

# THE PERFECT VOICE



**Man goes from hospital to hospital looking for missing brother ... pg 3**



**Experts call for higher 'Sin Tax' on tobacco ... pg 6**

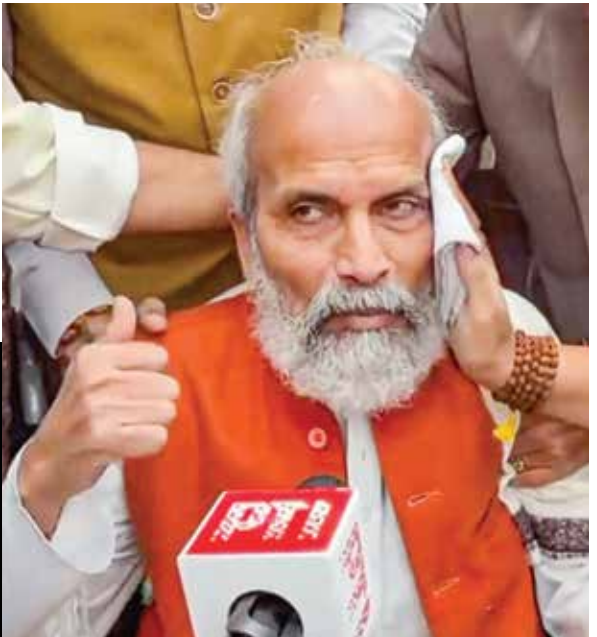


**Humiliation was going on ... pg 10**



## NEW LOW IN DEMOCRACY

- UNPRECEDENTED FRACAS ON PARLIAMENT PREMISES
- TWO BJP MPS INJURED; NDA, CONGRESS REACH POLICE
- RAHUL GANDHI ACCUSED OF PUSHING WOMAN MP



**New Delhi:** Plumbing new depths of political animosity, rival MPs screamed and shoved in the forecourt of Parliament on Thursday in unprecedented scenes of unruliness, capping three days of acrimonious debate inside the House over preserving the dignity of B R Ambedkar.

accusing us of shoving them," the 82-year-old said.

Two BJP MPs were hospitalised with injuries as Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi became the centre of the ruling party's accusations, including one by a woman MP who said he misbehaved with her.

However, the more apparent injuries were sustained by BJP's Balasore MP Pratap Sarangi, 69, who had to get stitches in the temple. His colleague Mukesh Rajput was also injured in the head.

NDA leaders filed a police complaint against him for "attempt to murder, physical assault and incitement".

The Congress vehemently denied the charges. Party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said Rahul Gandhi and the others were protesting peacefully, but were prevented from entering Parliament by BJP MPs carrying "sticks", it said.

The sordid incident perhaps without parallel started in the morning as BJP and opposition MPs marched towards each other over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's comments on Ambedkar. As the two groups came closer, tempers and voices rose, soon resulting in a melee.

The BJP MPs were seen carrying placards pinned to sticks. "BJP MPs stopped, threatened and intimidated me," Rahul Gandhi said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said he was pushed so violently that he lost his balance and sat down. "Now they are the ones who are

The Congress also filed a complaint against the BJP in the Parliament House police station. Both sides also complained to the respective Chairs in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha against each other.

The scuffles and the controversy served to unite the opposition in defending Rahul Gandhi. National Conference leader Omar Abdullah said he knew Rahul Gandhi and he would not



Three NDA MPs, including Anurag Thakur and Bansuri Swaraj, file a complaint at the Parliament Street Police station.

push anyone. The trouble broke out minutes before both Houses were to convene at 11 am.

A number of MPs of the ruling BJP-led National Democratic Alliance were protesting at the steps of Parliament's 'Makar Dwar', an entrance and exit reserved for lawmakers, against the Congress' alleged insult of Ambedkar, while MPs from the

opposition MPs claimed that the BJP members refused to give way to Gandhi who was heading to the Lok Sabha to attend to the House proceedings.

BJP member Nishikant Dubey accused Gandhi of pushing Sarangi. "Are you not ashamed Rahul, you are resorting to rowdy behaviour ('gundagardi'). You pushed an old man," a furious Dubey told Gandhi.

"He pushed me," Gandhi countered Dubey, walking off after having a cursory look at Sarangi, who was being attended to by fellow BJP members. Sarangi was later wheeled off to an ambulance.

"Rahul Gandhi pushed an MP, who fell on me and I got injured," he told reporters as BJP members squatted at the Makar Dwar raising slogans against the Congress.

Hitting out at Gandhi, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said appropriate action would be taken in the matter. "Parliament is not a place to show physical strength. It is not a wrestling ring," he said.

Dubey told reporters, "I am a four-time MP. I have seen something like this for the first time. I have never

seen Congress leaders barging into the BJP's protest or BJP members doing the same when Congress protests. Why did the Congress disrupt the BJP's protest today? This shows that their only aim is hooliganism."

A number of ruling alliance MPs, including Union ministers, met their injured colleagues in the hospital as the incident blew up into a major row.

Both Houses witnessed massive uproar amid 'Jai Bhim' chants from both sides and were adjourned without witnessing any transaction.

Congress MPs met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and submitted a complaint against the alleged unruly conduct of BJP MPs against Rahul Gandhi and attempts to stop him from entering Parliament House.

As the INDIA bloc parliamentarians came face to face with the ruling coalition MPs in front of the Makar Dwar of Parliament, the two sides engaged in loud sloganeering in a bid to outdo each other.

**Rahul came too close to me, he shouted at me, says BJP's woman MP ... Page 5**

### Locals assert claim on '250-year-old' temple

**Bareilly (UP):** Residents here in Katghar locality have alleged that a "250-year-old" Ganga Maharani temple in the area has been encroached upon by a cooperative body.

Narendra Singh, a local, claimed that his ancestors built the temple around 250 years ago.

"In 1905, the temple was officially documented, and prayers continued until 1950. However, the temple's premises were later rented out by the then-priest to a committee, which employed a watchman from another community, who gradually stopped worship, removed idols, and eventually established control over the land, replacing the temple with the board of the Dauli Raghuraj Dayal Cooperative Society," he said.

"We will soon submit a memorandum to the district administration, demanding the removal of the encroachment and the reinstatement of the temple," he said.

-PTI



India Women's captain Smriti Mandhana interacts with Richa Ghosh. They equalled world record of highest partnership during the third T20 International cricket match of a series against West Indies in Navi Mumbai on Thursday.

### Nashik man comes for asthma treatment, dies with wife, son

**Mumbai:** It was just two days back that a man from a town in Nashik district came to Mumbai, accompanied by his wife and minor son, for treatment of asthma. But little did he know that none of them would ever be able to return home.

The couple, Rakesh Ahire, wife Harshada and their five-year-old son Nidhesh, were among the 13 persons, who lost their lives in the ferry boat tragedy that took place off the Mumbai coast on Wednesday.

The tragedy occurred after a Navy craft undergoing engine trials lost control and collided with a passenger ferry 'Neel Kamal' off Karanja near Mumbai at around 4 pm on Wednesday. The ferry, carrying more than 100 passengers, was going from the Gateway of India to Elephanta Island, a popular tourist destination.

"Rakesh Ahire, who resided in Nashik's Pimpalgaon Baswant, was in Mumbai for the treatment of his asthma. His wife and

their five-year-old son accompanied him. The trio had arrived in Mumbai just two days back," their relative said.

"On Wednesday, they boarded the Neel Kamal ferry from the Gateway of India that was taking them to the Elephanta island. But their visit ended in a tragedy," the relative said.

He added that the bodies of the trio were sent to their native place in Pimpalgaon Baswant and the last rites were performed on Thursday afternoon.

Body of passenger found, toll rises to 14

The body of a 43-year-old man who was among the two missing passengers after a Navy craft rammed into their ferry off the Mumbai coast, was found on Thursday, police said.

The body was found near the ferry, police said. The death toll in the tragedy has now gone up to 14.

Search operation continues to locate a seven-year-old boy who is still missing a day after the tragedy, a police official added.



**ELEPHANTA FERRY TRAGEDY**

The Navy on Thursday instituted a Board of Inquiry to probe the collision of the naval boat with the passenger ferry. "A Board of Inquiry has been ordered into the accident to establish the facts of the case," the Navy said. Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi offered condolences.

### BJP youth wing vandalises Congress office

**Mumbai:** Bharatiya Janata Party Yuva Morcha (BJYM) workers on Thursday vandalised the Congress office in Mumbai, claiming that the grand old party had always insulted Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar.

The BJYM workers stormed the Congress office at Azad Maidan in south Mumbai and vandalised it, damaging furniture and tearing posters, police said. The workers also threw ink at posters of some Congress leaders.

The police used lathi charge to disperse

the crowd. The BJYM workers shouted slogans against the Congress while entering that party's office.

Police detained a few BJYM workers and took them to the Azad Maidan police station, where they clashed with Congress workers.

The BJYM protest came after Congress leaders accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of insulting Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar during his speech in Rajya Sabha.

Congress MP from Mumbai, Varsha Gaikwad, slammed the BJP for the vandalism.

"This is what the BJP and Sangh Parivar have always done when they have heard Babasaheb's name - attack and vandalism. Look at the level BJP gundas are stooping to just to save Amit Shah and divert attention from the atrocious statement he made against Mahamanav, Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar," she posted on X. "Around 50 BJP party karyakartas came

to our party office, threw chairs and tore posters, vandalised property. Our babbarsher karyakartas resisted their attacks. We shall be proceeding legally against this," she added.

Gaikwad demanded that Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnis must immediately take strict action under the most stringent sections against those involved in the vandalism. "Is this the kind of political decorum in a progressive state like Maharashtra? Shame!" she added.

### HC relief to lesbian couple

**Amaravati:** The Andhra Pradesh HC has upheld the right of a lesbian couple to live together, affirming their freedom to choose partners. The Court on Tuesday further directed the parents of Lalitha not to interfere with the relationship of the couple, asserting that their daughter is a major.

### India to play its CT matches at neutral venue



**Dubai:** The deadlock over the hosting of next year's Champions Trophy finally ended on Thursday when the ICC announced that India will play their matches of the 50-over event at a neutral venue instead of host country Pakistan, which will get a similar arrangement for tournaments to be held in India till 2027.

The agreement will also extend to the 2028 women's T20 World Cup, which will be held in Pakistan. Although no formal announcement has been made, but India's Champions Trophy matches are likely to be held in the UAE.

"The ICC Board has approved that all matches

between India and Pakistan played at ICC Events during the current rights cycle from 2024 to 2027 (which are to be hosted in India or Pakistan) will be played at a neutral venue proposed by the tournament host," said the ICC in a statement, confirming what PTI reported on December 5.

The arrangement will also cover next year's women's World Cup in India and the T20 World Cup in 2026, to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

"India's Champions Trophy games will most likely be played in the UAE. As far as the Women's ODI World Cup in India is concerned, the India-Pakistan game could be held in Sri Lanka," said a source.

India had refused to travel to Pakistan for the event scheduled in February-March due to security concerns. The Indians have not played in Pakistan since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which 150 people were killed. The two countries' last bilateral engagement was back in 2012.

Travelling to Pakistan also requires Indian government's clearance which has remained firm on the status quo.

"The schedule for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 is set to be confirmed soon," the ICC added.

The decision, that came after a series of back-channel talks, was on expected lines after the sport's governing body maintained prolonged silence on the contentious matter during the previous set-up led by chairman Greg Barclay.

His successor Jay Shah took charge on December 1 and all stakeholders, including the Pakistan Cricket Board, the BCCI and the broadcasters, were running out of time to organise the 50-over event that was last played in the UK in 2017.

Thursday's announcement meant it was the first major decision taken in Shah's tenure.

While BCCI's stance was always clear, the matter got stretched because of PCB's refusal to al-

low a "one-sided" arrangement of neutral venues. Led by Pakistan interior minister Mohsin Naqvi, the PCB was determined not to lose face in front of the local public.

PCB, which had sent its team to India for the ODI World Cup last year, had categorically opposed the hybrid model but eventually agreed to it on reciprocal grounds.

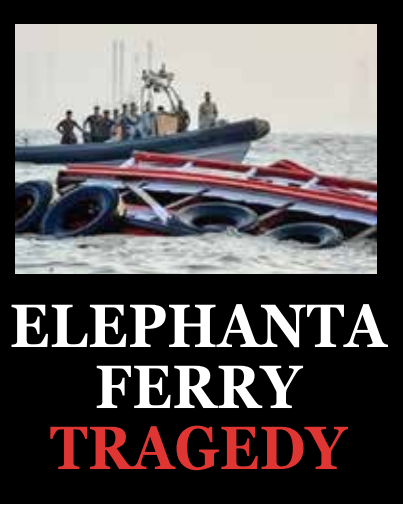
The PCB had earlier indicated that it wanted a greater share in the annual revenue cycle to accommodate the Indian demand for a hybrid model but there is no word yet on whether that has been discussed or accepted.

The tournament will feature eight teams, divided into two groups. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals.

-PTI



# Man goes from hospital to hospital looking for missing brother



**Mumbai:** Jogaram Bhati, 60, has not slept a wink since Wednesday as he is making rounds of hospitals in the city, looking for his younger brother who is one of the two people missing after a Navy craft crashed into the ferryboat 'Neel Kamal'.

Hansaram Bhati, 43, a Mumbai resident, was accompanying relatives from Rajasthan who were visiting Elephanta Island when the incident took place off Mumbai coast on Wednesday afternoon.

Speaking to PTI outside Colaba Police Station where he was called by the police for inquiry, Jogaram said his brother lived in Malad, a western suburb, and was in the imitation jewellery business.

On Wednesday, Pravin Rathod, the son of Hansaram's brother-in-law, and his wife Nitu, arrived from Rajasthan and wanted to do sightseeing in Mumbai, he said.

His brother took a day off from his work and accompanied them on a trip to Elephanta Island.

They left Malad around 2 pm and reached the Gateway of India where they boarded the ill-fated ferry.

After the Navy craft rammed the ferry and it began to capsiz-

Pravin and his wife spoke to their relatives in Rajasthan on phone amid the rescue operations and informed them about the incident.

"Our relatives in Rajasthan told me, and I reached Gateway of India around 4.15 pm. Pravin and his wife were rescued, but my brother was not there," he said.

"I do not know how he is and what ordeal he must have gone through....I want my brother back," said an emotional Jogaram.

"He is a very good human being, and most lovable among all us siblings," the elder brother added.

A relative of Deepak Wakchaure (50), a resident of Govandi area in the city who was among the 13 deceased, demanded that the government give a job to a family member of every deceased person.

He also claimed that a gold chain and other jewelry worn by Sandeep was missing when the family collected his body.

Colaba Police has asked them to lodge a complaint, he said.

Of the 113 persons on board both the vessels, 13 died after the collision and 98, including two injured, were rescued.

## Tourist inflow to Elephanta Island dwindles

A day after a Navy craft rammed into a ferry killing 13 persons, there was a decline in the number of tourists taking the ferry to visit Elephanta Island, a popular tourist attraction near Mumbai coast, going by the number of ferry passengers on Thursday. At the Gateway of India in south Mumbai, where passengers of the ill-fated ferry had boarded the vessel to visit Elephanta Island, people were still seen queuing up for tickets, but their numbers were far less than the crowd seen yesterday. Tourists come from various parts of the country to visit the Gateway of India, and from there hop on to ferries for a short ride or to visit tourist attractions like the Elephanta Island in the Arabian Sea. On Thursday afternoon, some tourists who were seen in the queue to get their ferry tickets to visit the iconic Elephanta caves were unaware of the Neel Kamal ferry tragedy a day earlier. The ferry service for the Elephanta caves, which is a part of the 'Mumbai Darshan' guided tour, began at 9 am as usual, a booking supervisor of Mumbai Jal Vahatuk Sanstha told PTI at the Gateway of India.

The boat service to Alibaug and Mandwa was also operational since 6 am this morning, he said. "There were fewer tourists than any

other day, due to the ferry capsiz tragedy," he said, adding that the number of tourists, who prefer to ride boats in the Mumbai harbour, also dwindled this morning. Ferry boats with depleted strength of passengers were seen leaving from the Gateway of India for Elephanta Island.

Kashmir Singh, who had come to the Gateway of India from adjoining Palghar district with his son and daughter-in-law, said that he knew about Wednesday's accident and avoided to take the 30-minute boat ride. "I know about the incident, but such tragedies don't happen every day," he said. Madinaben, a tourist from Ahmedabad who enjoyed the harbour boat ride on Thursday with her two children said she was unaware about the tragedy.

"I didn't know about the tragedy, I learnt about it when I was on the boat. My daughter called and told me not to take the ride, but it was too late," she said.

Punit Chaturvedi, who had come from Delhi, said that he knew about the incident but it didn't prevent him from taking the boat ride. "There was no question of getting scared as we were provided life jackets during the boat ride," he said.

## Life jackets mandatory for boat rides

Authorities on Thursday made life jackets mandatory for all people taking boat rides from the Gateway of India. Some tourists, however, said the life jackets would be of help only if people know how to use them. The authorities should instruct people how to use the life jackets in case of an emergency, they said. Some survivors of the tragedy on Wednesday claimed the ferry did not have enough life jackets. Devidas Jadhav, an assistant boat inspector deputed at the Gateway of India, told PTI that they have made the use of life jackets mandatory for every passenger taking ferry boat to Mandva near Alibaug (in neighbouring Raigad), Elephanta Island or while going for a short ride of the Mumbai harbour. Sangeeta Dalvi, who was travelling to Mandva with her husband for some work, said passengers must use life jackets as they can save lives in case of an emergency. She also said there was no need for the people to be scared after Wednesday's accident. "Such tragedies do not happen every day. We do not avoid travelling by roads though everyday several accidents occur on roads."

## Two still missing

Two passengers, a man and a child, were still missing a day after a Navy craft carrying out engine trials rammed into their ferry off Mumbai coast, police said on Thursday. The two missing persons have been identified as 43-year-old Hansraj Bhati and seven-year-old Johan Mohammad Nisar Ahmed Pathan, the police said.

"Tourists here do not want to wear the life jacket, but the same people use it without any complaint when they go to other countries like Singapore or Malaysia. It is because the authorities there do not allow a boat to move if even one person is without a life jacket."

Sameer Bamane, Boat owner

## Badlapur Sexual Abuse Case HC asks why kin of deceased accused being punished

**Mumbai:** The Bombay High Court on Thursday said the parents of the deceased accused in the Badlapur sexual assault case ought not to be punished.

The court also asked the Maharashtra government to see if it can make arrangements for their shelter and employment.

A division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Prithviraj Chavan briefly spoke to the parents of the accused in the case, who was killed in an alleged shootout with the police in September.

The accused was arrested in August for allegedly sexually assaulting two minor girls inside the toilet of a school at Badlapur in Thane district. He worked as an attendant there.

The parents told the court that ever since their son's arrest they have been targeted anywhere they go and have been unable to even live in their house at Badlapur.

"We have been thrown out of our house. We are liv-



Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi chief Prakash Ambedkar during a protest against Union Home minister Amit Shah in Mumbai on Thursday.

## VCs from 125 universities to meet

By Correspondent

**Navi Mumbai:** Vice Chancellors of around 125 universities from the Western Zone states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa will gather for a two-day meet at the D Y Patil deemed to be University here in Navi Mumbai starting Friday, Dr Pankaj Mittal, Secretary General of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) said.

Rajasthan Governor Haribhau Bagde will inaugurate the conference on Friday wherein the VCs shall discuss and deliberate various aspects related to

educational factors of higher education, governance and administration, Dr Mittal added.

Association of Indian Universities is the apex institution of higher education in India formed in 1925. Along with the VCs, eminent personalities from industry and academia will participate in the meet that will feature 10 engaging panel discussions on topics ranging from Sustainable Practices in Education, Leadership & Governance, Leveraging Technology in Higher Education, Achieving National Goals of 2047 and Artificial Intelligence

Revolutionizing Research in Academia.

The technical sessions on the first day are woven around topics like Role of Leadership in Promoting Innovations & Ranking and Autonomy & Accountability in Higher Education Institutes, while the ones on the second day would revolve around Leadership and E-Governance and the AIU Business Session.

The VCs will also get to view the ongoing Women's match between India and West Indies at the D Y Patil stadium, Dr Vandana Mishra, VC of the DY Patil University said.

## Process to revoke driver's licence begins

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra Motor Vehicles department has initiated the process of revoking the driving licence of the bus driver involved in the December 9 Kurla accident, which left nine persons dead and around 40 injured, officials said on Thursday.

The Regional Transport Office (RTO) at Wadala, which has jurisdiction over the eastern suburbs of Mumbai, has issued a show cause notice to bus driver Sanjay More as part of the process to revoke the licence, they added.

Deputy Regional Transport Officer Pallavi Kothawade confirmed the development and said the process of cancelling More's licence started earlier this week.

"I issued a show cause notice to More on Monday. Further action will be taken under Motor Vehicles Act based on his reply to the notice," Kothawade told PTI.

Wadala RTO regional transport officer Ravi Gaiwad did not respond to queries on the issue.

Meanwhile, other officials said Mumbai police had written to Wadala RTO seeking revoking of More's

## BEST BUS CRASH

**Death toll rises to nine**

The death toll in Kurla bus tragedy rose to nine after a 22-year-old man succumbed to his injuries at a hospital here, civic officials said on Thursday. The deceased, Mehtab Shaikh, undergoing treatment at the civic-run Sion Hospital, was declared dead a little before midnight on Wednesday, an official said.

More will not be able to drive any vehicle once his licence, which he has held for the past 23 years, is revoked, the officials said.

More was employed by a third-party agency that supplies drivers to EVEY TRANS, a subsidiary of electric bus manufacturer Olectra.

He had been driving mini-buses of BEST's wet lease operators for the last four years and was deployed to drive the 12-metre e-bus, the kind that was involved in the accident, from December this year after he joined the new company, officials said.

As per RTO records, More's transport category licence, initially valid for light motor vehicles like tempos and taxis, was issued on July 5, 1990 and on August 8, 1991 he got a heavy vehicle licence required to drive trucks and buses.

More also has a driver's badge, which is mandatory for driving public service vehicles, including buses in the fleets of BEST and Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC). This badge was issued to him by the RTO on December 18, 1999.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The demand to make Mumbai a Union Territory is condemnable. Be it the Congress or the BJP, the Shiv Sena (UBT) will never tolerate any attempt to break Mumbai away from Maharashtra."



Aaditya Thackeray, Leader, Shiv Sena (UBT)

## Production activity for first Fast Patrol Vessel

**Mumbai:** The Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL), a Navratna defence PSU, on Thursday commenced the production activity for the first Fast Patrol Vessel (FPV) of 14 FPVs project for the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), a statement said.

Along with this, plate cutting of a second ship of Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels (NGOPVs) was also undertaken.

Plate cutting ceremony for FPV1 marks the official start of the production activities for this project, the MDL said.

Biju George, director Shipbuilding, presided over the plate cutting ceremony in the presence

of senior officials of the Indian Coast Guard.

MDL has signed a contract with ICG to design, build and deliver a total of 14 Fast Patrol Vessels. The project is valued at Rs 1,070.47 crore.

Each vessel will feature a waterjet propulsion drive, built to meet contractual speed in excess of 33 knots and shall be classified under Dual class (ABS & IRS).

The vessels will be designed as high-speed craft, equipped with a waterjet propulsion, high-speed diesel engine. The vessel will be used for patrolling coastal waters and protection of fisheries.

These vessels will be capable of



carrying a small high-speed boat to carry out search and rescue missions in shallow waters. They will also have inherent capability to switch over to wartime roles such as providing communication link, escort coastal convoys, logistic support, medical evacuation

and supplement Indian naval resources, the statement said.

As regards to NGOPVs, the plate cutting ceremony of the second ship was also held on Thursday.

The first plate cutting was held on May 31. MDL has signed a contract with ICG to design, build and deliver six Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels.

The project is valued at Rs 1,614.89 crore. Each vessel is fitted with twin Controllable Pitch Propellers driven by 9,000 kW engines to meet contractual speed in excess of 23 knots and will be classified under Dual Class (ABS&IRS). The vessels will be designed as

high-speed craft under Class HSC rules, to be used primarily for Coastal and Offshore patrolling and policing Maritime zones of India.

Their primary role also includes Fisheries Protection, Anti-Smuggling and Anti-Piracy, Search and Rescue operations, Ocean Surveillance and Monitoring of Sea lines of Communication (SLOCs).

The first vessel of FPV is scheduled for delivery in March 2026. The delivery of first NGOPV is scheduled in July 2027 and second NGOPV is scheduled in December 2027.



# 'Rahul came very close to me, I really felt very uncomfortable'

New Delhi: Rajya Sabha proceedings were disrupted on Thursday due to protests by the treasury benches, which alleged misconduct by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi towards BJP MPs, and the opposition parties which demanded a discussion on Union Minister Amit Shah's remarks on Dr. Ambedkar.

Treasury bench members started sloganeering to demand action against the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, after BJP member S Phangnon Konyak alleged that he shouted at her when she was protesting on the Parliament premises.

As BJP leaders alleged that two other MPs were injured due to Gandhi's actions and expressed outrage at his conduct, Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar said Konyak had met him in his chamber and he was looking into her complaint.

DMK leader Tiruchi Siva contested the allegations against Gandhi and added that the Congress leader has said that he was pushed by ruling party members.

"Today while protesting, it was a peaceful protest. I was standing outside just below the staircase of Makar Dwar. Something happened to me for which I feel really disheartened. Leader of Opposition of Lok Sabha Shri Rahul Gandhi ji came in very close proximity to me. I really felt very uncomfortable and he started shouting at me which I felt is very unbecoming of a leader of the opposition," Konyak said.

The BJP MP from Nagaland said that she could have defended herself but did not do so.

"His action was really bad and I feel disheartened and no lady member, let alone me, an ST (scheduled tribe) member



Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and other INDIA bloc members during a protest demanding the resignation of Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Thursday. PicPTI



BJP MPs stage a protest alleging insult of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar by the Congress party at Parliament complex in New Delhi on Thursday. PicPTI

from Nagaland, should not be made to feel like this. So, I seek your protection for this letter for which I have already shared notice to you," Konyak.

She was given a chance to speak after Rajya Sabha Secretary-General PC Mody laid a copy of the ruling on the no-confidence motion against Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar without reading out the ruling.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju alleged Rahul Gandhi had "pushed" a female MP and "charged" at her "physically". He said that Rahul Gandhi pushed two more members with such force that they were bleeding and had been hospitalised.

"This behaviour of the Congress party is shameful beyond our belief. We have numbers. We are not going to be afraid but we don't want to plummet the standard of Parliament by manhandling to this low. I plead to

## Ruckus in Lok Sabha over Shah's remarks

Lok Sabha proceedings were adjourned for the day on Thursday amid continuous noisy protests by opposition benches over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks related to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The House was adjourned for the first time soon after it met at 11 am following noisy protests by the Opposition seeking an apology from Shah for his remarks on Ambedkar.

As soon as the House met, opposition members were on their feet raising their voices and staging protests. Speaker Om Birla tried to pacify them and announced the demise of former Union minister E V K S Elangovan, who was a member of the Lok Sabha from Tamil Nadu.

After he paid tributes to the departed leader, the House observed silence for sometime. As soon as the obituary reference was over, the opposition members again staged noisy protests.

Birla immediately adjourned the House till 2 pm. Even before the House re-assembled at 2 pm, opposition members, including Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi, were raising slogans including 'Jai Bhim', holding posters of the iconic leader. At 2 pm, the noisy protests continued and Dilip Saikia, who was in the Chair, adjourned the proceedings for the day.

While he was announcing that the House proceedings were being adjourned, some Congress MPs came near the Chair. House marshals were seen protecting the Chair as Saikia left the Lok Sabha chamber. The opposition sloganeering continued well after adjournment was announced till the BJP and other ruling alliance members had left the House chamber. The government had listed a resolution for Thursday to refer the two bills on simultaneous polls to a joint committee of the two Houses.

you -- all Congress members -- that the entire Congress should apologise to this House and the nation," Rijiju said. He said Parliament is not a

wrestling arena and a member of Parliament cannot raise hands on any other member. "The way Rahul Gandhi has beaten our two MPs, our MPs

are agitated. Had we also manhandled in the same manner then what would have been the situation? "We have numbers. We are

**"Will @RahulGandhi ever grow up? The Parliament is not his personal fiefdom. His arrogance, sense of entitlement and feudal behaviour today has caused grievous injuries to elected MPs and has put life in danger."**  
Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister, Education

not only apologise to the Parliament but to the entire nation," Rijiju said.

Dhankar said that he has received communication from Konyak and she also met in his chamber.

"I am looking into it. She was literally in tears.... she could never believe that as a lady member she could suffer so much at the hands of another member of Parliament," Dhankar.

DMK's Tiruchi Siva contested the claims made by the treasury bench members.

"This is the version of one side. There was a demonstration going on outside and Mr Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition in the other house, is a very senior person and he has complained that he was only pushed. We respect all elder members. We respect every woman in this country. Nothing has happened of that sort," he said.

## Notice seeking Dhankhar's removal dismissed: Sources

New Delhi: Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Hariyansh on Thursday dismissed the impeachment notice given by the Opposition seeking the removal of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar while ruling it as an act of impropriety, being severely flawed and drawn in haste to mar his reputation, sources said.



In his ruling, which was tabled in the House by Rajya Sabha secretary general PC Mody, the deputy chairman said the impeachment notice is part of a design to denigrate the nation's constitutional institutions and malign the incumbent Vice President, the sources said.

At least 60 opposition members had signed the notice for removal of Dhankhar from his post on December 10, alleging that they did not have trust in him and that he was "biased". The notice was moved by the opposition members under Article 67(b) of the Constitution as intention of a no-confidence motion against the Vice President of India.

The deputy chairman ruled that the gravity of this "personally targeted" notice which is bereft of facts and aimed at securing

publicity. He also held that the notice was a "misadventure" in "deliberate trivialising and demeaning" of the high constitutional office of the Vice President of the largest democracy.

Worrisomely for the prestige of Parliament and its members, the notice is replete with assertions only to malign the incumbent Vice President, the deputy chairman ruled, the sources added.

His ruling said the notice invoked Article 67(b) peremptorily mandates 'at least 14 days' prior notice for any resolution contemplating the Vice President's removal.

Thus the December 10, 2024 notice of intention could permit such a resolution only after December

24, 2024, he noted, adding that the current 266th session of the Council of States, as notified on November 6, 2024, commenced on November 25 and is scheduled to conclude on December 20, 2024, as known to all signatories.

In full know of the situation that the resolution cannot be brought during this session, this was initiated only to set a narrative against second highest constitutional office and the Vice President, the deputy chairman said.

Hariyansh also said the notice's "lack of bona fides", and subsequent events unfolding revealed "it being a calculated unwholesome attempt to garnish publicity; run down the constitutional institution; insinuate the personal image of the incumbent Vice President-notably, the first from the agricultural community to hold this office in the history of independent India". Sources said the deputy chairman has also ruled that the prejudicial intent manifested through orchestration of a coordinated media campaign, including a televised press conference initiated by the LoP and Chief whip of Congress.



Security forces personnel during an encounter with terrorists at Kadder in Kulgam district, J & K on Thursday. Pic: PTI

## Five terrorists killed, two security personnel injured

Srinagar: Five Hizbul Mujahideen terrorists, including a self-styled top commander of the outfit, were killed in an encounter with security forces in Kulgam district of Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday, officials said here.

Two security forces personnel sustained injuries in the operation that was launched in the early hours of the day, they said. Security forces launched a cordon and search opera-

tion at Kadder in Behibagh area of the district on Wednesday night following information about the presence of suspected terrorists there, the officials said.

They said the search operation turned into an encounter as the terrorists opened fire on security forces, who retaliated. The slain ultras include a self-styled commander of the Hizbul Mujahideen Farooq Ahmad Bhat alias Nali, who was allegedly in-

involved in a series of terror related crimes in south Kashmir area.

The other ultras killed in the operation have been identified as Irfan Lone, Adil Hussain, Mushtaq Itoo and Yasir Javaid, all local residents.

Search operations were continuing in the area as police requested local residents not to go close to the encounter site due to safety reasons. -PTI

## Kolkata Doctor Rape and Murder Case Parents move Calcutta HC seeking fresh probe

Kolkata: The parents of the doctor who was raped and murdered at the RG Kar hospital moved the Calcutta High Court on Thursday, seeking a fresh investigation into the crime.

Expressing a lack of confidence in the ongoing probe into the incident that led to huge protests, they prayed for a direction for a fresh investigation into the rape and murder of their daughter.

and Hospital ex-principal Sandip Ghosh and Tala police station's officer-in-charge Abhijit Mondal in the case.

They were granted bail as the CBI failed to file charge sheets against them within the 90-day statutory period, according to their lawyers.

While Ghosh was accused of tampering with evidence in the case, the police officer was accused



Justice Tirthankar Ghosh asked their lawyer to add the CBI, which is probing the case, as a party in the petition and mention the matter again before the court on Monday.

The on-duty postgraduate trainee doctor's body was found in the seminar room of the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital on August 9.

The Sealdah court on December 13 granted bail to RG Kar Medical College

of delaying the filing of an FIR after the body was found.

CBI has filed a charge sheet against the prime accused, Sanjay Roy.

In its charge sheet, the CBI said Roy, who was working as a civic volunteer with the local police, allegedly committed the crime when the victim had gone to sleep in the hospital's seminar room during a break. -PTI

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Amit Shah has gone mad. He is obviously full of hatred for our revered Babasaheb. I strongly condemn his madness. Of course, I want Shah out of the cabinet. He should resign. Not only that, he should give up politics."



Lalu Prasad Yadav, Supremo, RJD

## Parties condemn removal of chapter on revered sufi saint

Srinagar: The CPI(M) and People's Conference on Thursday criticised the Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education (BOSE) for removing the chapter on the life of revered saint Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani from the 9th-grade textbook, with former Minister Sajad Gani Lone calling it "cultural terrorism".

However, ruling National Conference spokesperson Tanvir Sadiq said the chapter on the saint will not be removed from the textbooks and the state education minister had asked the officials concerned to rectify the issue.

"The chapter on Sheikh-ul-Alam will not be removed from

textbooks. The Education Minister has directed the Principal Secretary to address and rectify the issue found in the PDF version," Sadiq told reporters here.

Taking to X, CPI MLA M Y Tarigami had called the incident deeply troubling and urged CM Omar Abdullah to intervene to ensure that the chapter is reinstated.

"It is deeply troubling that an entire chapter on the revered Sufi saint Sheikh-ul-Alam has been dropped from the Class IX textbook. This censorship, carried out prior to the Assembly polls, is unacceptable to a society rooted in rich Sufi traditions," Tarigami



Sajad Gani Lone

posted on his X handle.

"I urge Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to intervene and ensure that this crucial chapter is reinstated, thereby preserving and honouring our rich cultural and Sufi heritage," he added.

People's Conference chief Sajjad Lone said that the BOSE had removed a chapter based on the life of the revered saint of Kashmir from the Class 9 textbooks and called it "an assault on our culture and ethos."

"We have all revered him, and people, irrespective of religion, hold him in the highest esteem. This is pure cultural terrorism. It is an assault on our culture and

ethos. I, as a Kashmiri, strongly condemn it," Lone posted on X.

The former minister said that the teachings of the great saint are a beacon of hope in these troubled times filled with "violence, greed and hatred."

"More than ever, the current times are smudged with violence, greed, and hatred. In these times, our great saint is a beacon of hope and a role model for emulation," he said.

"And for those who removed the chapter from BOSE - our great saint and his saintly ways were etched in our hearts and minds long before BOSE came into existence," he added. -PTI

# Experts call for higher 'Sin Tax' on tobacco

**New Delhi:** Ahead of a crucial GST Council meeting on tax rationalisation health and economic experts have called for a higher 'Sin Tax' on tobacco and similar harmful products to curb their consumption and bolster public health and the economy.

At a webinar organised by 'Tobacco Free India', a citizens' initiative, experts endorsed the recent recommendation by the Group of Ministers (GoM) for a 35 per cent 'Sin Tax' slab on tobacco products, up from the current 28 per cent.

They argued that increasing taxes on tobacco would not only save lives but also strengthen the economy and advance the vision of a healthy and Viksit Bharat.

They emphasised that this step would curb tobacco consumption and fund preventive healthcare initiatives.

"Tobacco-related diseases place an unsustainable burden on India's health system. Tax hikes have proven globally effective in reducing tobacco consumption," said Dr Alok Thakur, Head of the National Cancer Institute, Govt. of India and Professor at AIIMS, New Delhi.

He also suggested that India must include all tobacco products under a stronger tax net to prevent users from shifting to cheaper, harmful alternatives.

The GST Council,



chaired by Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary, is scheduled to meet on December 21 to deliberate on the GoM's proposals.

These include introducing a new 35 per cent slab for Sin Goods like tobacco and aerated drinks while reducing GST rates on essential goods like notebooks, bottled water and bicycles as well as lowering premiums on health and life insurance.

Experts argue that the increased revenue from Sin Goods could help offset these rate cuts, offering relief to citizens while advancing public health goals.

Professor of Health Economics at the University of Lucknow Dr Arvind Mohan linked tobacco taxation with India's aspiration to become a developed nation.

"Tobacco use compromises our greatest asset?

human capital. For the past decade, tax burdens on tobacco products have steadily declined in real terms, falling short of global benchmarks. Reversing this trend through the Sin Tax will send a strong signal about prioritizing public health," he said.

He added that India's National Health Policy (2017) and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health (2022) have already prioritized tobacco taxation as a proven measure to reduce consumption.

"This aligns taxation with India's vision for growth, where people's well-being drives economic progress," Dr. Mohan reiterated.

Dr Prashant Kumar Singh, scientist at ICMR's National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research (NICPR), highlighted tobacco related mortality, noting that such diseases caused 2.6 million deaths

between 2019 and 2021 in India.

He emphasised that this is a health emergency demanding urgent intervention.

He highlighted the need to reverse affordability trends caused by rising incomes and stagnant taxation, explaining that increased taxes are not just a revenue tool but a critical step towards discouraging harmful consumption.

"Redirecting revenue from tobacco taxation to preventive healthcare can help India achieve its goal of Universal Healthcare," Dr Singh said.

Providing a fiscal analysis, Dr. Pritam Datta, Fellow at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP), warned about the country's lagging tax rates.

"The WHO recommends tobacco taxes should constitute at least 75 per cent of the retail price. In India, however, taxes currently account for just 57.6 per cent for cigarettes and as low as 22 per cent for machine-made bidi," he said.

With the Compensation Cess set to end in March 2026, Dr Datta emphasized the need for urgent action.

"If effective tax measures are not implemented, India risks further declining tax rates on tobacco. Aligning with WHO standards will ensure strong compliance, reduced consumption, and better health outcomes," he added. -PTI

## 'Diversify into ethanol'

**New Delhi:** Road, Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday called upon the sugar industry to explore multiple avenues for diversification, including ethanol-diesel blending and green hydrogen production.

Addressing the annual general meeting of the Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) virtually, the minister emphasised the need for setting up ethanol and CNG pumps, including through private sector participation.

There is a huge potential for flex engines, ethanol-based engines, and bioCNG as alternatives to fossil fuels.

Five automakers including Tata, Suzuki, and Toyota are set to launch flex engine fuel cars in the market, he said and urged the tractor makers to start manufacturing tractors on alternative fuels.

The minister suggested examining possibilities of exporting ethanol to neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka to expand market opportunities.

Bio-bitumen production using lignin and biomass sources, along with green hydrogen generation from sugar industry infrastructure, were highlighted as potential areas for expansion.

He emphasised the potential of green hydrogen as an alternative fuel source and suggested using existing infrastructure in the sugar and ethanol industries to produce green hydrogen. "I know that making sugar is not an attractive job, but at the same time, because of ethanol, CNG, hydrogen and other by-products, we can increase the productivity and profitability in industry."



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at the exhibition put up by defence industries during the Annual Convention of Indian National Academy of Engineering in New Delhi on Thursday. Pic: PTI

## Indian markets join global selloff, Sensex sinks

**Mumbai:** Equity benchmark Sensex on Thursday plunged about 965 points to crash below the 80,000 level due to heavy selling in global equities after the US Federal Reserve signalled fewer rate cuts next year.

Besides, deep losses in consumer durables, banking and IT stocks amid foreign fund outflows added to the gloom, analysts said.

Falling for the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 964.15 points or 1.20 per cent to settle at 79,218.05. During the day, the blue-chip index cracked 1,162.12 points or 1.44 per cent to 79,020.08.

The NSE Nifty tumbled

247.15 points or 1.02 per cent to sink below the 24,000 mark at 23,951.70.

"The Indian market saw a widespread decline following a global sell-off driven by the US Fed's hawkish stance on interest rates. Sectors sensitive to interest rates, such as banking and real estate, bore the brunt.

"However, the BoJ's decision to keep its interest rate steady, which surprised economists, aided in reducing the selling pressure. Despite this, investor caution persisted amid ongoing FII selling, with a strategic shift towards defensive sectors like pharma as evidenced by their outper-

formance," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30 blue-chip pack, Infosys, Bajaj Finserv, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finance, Asian Paints, ICICI Bank, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra were the biggest laggards.

On the other hand, Sun Pharma, Power Grid and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were trading in the negative territory. Wall Street ended sharply lower on Wednesday. -PTI

## Coal-based power rises

**New Delhi:** The government on Thursday said coal-based power generation rose 3.87 per cent in the April-October period of the current fiscal year.

"...there was a significant growth of 3.87 per cent in coal-based power generation from April 2024 to October 2024 compared to the same period last year," the coal ministry said.

The ministry further said the imports for blending purposes by thermal power plants dropped 19.5 per cent during the same period.

This decline emphasises the country's commitment to achieve self-sufficiency in coal production and reducing reliance on imports.

"Increase in coal import for power sector is attributed to the import of coal by imported coal-based power plants (designed to utilise imported coal only) i.e. 30.04 MT during this period, up from 21.71 MT, reaching a growth of 38.4 per cent in the corresponding timeframe last year," it said. Coal imports during April-October period of the current fiscal year dropped 3.1 per cent to 149.39 million tonnes (MT) over 154.17 MT in the corresponding period of the last financial year.

## Remove 20 per cent export duty on onions: Ajit

**Nagpur:** Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday urged the BJP-led Centre to remove the 20 per cent levy on onion exports and provide relief to the grower of the bulbous vegetable.

In a letter to Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, Pawar highlighted the issues concerning farmers from Nashik district, where onion is grown in large quantities. "The onions grown here (in Nashik) are available in other states of India and also exported in large quantities. As of today, onions from the summer yield have been exhausted and the fresh crop has reached various Market Committees in Maharashtra," Pawar wrote.

Due to the arrival of a large stock of onions, farmers are now in distress as they are forced to sell their produce at a much lower rate since they have yet to receive any minimum support price, said Pawar. They are selling onions at an average of Rs 2,400 per quintal, he said.

Unseasonal rains and changing climate have al-

ready caused a huge dent in the earnings of onion farmers, wrote the NCP leader, who is currently in Nagpur for the Winter Session of Maharashtra's state legislature.

NCP is a partner of the BJP in the ruling Mahayuti coalition in Maharashtra.

If they are further made to receive a rate less than the production cost, the onion farmers will incur a huge loss, said Pawar.

Onions from Maharashtra are in great demand abroad, he said. While Maharashtra is the largest onion-producing state in the country, Lasalgaon in the Nashik district has Asia's largest wholesale market for it.

The Centre has levied a 20 per cent duty on the export of onions due to which the kitchen staple from the state loses its competitiveness in international markets, according to farmers.

The 20 per cent export duty on onions should be removed so that the farmers can have a sigh of relief and recover some of their losses, Pawar wrote in the letter to Goyal.



Trucks loaded with onion stand at wholesale market during Mathadi workers' bandh call in protest against the Union Minister Amit Shah's remarks on BR Ambedkar in Solapur on Thursday. Pic: PTI

## Spanish to buy Titanic builder

**London:** The future of the Northern Ireland-based Harland and Wolff shipbuilder, which famously built the Titanic, appears to have been safeguarded on Thursday after the Spanish state-owned business Navantia stepped in to buy it.

The purchase of the company, which was placed into a type of bankruptcy in September for the second time in five years, is subject to regulatory approval.

If approved, the deal will secure 1,000 jobs at Harland

and Wolff's four shipyards, including at the iconic one in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Two of the others are in Scotland, while the fourth is in England.

The deal is important for the Royal Navy as Harland and Wolff is a subcontractor in part of a consortium that landed a major contract to build new ships. Navantia's UK, division is the main contractor on that contract.

"This deal is a major vote of confidence in the UK

from Navantia, which will not only secure the future of UK shipbuilding, but protect 1,000 jobs across the country and bring future investment into shipbuilding right across the UK," Business and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds said. He wouldn't be drawn on how much extra taxpayers' cash would be spent on the contract for Royal Navy support vessels to get a deal to help Harland and Wolff over the line. -AP

## Women hold only 10 pc key managerial positions:

**Mumbai:** Women constitute less than 20 per cent of the overall workforce, and only 10 per cent hold key managerial personnel (KMP) positions even as companies are making efforts for diversity, according to a report.

Women constitute less than 20 per cent of the overall workforce and hold just over 10 per cent of KMP positions, while female directors account for less than 20 per cent of the total board director positions, according to the 'Mind the Gender Gap' report by CFA Institute and CFA Society India.

The 'Mind the Gender Gap' report is based on insights from 300

Indian companies through their Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) disclosures.

The report also revealed that women board members and KMPs receive significantly lower compensation compared to their male counterparts, highlighting a gender pay disparity at the top level.

Female directors earn only 44 per cent of the median salary of their male counterparts, while female KMPs receive less than 25 per cent of the remuneration paid to male KMPs, it added.

The IT sector employs the highest percentage of women (34 per

cent), followed by consumer discretionary and financial sector (25 per cent and 24 per cent, respectively), with the lowest women participation in the utilities sector (4 per cent), the report said.

For BoDs, the Real Estate, Information Technology, Consumer Staples, Health Care, and Consumer Discretionary sectors show a more equitable gender distribution, it added.

However, the Financial Services and Energy sectors exhibit the most pronounced gender imbalance among BoDs, it said.

"There is a pressing need for stronger gender equality initiatives within Indian corporate

structures. While there has been significant progress, the data reveals persistent gaps in women's representation and remuneration parity, particularly in the senior positions, which require immediate attention from both companies and policymakers," CFA Institute Country Head, India, Arati Porwal said.

Companies with diverse leadership teams demonstrate greater innovation, improved decision-making, and enhanced financial performance, she added.

"To achieve this, Indian companies must encourage a culture of inclusion by attracting and retaining female talent and ensur-

ing fair and equitable remuneration practices. CFA Institute, with its analysis and reporting on BRSR parameters, remains committed to bridging the gender diversity gaps and encouraging inclusivity at all levels," she noted.

Corporate India must adopt meaningful initiatives and inclusive strategies to retain female talent, diminish the remuneration gaps, and subsequently pave the way for Indian workplaces to become more diverse and inclusive for women and differently-abled individuals, CFA Society India CFA Chairperson Rajesh Sehgal said. -PTI

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Women's self-help groups have also driven women-led microenterprises. This phenomenon, which can also be seen in other developing countries, has created fertile soil for women farmers to engage in agritech."



Isha Ambani Piramal, Board Member, Reliance Industries



## EDITORIAL

## Fatal Collision

The catastrophic collision off Mumbai's coast which claimed the lives of 13 people, underscores a chilling lapse in the Indian Navy's operational safeguards. A speedboat, testing a newly fitted engine, veered off course and collided with a passenger ferry bound for Elephanta Island, causing it to capsize. The devastating incident highlights both the perilous nature of naval trials and the question of accountability in safeguarding civilian lives.

While the engine malfunction is believed to have caused the craft to lose control, the tragedy raises alarming questions about the Navy's procedures for testing such critical components.

The questions that must be answered are both simple and profound. Why was a passenger ferry allowed to share waters with a Navy craft conducting a high-speed engine trial? Testing the limits of a newly installed engine cannot come at the cost of human life. Why were there no clear parameters set for conducting such tests in busy shipping lanes, especially when passenger vessels were known to be operating nearby?

This incident is not just a failure of operational procedure but also a stark reminder of the relative indifference to civilian safety. The victims, ordinary citizens simply enjoying a day out, were at the mercy of a Navy craft testing its engine in a scenario that no one could have predicted. And yet, such oversight is precisely the responsibility of the military, an institution tasked with the safety and well-being of its citizens.

It is not the first time that India's defence forces have faced criticism for operational errors that led to public harm. But this incident, with its gruesome toll, demands a new standard. The Navy must rethink how it conducts testing and ensure that civilian life is never again jeopardized for the sake of a trial run. Clear protocols must be established, limiting such tests to areas far from populated routes, and ensuring that the trial vessels are equipped with proper safety measures.

Moreover, the Navy's response in the immediate aftermath of the crash, while swift, should not distract from the systemic failures that allowed this tragedy to unfold. Had the Navy ensured that more rigorous precautions were in place, lives could have been spared. Instead, we are left with an avoidable tragedy and unanswered questions that only add to the heartbreak of those who lost their loved ones.

Given the high volume of civilian vessels in Mumbai's waters, particularly those ferrying passengers to islands like Elephanta, it is crucial that military trials are conducted in designated, off-limits zones to prevent future accidents. Such mishaps, often blamed on lapses in coordination and oversight, reflect systemic issues that have yet to be addressed comprehensively within the military's operational framework. Given the increasing number of civilian boats operating in popular coastal areas across the country, the urgency of implementing more stringent safety measures and conducting trials in controlled environments cannot be overstated.

## FRANKLY SPEAKING

## In Failed Marriages, Men Aren't Always the Villains

By  
Aditi Pai

On a wintry Sunday afternoon in Mumbai, an upscale Bandra pizzeria was buzzing with families digging into pizzas and cheesecakes. Amid the din of children and teenagers, a table-for-eight had a group of men intently chatting over endless glasses of wine. Were they metaphorically drowning their sorrows? Probably so. Some were gesticulating animatedly and a few were listing quietly. The mood at the table was sombre but they still, quite obviously, had a common point to bond over. It later emerged that they were all members of a support group for 'divorced dads', men who couldn't shed tears in front of their families or lawyers but sought solace in the company of like-minded sufferers.

Atul Subhash probably didn't have such a support group to lean on. Or friends and family who could help. Or maybe he felt cornered by the system that, according to many men, favours women in such matters. The Bengaluru-based techie's suicide has sparked debate, once again, if the domestic violence and divorce laws in India are highly tilted in favour of women. Maybe

**The Bengaluru techie's tragic end highlights the unseen wars men fight in broken marriages.**

so. But then, it's only a corrective measure to counter the years of oppression and violence that women have faced within their homes. A National Family Healthy Survey conducted between 2019 and 2021 showed some startling figures—that almost 30 per cent of married Indian women had faced some sort of violence. For years, women have been at the receiving end of violent acts; can we forget all those cases of dowry harassment and deaths which probably forced people not to want daughters? Even today, women face abuse—subtle and direct—in their marital homes. Indian laws relating to matters of marriage and protection of women within the household were framed to give women greater rights and a stronger voice and make stringent punishment a deterrent.

It's also equally safe to presume that these laws and rights can be—and are—misused. Subhash's blood-curdling suicide note accused his wife of 'harassment and false cases', drawing attention to the inconvenient social reality that exists but is rarely spoken about—how divorce laws in India are often weaponised against men. Murmurs for a 'national commission for men' are also growing, a year after such a proposal was shot down by the court.

Stirred by the case, all attention turned to the Supreme Court. A bench of the top court commented on the misuse of law, especially section 498(A) of the former Indian Penal Code which is now replaced by the Bharatiya Nyay Samhita. The court recognised that 'there has been a growing tendency to misuse provisions like Section 498A of the IPC as a tool for unleashing a personal vendetta against the husband and his family by a wife.' In a society that's seen several years of oppression of women and harassment of young brides, stringent laws tend to protect the woman in a marriage.

For years, calls for addressing the physical, emotional, and financial toll of



divorce on husbands have been dismissed, with allegations of harassment by wives often ignored by courts and society's bias against men persisting. On a busy Friday, the Supreme Court issued eight criteria for determining alimony, likely to guide courts nationwide. On the same day, a PIL sought reforms in dowry and domestic violence laws, which have long protected women but sometimes unfairly penalized men. Meanwhile, prolonged family court battles continue to exact a heavy toll, consuming years that could be spent in better companionship and joy.

Being slammed with accusations of cruelty and violence cannot be easy to handle; having arrest warrants against one's elderly parents in fictional cases of harassment can stab your emotional well-being and having to shell out large sums of money to an estranged wife who probably earns more than you, can be painful and shattering.

Break-ups and divorces are glamourised by the movies, with women swaying to 'break up songs', divorcees finding true love instantly after a legal decree or the 'heroines' digging into ice-cream

tubs to recover from heartbreak. Divorces aren't so smooth in real life, especially as many men would endorse. A health survey that I had read stated that divorce is the second most painful incident in one's life after the death of loved ones. Support groups and seeking professional help from counsellors can be a way of healing and dealing with the pain and loss of a relationship that had once been the focal point of one's life.

Mental health concerns are like an epidemic that's waiting to blow up if not addressed. In times of increased professional competition and stress, fragile relationships, break-down of joint families and friendships moving to the virtual world, the best help can come from professional caregivers. An equal society should have laws that protect the rights of all without gender discrimination. But the onus of implementation lies with those who interpret the laws. Sensitisation of the families of those locked in a divorce battle, lawyers, police and the courts can help both men and women get justice. Marriage and divorce should be personal choices and not ones controlled by law.

## GLOBAL WATCH

## The Arakan Army: India's Strategic Ally?

As Bangladesh grapples with economic challenges and rising radicalism, a new crisis along its Myanmar border is contributing to the chaos. The Arakan Army, a formidable ethnic insurgent group from Myanmar, had recently mounted a significant incursion into Bangladesh's southern regions, allegedly capturing areas along the border. While the development has alarmed Dhaka, it raises questions about whether this is a fortuitous development or a carefully calculated strategy by India to manage instability in its eastern neighbourhood.

Bangladesh's internal situation has been deteriorating rapidly ever since the toppling of Sheikh Hasina's government, which was well-disposed towards India. Economic woes, violent atrocities against minorities, and the radical hostility of Islamist groups — particularly those allegedly aligned with Jamaat-e-Islami and Al-Qaeda — have created a toxic mix. The situation is exacerbated by the leadership of Muhammad Yunus, whose policies are viewed as fostering Islamist sentiments. This environment not only destabilizes Bangladesh but poses a direct threat to India, especially in its border states.

Enter the Arakan Army, an insurgent group that has been steadily gaining ground in Myanmar's Rakhine State. With its control over vast stretches of the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, the Arakan Army's rise

**Whether by design or coincidence, the rise of the Arakan Army and the ensuing chaos along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border have emerged at a moment when India stands to benefit the most.**



could serve India's strategic interests in neutralizing the threats emanating from an increasingly unstable Bangladesh. Reports suggest the Arakan Army has declared its opposition to jihadist groups operating in the region, accusing them of atrocities against Buddhists and Hindus and collusion with international terror networks.

This aligns well with India's broader security concerns. By supporting or tacitly enabling the Arakan Army's operations, India could achieve multiple objectives, namely curtailing Islamist extremism.

The Arakan Army's campaign could weaken the influence of radical groups such as the Rohingya Solidarity Army and Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, which are reportedly using Bangladeshi soil as a base for operations against India. By bolstering the Arakan Army's control over the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, India could create a buffer zone that reduces the spillover of jihadist violence into its territory.

A destabilized Bangladesh under Yunus's leadership makes it harder for India to maintain regional stability. The Arakan Army's presence could give India leverage to counterbalance any anti-India policies emanating from Dhaka.

Speculation is rife about whether India's National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval, known for his unconventional strategies, is behind this de-

velopment. India has long maintained strategic ties with various ethnic armed groups in Myanmar, including the Arakan Army. Given the current geopolitical scenario, it would not be surprising if India were providing covert support—logistical or intelligence—to the Arakan Army as part of a larger game plan to safeguard its eastern flank.

Doval's focus has often been on pre-emptively neutralizing threats rather than reacting to them. Supporting the Arakan Army fits this modus operandi. It allows India to weaken Islamist networks without direct intervention, keeping its hands ostensibly clean while achieving strategic goals.

The Rakhine region, where the Arakan Army has established dominance, holds immense strategic importance. It not only serves as a corridor for China's Belt and Road Initiative but also impacts India's connectivity projects like the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. A weakened Myanmar military and a strengthened Arakan Army could give India greater access and influence in the region, countering Chinese designs.

If Ajit Doval's fingerprints are indeed on this development, it could go down as one of his most effective manoeuvres — a masterstroke in securing India's eastern frontier while subtly reshaping the geopolitical balance in South Asia.

## STATES WATCH

## A Struggle for Recognition and Rights

In a remarkable political development, the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO), representing six districts of Nagaland's eastern fringe, has tentatively accepted the Centre's proposal for a "Frontier Nagaland Territory" (FNT). The arrangement promises executive, legislative, and financial autonomy for the region but stops short of the statehood ENPO has long demanded. While the decision reflects pragmatism on the part of ENPO, it also underscores a history of neglect and a region's enduring fight for equitable treatment.

The ENPO's demand for a separate state has its roots in decades of marginalization. Formed as a response to the stark developmental disparities between Nagaland's eastern districts and the rest of the state, the ENPO has accused successive governments in Kohima of overlooking the needs of the eight tribes that inhabit the region, namely Chang, Konyak, Phom, Tikhir, Sangtam, Yimkhung, Khiamniungan and a segment of the Sema community. Allegations of insufficient infrastructure, limited political representation, and poor economic opportunities have fuelled discontent since Nagaland attained statehood in 1963.

The ENPO has temporarily accepted the Centre's compromise after talks with central and state representatives, marking a pivotal moment in its statehood struggle. This calculated pause aims to secure concessions from a central

**The 'Frontier Nagaland' proposal offers a stepping stone to addressing deep-seated grievances.**

government eager to maintain Northeast stability. The proposed FNT offers unprecedented autonomy with legislative, financial, and executive powers tailored to the region's needs. For the BJP-led Central government, the move balances addressing ENPO's demands while avoiding a precedent that might fuel other autonomy movements in the volatile Northeast.

The roots of eastern Nagaland's alienation can be traced to the creation of Nagaland in

1963. While hailed as a landmark in India's integration of its Northeast, the state's formation left some regions feeling marginalized. Eastern Nagaland, with its rugged terrain and sparse population, remained disconnected from the state's developmental narrative. Despite accounting for one-third of Nagaland's 60 Assembly seats, the six districts—Kiphire, Longleng, Mon, Noklak, Shamator, and Tuensang—lagged behind in education, health-care, and infrastructure.

In 2010, these grievances crystallized into a formal demand for statehood, with the ENPO launching a "people's movement" to press its case. The boycott of high-profile

events, including Nagaland's statehood celebrations and the internationally acclaimed Hornbill Festival, underscored the region's simmering discontent. This year's Lok Sabha and urban local body polls were similarly shunned, further amplifying the ENPO's call for change.

The ENPO's acceptance of the FNT proposal is a strategic gamble. The organization has expressed optimism that the Centre, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will honor its commitments. Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio had assured the ENPO during the 2023 Assembly election campaign that their concerns would be addressed if the BJP-NDPP alliance retained power.

However, the ENPO's trust is not without reservations. A history of unmet promises has bred scepticism among the region's residents. The proposed FNT remains a compromise.

The Centre's handling of the ENPO's demand carries wider implications for the autonomy movements across the Northeast, from Bodoland in Assam to Garoland in Meghalaya. The January tripartite talks will be crucial in resolving unresolved issues, particularly the scope of FNT's autonomy. Missteps could revive statehood demands, complicating the region's politics.

In the immediate term, the focus will be on whether the FNT can deliver tangible benefits. Improved infrastructure, better governance, and increased representation could validate the ENPO's decision to accept the proposal. Conversely, failure to meet expectations could deepen alienation, lending fresh impetus to the statehood movement. The proposed FNT may provide a temporary salve, but the region's journey towards equality and recognition is far from over.

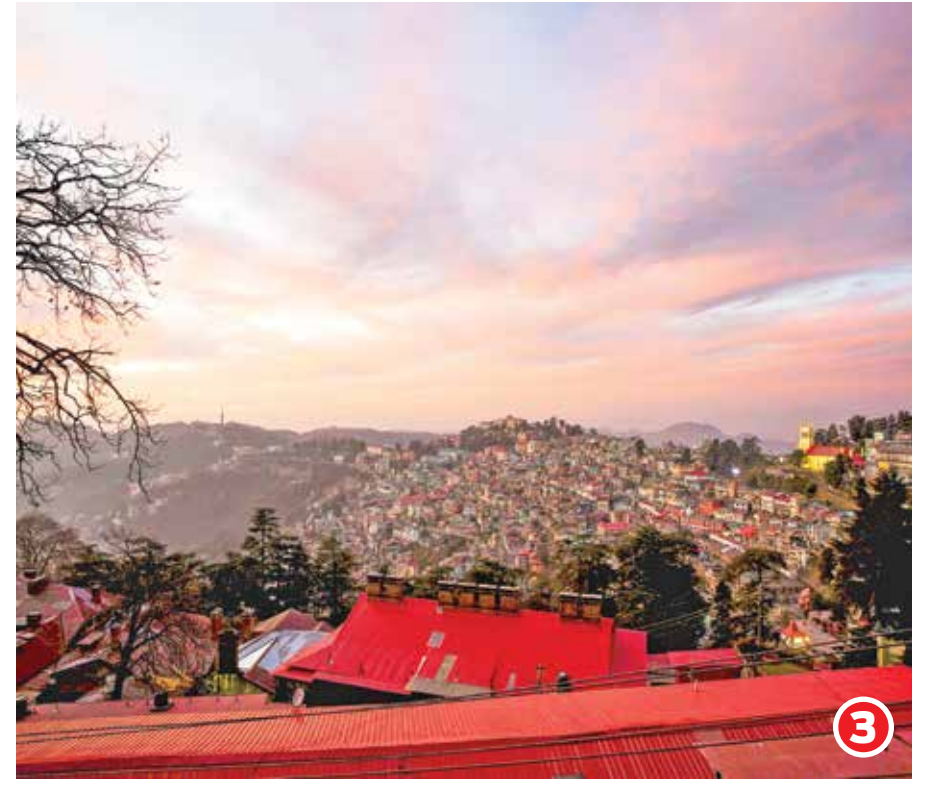


NAGALAND

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**KALEIDOSCOPE**

1. Mainland Chinese tourists take photos in front of a Christmas installation in Macao's historic Senado Square.
2. Para-athlete Ezequiel da Luz with an amputated leg celebrates upon reaching the top of Pedra da Gavea in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday.
3. The city of Shimla during sunset.
4. Artists during a cultural performance at Rashtrapati Nilayam in Hyderabad on Wednesday.
5. Visitors look at photos of food items and ingredients at artist Priya Mani's show, 'Visual Encyclopaedia of Indian Food' at the ninth 'Serendipity Arts Festival' in Panaji.

All Pictures PTI, AP

TALKING SENSE

## The Favourite Internet Service of Proxies and Non-State Actors



By  
Chaitanya Giri

The Indian Army's III Corps, also known as Spear Corps, and the Assam Rifles, in their joint searches in the districts of Kagpokpi, Imphal East, Chandel, and Churachandpur, have stumbled upon not only a diverse cache of handheld weapons but also a new-age device that has sent tremors in strategic circles. That new-age device is the swanky-looking receiver terminal of Starlink. The same Starlink, owned by Elon Musk, offers low-latency and high-bandwidth internet services to commercial markets worldwide through its constellation of thousands of satellites flying in low-Earth orbit. Interestingly, this terminal was found with 'RPF-PLA' written on it - which hints that it was in the hands of the Revolutionary People's Front, the political arm of the People's Liberation Army Manipur, which runs a government-in-exile from its headquarters in Sylhet, Bangladesh. Now the question is, how did a Starlink terminal arrive in the hands of RPF-PLA militants in Manipur?

Bangladesh, under the Sheikh Hasena government in April 2024, faced a tremendous internet outage when the SEA-ME-WE-5 submarine cable, one of the only two cables landing in Bangladesh, ruptured 400 km off the coast of Singapore. Whether it was accidental or sabotage is not known. The same month, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission began preparing guidelines for non-geostationary satellite operators to offer broadband services in the country. This was a big boost to Starlink, which has been interested in com-

mencing its commercial operations in Bangladesh. Starlink is expensive for a common Bangladeshi. Its terminal kits cost around USD 600, and monthly services are around USD 120 for unlimited data. The current Bangladeshi broadband rates are way cheaper at USD 5 for a 5 Mbps monthly subscription. The irony is that before the legitimate commercial services began in Bangladesh, militant groups settled in Bangladesh, which have vowed to call Bharat its enemy, have begun to use Starlink. This, by no margin, is India's first tryst with Starlink, which is now becoming a hot favourite of nefarious actors operating against India. In November 2024, the Indian Coast Guard seized a Myanmarese boat smuggling 6000 kg of methamphetamine, worth USD 4.25 billion, and also enjoying the services of Starlink in Indian waters.

Starlink has been involved in providing humanitarian services from Poland and Germany to Ukraine since the early days of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. However, it eventually fell into the hands of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion. It is said that the Russian forces, too, have derived tremendous gains from the use of Starlink terminals purchased from the black markets. Starlink has also made considerable windfalls by entering the civil war-ridden Sudan, where internet services are being offered at exorbitant rates by the Rapid Support Forces militia and when terrestrial internet networks have been disrupted due to the conflict. Sudan has many priorities to be attained before opting for costly internet; peace is one such priority.

tion to what is brewing in Bangladesh and Myanmar? Are the frequent internet disruptions in Pakistan also paving the way for Starlink? The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority is moving in that direction, too.

A well-known idiom, "A fool with a tool is still a fool," becomes too apparent when all these anecdotes are combined into one big picture. India is surrounded by a dozen proxies and non-state actors, which thrive on the business of conflict and secession, most sowed by the outgoing colonisers to exploit, nearly a century after imparting independence to this part of the world. These actors are constantly in search of non-interceptable lines of communication that would help them operationally, especially those engaged in guerrilla operations and in geographies that do not permit non-disruptible terrestrial networks. The threat precisely is not symptomatic of Starlink; the threat is ingrained in any direct-to-customer satellite internet service that has a terminal that can be easily backpacked akin to a laptop. But then, it would be wrong to say that these proxies are pulling off all this on their own. There are unknown forces behind these proxies and non-state actors, and Starlink is merely the 'black-marketed' tool, a messenger they use for their convenience. The Indian government, at this stage, is stuck in dichotomous circumstances. On the one hand, it wishes to bring Starlink officially into the Indian satellite internet market and be on good terms with Elon, a name now synonymous with efficiency. On the other hand, it finds Starlink being rampantly used by entities that see India as its enemy, a fact that shows our inefficiency in dealing with this situation.

(The author is a Space and Emerging Technology Fellow at the Centre for Security, Strategy and Technology, Observer Research Foundation, Mumbai. Views personal.)

OCCASIONAL THOUGHTS

## Study Paints Holistic Picture of Volunteering Eco-system in India



By  
Kreeanne Rabadi

In the first half of the nineteenth century (1800-1850), the emergence of institutional movements led to the establishment of Brahma Samaj, Arya Pratinidhi Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prathana Sabha, Indian National Social Conference, Ramakrishna Mission etc. Then Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who in 1905 founded the 'Servants of Indian Society', aimed to mobilise volunteers dedicated to serving the nation. Similarly, the Indian government too took voluntary organizations for nation-building and social development seriously, which led to initiatives like formation of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) in 1948, to engage youth in activities for personal and community development. This was followed by the National Service Scheme (NSS) initiated in 1969, aiming to involve higher education students in community service and social development initiatives.

At Child Rights and You (CRY), volunteers have always been our backbone. CRY was in fact born in the heart of a schoolboy - Rippan Kapur, who mobilised his young friends to collect old newspapers, sell them, buy milk with the money earned and distribute it to the children in the neighbouring slums. When Rippan established CRY in 1979, for many years he and his band of volunteers sold greeting cards, organised events and made CRY a household name in India. CRY has thus been built and nurtured by the heart and passion demonstrated by thousands of volunteers who joined our movement for children.

This led us to commission a study on 'Volunteering in India: Perspectives, Insights, and Potential for Social Impact.' in collaboration with Grant Thornton Bharat. The study looks at the evolving volunteering landscape in India, its impact and trends associated with volunteerism in people today.

This study was conducted with the participation of over 5,500 respondents which included school and college students as well as working professionals from the private and public sectors, entrepreneurs, homemakers, and senior citizens. It also had participants from tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3 cities, ensuring demographic equity and a comprehensive representation of the targeted population across 22 states and Union Territories in India.

One of the significant trends that the study showcases is that women showing a higher inclination towards volunteering (61.7 per cent) followed by senior citizens (46.85 per cent) between the age bracket of 60-69 years. The concentration of respondents in the 19-22 age bracket also emphasizes the eagerness of young adults to engage in volunteerism, likely driven by a combination of altruistic motives and the pursuit of personal development.

With a significant portion of participants holding or pursuing bachelor's degrees (48.9 per cent), the data reflects a well-educated demographic. This suggests that volunteer opportunities should be designed to leverage and further develop the sophisticated skill sets of these individuals.

Another worth-mentioning factor that comes out from the study is that while education (46 per cent) and health (31 per cent) remain the major areas of interest for volunteering, around (46 per cent) of the respondents confessed they would prefer volunteering in hybrid mode.

The study also showcases that the evolving landscape of volunteerism shows a societal shift towards individualistic approaches. Both Gen-Z and Gen-Y are making use of social media platforms to engage in various volunteer practices, strengthening the impact and outreach of or-



ganizations and across causes such as environmental concerns, community welfare, child rights and sustainability.

However, there still continues to be many challenges like addressing the disparities between urban and rural areas, time constraints, and shifting of social values.

The key takeaways from the study are that we need to create robust digital volunteering opportunities that offer fulfilling experiences, emphasizing virtual collaboration and community impact.

We also need to design campaigns and support structures that specifically target female student volunteers, addressing their unique challenges and motivations. Apart from the above, we also need to forge alliances with retirement communities, senior centers, and healthcare facilities to co-create volunteer programs that cater to the interests and abilities of senior citizens.

Similarly, we not only need to add tailored programs to match preferences with capabilities that can further enhance engagement and satisfaction for the volunteer but also craft targeted recruitment campaigns that can appeal to females and older professionals, highlighting the flexible nature of volunteer opportunities.

Volunteers continue to be an integral part of CRY, and we are committed to leveraging the learnings of the study to provide an enriching volunteer experience for all who give their time to make a difference in children's lives.

(The author is Regional Director, Child Rights and You - West. Views are personal)

# HUMILIATION WAS GOING ON

## ASHWIN'S FATHER OFFERS STUNNING REASON FOR INDIA OFF-SPINNER'S RETIREMENT, ASHWIN DENIES

Chennai: Just-retired R Ashwin's father Ravichandran kicked up a controversy on Thursday by claiming that "humiliation" could have been a reason for his son's decision to call it quits but the veteran off-spinner made light of the "dad comment", blaming it on lack of media training.

Ashwin dropped a bombshell on Wednesday when he announced his retirement from top-flight cricket at the end of the drawn third Test against Australia in Brisbane. He flew back to Chennai the same evening and was welcomed warmly by his family and friends here on Thursday morning.

Although Ashwin described his decision as an "instinctive" call that was on his mind for a while, his father raised eyebrows by hinting at other factors, including humiliation.

"I too came to know at the last minute. The way in which he gave that (retirement), there could be many reasons. Only Ashwin knows, maybe humiliation," Ravichandran told 'CNN News18'.

However, Ashwin later tried to douse the fire, saying his father was not "media trained" and his comment should not be taken seriously.

"My father isn't media trained, dey father inneda ithe-laam (what's all this, father). I

never thought you will follow this rich tradition of 'dad statements', he quipped after the comment became a viral social media trend.

"Request you all to forgive him and leave him alone," Ashwin wrote on X.

Earlier, Ravichandran said the family was expecting Ashwin's retirement for some time because "humiliation was going on", though he didn't reveal the exact nature of it.

"The sudden change - retirement - gave us a shock. We were expecting it because humiliation was going on. How long he can tolerate all those things? Probably, he would have decided on his own," he said.

"It's his wish and desire, I cannot interfere in that. The way he gave his retirement, one part I was very happy, another part not happy because he should have continued," he added.

Ashwin had told the media in Brisbane that he has a "bit of punch left" in him, hinting at reasons more than mere cricketing.

Washington Sundar was picked ahead of the seasoned off-spinner, who has 537 Test wickets, for the first game in Perth. The 38-year-old found a place in the eleven for the Pink Ball Test at Adelaide.

However, Ashwin was again benched for the third Test at the



'Gabba' as Ravindra Jadeja started in that match.

India skipper Rohit Sharma revealed that he had a chat with Ashwin on the sidelines of the Perth Test and convinced him to stay for the day-night game.

"...this was on his mind and there are obviously a lot of things that went behind it. When I arrived in Perth, this was a chat we had and I somehow convinced him to stay for that pink ball Test match," Rohit had revealed in his press conference on Wednesday.

"Then after that it just happened so that he felt that if I (Ashwin) am not needed right now in the series, I am better off

saying goodbye to the game," he added.

Ashwin will continue to play club cricket and will be turning up for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL next year.

**Ashwin deserved a fitting farewell: Kapil Dev**

Unable to comprehend R Ashwin's sudden decision to retire from international cricket, a shocked World Cup-winning skipper Kapil Dev says the premier off-spinner deserved a fitting farewell, ideally on home soil.

Ashwin stunned one and all by calling it quits on Wednesday, right after the Brisbane

Test against Australia ended in a draw.

Kapil felt Ashwin seemed unhappy with something.

"I was shocked by how one of India's greatest cricketers chose to leave the game. The disappointment among the fans was widespread, but I also saw a tinge of hurt on his face. He looked unhappy, and that was sad. He deserved much better, a fitting farewell," Kapil said in a statement to PTI.

As has been his wont, Ashwin chose to walk his own way while retiring in the middle of an important series. Kapil said he would like to hear the Tamil Nadu man's side of story.

"He could have waited and announced his retirement on Indian soil, but I don't know why Ashwin called it a day. I would want to hear his side of the story. Give him that respect. He has played 106 Tests for the country. I don't think anyone can match his humongous contribution to Indian cricket."

Kapil hoped that the Board of Control of Cricket in India (BCCI) would arrange a "grand farewell" to Ashwin.

"I am sure the parent body of cricket in India, BCCI, shall plan a grand farewell for this giant match-winner of Team India," he said.

Kapil, 65, said Ashwin was a stalwart, a versatile and unorthodox bowler, who constantly hustled the batters with his change of pace and cleverly disguised line and length.

"He was ready to experiment, and that is what set him apart. In a game where the batters get the most accolades, Ashwin stood out with his prowess.

"Ashwin was brave. He could bowl at any stage of the contest. Do you find bowlers with such tremendous tactical sense who can adapt quickly? He was his captain's go-to man," he said.

Praising both his cricketing brain and off-field character, Kapil said Ashwin was a match-winner with no parallel in modern cricket. -PTI

### Ashwin's fun time with support staff

New Delhi: A tough nut to crack on the field, just-retired India off-spin great Ravichandran Ashwin is not exactly the same once he is in the dressing room where he is known to enjoy fun moments with his team-mates and support staff.

In a footage released by the BCCI, a day after he brought down the curtain on an illustrious international career in Brisbane midway through the five-match Test series against Australia, Ashwin was seen taking bowling lessons of the support staff in an indoor net facility.

"The countless battles on the field are memorable. But it's also moments like these that Ashwin will reminisce from his international career," the BCCI said in a post on 'X'.

The 38-year-old Ashwin retired from the game as the second-highest wicket-taker for India in Tests with 537 scalps from 106 matches, placing him only behind the legendary Anil Kumble (619 wickets).

In the video footage, Ashwin was seen having some fun time with the likes of fielding coach T Dilip, trainer Soham Desai, analyst Hari Prasad Mohan and masseur Arun Kanade.

While announcing his retirement after the drawn Brisbane Test, Ashwin had said that he will cherish a lot of memories from the dressing room.

"I do feel there's a bit of punch left in me as a cricketer, but I would like to showcase that at the club level. I've had a lot of fun, and I've created a lot of memories.

"I must say I've shared some incredible moments alongside Rohit (Sharma) and several other teammates, even though I've lost some of them over the years."

## Rider Raju secures spot in Championships

New Delhi: Rider Raju Singh finished twice on the podium at the FEI's CCI 3-star event to qualify for next year's Asian Continental Championships in Pattaya, Thailand. Singh secured first place with his horse Mawillan and a close second with Matakali, cementing his superiority in the prestigious event.

Showcasing their prowess, Singh, Pradeep Kumar and Kumabhar Mahesh K Sharayu also successfully met the challenging Minimum Eligibility Requirements by completing the event with penalties of 48 or less and will make up the Indian team at the Asian Continental Championships.

"The exceptional performances witnessed here in Jaipur reflect the growing calibre of equestrian sports in India," EFI Secretary



General Col. Jaiveer Singh said.

"Raju Singh, Pradeep Kumar, and Kumabhar Mahesh K Sharayu's success in this event is a significant milestone, and their achievements, especially with the MER qualification of the Indian team, set an inspiring precedent for the upcoming Asian Championship in Pattaya."

Competing in the Dressage Test, Show Jumping, and Cross Country back-to-back days, Singh took the top podium in the latter with horse Mawillan and second place with horse Matakali, accumulating 38.8 and 40.6 penalty points.

## Trisha shines in India's win

Kuala Lumpur: G Trisha made a fine unbeaten fifty to guide India to a facile eight-wicket win over Bangladesh in their first Super Four match of the Women's Under-19 T20 Asia Cup here on Thursday.

Chasing a modest 81, India raced past the target in 12.1 overs with Trisha making 58 not out off 46 balls with 10 fours. India ended up at 86 for two.

However, India had started the chase on a shaky note losing opener G Kamalini for a four-ball duck and Sanika Chalke (1) when the team score was on 22.

But Kamalini and captain Nikki Prasad (22 not out, 14b; 1x4, 2x6) added 64 runs for the unbroken third wicket alliance to take India home.

Earlier, India limited Bangladesh to 80 for 8 in their full quota of overs.

## MCA to celebrate Wankhede Stadium's 50th anniversary

Mumbai: The Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) on Thursday announced plans to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the iconic Wankhede Stadium here from January 12 to 19.

A special logo was unveiled by the association during a function by the MCA officials and its apex council members.

"Built in 1974, Wankhede Stadium stands as one of the world's most iconic cricketing venues, having witnessed monumental moments in cricket history. From Sachin Tendulkar's final international match in 2013 to India's historic 2011 ODI World Cup triumph, the stadium has been home to countless memories," the governing body said.



Mumbai Cricket Association President Ajinkya Naik with Vice President Sanjay Naik and Secretary Abhay Hadap at the logo launch of 50 years of Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Thursday.

Pic: PTI

There will be multiple functions on different days to mark the celebrations while a special postal stamp will also be released.

Maharashtra chief minister

Devendra Fadnavis and former MCA president and ex-BCCI treasurer Ashish Shelar will also be felicitated during the eight-day event.

A cricket match will be held between MCA officials and Consul Generals and government officials on January 12.

"We are going to felicitate

all the MCA groundsmen and host a lunch for them because they are like unsung heroes. There are also a few others like security people of the MCA who have been working for long time and the MCA staff, we are going to felicitate everybody on January 15," president Ajinkya Naik said.

A coffee table book will be launched on January 19 along with a music show from Ajay-Atul. Since free entry cannot be facilitated owing to anticipation of a big crowd turnout as witnessed in the past, the fans will have to purchase tickets priced at Rs 300 for the event, which will also have several current and former Mumbai and India players along with Bollywood celebrities on January 19.



Players of East Bengal FC and Punjab FC vie for the ball during their Indian Super League (ISL) 2024-25 football match in Kolkata on Tuesday.

Pic: PTI

## ISL: FC Goa aim to end Mohun Bagan's unbeaten run

Margao: FC Goa will seek to snap a rampaging Mohun Bagan Super Giant's eight-match unbeaten streak in the Indian Super League (ISL) when the two sides square off in a 12th round match here on Friday.

FC Goa, under India head coach Manolo Marquez, will also aim to improve their record against the Mariners, having lost five of their eight meetings in the ISL, including a narrow 0-1 defeat in their most recent fixture in February.

Super Giant's unbeaten run has seen them win seven and draw one of their last eight ISL games, and that has put them on top of the league leaderboard with 26 points from 11 matches, winning eight, drawing twice and losing once.

On the other hand, the Gaur's are placed fourth with 19 points from the same number of games.

Both these teams have been in equally efficient form up-front, with the Kolkata-based side netting 22 times in the competition thus far, as compared to the 21 of the Goan club.

However, the visitors have been comparatively better organised at the back, as they have conceded 10 goals as opposed to the 15 of FC Goa.

Head-to-head, FC Goa have won twice, whereas Super Giant have emerged victorious five times in the eight times these two teams have faced each other in the ISL.

FC Goa head coach Marquez admitted that the Mariners have a nice mix of international and domestic stars that make them a strong opponent.

"I feel that we are playing one of the strongest teams in the competition. Mohun Bagan

### Punjab FC part ways with 'colourful' Mushaga Bakenga

Punjab FC on Wednesday parted ways with Norwegian international striker Mushaga Bakenga just four months after he joined the Indian Super League (ISL) side.

The club did not cite any reason for the 32-year-old Congolese-origin player's departure after he was roped in August this year. "After mutual discussions, it was decided that Bakenga would part ways with us. I truly appreciate his contributions during his time here and wish him the very best in all his future endeavours," Punjab FC Technical Director Nikolaos Topoliatidis said in a release.

Bakenga, who has played one match for the Norway national team in 2014, made 14 appearances for Punjab FC across the ISL and the Durand Cup. He scored three goals and provided one assist during his time with the club.

have most of the top national team players, and they've spent a lot on getting good foreigners too," Marquez said.

"We need to keep fighting to win" Super Giant head coach Jose Molina lauded his team for not giving up under any

circumstance. "The mentality of Mohun Bagan Super Giant is to fight every game till the end. We have to attack and defend well, communicate properly, but most importantly we need to keep fighting to get the win," Molina said. -PTI