

THE PERFECT VOICE



Zakir Hussain termed this man 'Steinway of tabla' ... pg 3



Rs 16,000 cr needed for EV charging demand ... pg 6



'It's a team in transition, won't point fingers at each other' ... pg 10

Uproar in Parbhani over custodial death

SOMNATH SURYAWANSHI MAY HAVE DIED DUE TO SHOCK, SAYS REPORT

Mumbai/Pune: Shock due to multiple injuries may have caused the death of a 35-year-old man arrested in connection with the Parbhani violence triggered by the vandalism of a replica of the Constitution last week, a provisional postmortem report suggested on Monday.

Somnath Venkat Suryawanshi, a resident of Shankar Nagar in Parbhani, some 530 kilometres from here, was among more than 50 persons arrested in connection with the violence.

He died at 6:49 am on Sunday at a state-run hospital where he was rushed to after complaining of chest pain and uneasiness while he was in judicial custody and was lodged in Parbhani district central prison, as per police.

Largely protests had degenerated into violence after a glass-enclosed replica of the Constitution near Babasaheb Ambedkar's statue outside Parbhani railway station was vandalised on the evening of December 10.

Police officials said an in-camera post mortem was conducted by a panel of six doctors at a state-run hospital in Chhatrapati Sambhajanagar.

Suryawanshi died due to shock following multiple injuries, the officials said quoting contents of the provisional post mortem report.

The report has mentioned that routine viscera has been preserved for chemical analysis, blood-soaked



gauze pieces have been preserved for blood grouping, and organ pieces preserved for histopathological examination, the officials added.

The report has stated that an opinion will be given after receipt of more documents, and the investigating officer has been instructed to submit previous medical documents, if any, the officials informed.

The provisional postmortem report has gone viral on social media platforms amid protests by Ambedkarite outfits across the state seeking justice for the deceased and action against the police.

Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) chief Prakash Ambedkar posted the autopsy report on X.

Speaking to reporters in Parbhani after attending Suryawanshi's last rites, Ambedkar said, "The postmortem carried out by the forensic department revealed that his death was caused due to physi-

cal assault as there are multiple injuries".

Ambedkar said lathi-charge by police after the December 10 demonstration in Parbhani needs to be verified whether it was "coordinated or uncoordinated".

"I spoke to some officials who said their first preference is to maintain the law and order situation and ensure that peace prevailed. They said they will probe whether the chain of events was coordinated or uncoordinated," he said.

Ambedkar refused further comments, saying concrete details are awaited.

"Lathi-charge by police at the site of the demonstration was justifiable but there are allegations that police assaulted people who were a km away from the riot venue. These allegations need to be probed," he added.

A bandh was observed in Parbhani and some villages in Latur district on Monday in protest against the desecration of the Constitution's replica and the death of Suryawanshi in judicial custody.

Since morning, several business establishments and shops in Latur city remained closed.

Activists submitted a memorandum of their demands to the Latur district collector demanding a CBI inquiry into Suryawanshi's death. They also demanded the registration of cases against police officials, and the withdrawal of alleged false charges against Ambedkarite women, youth, and students for rioting.

A shutdown was also observed in Ausa, Chakur, Renapur and Pangao villages in Latur district.

A protest rally was taken out in Ausa where business establishments and educational institutions remained closed.

Speaking on Parbhani violence and the murder of a sarpanch in the assembly, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis said, "I am sure the opposition will cooperate in suggesting ways to ensure such incidents don't repeat. Our government works by the Constitution and its insult will not be tolerated".

He said a mentally unstable person, who was involved in the desecration (of the Constitution replica) in Parbhani, has been arrested.

-PTI



President Droupadi Murmu with Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake during a banquet hosted by her in his honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Monday.

Pic: PTI

No SC reprieve to T M Krishna

THE APEX COURT SAYS THE VOCALITY NOT TO BE RECOGNISED AS MS SUBBULAKSHMI AWARD RECIPIENT

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday said carnatic vocalist T M Krishna should not be recognised as the recipient of the M S Subbulakshmi award as an interim measure.

A bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and S V N Bhatti passed the order on a plea filed by Subbulakshmi's grandson V Srinivasan, who alleged Krishna made scandalous remarks against the late singer.

"The court is mindful of the respect and honour that M S Subbulakshmi commands all across music lovers spreading across all spectrums. She is one of the most distinguished singers

and although she passed away in December, 2004, her melodious voice continues to bring great joy to her fans," said the bench.

The top court went on, "As an interim measure, as the award has already been awarded, we deem it apt to say that 4th defendant TM Krishna should not be recognised as a recipient of the MS Subbulakshmi award."

Before SC, Srinivasan challenged an order of the Madras High Court that set aside an interim injunction restraining the city-based music academy from conferring award on Krishna.

The bench issued notice to Krishna, the music acad-

emy, The Hindu and THG Publishing Private Limited while seeking their replies within four weeks.

The order was passed after additional solicitor general N Venkataraman submitted it was an extraordinary matter as Krishna wrote articles maligning Subbulakshmi.

A suit was filed by Srinivasan, Subbulakshmi's grandson, challenging the conferment of the Sankita Kalanidhi M S Subbulakshmi award on Krishna.

He alleged since Krishna made "vile, vituperative and scandalous attacks" against his grandmother on social media.

-PTI

42 accounts used to park Rs 50 cr

GUJARAT COPS BUST CYBERCRIME NETWORK

Junagadh: Police in Gujarat's Junagadh have unearthed an elaborate network allegedly involved in facilitating the parking of cyber fraud money into several bank accounts and arrested eight persons, an official said on Monday.

A scrutiny of 42 out of around 200 suspicious bank accounts by the police shows cyber criminals deposited a staggering Rs 50 crore they had earned illegally by defrauding people from various states.

The gang was prima facie working for inter-state cyber criminals and facilitated parking of crime money by obtaining bank accounts through illegal means and offering commissions to people, said Range IGP, Junagadh, Nilesh Jajadia.

The money transferred by cyber victims into these bank accounts used to be immediately withdrawn and routed to fraudsters located in different parts of India through Hawala net-

work and angadias, he said. The main accused in the case, who hails from Ahmedabad, has accepted to have obtained more than 200 bank accounts by offering commission to account holders on false pretexts, Jajadia said.

"Out of these 200 bank accounts, we collected information on 82 such accounts. After analysing 42 accounts, we have found that Rs 50 crore of cyber fraud money was deposited in them," he told reporters.

He said police acted on intel received around a month back about the activities of a gang in Junagadh and neighbouring districts. "The intel says the gang members obtained bank accounts from genuine account holders through fraudulent means and offering commission on money transferred by cyber fraudsters located in different states," Jajadia said.

-PTI



Abed Elrazeg Abu Jazer, the Charge d'affaires of the Palestine Embassy in New Delhi, meets Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra at her residence. Pic: PTI

12 Indians found dead in resort

Tbilisi: Twelve Indian nationals were found dead at a restaurant in Georgia's mountain resort of Gudauri, according to the Indian mission here.

Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs said in a statement that no signs of injuries or signs of violence were detected in an initial inspection. All victims died from carbon monoxide poisoning, local media report-

ed, citing police.

The Indian mission in Tbilisi said that all 12 victims were Indian nationals. However, Georgia's internal affairs ministry statement said 11 were foreigners while one victim was its citizen.

It added that the bodies of all victims, employees in the same Indian restaurant, were found in bedrooms on the second floor

of the facility.

"Mission has just learned about the death of 12 Indian nationals in Gudauri, Georgia. Deepest condolences to the bereaved families. Mission is in touch with the local authorities to get details of the Indian nationals who lost their lives. All possible assistance will be given," the Indian mission here said in a statement.

-PTI

Assad wanted to keep fighting

Damascus: Ousted Syrian leader Bashar Assad says he had no plans to leave the country after the fall of Damascus a week ago but the Russian military evacuated him after their base in western Syria came under attack.

The comments are the first by Assad since he was overthrown by insurgent groups.

Assad said in a statement on his Facebook page that he left Damascus on the morning of Dec 8, hours after insurgents stormed the capital.

He said he left in coordination with Russian allies to the coastal province of Latakia, where he planned to keep fighting.

Assad said that after the Russian base came under attack by drones, the Russians decided to move him on the night of Dec 8 to Russia. "I did not leave the country as part of a plan as it was reported earlier," Assad said.

-AP

Now, Abhishek questions Rahul's EVM doubts

New Delhi: Those raising questions on Electronic Voting Machines should give a demonstration of any "discrepancies" to the Election Commission, TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee said on Monday.

Banerjee's remarks come after Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, another leader of the INDIA bloc, dismissed the Congress' strong objections to EVMs, saying the party raises questions about their reliability only when it loses.

Asked about leaders from different INDIA bloc parties supporting Mamata Banerjee on the leadership issue, the TMC national general secretary told reporters that the alliance members will sit and discuss it.

"This is my personal opinion that those who are raising questions on the EVMs should show a demo of its discrepancies to the EC. They should show any

video (as evidence) to the EC," Banerjee said to questions on the EVM issue.

The TMC leader said once there is proper monitoring during various stages of the polling process by booth workers and others, there is "nothing substantial" in these allegations.

"I have been conducting elections on-ground for a long time. If someone works well during EVM randomisation and the booth workers check EVMs during mock polls or review the form 17C, which is used to check ballot units or control units, during the counting of votes, I don't think there is anything substantial in these allegations [of EVM manipulation]," Banerjee said.

"Even after that, if someone feels that the EVMs can be manipulated, their delegation should visit the EC and show a demo or evidence proving that there is some malware or technology to hack EVMs," he said.

What made Hussain an 'Ustad'?

By Ruddhi Phadke

Mumbai: In 1988, when the decision of awarding late Ustad Zakir Hussain title of Padma Shree was finalised, he was in the middle of a performance at St. Xavier's college in Mumbai. He was accompanying late Pt. Ravi Shankar who was playing Sitar while guru and father Ustad Alla Rakha Khan sahib was sitting right in front of the stage among the audience. A source pointed out that someone whispered in Ustad Alla Rakha Khan's ears about the good news and somehow he managed to enlighten Pt Ravi Shankar about the same. Soon after that, Pt. Ravi Shankar stopped playing and happily communicated to the audience

about the news and for the first time he referred to Zahir Hussain as "Ustad". From that point of time, Zakir Hussain was popularly referred to as Ustad Zakir Hussain by one and all. While, Guru Alla Rakha Khan Sahab and Sitar Maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar were the biggest source of inspiration for Zakir ji, the seeds of passion for Tabla were sown right from his birth when his father and guru whispered rhythms in his ears when he was born instead of prayers.

It is a myth that children don't take lessons from their own parents. However, there are numerous artists who were created by their own mother or father. Late Ustad Zakir Hussain is one of them who heard

rhythms as soon as he was born and grew up watching his father and great Tabla Maestro late Ustad Alla Rakha Khan sahib's riaz. He was indeed a dedicated worshipper and follower of his father. Zakir ji had once said in a media interview, "While a guru is like a fast flowing river, it is up to the disciple whether to grab a cup of water or a bucket of water from the river." Late Zakir Hussain first aimed at being a good listener to his father's riaz and performances of his guru and other Tabla Maestros.

There was an incident when his father took him to a concert of Sarod Maestro Ustad Ali Akbar Khan sahib at the Press Club in CST. Zakirji was sitting behind his guru Ustad Alla Ra-

kha Khan who was accompanying the Sarod performance. He suddenly turned to Zakirji and asked him if he would like to play. A seven-year-old child confidently replied asking, "Neki aur pooch pooch?" Ustad Alla Rakha Khan asked him whether he was familiar with "teen-taal". Zakirji quickly said yes and that set the ball rolling for an outstanding career ahead.

At the age of 7, Ustad Zakir Hussain Sahab gained the attention of many experts in the field, who would often visit his home and casually teach him pieces that added to his expertise. Right from that age, Zakirji was put into a discipline of starting riaz at 2 am every single morning that went on till 6 am for years together till he was

almost 12 years old. Like any other typical mother who would care for the future of her boy, she would point out that young Zakir needed to wind up his riaz and he needed to go to school and his father would reply, "This is school for him. This is his future."

However, his mother ensured that he took formal education despite his prime focus always being Tabla. Zakirji completed his schooling in Mumbai, and further pursued higher studies at St Xavier's college in Mumbai and later at Seattle University in US in percussion and composition. Zakir ji always attributed his success to the focussed efforts put in by him under the guidance of his guru when he was a child.



For a very long time, after Zakir Hussain ji was almost 12, his father and guru Ustad Alla Rakha Khan started travelling and couldn't see his son for long. His guru was away for a long duration, however Zakir ji continued his learning exercises through various experiments, from attending random dance classes, accompanying sitar students and so on and so forth.

One day, Zakir Sahab was sleeping in his Mahim apartment, when his doorbell rang. Someone had come looking for his guru hoping that he would

urgently agree to play for an impromptu concert. Zakirji's mother very innocently replied that Khan sahib was not in India, but his son could attempt to fill in for him.

Zakir ji was suddenly prepared by his mother for the concert and they rushed to the venue in Dadar. He was 14 years old at that time. He ended up playing flawlessly for the senior Dagar brothers which was an unthinkable leap for a 14-year-old child.

This landmark event paved the way for what he is today.

King of Spontaneous Creativity

USTAD ZAKIR HUSSAIN WAS ENGAGING, HIS SMOOTH CONNECT WITH THE AUDIENCE MADE HIM DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS

By Swapnil Bhise

It is very saddening and shocking to use the prefix "late" while making a mention of Khalifa Ustad Zakir Hussain sahab. The entire music fraternity is struggling to cope with the loss and to accept what has happened. I have a lot to share about Zakir Sahab. God blessed him with a quality that made him apart from all. Ustad Zakir Hussain was the one and only tabla player that created magic on stage. Remember how the audience would start applauding as soon as he played the first beat as he began his performance.

We all young tabla players have learnt and got inspired from him to a great extent. He was engaging, his spontaneous creativity along with a smooth connect with the audience made him different from others. Zakirji was not restricted to the gharana singing bestowed upon him. He has performed creations of all gharanas. We have closely watched his performances and have silently got inspired. Zakirji introduced the entire world to the art of Tabla playing by simplifying it to the masses.

The likes of Ustad Allah Rakha Khan who are popularly followed by generations of Tabla players have always been propagating the old style of Tabla playing called - "Gattha Tabla" - which essentially means tabla that's played using your wrist and your fingers. This style is acquired only when you gain a certain level of expertise. Zakir ji is the last player who actually played Gattha Tabla.



Zakirji accomplished 2 sessions of "Chilla" in his life. Chilla essentially means, rigorous practice of 40 days that involves continuous riaz for 24 hours, with break only for essentials. He has created magic by accompanying Birju Maharaj, Sitara Devi, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Pandit Ravi Shankar ji, Hariprasad Chaurasiya, Shiv Kumar Sharma and many others. What was unique about him was that he was not just a solo Tabla player, but he mesmerized the audience even being an accompanist to the main performers. The chemistry between Zakirji and Ustad Sultan Khan sahab is known to all.

I got an opportunity to visit his house once. I could spend hours with him and can never forget what I learnt from him during that meeting. The occasion was Guru Pournima celebration of Allah Rakha Khan sahab. My Guru Pandit Yogesh Samsi has helped me



get an opportunity to play Tabla in front of Zakir ji multiple times on the occasion of Allah Rakha sahab's death anniversary. I have met Zakirji several times at his concert venues. He was very warm and welcoming. He would address me by various names every time he met me, from "Bhise sir" to "Miyani ji" and many more. There was one instance in which I played a piece I had prepared in front of him. He very jovially punched me

and said, "You have worked really hard especially on 'dhir dhir' beats." I had once played his unique pieces in one of my solo performances. He had heard my performance, and he communicated to me saying, "I follow you on social media and I really liked the way you performed my pieces. I wish you to take my legacy forward." His words of praise and blessings are my biggest wealth that will keep giving me inspiration to take my pas-

sion to the next level.

I am too small to speak about his style of playing, however, I wish to highlight what he was best known for. His style of playing the "Dagga" was a blend of the styles of several Tabla maestros from Ustad karamatulla Khan saheb to Ustab Latif Ahmed Khan Saheb to Ustad Alla Rakha Khan Saheb and Samta Prasad ji from Banaras. He got inspired from all of them and created a unique style of playing the Dagga.

Besides, he was extremely particular about punctuality, discipline and protocols. I would like to narrate an incident that is the best example of his passion for abiding by protocols.

I had once visited him on the occasion of Ustad Allah Rakha sahab's death anniversary. Everyone was dressed in white which was the norm for such an occasion. One of the disciples had not worn white. Zakirji quickly pulled out a white

kurta from his bag and handed it over to the visitor. He was helpful and very disciplined indeed.

Ustad ji got tremendous opportunities to showcase his talent on a global platform. However, he was very much true to his roots and he never gave up his Indian citizenship despite being in America for a long period that could have easily given him an opportunity to get US citizenship. His love for his country is reflected in this decision that he made.

I cannot resist from sharing another interesting anecdote involving Ustad ji. In the middle of his performance, he had once invited my guru Pandit Yogesh Samsi up on the stage to perform a duet piece with him. Zakir ji announced to the audience saying, "Ustad Allah Rakha Khan had four sons - Zakir Hussain, Fazal Qureshi, Taufiq Qureshi, and Yogesh Samsi." Needless to say, Allah Rakha sahab had only three sons, but Zakir ji's love and respect for my guru Yogesh Samsi was so much that he considered him to be his close brother.

Yogesh Samsiji had sought guidance from Ustad Allah Rakha Khan for over 25 years. I am grateful to god for giving me an opportunity to take Zakir ji and Ustad Allah Rakha Khan saheb's legacy forward, under the expert guidance of my guru Pandit Yogesh Samsi.

- As told to Ruddhi Phadke

(The author is a professional Tabla player and student of renowned Tabla player Pandit Yogesh Samsi who was a disciple of Ustad Allah Rakha Khan.)

"A true legend, Ustad Zakir Hussain, who brought immense joy through his rhythmic brilliance. Your music transcends boundaries and will live on forever."
Satya Nadella,
Chairman and CEO, Microsoft

"The world has lost a rhythm it can never replace. Ustad Zakir Hussain, our maestro whose tabla beats will forever echo in the soul of India, leaves behind his inimitable form of timeless art. His legacy is an eternal taal, resonating through generations to come."
Gautam Adani, Chairman, Adani Group

"Words fail me at this point. I am completely heartbroken and devastated to hear about Zakir Bhai. Ustad Zakir Hussain was a phenomenon. He was indeed one of the most loved musicians the world saw."
Amjad Ali Khan, Sarod Virtuoso

"Hussain was an inspiration and a towering personality who elevated tabla to global acclaim. His loss is immeasurable for all of us. I regret not being able to collaborate with him as much as we did decades ago, though we had planned an album together. You shall be truly missed. May his family and his countless students worldwide find the strength to bear this immense loss."
A.R. Rahman, Music Director

"Hussain's death is a great loss to all forms of music, be it Indian classical or global. He was an amazing musician who represented Indian music on the global stage for a long time."
Kamal Sabri, Sarangi Exponent

"I had the privilege and honour to dress Hussain for the 66th Annual Grammy Awards in February. I will cherish those memories for life.. love and respect."
Manish Malhotra, Fashion Designer

"Hussain was beyond any gharana, or a musical lineage in Indian classical music. There are so many gharanas in Hindustani Classical music but I think Zakir Hussain sahab was one man who transcends gharana. He was not of one gharana but of every gharana."
Anuradha Palakurthi, Vocalist

"The curtains have fallen, but the beats will continue to echo in our hearts forever. If his hands delivered the rhythms, his smiling face and humble persona conveyed a melody - always respectful to everyone around him, putting them at ease. Rest in peace, Ustad Zakir Hussain ji. We were fortunate to witness your magic."
Sachin Tendulkar, Cricketer



In this Jan. 9, 2017 file photo, tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain and former cricketer Sachin Tendulkar during a concert, in Mumbai. Pict: PTI

"I have lost somebody who's been my biggest inspiration, a teacher and a human being who has influenced my music. He played a huge role in my musical career. He was the greatest in the world. I have never seen a rhythm artist with so much musicality and there will never be one more like this. Either there will be knowledge or expertise... It is impossible for an artist to be born of this calibre or to have knowledge, expertise and stage presence. Tabla is never going to sound like this ever again."
Shankar Mahadevan, Singer

"The sad demise of India's music sage and Padma Vibhushan Shri Zakir Hussain has not only caused a loss to the Indian music world but the entire world has lost a great music personality today. This great son of Maa Saraswati had unwavering faith in Indian culture. He has established tabla in a unique and attractive form all over the world."
Sunil Ambekar, Prachar Pramukh, RSS

When Hussain spoke of getting nervous

By Manish Sain

New Delhi: He was the consummate artiste who performed his first concert when he was just seven, going on to captivate audiences with his sheer exuberance and talent for more than six decades. Yet Zakir Hussain would get nervous before he went on stage and thanked his "lucky stars" for that.

The 73-year-old, amongst India's most celebrated musicians, died in a San Francisco hospital early on Monday.

In an interview with PTI earlier this year, Hussain quoted sitarist Ravi Shankar as saying he would be really worried about the show if he didn't get nervous.

"It meant that his focus wasn't 100 per cent on, it meant that he was taking this for granted. And you know it's true. Over the years, you get to a point where you have built up a reputation, you have built up some kind of a status for yourself, and the more you have done it the more responsibility falls on your shoulders because you



have got to live up to that," Hussain told PTI.

Hussain, who made the tabla more popular and recognisable to western audiences and was the founding member of the fusion group Shakti, added that performance pressure can be compared to the Indian cricket team when it plays in India.

"The amount of nervousness or some minor tension increases from day to day. I mean, look at the Indian cricket team playing in India, the pressure on them is 100-fold more than the pressure on the visiting team. I do really thank my lucky stars that I still get that little hint of tension or nerv-

ousness before I go to a concert."

The percussionist, who started touring when he was just 12, won three Grammy Awards at the 66th edition of the Grammy awards earlier this year. He was known for having worked with Indian and international musicians, defying genres and creating masterpieces such as "Planet Drum", a world music album with American percussionist Mickey Hart that was awarded the first-ever Grammy for Best World Music Album in 1992.

The son of Allah Rakha, Hussain said "all inclusive musical creativity" came naturally to him as someone who had learnt and worked with the all-time great tabla legend who also composed music for some films.

"From the age of seven or eight, I would go with him to all his recording sessions with Ashaji or Lata ji, or Rafi and be part of the orchestra... He would give me a kharajari or a tambourine or a little something to play. So I grew up in this situation where being in a combination of musical

creativity, which was an all inclusive process as opposed to a singular one, seemed like a natural way to go," he remembered.

"So the mindset as I was growing up tuned itself to the idea that music is music, it's not Indian music or that music, so when I actually started working with musicians who were non Indian it seemed like a natural handshake," Hussain added.

Tabla had long been viewed as an accompaniment in Indian classical music and over the years moved out of the shadows to become a centerpiece.

Hussain thanked his father and his contemporaries, especially Pandit Kishan Maharaj and Samta Prasad, for bringing notice to the humble percussion instrument.

He said it was their work with people like Pandit Ravi Shankar, Ustad Vilayat Khan, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, Ustad Bismillah Khan, and Pandit Birju Maharaj that audience really started to notice "that this other guy is not so bad and is cool and things started to happen". -PTI

When baby Zakir had rhythms for prayers from dad

Mumbai: Eight years ago, tabla maestro Zakir Hussain had narrated how his father Alla Rakha had welcomed him into this world by putting the musical instrument's rhythms into his ears when asked to recite prayers.

Mumbai-born Zakir Hussain passed away at a hospital in San Francisco due to complications arising out of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, his family said on Monday.

Zakir Hussain spoke of his father holding him in his arms for the first time. Alla Rakha was an accomplished tabla player and a frequent accompanist of

iconic sitar player Pandit Ravi Shankar.

"I was brought home and handed over to my dad in his arms. The tradition was that the father is supposed to recite a prayer in the baby's ear, welcoming the baby and putting some good words.

"So he takes me in his arms, puts his lips to my ear and recites the tabla rhythms into my ears. My mother was livid. She said, what are you doing? You're supposed to say, you know, prayers, not rhythms.

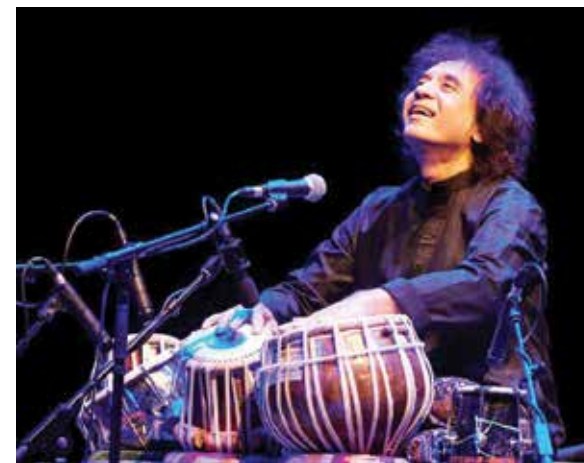
"And he said, but these are my prayers. This is how I pray. He said, I am the worshipper of Goddess

Saraswati and Lord Ganesh. This was a devout Muslim talking. He said this is the knowledge he got from his teachers and wanted to pass it on to his son," Zakir Hussain said.

Born on March 9, 1951 in Mumbai, Ustad Zakir Hussain was awarded the Padma Shri in 1988, Padma Bhushan in 2002 and Padma Vibhushan in 2023.

Zakir Hussain had his early education from St. Michael's School in Mahim and did his graduation from St Xavier's College, both in Mumbai.

During his early days, he used to travel by train and if he could not find a



seat, he would spread newspapers on the floor and sleep. During such journeys, so that no one's

feet touched his tabla, he used to sleep with the musical instruments in his lap.

the tabla maestro had said. -PTI

Zakir Hussain termed this man 'Steinway of tabla'

Mumbai: "I made tablas for him, he made my life," says Haridas Vhatkar who was termed the "Steinway of the tabla" by his most celebrated client - Ustad Zakir Hussain.

On Monday, as the world mourned the death of the legendary musician whose fame crossed the boundaries of geography and whose music blurred the lines between Hindustani, western and jazz, Vhatkar remembered the man who made it all possible for him. And also perhaps how his tablas made it possible for the world renowned percussionist.

"I first began making tablas for his father Alla Rakha and have been making tablas for Zakir Hussain since 1998," an emotional Vhatkar, 59, told PTI.

Sitting in his workshop at Kanjurmarg in Mumbai, the tablas lined up in shelves behind him, Vhatkar said the two first met on Guru Poornima where a lot of his admirers had gathered.

"The next day, I went to his house in Simla House Cooperative Society on Nepean Sea Road neighbourhood and were engrossed in conversation for a couple of hours," Vhatkar said.

And a lifelong relationship was born - even if they were not regularly in touch.

"He was very particular about what sort of tabla he wanted and when. He paid a lot of attention to the tuning aspect of the musical instrument," said Vhatkar, a third generation tabla maker, from Miraj in western Maharashtra.

Hussain, who passed away in a San Francisco hospital at the age of 73, has



Haridas Vhatkar at his workshop in Mumbai on Monday.

Pic: PTI

also spoken in detail about Vhatkar.

"He used to live in Miraj, near Kolhapur, and as a young man he came to Bombay because he heard me play. He decided to learn how to make the tabla, so he could make them for me," he has said in "Zakir Hussain: A Life in Music - A Conversation with Nasreen Munni Kabir".

The late Ustad detailed the painstaking effort that goes into each instrument. "Sometimes the parts are made in machines and then assembled together by someone who has the ear and knowledge, while Haridasji does everything from

scratch -- he gets the buffalo hide straps, polishes and cleans the goat skin to get the rough edges out, etc. It's all done by hand. The whole process can take weeks..."

"You can of course buy a standard tabla, which will not have even 10 per cent of the quality of Haridasji's work. He has become the Steinway of the tabla!" he famously said.

Hussain said he had put the artisan, who also went to the US, on a stipend. "So, if I'm gone for eight months, he does not have to worry, he will still have some money coming in."

And how many tablas did Vhatkar make for legend-

ary percussionist over the last two decades?

Innumerable, was Vhatkar's reply.

He also said he has many tablas left behind for him by Hussain.

"Besides making new instruments, I was also his sort of repair department for maintaining the collection of the older ones," said Vhatkar.

"I made tablas for him and he made my life," he added simply.

The star musician would call whenever needed, whether to ask about a new tabla or about the repair of an old one.

"Our conversations were

after a gap of months and not what you would categorise as regular calls," said Vhatkar who is following in the footsteps of his grandfather Kerappa Ramchandra Vhatkar and father Ramchandra Kerappa Vhatkar.

His sons Kishore and Manoj have carried forward the family tradition of tabla making. Haridas learnt the art of tabla making at an early age and developed a keen sense of innovation and perfection. He came to Mumbai in 1994 and started working as a tabla maker for the famous Haribhau Vishwanath company in Mumbai.

-PTI

BY INVITATION

Lung health awareness should be prioritised



By
Dr. Abhijit Ahuja

Zakir Hussain's untimely demise has highlighted the devastating impact of Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (IPF), a rare and chronic lung disease often overlooked due to its silent progression. This condition leads to irreversible thickening and scarring of the lung tissues (fibrosis), impairing the lungs' ability to function. The exact cause of this life-threatening condition remains unknown, which is why it is termed "idiopathic." There is an urgent need for public education regarding IPF since many people are unaware of it and its symptoms are often dismissed as minor or age-related. Tragically, most diagnoses occur at advanced stages when treatment options are limited. Early detection is crucial for improving patient outcomes and quality of life.

Recognizing symptoms

Patients and healthcare providers must be vigilant about the following signs such as persistent shortness of breath (dyspnea), especially during physical activity,

chronic dry cough that does not improve over time, unexplained fatigue and general weakness and sudden, unintended weight loss.

The diagnosis involves a detailed review of the patient's medical history, high-resolution CT scans, and lung function tests to confirm the presence of fibrosis.

Treatment and management

While there is no cure for IPF, recent advancements in medicine offer hope by slowing the disease's progression and managing symptoms effectively. Treatments often include antifibrotic drugs in the form of medications like pirfenidone and nintedanib that significantly reduce the progression of scarring in the lungs. There is also oxygen therapy which is providing supplemental oxygen helps manage breathlessness and improves patients' energy levels. Pulmonary Rehabilitation is another form of treatment that involves structured programs of breathing exercises and physical training enhance lung capacity, stamina, and quality of life. Last but not the least there is lung transplantation in severe cases which may be considered a life-saving option.

The combination of antifibrotic drugs, oxygen therapy, and pulmonary rehabilitation can slow disease progression and improve patients' lives. However, the success of

these treatments hinges on early detection.

Prognosis and early detection

IPF is a rapidly progressing disease with a poor prognosis. The average life expectancy following diagnosis is 3 to 5 years. However, early diagnosis and timely intervention can extend survival and significantly enhance quality of life.

Regular health check-ups and vigilance about respiratory health are vital. Early intervention is the only way to ensure a better prognosis for IPF patients.

Awareness campaigns should emphasize that persistent shortness of breath and a chronic cough should never be ignored.

IPF is not just physically debilitating—it also takes a severe mental and emotional toll on patients. While medical care is critical, psychological support for patients and their families is equally important. Addressing the emotional and mental strain can significantly improve the overall well-being of those living with IPF. Every individual experiencing symptoms like breathlessness or an unrelenting dry cough should consult a pulmonologist promptly.

Hussain's untimely demise is a somber reminder to prioritize lung health.

(The author is a leading pulmonologist at Saijee Hospital, Mumbai. Views personal.)

By Amrut Abhyankar

During my Engineering college days in Banaras, my first encounter with Indian classical music was mesmerizing. It was Banaras Hindu University and a pure hub of musical stalwarts exchanging their knowledge with each other and the students. The music college affiliated to BHU had frequent artist visitors daily. It was the platform that introduced me to different avenues of music, like violin by Padmabhushan Dr. N. Rajam, veena by Dr. Lalmani Mishra appointed by great P. Omkarnath Thakur, sitar, sarangi, jaltarang, santur, outstanding tabla players like Ishwarlal / Chotelal / Ramji Mishras - all disciples of legendary tabla player Anokhelal.

Returning to Mumbai after completing Engineering it was a disappointment as music programs were found to be difficult to book the tickets for, too expensive & not as frequent as we came across in Banaras. The surprise element was Zakir Hussain's solo recital in the mood indigo event of IIT-Bombay.

He was a new artist and I

Pleasant engagement with the maestro

THERE'S A LOT TO LEARN FROM USTAD ZAKIR HUSSAIN AND ARTISTS LIKE PT. JASRAJ WHO SHARED ONE STAGE AND CONGRATULATED EACH OTHER WITH CLEAN MIND FOR THE MASTERPIECES THAT INVITED AUDIENCE APPLAUSE



was sceptical if there would be any audience. To my surprise the theatre was overcrowded. Zakirji performed in such a way that the entire youthful audience with purely technical and engineering silhouette, with strong orientation of migrating to the US, was repeatedly giving tumultuous applause. Zakirji made some innovation to demonstrate a composition on Tabla, by striking a similarity of that rhythmical piece to that of the beauty of a jumpy running of a deer, galloping horse & so on, making him a unique illustrator.

While the youth was appearing to be drifting away from classical music, the



mood indigo program clearly showed Zakirji's ability to pull back the youth to our cultural ethos. I anxiously used to wait for Zakirji's concert either solo or an accompaniment to another artist both spellbinding. Once he was accompanying Pt. Jasraj Ji. Generally, the main artist, particularly a vocal artist doesn't give much scope to an accompanying tabla player or a harmonium player. The chemistry of Pt. Jasraj & Zakirji seemed to be totally different. Jasrajji was slowly rendering upper notes & encouraging Zakirji to reproduce it on Tabla.

To my astonishment, for the first time I heard two or three matching notes at the end of the mukhdha produced on tabla. He actually produced a tune on Tabla and took the audience to another level of bliss. At the upper notes in "atitarsaptak", Zakirji shook his head expressing inability, drawing roaring applause

from the audience. Considering Zakirji's potential, Jasrajji had no option but to give a free hand to Zakirji amid performances. It was a legendary concert, devoid of ego, domination and complete dedication and evolution of art.

Another memory which I wish to mention here is when Zakirji and his father and guru Ustad Alla Rakha khan once performed at Shivaji Park in Dadar. The host was Rani Varma, daughter of great vocalist Manik Varma. She had rightly said that listening to the performance of tabla by the Guru-Shishya duo is like acquiring A to Z knowledge of tabla. What an apt compliment it was indeed!

Needless to say, the sad demise of such a flawless yet humble artist is a great loss to the field of music. My friend residing in the US was shocked to hear the sad news as his memory of hearing him play at a concert of Santoor player Shivkumar Sharma's son just two weeks ago. Little did we know, it would be his last performance!

(The author is B-Tech (Electrical) and a fan of late Ustad Zakir Hussain.)

Many stories credit origin of tabla

By Manik Gupta

New Delhi: Legend has it that a competition was held in a Mughal court between two pakhawaj players. The losing maestro was so enraged that he smashed his pakhawaj, a two-sided percussion instrument, into two. And so was born the tabla.

Such was the dramatic birth of the tabla, the two pieces of wood, metal and bound leather, which today are the primary percussion accompanying instruments of any Hindustani classical performance.

For ages, the tabla largely played second fiddle to the vocalist or the main instrumentalist - until the holy trinity of Pandit Sam-

ta Prasad, Pandit Kishan Maharaj and Ustad Alla Rakha Khan gave it prominence.

However, it was left to Alla Rakha's son, Zakir Hussain, to put it on the global stage when he collaborated with Western performers such as John McLaughlin, Yo-Yo Ma and George Harrison of the Beatles.

Much like the diverse sounds it produces, the stories behind the invention of the tabla are also numerous. The smashing of the pakhawaj by Sudhar Khan Dadhi in the court of Mohammed Shah Rangeela in the 18th century is just one legend.

"The origin of the Tabla is one of the most contro-



versial aspects of Indian classical music and nothing can be said with any degree of certainty," says musicologist Pandit Vijay Shanker Mishra in his book "Art and Science of Playing Tabla."

Many also credit the invention of the tabla to a drummer named Amir

Khusrau Khan in the early 18th century, who was tasked with creating a more refined and melodic percussion instrument to accompany the emerging music style known as 'Khyal'.

Although the tabla is a relatively recent addition to Hindustani classical music, the instrument has

gained immense popularity, and today it is impossible to imagine a concert without the tabla, whether as a solo instrument or an accompaniment.

There is a more scholarly view of the origins of the name -- it is said to have been derived from the Arabic word "tabl", meaning "drum." The percussion instrument is made up of two drums, 'daayaan' or right, which produces bass sound, and 'baayaan' or left, which creates higher pitched treble.

While the daayaan is a narrower drum typically made of wood, the baayaan is the larger, rounded drum made of metal.

Over the centuries, several distinct gharanas in

classical Indian tabla have developed, including Ajrara, Benares, Delhi, Farukhabad, Lucknow, and Punjab. While these gharanas still dominate the tabla tradition today, the late 20th century has seen their boundaries start to blur as modern exponents seek to build upon the foundation laid by their predecessors.

Many artists have taken the tabla worldwide, exploring its versatile fusion possibilities. Like, Punjab master Alla Rakha, who became renowned as Ravi Shankar's principal accompanist during numerous global tours, and his son Zakir Hussain, widely considered as the tabla's foremost contemporary ambassador.

-PTI

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Bhujbal to Mungantiwar, aspirants dejected

Nagpur: Discontent is brewing in the 11-day-old Mahayuti government in Maharashtra with senior leaders from the ruling alliance openly expressing their displeasure over being denied ministerial berths during the cabinet expansion in Nagpur a day ago.

Senior NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal and BJP politician Sudhir Mungantiwar, both of whom overlooked for cabinet positions on Sunday, appeared unhappy on Monday after the ministry expansion along with some legislators from the Shiv Sena who also felt ignored.

Bhujbal said denial of a

cabinet berth was a "gift" for taking on quota activist Manoj Jarange and opposing his demand for including the Maratha community in the OBC category. Bhujbal, a prominent OBC leader, and Jarange have publicly clashed over the latter's agitation seeking OBC status for the Marathas.

Mungantiwar, who was part of the previous Eknath Shinde cabinet, said he was told his name has been included in the list of ministers who were going to take oath, but was dropped later.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis expanded his cabinet in Nagpur, where the

winter session of the state legislature is currently taking place, and inducted 39 new members in his team - 19 from the BJP, 11 from the Shinde-led Shiv Sena and 9 from Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

Bhujbal, who was a minister in the previous Mahayuti government, said in Nagpur he would talk to his constituents and decide his future course of action. The prominent OBC leader left for his home district Nashik after the assembly was adjourned for the day.

The former cabinet member said he wasn't sure if he would return to the city before the winter session of the legislature ends

on Saturday.

Bhujbal, who served as the food and civil supplies minister in the previous Mahayuti government, said he was upset at not being included in the new cabinet.

"I am an ordinary political worker. It doesn't matter if I am sidelined or rewarded," said the MLA from the Yeola constituency in Nashik district.

BJP leader Mungantiwar put up a brave face, saying he was not upset and stressed he was an organisation man.

"I will continue to work for people of my constituency and highlight issues about their welfare in the legislative assembly," the former forest minister told reporters.

Mungantiwar later called on Union minister Nitin Gadkari and their closed door meeting lasted for nearly two hours.

Shiv Sena leader Vijay Shivtare also sounded unhappy at being ignored in the first cabinet expansion of the Fadnavis-led government.

A miffed Shivtare said he wouldn't take up ministerial post even if offered after two-and-half-years.

Another cabinet aspirant, Shiv Sena MLA from Bhandara, Narendra Bhonekar, quit all party posts - deputy leader and coordinator for eastern Vidarbha - after being overlooked for ministerial position.

-PTI



Mumbai Police personnel carry 'chaddar' to Mahim Dargah on Monday. The city police force has the privilege of laying the first chaddar on the Urs of saint and scholar Makhdoom Ali Mahimi. Pic: Bhushan Koyande

Raut targets CM for 'system failure'

Mumbai: Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Monday targeted Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis over Parbhani violence, saying the "custodial" death of an accused in the incident reflects "failure of the system".

Speaking to reporters in New Delhi, Raut criticised the handling of the Parbhani violence case by the Maharashtra administration and said he would raise the issue in the Rajya Sabha.

He accused the Maharashtra government of being "anti-constitutional" and questioned why "protectors" of the Constitution were losing their lives under its rule.

Violence erupted in central Maharashtra's Parbhani city after a glass-enclosed replica of the Constitution near Dr B R Ambedkar's statue outside the Parbhani railway station was vandalised on the evening of De-

ember 10.

More than 50 persons have been arrested and multiple cases registered in connection with the violence.

A 35-year-old man, identified as Somnath Venkat Suryawanshi, apprehended following the violence was in judicial custody and lodged at the Parbhani District Central Prison, according to police.

He had complained of chest pain following which he was taken to a hospital where he was declared dead at 6.59 am on Sunday, the Parbhani police said.

A magisterial inquiry has been constituted into the allegations of Suryawanshi's "custodial" death and the body shifted to a government hospital in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar for postmortem.

Raut said Suryawanshi fought to "save" the Constitution after its replica was vandalised in Parbhani.

"Though his methods

might have been questionable, he was arrested, and then he died in custody. This is a failure of the system. Devendra Fadnavis is responsible for it," the Rajya Sabha member charged while referring to the CM as home minister.

Notably, the portfolios of Maharashtra ministers have not yet been announced.

Raut appealed to Ambed-

karites to maintain peace. The incident has led to demands for action against those responsible for Suryawanshi's death. A bandh has been called by local organisations in Parbhani on Monday to press for justice.

Meghana Bordikar, BJP MLA from Jintur in Parbhani described the incident as unfortunate but defended the police's actions.

Protesters seek action against cops

Thane: Several Dalit outfits protested in Thane on Monday against the death of a man arrested in connection with the December 10 violence in Parbhani district after a glass-enclosed replica of the Constitution near Babasaheb Ambedkar's statue there was vandalised. Somnath Venkat Suryawanshi (33) was among the more than 50 persons who were arrested in connection with the violence. He died at a hospital on Sunday morning after complaining of chest pain while he was lodged in Parbhani district central prison, as per police.

Among the groups was the People's Republican Party, whose leader Rajabhau Chavan said the government must give justice to Suryawanshi by dismissing the Parbhani superintendent of police and senior inspector.

Don't know why my name was removed: Mungantiwar

Senior BJP leader Sudhir Mungantiwar, on Monday claimed his name had figured in the list of ministers who took the oath a day before but it was removed later. A day after Mungantiwar failed to find a place in the expanded Devendra Fadnavis-led cabinet, the BJP leader said he was not upset and stressed he was an organisation man. "I will continue to work for people of my constituency and highlight issues about their welfare in the legislative assembly," the former forest minister told reporters in Nagpur. The BJP secured 19 ministerial berths, followed by 11 ministers of the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and 9 by Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). Mungantiwar claimed he was told earlier that his name was included in the list of ministers.

"There is no reason for me to be upset as I do my job in whatever role the party assigns to me. The only issue is that I was told that my name was there (in the list of ministers). But it wasn't there yesterday. I don't know why my name was removed," the seven-time BJP MLA told reporters in Nagpur.

Mungantiwar didn't attend the legislature session on the first day on Monday though he was in Nagpur.

When asked if the BJP leadership was upset with him, Mungantiwar said such things are not expressed by denying the ministerial position.

Queried if the BJP leadership was upset with him, he said they would call and speak to him if that is the case.

"Maybe the BJP has some other responsibility planned for me," he added.

-PTI

Quota activist Jarange to launch indefinite fast, again

Jalna: Activist Manoj Jarange on Monday declared he would launch a fresh round of indefinite fast to press for the Maratha community's demands, including reservation in jobs and education under the OBC category, and announce the date on Tuesday.

Speaking to the media at Jalna district's Antarwali Sarati village, the site of his previous half a dozen hunger strikes in central Maharashtra, he said Maratha community members were welcome to join his fast.

Jarange's announcement has come at a time when the new Mahayuti government led by the BJP is settling down after a mega cabinet expansion on December 15.

The 42-year-old activist informed that he would declare the date of the fast on Tuesday.

He emphasized the fast would be open to all Maratha community members, but clarified there was no compulsion in participating in the hunger strike, part of a wider state-wide quota agitation spearheaded by him.

"Anyone from the community who is willing to



join the fast is welcome. There is no pressure on anyone," Jarange stated.

The activist argued the BJP-led government must show its intent to resolve the quota issue by taking concrete steps during the winter session of the state legislature which is being held in Nagpur.

"The government has already expressed its commitment to addressing the Maratha community's demands. Now, we expect them to show their sincerity and dedication by taking concrete steps during the session," he insisted.

He asked the government to implement the draft notification of Sage soyare (closed relatives),

the Hyderabad, the Bombay and the Satara Gazetteers declaring Marathas as kunbi.

Jarange has been demanding implementation of a draft notification that recognises Kunbis as 'sage soyare' (those related by birth or marriage) of Marathas and granting reservation in jobs and education to the latter under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category. The agrarian Kunbi community already gets quota benefits under the OBC category.

He has also demanded speeding up the work of the Justice (ret'd) Sandeep Shinde Committee set up by the Maharashtra government to expedite the process of granting Kunbi certificates to members of the Maratha community, making them eligible for quota.

In February this year, the state legislature unanimously passed a bill providing 10 per cent reservation for the Marathas in education and government jobs under a separate category. However, Jarange has been insisting on quota to the community under the OBC head.

-PTI



Minister Pankaja Munde arrives on the first day of the state Legislative Assembly's winter session at Vidhan Bhavan in Nagpur on Monday. Pic:PTI

Stone pelting over Whatsapp message

Mumbai: Sixteen persons were arrested in Hingoli in Maharashtra for allegedly pelting stones at the residence of a businessman over an "objectionable" Whatsapp message on Islam, a police official said on Monday.

Those injured in the stone pelting on Sunday evening in Mondha included Vasmat Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Rajkumar Kendre (54), he said.

"A mob of 50 persons hurled stones at a shop and were moving towards the residence of businessman



Kailash Kabra to vandalise it. Kabra allegedly forwarded an objectionable Whatsapp message about Islam. Kendre sustained injuries when he and his team tried to stop the stone pelting. Additional force was sent to the site and police carried out a cane charge," the official said.

Eight persons were held from the spot, while another eight were apprehended following a search operations in the vicinity, he added.

They have been charged under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita for attempt to murder, rioting, voluntarily causing hurt to deter a public servant from his duty and other offences on a complaint given at Vasmat police station by Kendre, the official said.

Efforts are on to nab 20 persons involved in the incident, he added. -PTI

Malhotra emphasizes for perfection

Mumbai: Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Monday exhorted colleagues to "strive for perfection" and support the realisation of the Viksit Bharat vision.

The career bureaucrat appointed to lead the central bank "reassured" staffers that the RBI, an "august institution", is his "family" now.

"I exhort you to strive for perfection in performing our critical roles as we enter Amrit Kaal and support in the realisation of our vision of a Viksit Bharat," Malhotra, who took charge as the RBI Governor last Thursday, said in a message to staff.

Malhotra, who faces a slew of challenges, including the unsettling of the inflation-growth balance and the continuous pressure on the rupee, said, "Continuous improvements and kaizens (improvement) are essential for any organisation to excel."

"I hope you will continue to put your best foot forward and not only maintain but also improve the high standards already set," he added.

RBI employees must uphold the critical values of

public service, including integrity, impartiality, industriousness, objectivity, accountability, decisiveness and transparency, he noted.

Malhotra said the RBI touches the lives of every citizen and performs some critical and important functions like monetary policy formulation, maintaining price stability, operating the currency and credit system and foreign exchange management.

Committing to working hand-in-hand with colleagues, Malhotra said he believes in working as a team and participative decision-making.

"I will maintain an open-door policy and remain accessible to each one of you, irrespective of rank or seniority," the governor said, adding that he looks forward to frank and free views.

"I would like to reassure you that this august institution is my family," he said.

The governor ended the single-page message, saying he looks forward to working with the RBI employees to make the "reverted institution scale greater heights".

Fadnavis calls Parbhani violence 'serious'

Nagpur: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday said he was ready for a discussion in the state legislative assembly on the recent Parbhani violence and murder of a sarpanch in Beed.

Speaking in the Lower House on the first day of the state legislature's winter session, Fadnavis described both the incidents, which occurred after the BJP-led Mahayuti came to power in the state, as serious.

The CM he was ready to

discuss the issues and spell out steps taken by his government to maintain law and order.

Violence erupted in central Maharashtra's Parbhani city after a glass-enclosed replica of the Constitution near Dr B R Ambedkar's statue outside the Parbhani railway station was vandalised on the evening of December 10.

More than 50 persons have been arrested and multiple cases registered in connection with the violence. In Beed, the sarpanch of

Massajog village, Santosh Deshmukh, was abducted and murdered on December 9. On Monday, Congress leader Nana Patole raised in the assembly the issue of violence in Parbhani over vandalising of a replica of the Constitution and the murder of a sarpanch in Beed district last week and demanded the government's response. CM Fadnavis agreed to discuss the two incidents in the House.

"I am sure the opposition will cooperate in suggesting ways to ensure such

incidents don't take place again. Our government works by the Constitution and it's insult will not be tolerated. A mentally unstable person, who was involved in the desecration (of the Constitution replica) in Parbhani, has been arrested," he said.

Fadnavis also introduced his newly sworn-in ministers on the floor of the House.

A total of 39 legislators from Mahayuti allies (BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP) were sworn in on Sunday in the first cabinet expansion of

the Fadnavis-led ministry.

While 33 legislators were sworn in as cabinet ministers, six took oath as ministers of state. The government on Monday also tabled supplementary demands to the tune of Rs 33,788 crore in the House.

On the first day of the session, the government reintroduced eight bills, including one for an amendment to postpone elections to the posts of president, vice president and chairpersons of certain zilla parishads and deputy chairpersons of

some panchayat samitis.

The legislative assembly also paid tributes to former Maharashtra governor SM Krishna, who passed away on December 10. Krishna, who had also served as the chief minister of Karnataka and Union minister, was the governor of Maharashtra from 2004 to 2008.

The House also paid tributes to former MLA Dinkarrao Jadhav, who died recently. Jadhav represented the Radhanagari assembly constituency from 1980 to 1988. -PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Sudhirbhai is a senior leader of BJP and a key leader in the state. It seems that some bigger role must be in the offing for him. Decisions taken by the central leadership are always for a good reason."



Chandrashekhar Bawankule, President, State BJP

Ilaiyaraaja denies he was stopped at temple

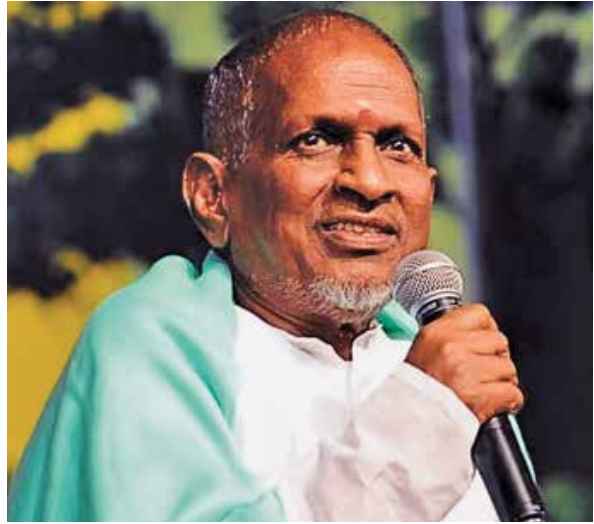
Chennai: Popular music composer Ilaiyaraaja on Monday dismissed as "false" the media reports that he was denied entry into the sanctum sanctorum of renowned Andal temple in Tamil Nadu's Srivilliputhur.

False news is being spread about something which had not happened at all, he said without going into details.

"I am not the one who compromises my self-respect at any time or place, and I will not compromise," the Maestro said.

A senior Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department official said Ilaiyaraaja who had attended a concert on December 15, visited the temple in Virudhunagar.

During the visit, while engrossed in a conversation with Sri Tridandi Sri-mannarayana Ramanuja Chinnna Jeeyar (Sri Vaishnavite religious guru), Ilaiyaraaja was about to enter the Artha Mandapam situated in front of the Garbhagriha, the official said.



Immediately, he was told that only the priests of that temple and Jeeyars were permitted to enter the Artha Mandapam where the temple's processional deities are kept.

"At once, Ilaiyaraaja stopped right at the entrance to the Mandapam and offered his prayers. He was given full temple honours upon his arrival at the shrine," a HR & CE official told PTI.

Later, when an explanation was sought over the controversy on Ilaiyaraaja's visit, the HR and CE joint commissioner stated that just as he began to ascend the steps of the Artha Mandapam, the music composer was told that he could have darshan in front of the Mandapam.

"He agreed and had a darshan. As per the tradition followed at the temple, only the priests and 'madathipathis' were allowed inside the sanctum sanctorum," the joint commissioner said in a communication to the Virudhunagar district collector.

Seeking to put to rest the controversy over his visit, Ilaiyaraaja said in a post on the social media platform X, "Some people are spreading false rumours centered around me."

"I am not the one to compromise my self-respect at any time or place, and I will not compromise. They are spreading news that did not happen (and portraying) as if it happened. Fans and the public should not believe these rumours," the composer said.

"Normally, only the priests of that particular temple who perform daily puja and abishekam alone are entitled to enter the Garbhagriha in Tamil Nadu temples. Devotees and even the Brahmins are not allowed to enter the temple's Garbhagriha," says V Subramanian, Secretary of Jankalyan, Chennai.

-PTI



Members of the 'Bhai Welfare Society' stage a protest demanding justice in the recent suicide case of Bengaluru techie Atul Subhash in Bhopal on Sunday. Pic: PTI

Booked for assaulting woman

Bhadohi: A case has been registered against several people for allegedly stripping and assaulting a woman in this Uttar Pradesh district. The woman, who runs a dairy shop, alleged that Shailendra Kumar Upadhyay came to her shop, seeking to buy two kilogrammes of ghee (clarified butter). She expressed her inability to sell him the ghee, having run out of stock. Upadhyay returned with a group of people who allegedly entered the shop, stripped and assaulted her while also making obscene gestures at her.

The woman alleged that hearing her scream, shopkeepers rescued her.

A case has been registered under sections 74 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 76 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to disrobe), 333 (house trespass after preparation for hurt, assault or wrongful restraint), 352 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace).

Priyanka shows solidarity with Palestinians

New Delhi: In a show of support for the people of Palestine, Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra Monday carried a bag to Parliament that had "Palestine" emblazoned on it.

The Congress general secretary has been raising her voice against Israel's actions in Gaza and expressing solidarity with Palestinians. Gandhi was seen carrying a handbag emblazoned with the word "Palestine" and Palestinian emblems, including a watermelon -- seen as a symbol of Palestinian solidarity.

Asked about BJP leaders raising the 'Palestine' bag issue, Priyanka Gandhi said, "Tell them that they should do something about the atrocities that are happening on minorities -- Hindus and Christians -- in Bangladesh. Talk to the Bangladesh government and stop these atrocities."

Abed Elrazeg Abu Jazer, the Charge d'affaires of the



Palestine Embassy in New Delhi, last week called on Gandhi to congratulate the Congress leader on her recent Lok Sabha bypoll victory from Kerala's Wayanad. In June, Gandhi slammed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over what she had said were the Israel government's "genocidal actions" in Gaza, as she accused him and his government of "barbarism".

The Congress general secretary's remarks had

come after Netanyahu defended Israel's ongoing war in Gaza in a speech to the US Congress.

Gandhi had said it was no longer enough to speak up for the civilians, mothers, fathers, doctors, nurses, aid workers, journalists, teachers, writers, poets, senior citizens and the thousands of innocent children who were being wiped out day after day by the "horrific genocide" taking place in Gaza.

"It is the moral responsibility of every right-thinking individual, including all those Israeli citizens who do not believe in hatred and violence, and every government in the world to condemn the Israeli government's genocidal actions and force them to stop," she had said in a post on X.

Their actions are unacceptable in a world that professes civility and morality, Gandhi had said.

-PTI

JNU warns against BBC documentary

New Delhi: JNU has issued an advisory warning students against participating in the screening of a banned BBC documentary featuring Narendra Modi, stating such activities could disturb "communal harmony".

The university said no permission had been granted for the screening.

RS MPs target Govt

New Delhi: Opposition MPs in Rajya Sabha on Monday accused the government of attacking the federal structure and undermining constitutional bodies while claiming that an Emergency-like situation exists in the country. Participating in a debate on the 75-year journey of the Constitution, Debashish Samantaray, whose party Biju Janata Dal (BJD) is not a part of either the ruling

National Democratic Alliance (NDA) or opposition's Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, alleged that Constitutional watchdogs have been converted into "pet-dogs".

"What is the situation today, anyone can be sent to jail, chief ministers were put in jail, denied bail. There is definitely an Emergency in the country, I will say it openly," he said. "The so-called Constitu-

tional watchdogs have become pet dogs, anyone can be behind bars without justification," he said. "We speak about Emergency, but there is a pseudo-Emergency in India."

"The Constitution somewhere has gone off track and none of us are willing to address it...," he said.

TMC MP Saket Gokhale alleged that justice is being denied to people under the NDA government.

Historian wants Nehru documents back

Ahmedabad: Historian Rizwan Kadri has requested Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to help the Prime Ministers' Museum and Library Society in getting back some important documents related to former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Those documents were removed from the library in 2008 at the behest of Congress leader Sonia Gandhi during the UPA rule, Kadri alleged. The Ahmedabad-based historian is a member of the New Delhi-based Prime Ministers' Museum and Library Society, which was known as the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in the past.

Talking to the reporters here on Monday, Kadri said he sent an email to Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, after a similar request to his mother and former Congress president Sonia Gandhi yielded no response.

"In 2008, 51 cartons which were part of the Nehru collection in the library were removed on the orders of Sonia Gandhi. These documents were originally part of a collection of Nehru papers, con-

taining both official and personal correspondence of our former PM. These documents are now missing from that collection," he claimed.

Kadri said that in September this year, he sent an email to Sonia Gandhi, requesting her to either return those documents to the library or give it permission to scan those original papers.

He claimed the documents which were removed from the library included letters exchanged between Nehru and Edwina Mountbatten, wife of Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last British viceroy to India.

Letters written to Nehru by India's former home minister Govind Ballabh Pant and socialist stalwart Jayaprakash Narayan were also part of the collection, he said.

"When there was no response from Sonia Gandhi, I sent an email to Rahul Gandhi to help the library in getting back those very important documents. These letters are national treasures and our heritage. It must be available to scholars and researchers. We all must know what was

there in the correspondence between those leaders," said Kadri.

During the society's annual general meeting held in February, Kadri said some members raised questions that how can someone just take these documents away when they have already been donated to the library and remained part of the collection for all these years.

According to Kadri, he had even seen a person destroying some papers using a shredder at the library in the past.

"Following that incident, we had demanded a forensic audit to be conducted to find out how pages were removed from files and destroyed, and what was the motive behind it. An internal inquiry committee was also formed by the administration to look into that matter," he said.

"I am a researcher and my aim is to preserve history which is real and neutral. I always wanted to study the correspondence between Nehru and Lady Mountbatten. Since 2019, I have been demanding that this collection should be shared with researchers."



A military personnel perform during 'Military Tattoo' on the occasion of 'Vijay Diwas 2024', marking India's victory in the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, at RCTC ground in Kolkata. Pic: PTI

Will defend Das: Lawyer

By Pradipta Tapadar

Kolkata: Rabindra Ghosh, a prominent Bangladeshi lawyer, on Monday claimed that he has been receiving death threats since he has decided to represent jailed Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das but vowed that he would continue his fight for justice and minority rights.

He alleged that the interim government in Bangladesh was targeting Das as he had been vocal against atrocities on Hindus and was uniting the persecuted minority community.

"I am aware that false cases could be filed against

me, but that will not stop me. All my life, I have fought against injustice. I have also fought cases for Muslims and helped them get justice. Death will come one day, but I will continue the fight," the 74-year-old lawyer of Bangladesh Supreme Court told PTI in a telephonic interview.

Ghosh, while highlighting the role played by the Hindu minority in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, lamented that the ongoing atrocities against minorities in Bangladesh defeat the "very principles" of the war, which was fought to end the unequal treatment of subjects of

West Pakistan and East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.

Speaking from Barrackpore, near Kolkata, where he has come for medical treatment, Ghosh said, "Since the day I declared that I will be fighting for Chinmoy Krishna Das, I have been receiving life threats. I get regular threat calls and messages, but that will not deter me from performing my duty. I will continue to fight against the injustice meted out to Das and other Hindus."

Chinmoy Krishna Das, a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote, was arrested earlier this month.

Provision of bypass to simultaneous elections

New Delhi: The bill which seeks to put in place a mechanism to hold simultaneous elections in the country has a provision for situations when election to an assembly cannot be held with those of Parliament.

The constitution amendment bill, which is expected to be brought in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, said the president can issue an order that polls of an assembly which cannot go to elections with the Lok Sabha can go for the democratic exercise later.

According to section 2 sub clause 5 of the Constitution (129th) Amendment Bill, "If the Election Commission is of the opinion that the elections to any Legislative Assembly cannot be conducted along with the general election to the House of the People, it may make a recommendation to the President, to declare by an order, that the election to that Legislative Assembly may be conducted at a later date."

The bill seeks to insert a new article in the Constitution and amend three articles to put in place the mechanism to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state

assemblies.

The bill proposes to insert a new article 82A -- simultaneous elections to the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and all legislative assemblies and to amend Article 83 (Duration of Houses of Parliament), Article 172 (Duration of State Legislatures) and Article 327 (power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures).

It also provides that after its enactment, a notification is to be issued by the President on the date of the first sitting of the Lok Sabha after a general election, and that the notification will be called.

The tenure of the Lok Sabha will be five years from that appointed date.

The tenure of all state assemblies, constituted by elections to the Legislative Assemblies after the appointed date and before the expiry of the full term of the House of the People, shall come to an end on the expiry of the term.

"Thereafter, all general elections to the House of the People and all Legislative Assemblies shall be held together simultaneously.

-PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Only the tradition of Ram, Krishna and Buddha will remain in India. The tradition of Babur and Aurangzeb will not remain (in India)."



Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh

Damaged idols found inside well

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

The Shri Kartik Mahadev temple (Bhasma Shankar temple) was reopened on December 13 after the authorities said they stumbled upon the covered structure during an anti-encroachment drive. The temple housed an idol of Lord Hanuman and a Shivaling. It had remained locked

since 1978. The temple also has a well nearby which the authorities had planned to reopen.

District Magistrate of Sambhal, Rajender Pensiya, told reporters that the ancient temple and the well were being excavated.

"Around 10 to 12 feet of digging has been done. During this, today, first an idol of Parvati was found with its head broken. Then Ganesh and Lakshmi idols were found," he said.

Asked if the idols were damaged and then put in-



side, Pensiya said, "All this is a matter of investigation."

To a question on encroachments around the temple, the district magis-

trate said some people removed encroachments on their own while others were requested to remove them.

Further due process will be followed and then these will be removed through the nagar palika, he said.

Asked if the temple would also be beautified, Pensiya said, "First the temple's 'praacheentaa' will be ensured." Sanjeev Sharma, who was present at the site during the excavation, said a damaged Lakshmi idol was found in the well along with a Parvati idol. Saten-

dra Kumar Singh said the Parvati idol was found about 15-20 feet inside the well.

The temple is situated in the Khaggu Sarai area, just over a kilometre from the Shahi Jama Masjid where violence took place on November 24 during a protest over a court-ordered survey of the mosque. Four people were killed and several, including police personnel, were injured in the violence.

The district administration has written to the Ar-

chaeological Survey of India for carbon dating of the temple, including the well. Carbon dating is a method used to determine the age of archaeological artefacts from ancient sites. Worshipers have started visiting the temple and it is being guarded round the clock.

Meanwhile, BJP's Sambhal district unit chief Chaudhary Harendra Singh, who offered prayers at the temple late on Sunday evening.

-PTI

Rs 16,000 cr needed for EV charging demand

New Delhi: India needs capital expenditure to the tune of Rs 16,000 crore to meet the country's growing public charging demand for electric vehicles (EVs) and achieve the mission of over 30 per cent electrification by 2030, according to a report released on Monday.

The FICCI report on "Electric Vehicle Public Charging Infrastructure: 2030 Roadmap" reveals that the current financial viability for public charging stations in India remains low with utilisation rates of less than 2 per cent, and to achieve profitability and scalability, "we need to aim for an 8-10 per cent utilisation by 2030".

"For instance, the current cost structure of electricity tariffs with fixed charges regardless of energy consumption combined with low utilisation at public charging stations is making it challenging to achieve break even. States like UP, Delhi and Gujarat have no/low fixed tariffs but there are other states where fixed tariffs are high, thereby challenging the viability," FICCI said.

The report called for action by key stakeholders, including policymakers, industry players, and government bodies, to enable India's transition towards clean energy and sustainability.

It also outlined five key challenges that need to be addressed to scale up public charging infrastructure. These include limited financial viability; DISCOM or power-related issues;



land-related issues; operational challenges; and standardisation and inter-operability.

The report further suggested standardising GST rates for EV charging services from 18 per cent to 5 per cent in line with taxation across the EV value chain. It also called for a shift from two-part tariff to single-part tariff with consistent pricing across states.

The report also recommended that states promote electric three-wheeler (E3W) adoption such as no permit requirement for buying E3W; in the interim, usage of same permit to shift from CNG three-wheeler to E3W.

It suggested setting-up a state-level cell with representation from industry stakeholders, state and central authorities to enable and monitor charging infrastructure roadmap implementation.

Another important recommendation by the report sought the Ministry of Power guidelines for installation and operation of EV charging infrastructure to be a mandate for state discoms (distribution companies) to ensure timely establishment of public charging stations (PCS).

The report further suggested that the top-40 of the 700-plus cities analysed on the basis of their EV sales from 2015 to 2023-24 and 20 highway stretches be prioritised for scaling up public charging infrastructure.

These top 40 cities are expected to have higher EV penetration in the next 3-5 years, given the current EV adoption rate, and favourable state policies. Moreover, 20 highway stretches connecting these 40 priority cities contribute to 50 per cent of the vehicular traffic.

UK wants to resume trade talks

New Delhi: The UK has suggested to resume the talks for the proposed free trade agreement in January next year, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said on Monday.

The talks for the proposed FTA began in January 2022. The 14th round of talks stalled as the two nations stepped into their general election cycles.

In November, an official statement said the dates for the FTA talks in early 2025 would be finalised through diplomatic channels.

"The UK wants to start the negotiations in January. Our delegation will go there. We will be taking up all the issues where we have left," he said.

When asked about the date, he said: "We are working out that".

The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty.

On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, electric vehicles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items.

Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services - banking and insurance.

The two countries are also negotiating a bilateral investment treaty (BIT). There are 26 chapters in the agreement, which includes goods, services, investments and intellectual property rights. The bilateral trade between India and the UK increased to USD 21.34 billion in 2023-24.

-PTI



An artisan packs papier-mache items ahead of Christmas celebrations, in Srinagar, Monday, Dec. 16, 2024. Global conflicts have affected the Kashmiri craftsmanship, with the papier-mache craft witnessing a 30 per cent decline in international orders.

Pic: PTI

AI revamps international network

New Delhi: Air India will revamp its international network by deploying retrofitted A320 neo aircraft, erstwhile Vistara's A321 neo and B787-9 planes on certain routes as well as optimise schedules for flights from Delhi to Paris and Frankfurt.

The Tata Group-owned airline, which is undergoing an ambitious five-year transformation plan, will deploy its retrofitted A320 neos for all flights between Delhi and Bangkok from January 16, 2025. These planes will have fully refreshed interiors across economy, premium economy, and business classes, according to a release on Monday.

Air India will also start a fourth daily flight between Delhi and Bangkok from January 1, 2025. Currently,

it has three daily services on this route.

Further, the carrier will deploy erstwhile Vistara's A321 neos and B787-9s on certain routes.

Delhi-Frankfurt and Mumbai-Frankfurt services are now operated with B787-9s while twice-a-day Mumbai-Singapore flight will be operated with A321 neos from January 1, 2025.

The release said from January 1, 2025, B787-9 will be deployed for a daily flight between Delhi and Singapore, and A321 neos will be operated for two daily flights on the same route.

As part of Tata Group consolidating its airline business, Air India has merged Vistara with itself and AIX Connect has been integrated with Air India Express.

From February 1, 2025,

Air India will also optimise the schedule of its flights on the Delhi-Frankfurt and Delhi-Paris routes.

"The new flight times now offer both daytime and nighttime departures on each route in both directions, providing greater flexibility to travellers. Air India has also retimed its daily flights on the Delhi-Sydney and Delhi-Melbourne routes to enable seamless two-way connectivity between Europe and Australia or points in Southeast Asia via Delhi.

"This means travellers from London, Paris, and Frankfurt can now easily take one-stop connections to Sydney and Melbourne in Australia, and to points like Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Ho Chi Minh City in Southeast Asia via Delhi," the airline

said in the release.

On September 17, Air India announced the commencement of its over USD 400 million-refit programme for the phased revamp of 67 legacy aircraft -- 27 narrow body A320 neos and 40 wide-body Boeing planes.

The retrofitting of the first narrow-body A320 neo has started while that of wide body aircraft is expected to commence in early 2025.

Air India CEO and MD Campbell Wilson, on November 28, said the airline will see most of the air traffic growth coming from domestic and short-haul international operations in 2025.

Air India Group, including Air India Express, has a fleet of around 300 aircraft.

-PTI

Cong raises conflict of interest allegations against SEBI chief

New Delhi: The Congress on Monday levelled conflict of interest allegations against the SEBI chairperson Madhabi Buch and claimed that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's "failure" to act decisively on it has not only tarnished the credibility of the government but also jeopardised the financial governance framework.

Attacking the government over the Adani issue during the discussion on the supplementary demands for grants in Lok Sabha, Congress MP K C Venugopal said a joint parliamentary committee must probe the entire matter.

He alleged it is a government "by Adani, of Adani, for Adani".

Venugopal said between 2017-2024, Buch allegedly received over Rs 16.4 crore from ICICI bank while serving as a Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) official regulating that bank.

"This was five times her salary from SEBI, presenting a blatant conflict of interest," he said.

She received rental income from entities linked to a firm under SEBI investigation, said Venugopal,



who also heads the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

"What does it mean sir, SEBI is investigating the company and the chairperson is renting out property to entity linked to that company," he said.

Venugopal also alleged that the SEBI chairperson traded in securities worth of Rs 36.9 crore while holding access to unpublished price-sensitive information which he said was a direct violation of SEBI code of ethics.

She failed to disclose assets in Singapore and the US between 2017-21 despite being obligated to do so, Venugopal said.

Despite these allegations, the finance minister neither initiated an independent inquiry nor has taken any disciplinary action, Venugopal said.

"Inaction undermines the government's claim of transparency and commitment to investor confidence," he said.

Posing questions to the finance minister, Venugopal asked why has the finance ministry not initiated any disciplinary and legal proceedings against the SEBI chairperson despite clear evidence of conflicts of interest that undermines the integrity of the regulatory body.

"Doesn't the finance minister take note, acknowledge and take responsibility for the damage to investor confidence, both domestic and foreign, due to the lack of timely action against SEBI chairperson?" he said.

Can the finance minister clarify whether the government is willing to accept responsibility for the uncertainty and volatility of stock market, stemming from the conflict of interest involving the SEBI chairperson, he said.

What steps does the finance minister intend to take to ensure transparency and accountability in SEBI leadership especially in the light of the allegations, Venugopal asked.

-PTI



BSE (Bombay Stock Exchange) Managing Director and CEO Sundararaman Ramamurthy receives a memento from Merchants' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (MCCI) Vice President Munish Jhajharia in Kolkata on Monday.

Pic: PTI

Probe against Amazon, Flipkart

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday said the petitions of e-commerce giants Amazon and Flipkart challenging an order of the Competition Commission of India ordering a probe against them for alleged malpractices should be transferred to the Karnataka High Court.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Manmohan issued a notice on the plea filed by the CCI which sought the transfer of the petitions filed by the e-commerce

platforms from the high courts to the top court or the Delhi high court.

"Issue notice. Prima facie, we are of the view that all cases, which are pending in various High Courts should be transferred to Karnataka High Court for hearing," the bench said and posted the matter on January 6, 2025.

The top court, however, asked the Karnataka High Court not to proceed with the hearing on the petitions filed by e-commerce

giants.

During the hearing, attorney general R Venkataramani submitted CCI did not have an objection if the matter was heard by the Karnataka High Court.

In its plea before the top court, the CCI sought directions to transfer the cases pending before the high courts of Allahabad, Madras, Telangana, Punjab and Haryana, Delhi and Karnataka, either to the Supreme Court or the Delhi High Court.

-PTI

Gold imports up 331 pc

New Delhi: The country's gold imports in November reached a record high of USD 14.86 billion, registering a four-fold increase, mainly on account of festival and wedding demands, according to commerce ministry data. Gold imports stood at USD 3.44 billion in November 2023.

Cumulatively, imports during April-November this fiscal year rose 49 per cent to USD 49 billion as against USD 32.93 billion in the same period last fiscal.

According to the ministry, gold, with about 25 per cent average annual return, is one of the best-performing assets in 2024 (till November) and high imports indicate strong investor confidence in the precious metal as a safe asset.

The other reasons include asset diversification towards gold due to global uncertainties, increasing demand from banks, cut in customs duties.

Prices of the yellow metal have increased 23 per cent so far this year to Rs 78,350 per 10 gm in the national capital.

In the Budget, the government slashed the duty from 15 per cent to 6 per cent. India's gold imports, which have a bearing on the country's current account deficit (CAD), surged 30 per cent to USD 45.54 billion in

2023-24. Switzerland is the largest source of gold imports, with about 40 per cent share, followed by the UAE (over 16 per cent) and South Africa (about 10 per cent).

The precious metal accounts for over 5 per cent of the country's total imports. The jump in gold imports pushed the country's trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) to a record USD 37.84 billion in November.

India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China. The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry. Gems and jewellery exports last month declined 25.32 per cent year-on-year to USD 17.43 billion.

The country's CAD widened marginally to USD 9.7 billion, or 1.1 per cent of the GDP, in April-June 2024 against USD 8.9 billion, or 1 per cent, in the year-ago period. A current account deficit occurs when the value of goods and services imported and other payments exceed the value of export of goods and services and other receipts by a country in a particular period.

India is seeking a review of certain provisions of the free trade agreement with the UAE, which came into force on May 1, 2022.

-PTI

LIC's unclaimed maturity amounts at Rs 881 cr

New Delhi: Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) has unclaimed maturity amounts of Rs 880.93 crore in 2023-24, Parliament was informed on Monday. As many as 3,72,282 policyholders did not claim maturity benefits during FY2024, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

During the previous year, he said, the amount worth Rs 815.04 crore belonging to 3,73,329 policyholders remained unclaimed. As many as 10

death claims worth Rs 14 lakh remained unclaimed during 2023-24, he said.

In order to reduce the Unclaimed and Outstanding Claims, LIC has undertaken several measures, including print media and digital media advertisement apart from radio jingles for policyholders to claim their due amounts.

Outstanding amounts lying in unclaimed accounts are settled in favour of respective policyholders or claimants upon receipt of claim request, he said.

Reminder letters are sent

through ordinary/speed post as well as through email where available and also SMS are sent where mobile numbers are available, he said.

The claim settlement process is simplified and only valid NEFT is required to settle the claim, he said, adding that continuous follow-up is made with the policyholders through agents and development officers to comply with the requirement and claim the amounts.

In reply to another question, Chaudhary said the

Foreign Exchange Reserves (FER) decreased by 2.63 per cent for the week ended November 15, 2024, against the previous week.

However, in percentage terms, the highest decline till date in the last 20 years was observed in the week ended October 24, 2008, with FER declining by 5.65 per cent over the previous week, he said.

The value of the Indian Rupee (INR) is market-determined, with no target or specific level or band, he said.

Apart from capital flows

(which include equity flows as well), the factors that influence the exchange rate of INR include movement in the dollar index, level of interest rates, movement in crude prices, current account deficit, etc, he said.

Further, it said, RBI intervenes in the forex market to curb undue volatility in INR.

There are 5,728 Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) and Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) whose Certificate of Registration (CoR) has been cancelled by the Re-

serve Bank of India (RBI) as on June 30, 2024, he said in another reply.

As on June 30, 2024, as many as 25 deposits taking NBFCs are registered with RBI.

Complaints received regarding harassment of borrowers by recovery agents are taken up with the Supervised Entities (SEs) for immediate action by RBI.

The RBI guidelines provide for informing borrowers of comprehensive information about the fees/charges, etc, he said.

-PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"By 2050, it will be impossible to live in India. It will be impossible to work in India...therefore, the circular economy offers a really compelling solution to the dilemma that India is facing due to rapid urbanisation and industrialization."



Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa

US: Pak made significant progress in countering terrorist financing

Islamabad: Pakistan has made substantial progress in countering terrorist financing and addressing regional extremist networks, a US State Department report states while also highlighting significant security challenges, including a sharp rise in terrorist attacks in 2023.

The Dawn newspaper said that the report released this week commends Pakistan for completing its updated National Risk Assessment (NRA) on money laundering and terrorist financing in 2023.

This assessment evaluated 87 terrorist organisations, conducted sectoral vulnerability analysis and identified donations and extortion as key funding sources for terrorism.

According to the assessment, 41 groups remain active in Pakistan, leveraging cash couriers and illegal money transfer services. The report flagged porous borders with Afghanistan as critical vulnerabilities facilitating illicit financial flows.

The report notes that consistent with its commitment to relevant UN resolutions, Pakistan prosecutes its returning citizens who participated in foreign wars.

"There were about 100 Pakistani nationals in northeast Syria in 2023," it said. "To date, Pakistan has declined to repatriate any of its nationals," it added.



The State Department underscores Pakistan's efforts to disseminate the findings to law enforcement and other stakeholders, directing them to implement targeted policy and operational priorities. Notably, Pakistan extradited a dual US-Pakistani citizen to the US in December to face prosecution for terrorism-related crimes.

The US report notes that Pakistan collects biometric information at land crossings through its International Border Management Security System.

The Customs Service attempted to enforce anti-money laundering laws and foreign exchange regulations at all major airports, in coordination with other agencies.

In 2023, Pakistani customs managed the entry of dual-use chemicals for legitimate purposes through end-use verification, while also attempting to prevent their diversion for use

in IEDs.

FATF, rising threat

Pakistan's removal from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Grey List in October 2022 is highlighted in Washington as a "pivotal achievement". This followed sustained efforts to address strategic deficiencies identified in 2018.

The FATF acknowledged Pakistan's improved compliance with international anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorist financing (CFT) standards, culminating in a strengthened regulatory framework.

Despite advancements in combating terrorist financing, the report paints a grim picture of the security landscape in 2023. Terrorist attacks increased by over 50 per cent compared to 2022, with civilians and security forces being frequent targets.

Provinces such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Ba-

lochistan experienced concentrated violence, with groups like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Balochistan Liberation Army, and local ISIS affiliates employing explosives and small arms in their attacks.

Madrassas' compliance

The report notes Pakistan's continued efforts in countering violent extremism, including operating "deradicalisation" camps in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that provide corrective religious education, vocational training, and counselling.

The National Counterterrorism Authority also expanded its Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) office in 2023, signing an MoU with the Higher Education Commission to implement CVE initiatives across universities.

However, concerns remain regarding madrassas failing to comply with registration and funding documentation laws, some of which continue to promote ideologies that could lead to violent extremism.

Pakistan's active participation in multilateral counter-terrorism forums, such as the Global Counterterrorism Forum and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, as well as the inclusion of cities like Karachi and Peshawar in the Strong Cities Network, underscores commitment to regional stability.

Political, strategic dimensions

Security analysts note that while Pakistan has made progress in countering terrorist financing, its domestic security remains precarious.

"The rise in terrorist activity alongside progress in countering terrorist financing highlights the complex reality Pakistan must navigate," said Agha Murtaza Haider, a security analyst, while highlighting the dual challenges the country faces.

He also addressed domestic political concerns such as jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's call for US sanctions over alleged democratic backsliding.

But he believed Washington's strategic interests in counter-terrorism and regional stability are likely to take precedence over such demands. "Washington's approach has consistently favoured stability over punitive measures," he observed, adding that Pakistan's cooperation in addressing terrorist financing remained a key US priority. While Pakistan's efforts have earned international recognition, the steep rise in terrorist activity in 2023 underscores the daunting challenges ahead in ensuring both domestic stability and global trust, according to the Dawn newspaper.

-PTI



Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake with President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi poses for photographs after his ceremonial reception at the Rashtrapati Bhava. Pic: PTI

PM Modi holds talks with Dissanayaka

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Monday held extensive talks with Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka, focusing on further shoring up India-Sri Lankan cooperation in a range of areas, including defence, trade and investment.

The Sri Lankan leader arrived in Delhi on Sunday, his first foreign trip after becoming president in September.

Ahead of the talks, Dissanayaka was accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

"An extensive agenda encompassing trade, investment, development and security cooperation will be discussed," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on X ahead of the Modi-Dissanayaka talks.

On Sunday, the Sri Lankan leader held separate

meetings with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and NSA Ajit Doval.

The Sri Lankan leader will also meet President Droupadi Murmu.

Dissanayaka is scheduled to attend a business event in Delhi to promote investment and commercial linkages between India and Sri Lanka. He is also scheduled to visit Bodh Gaya.

Sri Lanka is India's closest maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region and holds a central place in Prime Minister Modi's vision of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday.

"The visit of President Dissanayaka to India is expected to further strengthen the multi-faceted and mutually beneficial cooperation between the two

countries," it said.

Issues relating to maritime security cooperation are likely to figure during Dissanayaka's visit, people familiar with the matter said.

India has been expanding its overall defence and strategic ties with Sri Lanka amid concerns over China's attempts to increase its military presence in the Indian Ocean.

The docking of the Chinese missile and satellite tracking ship 'Yuan Wang' at Hambantota port in August 2022 had triggered a diplomatic row between India and Sri Lanka.

Another Chinese warship docked at the Colombo port in August last year.

India has been supporting various capacity-building measures of Sri Lankan defence forces, including providing indigenously constructed Off-shore Patrol Vessels.

-PTI

Yunus calls Victory Day 'extra significant'

Dhaka: Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus on Monday led Bangladesh in celebrating the 54th Victory Day that led to the liberation of the country in 1971, calling this year's celebration extra significant after the ouster of what he referred to as the "world's worst autocratic government".

Yunus did not mention the country's founding leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Victory Day or Vijay Diwas commemorates the Pakistan military's surrender to Indian forces. India's historic victory led to the liberation of Bangladesh.

Yunus and Bangladesh President Mohammed Shahabuddin separately paid tributes to millions of Liberation War martyrs and the National Memorial at Savar on the outskirts of the capital.

"I recall the millions of martyrs including numerous children and juveniles, youths and the elderly people's sacrifices that made possible the achievement of our independence," Yunus said in a televised speech.

His address, however, made no mention of the political leadership in 1971 and that of Rahman, the



father of deposed premier Sheikh Hasina.

Yunus said, "Because of our faults we could not give completeness to our achievements" and of late a "monstrous autocratic government had grabbed the country which virtually promised that it will not allow anything to remain which could benefit the country".

Yunus, 84, said the ouster of the "world's worst autocratic government (Hasina's Awami League regime)" and forcing it to flee amid a mass upsurge earned extra significance to the celebration this year.

A student-led uprising ousted the regime of prime minister Hasina on August 5, forcing her to take refuge in India. An interim government was installed after here ouster with Professor Yunus as the Chief Adviser or de facto prime minister.

During the celebrations on Monday, Army bugles played the last post as they

stood in solemn silence.

East Timor President Jose Ramos-Horta accompanied Yunus there as a visiting top foreign dignitary to join celebration.

Deviating from the tradition since the independence, Bangladesh did not stage the Victory Day Parade in the capital which the Liberation War affairs adviser Farook-e-Azam said could not be held because of preoccupation of the armed forces.

"The army is currently engaged in activities across the country, and organising the parade requires advance preparation, which wasn't feasible this year," he said in an interview with the Daily Star newspaper.

But he said the celebration would be inclusive for all with 'Victory Fairs' across the country featuring art and craft exhibits, agricultural product displays, and showcasing of domestic goods.

He said schools were hosting their own programmes as part of the festivities and cultural programmes would include the participation of children, women, and men, making the celebration inclusive for all.

-PTI



A Cambodian flag flutters as USS Savannah arrives for a port call at Sihanoukville port, Cambodia on Monday. Pic: AP/PTI

Two killed, four injured in shooting

Houston: Two teens were killed and four were injured — including a 13-year-old girl — in a shooting at a makeshift club in Houston, police said Sunday.

Officers arriving at the site of the shooting late Saturday night found "a very hectic scene — a large crowd of people running out of a makeshift club," Assistant Chief Luis Menendez-Sierra said at a news conference.

Police have not yet identified a suspect and have asked those who were at the event to call police with any

information. Police said some witnesses told detectives that they saw a man wearing all black, including a hooded sweatshirt and a black mask covering his face, shoot a pistol into a crowd of people at the venue.

Police said a 16-year-old male died at the scene and a 14-year-old female died at the hospital. Their identities are pending verification by the medical examiner.

The four who were injured, all females, were hospitalised. The injured

13-year-old was in critical condition, while an 18-year-old was in serious condition and a 17-year-old and 19-year-old were both in stable condition.

Menendez-Sierra said most of those attending the event, which appeared to be organised on social media, were juveniles. He said they were gathered in an empty business.

Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said in a post on X that "makeshift, unsanctioned pop-up parties can quickly lead to chaos and violence." -AP

Death toll in Gaza Strip tops 45,000

Deir al-Balah: The death toll in the Gaza Strip from the 14-month war between Israel and Hamas militants has topped 45,000 people, Palestinian health officials said Monday, with 52 dead arriving at hospitals across the bombed-out strip over the past 24 hours.

The Gaza Health Ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count, but it has said that more than half of the fatalities are women and children. The Israeli military says it has killed more than 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The Health Ministry said 45,028 people have been killed and 106,962 have been wounded since the start of the war. It has said the real toll is higher because thousands of bodies are still buried under rubble or in areas that medics cannot access. The latest war has been by far the deadliest round of fighting between Israel and Hamas, with the death toll now amounting to roughly 2 per cent of Gaza's entire prewar population of about 2.3 million.

Among the dead reported in the overall toll were 10 people, including a family

of four, who were killed in an overnight Israeli strike in Gaza City, Palestinian medics said.

The strike late Sunday hit a house in Gaza City's eastern Shijaiyah neighbourhood, according to the Health Ministry's emergency service. Rescuers recovered the bodies of 10 people from under the rubble, including those of two parents and their two children, it said.

Israel claims Hamas is responsible for the civilian death toll because it operates from within civilian areas in the densely populated Gaza Strip. Rights groups and Palestinians say Israel has failed to take sufficient precautions to avoid civilian deaths.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Israel responded by heavy bombardment and a ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead. Most of the rest were released during a cease-fire last year.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"As this government is not democratically elected, they have no accountability to the people. Their main aim is to suppress the spirit of the Liberation War and the pro-liberation forces and suppress their voice."



Sheikh Hasina, Ousted PM, Bangladesh

1971 war veterans mark Vijay Diwas

Dhaka: Eight Indian military veterans of Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War reached Dhaka while eight officers of Bangladesh Army arrived in Kolkata to join the Vijay Diwas celebrations in the two countries, officials said.

Bangladesh officials and Indian high commission in Dhaka said two serving officers from both sides comprised the delegations that will attend the celebrations in Dhaka and Kolkata. They reached their destination cities on Sunday. The Bangladesh delega-



The interim government of Muhammad Yunus has firmly rejected any major communal violence. Hindus constitute around eight per cent of Bangladesh's population.

"The exchange of veterans' visits is a reminder of friendship forged in 1971," a political analyst in Dhaka said.

He said Indian external affairs secretary Vikram

Misri's one-day Dhaka visit on December 9 for foreign office consultations with his counterpart Jashim Uddin partly eased the tensions in bilateral ties as he also met Yunus and his de facto foreign minister Touhid Hossain.

"Now the exchange of the veterans' visits is expected to manifest the goodwill of both the countries for each other," the analyst said.

Both India and Bangladesh celebrate the victory over Pakistan on December 16, 1971, and every year in-

vite each other's war veterans and serving officers to participate in the celebrations in two countries.

Bangladesh celebrates its Independence Day on March 26 but Dhaka emerged as the free capital of a free country on December 16 after nine months of Liberation War with crucial Indian assistance.

"These annual bilateral visits provide a platform for Mukti Jodhas and Liberation War veterans to celebrate the unique friendship of the two countries," Indian high commission said.

EDITORIAL

Eternal Rhythms

Few artists bridge the divide between tradition and modernity. East and West, as seamlessly as Ustad Zakir Hussain did. The tabla maestro, who passed away in San Francisco at the age of 73, leaves behind a legacy so vibrant that his rhythms will echo in concert halls and living rooms for decades. His death marks the end of an era not just for Indian classical music but for global musical innovation.

Hussain was cradled by rhythm from his very first breath. His father, Ustad Alla Rakha, the iconic tabla virtuoso, recited tabla rhythms into the infant Zakir's ears instead of traditional prayers. This unconventional blessing not only set the tempo for Zakir's extraordinary life but also revealed the deep spiritual and artistic confluence that would define him.

By the tender age of 12, Zakir was already performing across India, carrying the weight of his father's formidable legacy. Yet, he did not merely walk in his father's shadow but forged his own path, boldly transcending the boundaries of Indian classical music. Over six decades, Zakir collaborated with legends from every corner of the music world—Pandit Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan in India, jazz stalwarts John McLaughlin and Miles Davis internationally. In his hands, the tabla was not merely a percussion instrument but a voice that could articulate joy, sorrow and the ineffable mysteries of life itself.

Zakir's musical curiosity found its apotheosis in collaboration. He was a founding member of Shakti, the groundbreaking fusion band created in 1973, which married Indian classical ragas with the improvisational essence of jazz. With violinist L. Shankar, percussionist T.H. Vinayakram and McLaughlin on guitar, Zakir shattered conventional notions of genre, creating something neither wholly Indian nor entirely Western but an exhilarating blend of the two. This ability to merge without losing authenticity became his hallmark.

For all his global accolades—four Grammy Awards, the Padma Vibhushan—Zakir retained a disarming humility. Fellow musicians described him as generous with his time and wisdom, a maestro who elevated not just his instrument but everyone who shared a stage with him.

Zakir's philosophy towards his art was deeply personal, almost mystical. He spoke often of building a friendship with his tabla. This belief reflected in his performances, which combined precise technical mastery with an effervescence that turned the mechanical into the magical.

Culturally, he embodied India's syncretic ethos. His formative years were spent toggling between Hindu shlokas, Islamic teachings and Christian hymns at St. Michael's Church. This pluralistic upbringing resonated in his music, which refused to adhere to rigid boundaries of culture or creed.

Zakir's passing is mourned not just by musicians but by millions worldwide who marvelled at his ability to universalize the particular. He was not just India's cultural ambassador but music's global citizen. His rhythms were prayers, his performances revelations. And though his hands have now fallen silent, his music will forever carry forward the essence of his life—limitless, timeless, eternal.

NATIONAL INTEREST

The Problem with Rahul Gandhi's Savarkar Obsession



By
Kiran D. Tare

Congress MP's Rahul Gandhi's attacks on historical figures like Veer Savarkar and sacred Hindu texts like the Manusmriti betray a concerning superficiality in his understanding of history. His recent diatribe in Parliament reflects not only a lack of depth but also a penchant for perpetuating simplistic and politically expedient narratives. This intellectual laziness raises a fundamental question: is the Congress scion a slow learner, incapable of nuanced thought, or is he simply unwilling to engage deeply with India's rich and complex past?

Take his frequent assaults on Savarkar, for instance. Gandhi has often portrayed the Hindutva ideologue as a 'British collaborator,' citing Savarkar's mercy petitions from the Cellular Jail in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as proof of his supposed cowardice. This claim wilfully ignores the context of Savarkar's imprisonment—a harrowing ordeal that would have broken lesser

The Congress scion's ill-conceived crusade against Veer Savarkar expose his flawed grasp of history while offering an object lesson in distorted narratives.

men. Sentenced to two life terms (of 50 years), Savarkar endured the most inhuman conditions at 'Kaalapaani.' Prisoners were manacled, flogged and forced to grind mustard seeds like bullocks. Food was infested with worms, medical aid was non-existent, and dissenters were subjected to brutal force-feeding via rubber catheters.

Savarkar's mercy petitions, far from being acts of surrender, were tactical manoeuvres designed to escape a living hell and continue his fight for India's independence. Historian Jaywant Joglekar compared these to Shivaji's letter to Aurangzeb during his captivity in Agra—a strategic ploy rather than capitulation.

After his release in 1937, Savarkar led a robust political campaign to prevent the Partition of India and worked tirelessly to bolster India's military strength. Yet Rahul Gandhi clings to half-truths, refusing to acknowledge Savarkar's towering contributions to India's freedom struggle.

Contrast this with Gandhi's great-grandfather, India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, whose time in British prisons was far more comfortable. Nehru's 'jail' accommodations reportedly included a personal bungalow, opportunities for gardening and time to write books. When his wife fell ill, his sentence was suspended without protest. To equate these privileged confinements with Savarkar's torment is not just dishonest but absurd.

Rahul Gandhi's grasp of history is further undermined by his shallow critique of the Manusmriti—which has been used as a tool of rank political opportunism by parties claiming to represent Dalits and other Leftist outfits. Labelling it a relic of patriarchy and caste oppression, Gandhi ignores the text's historical and philosophical significance. Written nearly 2,000 years ago, the Manusmriti provided a framework



for governance, justice, and personal conduct. While parts of the text have been misused to justify social hierarchies, its overarching ethos emphasized duties over rights, fostering moral responsibility and societal harmony. It advocated virtues like patience, humility, and respect for elders—values that resonate even today.

But nuanced readings are clearly beyond Rahul Gandhi's intellectual appetite. For him and his Congress cohorts, the Manusmriti serves as a convenient punching bag to rally so-called progressive forces. Their attacks, however, often reveal more about their own opportunism than any genuine engagement with the text. Gandhi's propensity for historical shortcuts reflects an alarming trend: the weaponization of history for identity politics.

This brings us to Gandhi's broader pattern of historical gaffes. Whether confusing timelines, conflating events, or making baseless claims, his public statements frequently betray a tenuous grasp of facts. His attack on Savarkar for allegedly collaborating with the British ignores documented evidence of Savarkar's fierce anti-colonial activities. Similarly, his claim that Savarkar opposed the Quit India Movement lacks context. Savarkar's stance—'Quit India but not the Army'—was rooted in pragmatism. He encouraged Indians to join the British-Indian Army, recognizing the strategic importance of military

training for post-independence defence. This foresight proved invaluable during the Partition and subsequent conflicts with Pakistan.

Savarkar's contributions were acknowledged even by his contemporaries. Subhas Chandra Bose praised him for urging youth to enlist in the armed forces, while Rash Behari Bose hailed him as a symbol of sacrifice. Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev considered Savarkar's writings essential reading for revolutionaries. These endorsements expose the hollowness of Rahul Gandhi's allegations.

Perhaps the most egregious of Gandhi's claims is that Savarkar was complicit in Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. Despite being acquitted by the courts, Savarkar remains a target of Left-Liberal vitriol. This selective scepticism towards judicial verdicts reveals the ideological biases of Gandhi and his allies. Their attacks on Savarkar's Hindutva philosophy are equally uninformed. Savarkar's vision of a Hindu Rashtra was inclusive, advocating equal rights for all citizens irrespective of religion. He opposed the creation of a 'nation within a nation' based on religious minorities—a prescient warning in light of contemporary communal tensions.

Rahul Gandhi's facile approach to history and his reductionist narratives fuel polarization, eroding the possibility of meaningful discourse. Worse, they expose his own intellectual inadequacies, raising serious doubts about his capacity to lead the Congress.

I would say the question is not just whether Rahul Gandhi is a slow learner but whether he is willing to learn at all. His repeated historical blunders suggest a leader more interested in scoring political points than engaging with the complexities of India's heritage. For a nation as diverse and historically rich as India, this is not just disappointing—it is dangerous!

The Road Not Taken



By
Ruddhi Phadke

When the Arab Spring erupted in 2011, it swept across North Africa and the Middle East like a tidal wave of discontent. Tunisia ignited the movement, quickly followed by Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco, and Syria. Many countries witnessed dramatic transformations within months. Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia; Egypt's Hosni Mubarak resigned; Libya's Muammar Gaddafi met a brutal end. Syria, however, became an outlier, descending into a prolonged civil war that persisted for over a decade. Now, 13 years later, the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime has brought Syrians to a jubilant crossroads, yet their path forward remains treacherous.

The uprisings were as diverse as the countries they engulfed. Morocco's monarchy survived by preemptively implementing constitutional reforms. Bahrain's Sunni-led government brutally crushed protests by its Shia majority with Saudi support. Yemen spiralled into chaos, with Ali Abdullah Saleh ousted in 2012 only for the country to devolve into a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Arab Spring's outcomes were a mix of triumph, compromise, and calamity.

While Syria's trajectory post-Assad captures global

attention, the Arab Spring's legacies in Yemen and Morocco offer contrasting narratives that underscore the complexities of revolution and reform in the Arab world.

Yemen, already one of the Arab world's poorest countries, became a battleground for competing visions of power following the 2011 ousting of Ali Abdullah Saleh. Unlike Syria's prolonged civil war, Yemen's initial transition promised cautious optimism under President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. However, Hadi's administration proved incapable of addressing endemic corruption, rising sectarian tensions, and the dominance of armed groups.

The Houthi rebellion, rooted in longstanding grievances of the Zaidi Shia minority, seized the capital, Sana'a, in 2014, plunging Yemen into chaos. Saudi Arabia, viewing the Houthis as Iranian proxies, launched a military intervention in 2015. The war metastasized into one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with famine, cholera outbreaks, and airstrikes devastating civilian life. The conflict's intractability reveals the fragility of post-revolutionary states, where power vacuums are often filled by opportunistic actors rather than reformist leaders.

In 2024, Yemen remains a cautionary tale. Despite UN-brokered ceasefires, hopes for a lasting resolution are dim, as external powers—Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the UAE—continue to treat Yemen as a proxy battleground. The lessons for Syria are stark: transitions falter without broad-based governance and international coordination to prioritize human

THE ARAB SPRING AND THE CONTRASTING FATES OF SYRIA, YEMEN AND MOROCCO



security over geostrategic gains.

By contrast, Morocco's experience exemplifies a more measured response to popular discontent. King Mohammed VI, aware of the winds of change, introduced constitutional reforms early in 2011, ceding some powers to the elected parliament while maintaining the monarchy's overarching influence. This calculated concession curbed the momentum of protests while preserving Morocco's stability.

However, these reforms did not address systemic issues such as unemployment, wealth inequality, and corruption. The king's control over critical sectors of the economy remains a source of contention. While Morocco avoided the violent upheavals that plagued Syria and Yemen, its limited reforms risk creating a pressure cooker of unfulfilled demands. For now, Morocco's stability serves

THE BROKEN CRESCENT
PART 2

as a reminder that pragmatic leadership can avert disaster, though it requires continuous effort to adapt to changing societal expectations.

For Syrians, the success of revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya inspired dreams of similar liberation. In March 2011, those dreams found a voice in Daraa, where peaceful demonstrations erupted after schoolboys were arrested and tortured for anti-regime graffiti. Calls for reform quickly transformed into demands for Assad's resignation. The government's response was predictably brutal: security forces opened fire on protesters, igniting clashes

that escalated into full-scale civil war by mid-2011. By July, defected military officers formed the Free Syrian Army (FSA), setting the stage for an armed rebellion.

Syria's war was not a simple binary between regime and opposition. Its multiethnic and multi-religious society—Sunni Muslims, Alawites, Christians, Kurds, and others—fractured along sectarian and ideological lines. By 2012, jihadist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda affiliate, and later the Islamic State (ISIS) entered the fray, reshaping the conflict's dynamics. ISIS declared a 'caliphate' in 2014, seizing vast swaths of terri-

tory, including Raqqa, which became its de facto capital.

The Assad regime endured through a potent mix of repression and international support. Russia's 2015 intervention, marked by relentless airstrikes, turned the tide in Assad's favor. Iran provided economic aid, military advisors, and Hezbollah fighters. Meanwhile, Turkey's incursions targeted Kurdish groups it viewed as existential threats, further complicating the battlefield. The United States, leading a coalition against ISIS, conducted airstrikes but refrained from direct confrontation with Assad.

The deadlock shattered on December 7 when Syrian opposition forces launched a decisive offensive. A coalition comprising the Southern Operations Room, Tahrir al-Sham, and the Syrian National Army stormed government-held areas, swiftly capturing

Damascus.

For many Syrians, the fall of Damascus was both euphoric and surreal. Crowds flooded the streets, chanting 'freedom' and dismantling symbols of Assad's regime. Yet the scenes of jubilation were tinged with apprehension. The patchwork nature of the opposition forces raised questions about their ability to govern a fractured nation.

Assad's downfall marks a turning point in the Syrian saga, but the nation he leaves behind is shattered. Infrastructure lies in ruins, from schools to hospitals, while sectarian mistrust lingers. The country's vast displacement crisis—with millions of refugees and internally displaced persons—poses immense logistical and social challenges.

The geopolitical ripples are equally significant. Russia, Assad's most powerful backer, has scrambled to salvage its influence. Moscow's deal with the opposition, guaranteeing the safety of its military bases in Latakia and Tartous, underscores its intent to remain a key player in the region. Yet the loss of its ally diminishes its leverage. Similarly, Iran's waning role in post-Assad Syria threatens its regional strategy, as competing factions may limit Tehran's sway.

Syria's unfolding chapter invites comparisons with its Arab Spring peers. Morocco's monarchy and Bahrain's Sunni rulers retained power through strategic concessions and brute force, respectively. Yemen, meanwhile, remains mired in a humanitarian catastrophe, its hopes for democracy smothered by external meddling.

Morocco has emerged as a relative success story in

managing dissent through co-optation rather than repression. Yet, its stability is fragile, relying heavily on the monarchy's ability to balance reform with control. As Syria charts its uncertain path forward, Morocco's strategy highlights the importance of incremental change to avoid descent into chaos.

Syria's neighbors, particularly Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, will feel the effects of Assad's fall acutely. Managing the return of refugees and recalibrating regional security dynamics will test their resilience. The United States and Europe, long critics of Assad, must decide how deeply to engage in Syria's reconstruction and governance. Their involvement could bolster moderates within the opposition and counterbalance the influence of more radical factions. Failure to act risks allowing extremist groups to exploit the vacuum, perpetuating cycles of violence.

Assad's departure closes one of the darkest chapters in Syria's history but opens a new, uncertain one. The euphoria in Damascus may fade as the enormity of rebuilding a nation becomes apparent. The road to recovery will require not only rebuilding infrastructure but also healing deep-seated divisions, fostering inclusivity and prioritizing justice for victims of the war.

The world's eyes will remain fixed on Syria in the foreseeable future as a nation that has endured unimaginable suffering yet refuses to be defined by it. The resilience of its people and the lessons of the Arab Spring will shape its next chapter, offering both cautionary tales and glimmers of hope.



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KALEIDOSCOPE

1. Artists with the mascot of the '38th National Games' during its launch, at Maharana Pratap Sports Stadium in Dehradun on Sunday.
2. Models display a designer's collection during the 'Heritage Door Fashion Show' at Hawa Mahal in Jaipur on Sunday.
3. Artists perform during an event for Guinness World Records as the 'largest Hindustani classical band' during the '100th International Tansen Samaroh' in Gwalior, MP on Sunday.
4. World's youngest Chess Champion Gukesh Dommaraju upon his arrival at the airport in Chennai on Monday.
5. Students celebrate during after the 4th annual convocation Patliputra University, in Patna on Monday.

All Pictures PTI, AP



5

EXPLAINER

Why Trump's Return May Prove to be a Boon for Netanyahu?

Shortly after Donald Trump's win in last month's US election, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rushed to congratulate the president-elect: "History's greatest comeback!" he gushed.

If Trump's staunchly pro-Israel first term and his nominations for top administration positions are any indication, Netanyahu's glee is justified.

But much has transpired since Trump left office in early 2021. The wars in the Middle East, the lofty ambitions of Netanyahu's far-right governing coalition and Netanyahu's personal relationship with him could dampen that enthusiasm and complicate what on the surface looks like a seamless alliance.

"For Bibi, this is his dream. He wanted this," said Mazal Mualem, an Israeli journalist and Netanyahu biographer, referring to the Israeli leader by his nickname. "For Bibi, it's too good to be true."

With Netanyahu set to testify in his corruption trial and facing an international arrest warrant over the war in Gaza, Trump's backing will be all the more significant.

During Trump's first term, he adopted policies largely favorable to Netanyahu. Trump broke with longstanding U.S. policy to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, moving the U.S. Embassy to the contested city over Palestinian objections.

He recognized Israel's claim to the Golan Heights,

which the international community considers occupied Syrian territory. He also turned a blind eye to Israeli settlement construction in the occupied West Bank and presented a peace plan that would leave dozens of settlements intact.

The Palestinians seek all of the West Bank, captured in 1967, as the heartland of a future state, with east Jerusalem as its capital. The international community considers settlements in both areas illegal.

At Netanyahu's urging, Trump withdrew the U.S. from an Obama-era deal between world powers and Iran over its nuclear program and ramped up sanctions against Iran, while also killing a top Iranian general.

And in the final days of his presidency, Trump brokered a series of diplomatic deals between Israel and Arab countries, shattering a longstanding assumption that Arab countries would not normalize ties without progress on Palestinian statehood. The accords marked a major foreign policy achievement for Netanyahu.

Likely to top Netanyahu's wish list this time around is for Trump to be tough against Iran or perhaps even provide Israel with the weaponry it needs for an effective strike against Iran's nuclear program. Netanyahu will also want to see progress on normalization with Saudi Arabia, but he will seek to minimize Israeli concessions to the Palestinians in



Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu attends his trial on corruption charges at the district court in Tel Aviv, Israel on Monday. Pic: AP/PTI

return. And he will likely expect Trump to give Israel a free hand in Gaza and not pressure it to withdraw troops, even under a ceasefire deal.

In the weeks since Trump's reelection, Netanyahu and his allies have expressed hope that the good times will return after strained relations with the Biden administration.

"The belief for now is that Trump will deliver," said Aviv Bushinsky, a former adviser to Netanyahu. He said Netanyahu's appointment of a hard-line settlement advocate as ambassador to Washington



was a sign of the Israeli leader's confidence in the future under Trump.

Netanyahu could certainly use the boost, especially after seeing his popularity drop after the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks. Despite important battlefield gains against Hamas, including the death of

its leader in October, and the recent ceasefire that ended nearly 14 months of fighting with the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, opinion polls have repeatedly predicted that Netanyahu's governing coalition would fall far short of a required majority to stay in power if new elections were held now.

Netanyahu is also scheduled to testify in his long-running corruption trial this month, setting the stage for a spectacle that could draw unwelcome attention. And the International Criminal Court warrant, which could

complicate his travel to dozens of countries worldwide, is a new blow to the Israeli leader. Some of Netanyahu's aides are also embroiled in a series of scandals over leaked or doctored sensitive wartime documents.

But there are no guarantees that Netanyahu will get what he wants from Trump.

For starters, it's not clear whether their relationship is as strong as it once was. Netanyahu upset Trump when he congratulated President Joe Biden for his win in 2020, despite Trump's claims that the

election was stolen from him. Although Netanyahu visited Trump in Florida earlier this year, it's not clear if Trump will hold a grudge once back in office.

Trump also returns to the White House with a Middle East roiled by conflict, potentially scrambling their alignment.

Although the ceasefire with Hezbollah appears to be holding, Israel is still fighting in Gaza 14 months after the Hamas attack that triggered the war. Trump has indicated he wants Israel to wrap things up in the war-ravaged Palestinian enclave, but he hasn't said what that might entail. He has demanded that Israeli hostages held in Gaza be freed before he is sworn in in January, warning that if they are not released, there will be "HELL TO PAY," without elaborating.

It is far from clear whether Netanyahu's post-war vision of Gaza — which includes an open-ended military presence in the territory — is acceptable to Trump.

Trump also may have bigger plans for the region. He has talked in the past of normalizing ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia, the wealthiest and most influential Arab country. His first-term peace plan, while heavily favoring Israel, nonetheless called for the establishment of a Palestinian state, albeit far smaller than what the Palestinians seek.

Progress on either of these tracks would require

Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians.

Saudi Arabia has repeatedly said there will be no normalization with Israel without a clear path to Palestinian independence — an idea that Netanyahu and his hard-line governing partners reject. Even if Netanyahu comes around, his government would almost certainly collapse.

"Netanyahu is convinced that he will be able to recruit Trump to his goals, as happened in the past. However, the American president-elect has been sending, as usual, difficult-to-decipher messages since the victory on Nov. 5," wrote Amos Harel, a commentator with the liberal Haaretz daily.

Trump's strategy on Iran is also murky. Eytan Gilboa, an expert on U.S.-Israel relations at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, said Netanyahu expects Trump to resume exerting "maximum pressure" on Tehran to rein in its nuclear program, but he might give negotiations a chance in a second term bid to secure a legacy as a peacemaker.

Trump's possible positions on any of these issues could force Netanyahu to choose sides, setting him up for a clash with the parties that hold the key to his political survival.

"Netanyahu has described Trump as Israel's greatest friend in the White House. And if Trump asks something of him, he won't be able to say no," Gilboa said. "All sorts of problems can arise here." -AP

'It's a team in transition, won't point fingers at each other'



Brisbane: Jasprit Bumrah on Monday defended the struggling Indian team in Australia and played down talk of additional pressure on him, saying it's a side in transition and given his experience, it's his "job" to shoulder extra responsibility.

Having taken a seemingly erroneous call of bowling first in the third Test at the Gabba here, India conceded a huge first-innings total of 445 despite Bumrah returning 6/76.

"We don't, as a team, point fingers at each other and we don't want to get into that mindset where we are pointing fingers at each other that 'you should do this, you should do that'," Bumrah told media after stumps when asked for his assessment of India's batting.

"We, as a team, are going through a transition, new players are coming here and it's not the easiest place to play cricket. Over here, it's a different atmosphere with this wicket being a different challenge so yeah, we are not looking at that."

Bumrah, who leads the bowling chart in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy with 18 wickets so far, defended the Indian attack amid chatter that he is not getting adequate support from fellow bowlers.

"As a bowling unit, as I said, we are in transition so it's my

job to help the others. I have played a little more than them so I am trying to help them," said the owner of 191 Test wickets in just 43 Tests.

"Everyone will learn through it, will get better and eventually will find different ways so this is the journey that you'll have to go through," he added.

Bumrah rejected suggestions that India's poor first innings scores were putting more pressure on the bowlers and on him.

"We have 11 players, it's not like that. I don't look at it that I have to do extra (work). As I said, we are a new team, a lot of new players have come into the side. We have to be considerate and give them that cushion that they will learn from experience," he said.

"Nobody is born with all the experiences, nobody is born with all the skills. You keep learning, you keep finding new ways (and) you keep learning about your own game," he continued.

The Indian vice-captain said he has enjoyed the challenge of bowling on different pitches in Australia.

"I always find different challenges very interesting. Because in the Test match that we played in Perth, the wicket was different. (At) Adelaide (with) the pink ball (was) different, the wicket behaved differently, the ball behaved differently," he said.

"Here it is a little different because the wicket is at a level and the run-up is low. In India we are not used to that," he explained.

"Don't like whinging, don't take opinions seriously" Bumrah said his primary target on encountering a challenge is to tackle it instead of looking at others

Day 3 Scoreboard

Australia 1st innings: 445 all out in 117.1 overs

India 1st Innings:
Yashasvi Jaiswal c Mitchell Marsh b Mitchell Starc 4
KL Rahul batting 33
Shubman Gill c Mitchell Marsh b Mitchell Starc 1
Virat Kohli c Alex Carey b Hazlewood 3
Rishabh Pant c Alex Carey b Cummins 9
Rohit Sharma batting 0

Extra: (NB-1) 1
Total: 51/4 in 17 overs
Fall of wickets: 4-1, 6-2, 22-3, 44-4
Bowling: Mitchell Starc 8-1-25-2, Josh Hazlewood 5-2-17-1, Pat Cummins 2-0-7-1, Nathan Lyon 1-0-1-0, Travis Head 1-0-1-0.

to come up with the solutions.

"...I look at how do I solve it, what can I do in this scenario rather than whinging or complaining or looking at someone else or pointing fingers that I need this from this person," he said.

Bumrah reiterated he wants to remain level-headed in dealing with success and failures and that he cannot carry the "baggage of expectations".

"When I was a youngster, yes, maybe I used to take extra baggage of fans and opinions. But I don't take any opinions seriously," he said.

"I look at myself. I look at answers what I have to do. I give it my absolute best. If I have given it my absolute best, I will accept the results. (But) I cannot carry someone else's energy or baggage that people are expecting me to do the heavy-lifting," he gave a peak into his mindset.

"There will be days when I will not get wickets. Somebody else will do, so I will have to do a holding job," Bumrah added.

-PTI

Gukesh vs Carlsen at Norway Chess

Stavanger (Norway): The youngest-ever world champion, Gukesh Dommaraju will take on Magnus Carlsen, the world's highest-rated player, in a highly-anticipated contest at next year's Norway Chess.

The tournament will take place in Stavanger from May 26 to June 6, 2025.

Gukesh, 18, has achieved remarkable success this year, winning the Tata Steel Masters, leading India to gold at the Chess Olympiad, dominating the Candidates Tournament, and finally claiming the ultimate prize in classical chess: the World Championship title in Singapore last week.

"I'm excited to face the strongest players in the world again in Norway and also the Armageddons will be fun," Gukesh said in a media release.

In 2023, Gukesh finished third in Stavanger. Now, he's back as World Champion, ready to challenge Carlsen on home soil.

Will the rising star seize victory, or will Carlsen's experience and home advantage prevail?

"This matchup is truly unique, and it's thrilling to see the World Champion face off against the world's highest-rated player," said Kjell Madland, founder and tournament director of Norway Chess.

"The whole world will be watching, and the Norway Chess team is proud to host such an incredible event here in Stavanger."

Norway Chess is one of the world's premier chess tournaments, bringing together the top male and female players in a distinctive six-player double round-robin format.

-PTI



Riya Thatte wins maiden national shooting title

New Delhi: Aurangabad teenager Riya Shirish Thatte stunned a star-studded field to win the women's 25m pistol event at the 67th National Shooting Championship Competitions (NSSC) here on Monday.

Riya got the better of Punjab's Simranpreet Kaur Brar 7-2 in a shoot-off for gold, after both had tied at 31-hits in the 8-series of five-shot decider. Olympian and former Asian Games champion Rishi Sarnobat was third with 25 hits.

Simranpreet rounded off a great year to win the junior women's title on the day to add to her senior silver, this time winning the gold via shoot-off 5-2 over Haryana's Payal, after both had tied on 34-hits-a-piece. Riya won bronze in this category with 30-hits.

Riya's father Shirish, a former national level shooter himself and her first coach, said, "She had tears in her eyes. There is no range in Aurangabad and we used to travel 250kms to Pune's Balewadi range where Akshay Ashtaputre, also the mentor of Swapnil Kusale, has been coaching her for the last five years. She wants to shoot and earn laurels for India."

The senior finals field, besides Simranpreet and Rishi, also had top former internationals like Heena Sidhu and Annu Raj Singh.

Earlier, Simranpreet topped both the qualification stages with identical scores of 584. Riya, while qualifying second in the juniors, managed to make the final, clinching the eighth and last qualifying spot with 576.

-PTI

Squash: Indian men finish fifth

Hong Kong: Indian men secured an impressive fifth-place finish, while the women ended in a commendable seventh position at the World Team Squash Championship here.

The Indian men upset fifth seeds Malaysia, while the women defeated nine-time champions Australia on their way to the quarterfinals.

In the last-eight stage, the Indian men's team, comprising Abhay Singh and Veer Chotrani, lost to France 0-2, while the women's team went down against the USA by the same scoreline.

The women's team, led by national champion Anahat Singh, reached the quarterfinals of the world event after a 12-year gap.

Services, Bengal notch dominant wins

Hyderabad: Title holders Services and former champions West Bengal registered dominant victories in Group A matches of the final round of the National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy here on Monday.

West Bengal maintained their top spot on the points table after beating hosts Telangana 3-0 for their second consecutive win, while defending champions Services finally got going and opened their account with a 4-0 win over Jammu and Kashmir.

Jammu & Kashmir remained at the bottom with no points from two games. Telangana are currently on fifth with a point from their draw against Rajasthan on the opening day.

For West Bengal, Narohari Shrestha (45+3, 56th) struck twice while Robi-Hansda (39th) scored once.

The cautious and defensive setup of Telangana could only keep West Bengal at bay until the 39th minute. Hansda took advantage of a botched clearance inside the box and smashed it into the bottom corner for the opening goal.

It was Hansda's eighth goal of the Santosh Trophy campaign, which helped him overtake Tamil Nadu's Lijo K to become the current top-scorer.

Shrestha joined the scoresheet with a superb glancing header into the roof of the net at the stroke of half-time. Shrestha continued his fine scoring form and netted his second and West Bengal's third goal of the game in the 56th minute.

Receiving a through ball from Rabibal Mandi at the edge of the box, Shrestha swiftly turned and side-footed it into the bottom right corner.

In the match, Lethaolen Khongsai (11th), Sreyas VG (26th), Rahul Ramakrishnan (53rd) and Thingnam Bidyasagar Singh (54th) scored in Services' 4-0 drubbing of J&K.

Coming into the game after a defeat to Manipur, Services were dominant from the get-go and led 2-0 at half-time.

Khongsai scored the opener in the 11th minute, nodding in a free-kick from captain Christopher Kamei with a back header towards



the far post. Sreyas made it 2-0 by converting a low cross from Alan Thapa with a textbook finish from six yards out.

Jammu and Kashmir had started to find some rhythm as the game progressed but any hopes of a comeback were dashed when Services scored twice in the 53rd and 54th minutes.

Rahul Ramakrishnan got on the end of a long ball from Khongsai and calmly slotted it past goalkeeper Nirdosh Sagotra.

Thapa then got his second assist of the game as he set up Bidyasagar Singh, who cut to his left and drilled it in.

Ankit Rajpoot announces retirement at 31

New Delhi: Uttar Pradesh pacer Ankit Rajpoot on Monday announced his retirement from Indian cricket at 31 years of age, opening the prospect of a career in overseas T20 leagues.

Rajpoot, who represented Uttar Pradesh in the latest Ranji trophy season, made the announcement on social media. "Today, with immense gratitude & humility, I announce my retirement from Indian cricket. My journey from 2009-2024 has been the most wonderful period of my life," he wrote on social media.

"I am grateful for the opportunities given to me by the Board of Control for India, Uttar Pradesh Cricket Association, Kanpur Cricket Association..."

Rajpoot also thanked the five IPL teams -- Chennai Super Kings, Kolkata Knight Riders, Punjab Kings Rajasthan Royals and Lucknow Super Giants -- he was part of.

Former India pacer Sidharth Kaul had also said goodbye to domestic cricket last month.

Like him, Rajpoot would be exploring opportunities in T20 leagues around the world.

-PTI

Lot of emotional pressure too: Gukesh

Chennai: His history-scripting world title was not just a result of good strategy on the chess board, said Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh on Monday, crediting mental conditioning coach Paddy Upton for helping him tame the "emotional pressure" of competing at the biggest stage.

The 18-year-old Gukesh, who defeated China's Ding Liren to become the youngest ever owner of the world title, arrived here on Monday to a rousing welcome from enthusiastic fans and officials.

"In a world championship, it's not only about chess. There is a lot of mental and emotional pressure to deal with. Paddy's teachings helped me in that regard," Gukesh said in a press meet organised by Velammal Vidyalaya, his childhood school.

Upton, a renowned mental conditioning coach, worked with Gukesh in the run-up to and during the 14-game marathon event in Singapore.

"The suggestions and the conversations I have had with him, have been very important for me and my development as a player," he said.

Gukesh also detailed how his association started



World Chess Champion D Gukesh being garlanded during a press conference in Chennai on Monday.

with the South African, who has the experience of working with the 2011 cricket World Cup-winning Indian cricket team and the national men's hockey team that bagged a bronze at the Paris Olympics.

"Paddy has been a very important part of my team. After I won the Candidates (April), I asked Sandeep sir (Sandeep Singhal of West-bridge Capital) for a mental trainer," Gukesh recalled.

"He immediately put me in touch with Paddy Upton, who has a lot of experience working with high-performance athletes," said the youngster.

In an interview to PTI a day after Gukesh's win, Upton had lauded the teenag-

er's 'self-awareness.'

"I think that's the thing that's really stood out, his ability to recognise his thoughts and manage his mind and his understanding of how to do so," Upton said.

"...he is a world champion because he was able to manage himself and remain focused and stay in the game even though he's 0-1 down right from the beginning. So that really is a mark of a champion," he had stated.

Gukesh also thanked Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and Deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin for supporting him in his chess journey.

"Definitely, there was a

lot of support from the Tamil Nadu government. Honorable Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister invite me home and encourage me whenever I achieve something.

"The Tamil Nadu government sponsored me during the Chennai Grandmasters last year. They made all the arrangements. That's how I won the tournament and qualified for the Candidates.

"If we get more support like this, I believe more chess players will come. I am very thankful to the Tamil Nadu government," he said.

Gukesh is only the second Indian after the great Viswanathan Anand to claim the world title.

Accidental chess player

Gukesh's father Dr Rajnikanth, who is an ENT surgeon by profession, said he encouraged his son to join chess sessions in the school as a hobby.

"You have to have interest and hard work, otherwise nothing will happen. We did not plan to make him a chess player, but enrolled him in Velammal school chess class as part of the extra-curricular activity."

-PTI

'Sky's limit for Prithvi if he gets his work ethics right'

Bengaluru: Prithvi Shaw's fall from prodigy to prodigal has been swift and seemingly irreversible, but Shreyas Iyer feels the Mumbai batter can touch the deserved heights if he "gets his work ethics right."

Shaw gave glimpses of his immense talent in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, which Mumbai bagged under Shreyas, while making 197 runs over nine matches but he could not even make a fifty.

"I think personally he is

a God gifted player. The amount of talent he possesses as an individual, no one has it. It's just that he needs to improve his work ethics," said Iyer after Mumbai's 5-wicket win over Madhya Pradesh here in the SMAT final.

"He needs to get his work ethics right. And if he does that, sky's the limit for him," he said.

However, Iyer said the desire to embrace redemption should stem within Shaw himself.

"We can't babysit anyone, right? He has played so

much of cricket. Everyone has given him inputs. At the end of the day, it's his job to figure out things for himself. And he has also done it in the past. It's not that he hasn't," he said.

Detailing his point, Iyer said: "He has to focus. He has to sit back, put a thinking cap on. He will get the answer by himself. No one can force him to do anything."

Iyer's appreciation of Ajinkya Rahane's contribution to Mumbai's SMAT vic-



tory should work as a guide for Shaw.

"He is that sort of a character who will give 110% for the team. He started at number 4, where he knew that there were two openers. So, he sacrificed his position and then after that when Surya came in, he became an opener. So he is a fantastic team-man

"But irrespective, salute to him, the way he approached each and every game, match. I am a

firm believer of someone who has a certain type of routine and he is one of them," he said.

It came as a little surprise then that Rahane emerged as the top run-getter in this edition of SMAT with 469 runs at an average of 58.62, and at a strike-rate of 165.

Mumbai's cupboard is brimming with young talent, and Iyer underlining that fact might just also have been a mild warning to Shaw to buckle down.

"All the youngsters who have come up and the way

they showcase their talent is simply phenomenal. You should see their character and their approach outside the dressing room and also on the field.

"They're fearless in their approach and this is the kind of players we need to back. And for me personally, whenever I go out there I want to win. It doesn't matter who we play, winning is something that makes me feel happy and it is everything for me," he explained.

But for now, Iyer wants to immerse in the joy of

leading his side to the second SMAT title after 2022, without worrying about the road ahead including a new IPL franchise in Punjab Kings.

"Right now I just want to go and enjoy it with my teammates. I am not thinking about what to plan ahead. Go out there, enjoy with my teammates, my family, my friends

"Get some applause from my friends about this success. Cherish it. And after that we will see what is up there," said Iyer.

-PTI