened Panama Canal could push more trade toward China's Belt and Road Initiative, undermining American

influence in Latin America.

The canal's plight underscores an inconvenient reality: climate change is no longer a distant threat but an immediate economic disruptor. Droughts, extreme weather, and shifting environmental conditions will continue to reshape global trade. Sensible policymaking would recognize the need for climate adaptation and international cooperation. Trump's brand of populist denialism, however, offers no solutions, only a dangerous illusion that America can insulate itself from the consequences of a warming planet. The drying Panama Canal should serve as a warning. If the world's largest economy cannot reconcile economic policy with environmental responsibility, the costs will be measured not just in rising shipping fees, but in economic instability and lost global influence.

As Trump rallies his base with promises of economic revival and America's resurgence, his vision remains dangerously shortsighted. The forces shaping the 21st-century economy - climate instability, shifting supply chains, and geopolitical competition - require leadership that sees beyond the next election cycle. Will America navigate these turbulent waters, or will it be left adrift in the question.

*(The author is an educationalist. Views personal.)*

## GLOBAL WATCH

## National Land, International Meddling

Few issues are as politically explosive in South Africa as land reform. More than three decades after apartheid ended, the vast majority of private farmland remains in white hands, a glaring legacy of colonial dispossession and racial segregation. President Cyril Ramaphosa's decision last month to sign into law a bill that allows land expropriation without compensation has reignited fierce debate which now extends far beyond South Africa's borders.

Donald Trump, never one to shy away from controversy, has waded into the fray with characteristic bluntness. The US president announced that he would cut all future funding to South Africa over what he called the country's policy of "confiscating land" and allegedly "treating certain classes of people very badly." He has demanded a full investigation into what he perceives as state-sponsored land seizures.

The South African president has dismissed these allegations outright, declaring that his country remains a constitutional democracy. The law, his government insists, is neither arbitrary nor discriminatory, but rather an essential corrective to an unjust past. As Ramaphosa fends off Trump's broadsides, he is also contending with mounting resistance at home - not just from white landowners and opposition parties but even from within his own government.

To understand the current controversy, one must look back more than a century. In 1913, the British colonial authorities enacted the Natives

**Trump's threat to cut funding over South Africa's land reform exposes a deeper, unresolved historical wound.**

Land Act, which restricted black land ownership to just 7 percent of the country's total area. This was later expanded to 13 percent but remained grossly disproportionate in a country where black people formed the overwhelming majority. Apartheid-era forced removals deepened the injustice, relegating millions to impoverished townships and so-called "homelands."

When Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) took power in 1994, land reform was a priority. But successive governments struggled to implement it effectively. By 2017, a government report found that 72 percent of privately owned farmland remained in white hands, despite whites constituting just 7.3 percent of the population.

The new law, its proponents argue, is a belated but necessary step to address this imbalance. It allows for expropriation without compensation in cases where land is unproductive, abandoned, or poses a social risk. The government insists that it will not lead to mass land seizures. Comparisons with Zimbabwe's disastrous land seizures loom large. At the turn of the millennium, Robert Mugabe's government forcibly removed white farmers, triggering economic collapse and hyperinflation. Investors fled, and agricultural productivity plummeted.

Ramaphosa's critics warn that South Africa could be heading down the same path. The pro-business Democratic Alliance (DA), the country's second-largest party, has vowed

to challenge the law in court. Even some members of Ramaphosa's governing coalition are wary, arguing that the process of enacting the law lacked due diligence.

On the other side of the spectrum, the radical Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) have lambasted the law for not going far enough. They advocate sweeping nationalisation of land, arguing that anything short of this is a betrayal of the landless black majority.

Into this volatile mix steps Trump. His threat to cut aid is unlikely to have a crippling financial impact as most US funding to South Africa comes through PEPFAR, the health initiative that supports HIV/AIDS treatment. But it signals Trump's alignment with white South African farmers, a constituency that has long sought international support against land reform.

Trump's position also plays well to his base. Many on the American right view South Africa's land policies as an example of 'reverse racism.' Yet, Trump's posturing may prove counterproductive. His comments risk alienating South Africa, a major player in the BRICS bloc that has been moving closer to China and Russia.

They could also backfire domestically; even AfriForum, an organisation advocating for white Afrikaner rights, has distanced itself from Trump's blanket condemnation, suggesting that any punitive measures should target ANC leaders rather than the country as a whole.

## STATES WATCH

## Counting Castes, Courting Trouble

Caste, the defining feature of Indian politics, has always been at the center of any political debate. The Telangana government's recently released caste survey, completed in record time, has provided a numerical basis for long-standing demands for greater representation, potentially upending political calculations in the state. With Backward Classes (BCs) forming the majority of the state's population, their leaders are demanding higher political quotas, putting pressure on Revanth Reddy's Congress-led government.

Unlike its neighbour Karnataka, where Siddaramaiah's Congress-led government has been sitting pretty on a similar exercise, Reddy appears intent on stirring the caste cauldron in Telangana. However, what was meant to be a tool to consolidate support among BCs could soon become a political liability for the state government as well as Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's nationwide pitch for a caste census.

The preliminary findings of Telangana's Socio-Economic, Educational, Employment, Political, and Caste (SEEEPC) Survey hold few surprises. The survey, covering around 9 percent of all households, found that 56.33 percent of Telangana's population belongs to the Backward Classes (BCs), including 10.08 percent Muslim BCs. Scheduled Castes (SCs) make up 17.43 percent, Scheduled Tribes (STs) 10.45 percent, while the so-called 'Other Castes' (OCs) account for just 15.79 percent. These figures largely align with historical estimates but now serve as a rallying cry for BC lead-

**Telangana's caste survey could prove a political landmine for Rahul Gandhi and the Congress.**

ers, who are demanding that their numerical strength translate into increased political and economic representation.

With local body elections due soon, the survey's findings are bound to shape party strategies. BCs, already seen as a crucial voting bloc, played a pivotal role in the Congress's victory over the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) in 2023. Now, BC leaders want tangible political gains. The Congress government, which has only two BC ministers in its Cabinet, now faces intense pressure to act.

The BJP, which is keen to expand its footprint in Telangana

after securing eight seats in 2023, is actively courting BCs, sensing an opportunity in Congress's predicament. The BRS, still reeling from its electoral defeat, is also demanding the immediate implementation of the survey's findings. If Congress fails to meet BC demands, it risks alienating a key constituency ahead of both local and future assembly elections.

Rahul Gandhi has been the loudest advocate for a nationwide caste census, making it a cornerstone of Congress's political strategy. Yet, the Telangana survey now forces Congress to walk the talk, raising uncomfortable questions about whether the party is willing to implement the very policies it champions at the national level.

The Karnataka caste survey, completed in 2018, has been a political hot potato for Congress. Despite commissioning the survey, the Kar-

nataka government now led by the Congress has kept its findings under wraps for seven years.

By contrast, Bihar's caste census was completed relatively swiftly. The Nitish Kumar-led government took just

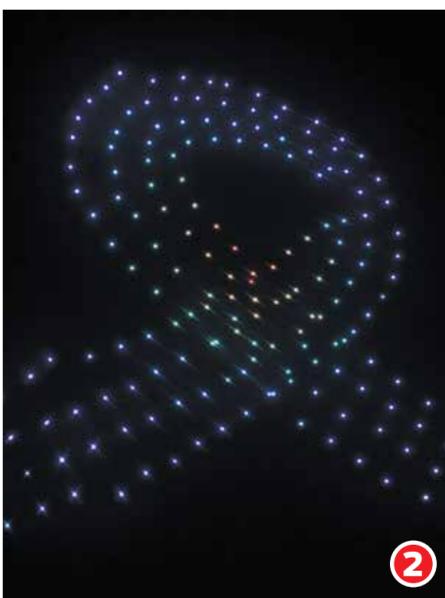
six months and spent Rs. 500 crore to publish its findings, which revealed that BCs and EBCs make up a staggering 63% of Bihar's population. The move allowed Kumar to claim the mantle of championing backward caste politics while Congress, despite being a coalition partner, played a secondary role. The Telangana survey's timing is particularly inconvenient for Rahul Gandhi, who has championed a national caste census but now faces internal resistance within his party. The Telangana government has already committed to increasing BC reservations in local body polls, yet BC leaders remain unsatisfied, fearing a repeat of Karnataka's dithering.

If Congress appears hesitant in Telangana, it risks losing credibility on its national caste census campaign. If it acts decisively, it could alienate upper-caste leaders within the party, triggering internal rifts similar to those in Karnataka. The BJP, which has historically been reluctant to embrace caste-based politics, could exploit Congress's divisions to consolidate its position among non-BC voters.

## TELANGANA



1



2



3



4



KALEIDOSCOPE

1. Bollywood actors Ishaan Khatter, Zeenat Aman, Sakshi Tanwar and Bhumi Pednekar during an event of Netflix in Mumbai on Monday.
2. 200 drones make a formation to create awareness against cancer at a hospital in Hyderabad on Monday.
3. Two Philippine Air Force FA-50 fighter jets fly with two U.S. Air Force B-1 bomber aircraft during a joint patrol and training over the South China Sea on Tuesday.
4. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami during a visit to check arrangements for the 38th National Games in Dehradun on Tuesday.
5. A devotee participates in a 'Kavadi' procession as part of the Arattu festival of Panathura Sree Subramoniyaswamy temple in Thiruvananthapuram on Monday.



5

All Pictures PTI, AP

READERS' VOICE

A Modern Treasure Map



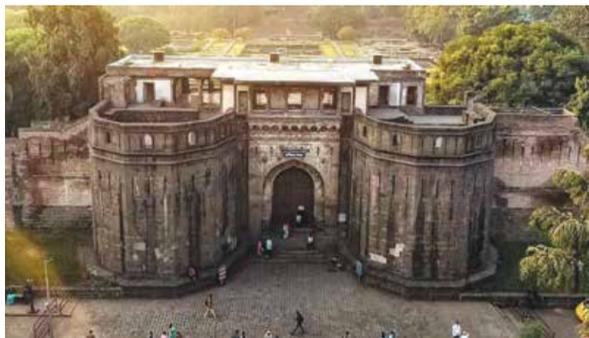
By Akshay Mirasdar

Last year, I, along with some friends, visited Wai for two days. Wai is located in Satara district in the State of Maharashtra. During our free time while there, we decided to do some sightseeing. However, aside from well-known places like Menavali, we weren't aware of any other place to visit. A casual search for places to see around me on our faithful companion, Google, also did not reveal much more, other than what we already knew. So, we went ahead and visited the same places we had visited a few years back—nothing new to see. I was disappointed when I later learnt that the Laxmi-Nrusinha Mandir, which has a unique Nandi-Mandapa on the back of a turtle sculpture, was located nearby.

All of us may have experienced this disappointment at least once in our lives when we visit an unfamiliar place and regret missing a beautiful temple or monument that was situated nearby. Our everyday life saviour, Google is very useful when providing us with a list of restaurants, hotels, etc. around us. But it is not particularly good when showing us heritage monuments, especially lesser-known ones. And you may be surprised when you learn of the heaps of beautiful monuments that lie hidden in plain sight.

The Wai incident gave me an

Discover ancient and historical sites near you. The HeritageTravelerPune app launches this month—stay tuned!



idea—why shouldn't there be an app that provides common people access to hidden gems that, so far, have only been known to archaeologists and scholars? It should be user-friendly and convenient. Not everyone travels solely to visit temples and caves, but everyone travels for some reason—be it work, family pilgrimages, trekking, vacations at resorts, etc. During their travels, people often have at least an hour of free time. When in an unfamiliar town or city, they naturally wish to explore something remarkable nearby—especially since they may never visit that place again. For the hundreds of thousands who travel, a smart and convenient app would be the perfect companion.

Depending on the time available, users should be able to search for monuments within a 2-3 km radius or even up to 20-50 km. For those too busy to check their phones, imagine an app that does the work for you—sending notifications when you're near a historical site. Even better, if you're travelling from point A to B,

the app could alert you to interesting spots along the way. The best part is, such an app already exists! Currently available for Pune district, it has the potential to expand across the state or even the country, depending on user response.

The sites provided in the app have been personally searched by the creator, who happens to be an archaeologist. So as not to waste the user's time, each site has been rated by him out of 5. So, a user can decide if the site is worth a visit. For those history enthusiasts and scholars who visit a place just to see its monuments, the app can help too. It will be easier to plan which site to visit more monuments are always preferable to a single one. The app can help you surf and search. It will have up to nine filters for nine categories of monuments: temples, forts, caves, Wadas, tombs (Samadhi, Chhatra, etc.), step-wells, mosques, bridges, and river Ghats. This filter will prove useful to many people, not just tourists. For example, NGOs that restore step wells and water resources can check out only what they need.

If I were to describe my app in some other way, I would call it a 'treasure map!' What's more, this treasure map fits in your pocket. Our heritage is like a treasure and providing easy access to it can bring new life into the dying and forgotten wonders.

(The author is an archaeologist and a research fellow at Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini, Mumbai. Views personal.)

CINEMA STORIES

'The Great Silence' and the Subversive Genius of Spaghetti Westerns



By Shoumujit Banerjee

In the winter of 1968, Sergio Corbucci's uncompromising Western, 'The Great Silence', arrived like a snowstorm in the desert. A bleak masterpiece set in the snow-bound frontier of Utah towards the close of the 19th century, it upended the conventions of both American and Italian Westerns with its utterly merciless vision of justice—brutal even by the violent standards of Spaghetti Westerns.

The film has become notorious for having possibly the most downbeat ending in the history of Westerns. In so doing, it has cemented Corbucci's place as the true revolutionary of the Spaghetti Western, a genre often overshadowed by the towering presence of Sergio Leone.

When American critics first came to grips with Italian Westerns, they witnessed a radical subversion of a beloved, staple genre. For decades, Hollywood had enshrined the Western as America's mythic foundation, an elegy to 'Manifest Destiny' as evinced by the films of John Ford and Howard Hawks.

But by the 1950s, Cold War paranoia had unsettled the genre. 'High Noon' (1952) reflected McCarthyite anxiety, while Anthony Mann's and Budd Boetticher's collaborations with James Stewart and Randolph Scott introduced tormented anti-heroes, reshaping the Western into stark tales of isolation and vengeance.

Then, in the summer of 1962, Akira Kurosawa's 'Yojimbo' opened in Rome, and two Italian directors saw in it the seeds of a new cinematic language. Sergio Leone would win the race to reimagine

the film as 'A Fistful of Dollars' (1964), giving Clint Eastwood his signature role. Corbucci, working in Leone's shadow, would instead craft the fever-dream, anti-clerical, apocalyptic 'Django' (1966), a twisted homage to 'Yojimbo.'

By 1968, the Spaghetti Western had become a movement, capped by Leone's masterpiece 'Once Upon a Time in the West'. Corbucci delivered his own masterwork in form of 'The Great Silence'. Shot in the frigid Italian Dolomites rather than sunbaked Almeria of Leone's films, Corbucci replaces the dust and tumbleweeds with unforgiving snow. The setting serves as a metaphor for the film's pitiless moral climate.



Frenchman Jean-Louis Trintignant plays 'Silence,' a mute gunslinger wielding a Mauser whose vocal cords were mercilessly cut as a child. His adversary is 'Loco'—a maniacal bounty hunter played by German actor Klaus Kinski, at his most reptilian. Loco is a systematic executioner, a man who finds legal loopholes to justify his butchery. The film's secondary antagonist, the banker Pollygut (Luigi Pistilli), a ruthless land-grabber, forces farmers into the wilderness, where Loco can legally exterminate them

for profit. In Leone's world, survival depended on cunning, not virtue. In Corbucci's, even cunning was not enough. Instead of the moral certainty of a John Wayne film or the mythic grandeur of Leone's Dollars Trilogy, The Great Silence offers only nihilism. The silence of the title is both literal—its hero cannot speak—and metaphoric: it is the silence of history, the silence of the oppressed, the silence of those crushed beneath the boot of capital and power.

The film's shocking ending, where Silence is unceremoniously gunned down along with the innocents he tried to protect, remains one of the most haunting finales in cinema. There is no last-minute salvation, no act of divine justice. Loco wins. The bounty hunters collect their rewards. The frontier is not tamed but consumed by its own brutality. It is a world where the lone hero cannot hope to triumph, only to be obliterated.

This nihilistic vision of the West was a radical departure, even within the Spaghetti Western genre. Leone's films, for all their cynicism, still operated within a mythic framework; 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly' ended with a triumphant duel while 'Once Upon a Time in the West' was an elegy to the Old West. Corbucci offers no such solace.

Despite its brilliance, 'The Great Silence' was largely ignored outside of Europe. Prominent American critics like Roger Ebert dismissed the genre outright, failing to see its influence on American filmmakers. Yet, the lineage of The Great Silence runs deep. Sam Peckinpah's 'The Wild Bunch' (1969) echoed its finale, while Quentin Tarantino paid homage in 'The Hateful Eight' (2015) with its snowy setting.

If the Spaghetti Western was a subversion of the American Western, then 'The Great Silence' was the genre's most radical act of sabotage. Corbucci didn't just make a great Western; he made the Western's most devastating eulogy.